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Box 5, Folder 12, Response upon Receiving the American Jewish  
Committee citation, 30 October 1988.

## RESPONSE

## ON RECEIVING THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE CITATION

October 30, 1988

Receiving this "Farewell Citation" -- as I know you must understand -- is a deeply moving occasion in my life. It is especially meaningful to accept this from Leo Nevas who, from his years of leadership as chairman of the AJC's International Relations Commission, has been a steadfast, trusted friend and mentor in both my incarnations in Interreligious Relations and International Relations. I have been blessed to have had dedicated chairmen who remain good friends -- Norman Raab, Bob Jacobs, Jordan Zacks, Leonard Yaseen, and Richard Rice. I thank them with abiding gratitude.

"Farewell" is an ambiguous term. To play in the manner of William Safire's word games, "farewell" could mean finality, closure, the end. But used in the Elizabethan sense, "farewell" connotes "fare-thee-well," and suggests good wishes, a blessing. And if you stand the word on its head, it becomes "welfare," indicating a concern for one's well-being. As many of you know, I have committed the last twenty-seven years of my life to serving the American Jewish Committee--the majority of the years of my professional career--and I therefore find it incomprehensible that "farewell" could mean in any sense rupture, or termination. AJC has been too much a part of my identity to allow for that to happen. On the contrary, I view this moment as a time of creative transition, for which I am grateful, to a future for which I am exceedingly hopeful.

There is a somewhat funky anecdote which catches something of my sense of self today. Two older society women, poor but snobbish, were talking about a matrimonial prospect. "He's got plenty of money," one said, "but he's too old to be termed eligible." The other lady replied, "Darling, he's too eligible to be termed old."

Last May, when I was privileged to receive "The Interfaith Medallion" from the International Council of Christians and Jews headed by Sir Sigmund Sternberg, I tried to summarize my feelings about AJC in such words as these:

"As I have thought about my past quarter of century with the American Jewish Committee, I experience feelings of gratitude for AJC's having made possible opportunities for living a life of high meaning, enabling contributions to be made in many areas of importance to the Jewish People and to society at large -- in some cases, contributions, I hope, of lasting, even transforming values."

In retrospect, it is remarkable that AJC's lay of professional leadership supported activities in every decade during which I have been associated with AJC -- from 1960 until the present -- that helped change the course of history for the better.

These are my sentiments today. I have enormous pride in our collective achievements at Vatican Council II and in Catholic-Jewish relations since then. There are few greater personal satisfactions for me than that of being embraced by Jewish and Christian friends--as by Cardinal Law last evening--in virtually every major city in the United States and in many other parts of the world; our pioneering relationships with Dr. Billy Graham, Evangelical Christians and other Protestants and Greek Orthodox--relationships which hardly existed before we became involved; our life-saving work in behalf of suffering Jewish and non-Jewish refugees in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Soviet Union, Israel, and

in the Middle Eastern countries; our programs in a number of European countries.

Ted Ellenoff, our distinguished President, and other AJC officers have asked me to continue to serve as "International Consultant" to the American Jewish Committee. To the degree that my accumulated experiences and extended networks of personal contacts and friendships in many parts of the world may continue to be helpful to my successor and to AJC, I will do what is appropriate and possible to be of assistance.

As of January 1st, 1989, I will cross a threshold to another career to which I look forward with genuine eagerness and enthusiasm. The fact that, thank God, I have been restored almost miraculously (a natural miracle called my wife, Georgette Bennett), to normal good health, reinforces these optimistic feelings.

With all the sense of achievement that has been possible through AJC in the past quarter century, it also must simply be said that there has been a price to be paid. The unrelenting travels, overseas and domestic, take their toll in personal health, in family sacrifice, but also in sacrifice in personal fulfillment. I hope now to compensate for some of those imbalances by concentrating my energies on long-delayed intensive study, scholarship, and writing two books for which I am now committed to a publisher, lecturing, and when my schedule is ready, to a university professorship that has been proposed to me. In that sense, "farewell" means to me not "closure," nor "the end" but the "fare-thee-well" of blessing and fulfillment. And I look forward to maintaining ties of warm friendship with many of you who have been my AJC family as I speak around the country.

I cannot conclude without two acknowledgments. One is the expression of my deepest gratitude and affection for my secretary of the past fourteen years, Rita Reznik.

Rita has been infinitely more than a secretary; she has been my consummate hostess in at least three languages; my confidant; and above all, my friend. I will always be in Rita's debt.

And recalling my words of last May -- words which remain my deepest heartfelt feelings today:

"There is a Hebrew phrase, 'acharon, acharon chaviv' -- the last is the most beloved. My magnificent, beautiful and authentically brilliant wife, Georgette, has saved my life in many ways. It is difficult to imagine that any human being can give more to another than my wife has given to me. During our years together, Georgette has made me possible."

Ted, Leo, Ira, Bert, Selma, my colleagues and my family of friends, for this important day of my life, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

