

CD-1027 Transcription

Farewell to the American Jewish Committee. 30 October 1988.

F1:

[00:00] Testing, testing, testing.

Steve Law:

-- three decades, he's been one of the brightest stars in the AJC firmament. He came to us in 1960 from a position of executive vice president from the Synagogue Council of America to head our Interreligious Affairs department. During the last five years, he's headed the AJC's work on the world scene, as director of the international affairs department. A list of his academic accomplishments and publications, as well as other activities, would take me far more than the time allotted for this purpose, and for this presentation. Perhaps it's appropriate to describe him as others would describe him, and have referred to his accomplishments. *New York* magazine has described him as one of the foremost Jewish ecumenical leaders in the world today. [01:00] *Newsweek* magazine has defined him as the American Jewish community's foremost apostle, (inaudible). Sacred Heart University, in awarding him the honorary degree of doctor of laws, described him as the human rights rabbi of America. In a national poll among religious editors and

religious writers, he was designated as one of the most influential and respected religious leaders in America. Naming him fourth, after only Billy Graham, Dr. Martin Marty, and President Carter. His work at Vatican Council number two, as the only rabbi invited to participate as an observer, is well known, and (inaudible). He made a tremendous contribution to us, and to our welfare, which will bear fruit for years to come in that effort, and in that capacity. [02:00] He worked closely there with Cardinal [Deal?], both prior to and during that conference, and he helped clarify and drastically improve Catholic attitudes and positions towards the Jewish people. He was the first Jewish leader to be invited to address the 4,000 delegates gathered at the world conference of the World Council of Churches.

He's been a major force in the promotion of social justice and human rights, helped to organize the American Jewish emergency relief effort for victims of the Nigerian-Biafran conflict. He's aided refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Ireland, Bangladesh, (inaudible) and Cyprus. He is national co-chairman of the Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, and national co-chairman of the Interreligious Coalition on World Hunger. He was the founder and program chairman of the historic national conference on [03:00] religion and race, which has been regarded as a turning point in the promotion of civil rights in

the '60s. Served on various presidential White House, UN, and other commissions on children and the aging, hunger, and population problems. I could go on at further length, describing some of these activities. I would have been saved a lot of effort if I had had available to me the notes of Cardinal Law, or a copy of his speech of last night, because he did speak -- pay tribute to our honoree. We pay tribute to the tremendous contribution made to Catholic Jewish relations, it speaks for itself. It was a real tribute to our organization. After the meeting last night, in conversation with Monsignor Murphy, who was associated with the Vatican, and is now an aide to the cardinal, [04:00] he elucidated further on Marc's work at the Vatican, and paid further tribute to that effort. You know, of course, who I've been talking about, I've mentioned his name inadvertently a couple of times, it's no mystery. It would be easy for me to spend another half hour talking about his efforts in the international scene, as well as those (inaudible) largely in the religious (inaudible).

I came to know Marc about five or six years ago, when he became chairman of the -- when he became director of international affairs department. I've been associated with that commission for about 15 years as chairman of (inaudible) shortly after he (inaudible). I came to admire his intellect, his character, his

notions of social responsibility, and the depth of his knowledge (inaudible). I never cease to be astonished by his grasp of [05:00] all the nuances of international relations, particularly [in regards?] to the Jewish people. As we traveled, and met with leaders, and [grants?] (inaudible) South Africa and other countries, Marc's depth of knowledge never ceased to amaze all of us. How he spoke very -- all specifically, our delicate [visit?], the efficiency of the Austrian government, Foreign Minister, Chancellor, the Minister of Education and leaders of political parties, (inaudible) Austrian (inaudible) history of anti-Semitism (inaudible).

One encounter with the later People's Party, now the Foreign Minister of Austria, we ere discussing a history of (inaudible). Marc was able to pick up that challenge and go back over the long, sad history [06:00] of Austria's anti-Semitism, detailing it by day, by individuals, and by events. [It's enough to say?] we were amazed. The Austrians were nothing short of stunned by this look [in their?] sad history.

I think it's hardly necessary to recount all of this.

(inaudible) often take for granted the remarkable talent [we have in?] our profession. And in our case, particularly saying the prophet (inaudible) safe in his own country (inaudible).

What is appropriate at this time, I suggest, is for us to join in tribute to Marc as he's preparing to close one [day's lay-based chapter?]. (inaudible) this organization (inaudible) [instead of?] (inaudible) [described?]. Look forward to the [07:00] continuing relationship with AJC [and serving us in any way?], whose talents are needed by the organization, by the community, by the [new?] (inaudible). Marc, our gratitude may not always be visible to you, but it is there, and along with it goes our heartfelt wishes for good health, continued success in all of your undertakings, (inaudible), (inaudible), [lovely wife?], happiness in the years ahead. We look forward to seeing you and having you with us (inaudible). On behalf of (inaudible).

(audio cutting out; inaudible stretch [07:44]-[08:16])

(applause)

Marc Tanenbaum:

[Steve?], (inaudible) response. (laughter) [09:00] I began to worry a little bit last night that spontaneous, wholly unexpected personal expression of friendship (inaudible) Cardinal Law. I knew him when he was a (inaudible), and he was Monsignor and first began working to set up the secretariat (inaudible) bishops (inaudible). And (inaudible) school, [Bernie Low?] and I

were [drinking partners?] (inaudible). If you want to know the secret [salve?] in Catholic-Jewish relations, it's a great bottle of Scotch (inaudible). In St. Peter's Basilica, they had two bars as a sign of [10:00] a new era in Catholic-Jewish relations. One of the bars was called Bar Mitzvah. (laughter) The other bar was called Bar Young. We used to alternate between the two of them [in the daytimes?] together.

