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Presentation of Nostra Aetate Award to Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg

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BARRY STERNLICHT

*Presentation of Nostra Aetate Award
to Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg*

Good evening, everyone. Tonight we meet on the occasion of the Fourth Annual *Nostra Aetate* Awards Ceremony. I think this is a quiet reminder that we are personally living in an extremely unusual and remarkable revolution in our time. Maybe a millennium from now, people will look back and say that this time was marked by one of the great religious and moral achievements in the history of religion.

Consider this evening that has been organized by the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University. The Center is sponsored by a Catholic university because Catholicism has concluded that it is of overriding importance that Christians understand Judaism properly and respectfully. The CCJU is led by an Orthodox Rabbi, who used to be my Rabbi, which is how I became involved in the Center. The leadership of the Catholic Church, one of whose great leaders we honor tonight, Cardinal Cassidy, has affirmed that Christianity must relate to Judaism as a valid religion and as an elder brother. This is to say that Catholics act on the principle that Judaism is to be understood on its own terms, spoken for by self-affirming, independent spokesmen, and treated as an equal in every way. Whenever one group undertakes a difficult journey of self-renewal and repentance towards another group, it needs help. Partners from each group have to be willing to challenge morally, to help theologically, to respond supportively when there are new initiatives, and to guide thoughtfully when there are conflicts and choices to be made.

Tonight we honor such a person, Rabbi Irving Greenberg. Unlike our other honoree, Cardinal Cassidy, who is an institutional leader, a prince of the Church, and head of the Vatican's Commissions for Religious Relations with Jews, Rabbi Greenberg has never held a formal office and does not sit on the International Jewish-Christian

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Interreligious Committee, which institutionally represents Jewry in

these relationships. Rabbi Greenberg, or "Yitz," as he is universally known, represents the power of independent thought and the indispensable role of moral example in carrying out positive revolution. Twenty-six years ago, Yitz established CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, to educate Jewish leadership in the Jewish Tradition and to apply the lessons of pluralism and the Jewish-Christian dialogue to relationships between Jews and their denominations. But as he often says, it may be more difficult to accomplish Jewish pluralism than advance Jewish-Christian dialogue.

In recent years, Rabbi Greenberg has taken up the difficult task of developing a more affirming, constructive Jewish theology of Christianity and the role it plays for one billion people worldwide. Here again, he has been a pioneer in his thinking. Dr. Eugene Fisher, the head of the Secretariat for Jewish-Christian Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has called him the most important thinker in this field. Tonight, the CCJU acknowledges Rabbi Greenberg's leadership and honors his pioneering work.

People like tonight's honorees are the best assurance that there is no going back to the old days of bitterness, denial, and hatred. In extending this honor, we pledge our best efforts that the future relationship between Judaism and Christianity will be one of pluralism and respect, of mutual responsibility for building a better world. We will work together until our two religions exclusively teach love for each other and devotion to the dignity of every human being of every faith, all created in the image of God.

It is my great pleasure to present this award to you, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg.