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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93106

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Dr. Jamil Zainaldin  
Humanities Federation  
1012 - 14th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Jamil:

It was an excellent meeting. And it was most gratifying meeting you and Maggie. I am proud and pleased. The search committee did very well.

I am writing specifically about the item Rene Zentner placed on the blackboard -- "the book." We covered the first two stages in the planning process at the meeting: the idea was introduced, and it was identified as a possible Federation project for the future. I wish now to take the next step -- to outline what might happen from here on, though in no sense is this as yet a proposal.

But I do indeed have some interest in such a project myself. I have come to it not only through the five years in which I have been involved in the work of the state humanities programs, and not only through the more than ten years that I have been involved in the work of the Endowment. I also thought of it frequently in Charlottesville, as our committee deliberated on the project that Merrill Peterson headed. The one archives resource that we lack is a comprehensive narrative history of the program, or "the movement."

The book I have in mind would be both philosophical and factual. It would describe the growth of the program from its beginnings to the present, and would call attention to its remarkable achievements as well as to the obstacles it has faced and the challenges that remain. It would identify the key individuals involved, and would trace the process by which they became involved together. Readers of the book would come away knowing who "the founders" were, and would be able to attach names to critical formative events in the program's history. I have a narrative format in mind as literary carrier of these interdependent accounts.

From the philosophical side, the book would attempt to identify the primary program objectives of the work that has gone on, the underlying convictions, the rationale that has been employed, the relationship to other NEH-sponsored programs as well as to the other divisions within the Endowment, the minor and (sometimes) major shifts that have occurred over the years in program and methodological conception and intention, etc. From this perspective, the book would do its best to emphasize how intellectually sophisticated this national effort has been -- combining the best of philosophical ideals with a necessary national "grass-roots" citizens' component. In terms of conceptual models, I see the movement in Aristotelian terms: as an organism with a variety of components that is striving to move from potency to actuality, and has done so, though with considerable unactualized potential still remaining.

It would be desirable to have such a book available in November, 1987, as an important piece in the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Federation. And this brings up another matter.

I haven't decided for myself whether I would wish to undertake such a project myself, and/or in collaboration with someone else. But I do know that if I were to take such a step -- with a number of crucial questions remaining open -- it would have to be according to the following terms and schedule. To meet a November 1987 deadline, the book would have to be finished by the end of next summer at the latest, and this would require cooperation on the part of the publisher and printer. To meet such a deadline, I would have to set aside the spring and summer for the writing, with the research to be completed, say, by May 15, 1987. And all of this may be absolutely impossible. But this would mean that I would have to take the spring quarter off, and devote the summer to the project as well. And this would require a working salary equal to what I would receive were I teaching during the spring quarter and devoting the summer months to funded projects. Under such an arrangement, I would agree to do the project for a fee, as it were, with whatever royalties may be involved belonging to the Federation, or the program. According to my present salary schedule, I am talking about a fee of about \$35,000, together with some travel expense so that I could interview the appropriate persons (which work I would do in the fall, when my teaching schedule is relatively light), and some minimal research and secretarial assistance. Maybe I am thoroughly underestimating the amount of work that would be involved, but I think such a plan would be workable with a target date of the 10th anniversary looming there as compelling incentive.

The Aristotelian approach would enable a writer to weave the two important narratives together. Clearly we are talking about the NEH program for state humanities efforts and we are talking, more specifically, about the work of the Federation over a decade. My thought is that a book on the history of the NEH program is the appropriate working context to deal more specifically with the work of the Federation. In other words, if there were simply a history of the Federation, I wouldn't be able to undertake it; in fact, I wouldn't want to undertake it. The kind of narrative I have in mind is specifically styled to come to intelligible terms with what I've been referring to as a "coordinated movement."

In this respect, I can envision the major funding coming directly from the Endowment. And I can envision such sponsorship to meet a number of other current objectives, all of which are expressed in the recognition that such a project "is good for everyone." In short, I see "the book" as having real substance in and of itself, but I also see it as an instrument to emphasize the necessity of cooperation between the several elements involved -- such a function belongs to the Aristotelian model -- and to illustrate the same in both descriptive and prescriptive terms.

I haven't even made a mental commitment yet. But, as I promised you and Sondra and the others there, I have written out some thoughts on the subject, at this point, in a non-proprietary way.

Sincerely,