What I really enjoyed about what Cardinal Law did last night is that he read that tribute just as I wrote it. (laughter)

Receiving this farewell citation, as I know you must understand, is a deeply moving occasion in my life. It's especially meaningful to accept this from Leo [Nebitz?], who from his years of leadership as the AJC's International Relations Commission has been a steadfast, trusted friend and mentor. [11:00] Both of my incarnations and interreligious affairs, and in international relations, the committee that I personally have also been blessed, who had the benefit of relationships and dedicated chairmen, who remain to this day very good friends, Norman [Rab?], Bob Jacobs, (inaudible), and now Richard [Rights?], and I owe them for their dedication and friendship (inaudible) gratitude.

This program that you have lists this moment as an occasion for "farewell citation." Well, farewell is an ambiguous term. To

play with it in the manner of William Sapphire's word game, farewell could mean finality, closure, the end, (inaudible). Usually, there is a (inaudible) sense [12:00] "farewell" connotes "fare thee well," and suggests good wishes [thusly?]. And if, frankly, you stand the word on its head, it becomes welfare, indicating on one level a concern for one's wellbeing. Obviously it has another meaning, and I'd rather not go into that at this time. (laughter)

As many of you know, I've committed the last 27 years of my life to serving the American Jewish Committee. Hopefully, the American Jewish Committee (inaudible). These have been a majority of the years of my professional career, and therefore I find it incomprehensible that "farewell" could be in any sense (inaudible) termination. AJC has been too much a part of my identity for now for that to happen. On the contrary, I view this moment as a time of [13:00] creative transition, for which I am grateful, to a future for which I'm exceedingly hopeful. There's a somewhat funky anecdote (inaudible) something of my sense of self today. There are two older society women -- I hope the feminists in the audience will indulge me this; I say this only for [metaphoric?] purposes -- two older society women, poor but snobbish, were talking about a matrimonial prospect. "He's got plenty of money," one said. "He's old to be termed

eligible." And the other lady replied, "Darling, he's too eligible to be termed old." (laughter)

Last May, when I was privileged to receive the International Interfaith Medallion from the International Council of Christians and Jews (inaudible) many of them (inaudible), [14:00] I've had to summarize my feelings about AJC in such (inaudible) at this time, as well. As I thought about my past quarter century with the American Jewish Committee, I experienced feelings of gratitude for AJC's having made possible opportunities for living a life of high meaning. (inaudible) contributions could be made in many areas of importance to the Jewish people and to society at large. In some cases, contribution by (inaudible) [blasting?] even transforming value. In retrospect, it is remarkable that AJC's lay and professional leadership supported activities in every decade during (inaudible), and certainly much before that, from 1960, at least, until the present, my time here. It helped change the course of history for the better. These are my sentiments today. I have enormous pride in our collective [15:00] achievements at Vatican Council, too, 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 was the case unexpectedly last night by Cardinal Law, in virtually

every city in the United States and many other parts of the world. I know that something has happened in Catholic-Jewish relations when you look at Paris, Rome, (inaudible), and Argentina, and elsewhere, and finding people responding to me as a representative of AJC (inaudible) the way Cardinal Law responded last night. And that has persuaded me something permanent has happened in many parts of the world in Catholic-Jewish relationships.

And I take pride, as well, in the fact that it was very (inaudible) office that we were able to carry out [16:00] the pioneering relationships with Dr. Billy Graham, Evangelical Christians and other Protestants, as well as people of (inaudible) church. And in many ways, (inaudible) greatest meaning for me has been AJC's making it possible for me, together with our colleagues, to engage literally in life saving work, on behalf of Jewish and non-Jewish refugees throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, Jews in the Soviet Union, Christians in the Soviet Union, preoccupation centrally with Israel, Jews in the Middle Eastern countries, and programmed with a number of European countries, which we were able to (inaudible). (inaudible) 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 [17:00] and extended networks of personal contacts and friendships in many parts of the world, and to continue to be helpful to my successor in AJC I will do what is appropriate and possible to be of assistance. As of January the 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 (inaudible) sitting over here, my wife Georgette, who made possible more than anyone else, except possibly my (inaudible) [physician?], my being restored literally to normal good health reinforces these (inaudible). But all the sense of achievement that has been possible through AJC in the past (inaudible) simply also must be [said in truth?] there has been a price paid. [18:00] The unrelenting travels overseas and domestically take their toll on personal health and family sacrifice, but also in sacrificing personal fulfillment. I hope now to compensate to some of these imbalances by concentrating my energies on long delayed intensive, systematic study, scholarship, and writing two books for which I have recently committed myself to a major publisher, continue with a good deal of lecturing, and, when my schedule is ready, to (inaudible) 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 will

look forward to maintaining ties of warm friendship with many of you who have been my AJC family as I speak around the country in the coming months and years.

[19:00] I cannot conclude without two acknowledgements. One is an expression of my deepest gratitude and affection for my secretary the past 14 years, Rita [Resin?]. Rita has been infinitely more than a secretary. She has been my constant hostess in at least three languages, my confidant, and above all my friend, and I will always be in grievous debt. And she's in the back of the room, and I hope you will stand. (applause)

Finally, recalling my words of last May, words which remain my deepest heartfelt feeling today. There's a Hebrew phrase, *acharon, acharon chaviv*, [20:00] "the last is the most beloved." My magnificent, beautiful, truly brilliant wife Georgette has saved my life in many ways. It's 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 (inaudible). So Ted, Leo, Ira, [Bert?], [Selma?], my colleagues, personal colleagues and my family of (inaudible) and friends, for this important turning point day of my life [21:00] I thank you from the bottom of my heart. (applause)

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