

CLOSING REMARKS

BY DR. GERHART M. RIEGNER

At the end of this meeting, I would like to make a few remarks. My first remark is that I was enormously stimulated and encouraged by the last session we had this morning. The fact that so many positive, constructive proposals were made, and that the whole audience supported what we were trying to do during these last few days, is for those who have planned this meeting a great encouragement. This is really a sign that we succeeded in creating an enthusiasm for the future work that we wanted to undertake. I am most grateful to all of you, and nearly all of you have contributed this morning to the proposal for the future activities.

I would like to say at the same time, that what you asked us to do is certainly beyond our forces, and beyond our financial means at present. We will have to have a strong support from all of you to go on in our work and to select the right subjects. We have decided to meet at least every three years. But the suggestions which were made also include the idea that there should be working groups or other instruments which could carry forward our work. The implementation of these ideas will, to a great extent, not only depend on our intellectual capacities, but also on the finances which we will be able to mobilize. But the fact that you all want to go forward and that you all made constructive proposals is, I believe, the best sign of the positive result of this meeting.

Now, let me say a few words concerning this meeting. I believe that we have succeeded in convincing each other that we not only have to work together, but we also have to find the ways and methods of working together. This morning there was a proposal that we should not only have academic meetings, but also meetings of community leaders and

we should somehow reach the great masses of our faithful. Of course, this is a logical approach. I personally believe that this meeting was not only an academic meeting and I believe we should keep it this way. Our meeting was a mixture of an academic meeting and a leadership meeting.

For us Jews, for instance, the approach to such meetings is not only academic. The problems with which we deal are not only theological problems. They are, in the real sense of the meaning, existential problems. We came here knowing that we would deal with very existential problems. I noted that some of us — and this is true also for our Orthodox partners — approached the problems in the first instance from a very historical and sometimes theological aspect. But when it came to a problem of our time, for instance to the situation in Israel, suddenly the same people who argued that we have an academic discussion, became as existential in their approach as we had been in ours. That means, in reality, we are more than an intellectual and academic team. We are really *panim el panim*, “face to face.” This is the natural way and this is the necessary way.

I believe that we have to learn on both sides how we conceive of ourselves in our own identities. That is the first condition for the establishment of a real dialogue. We have to understand, and those who approach the theme from a point of view of history and theology have to understand, that we cannot only approach it from this aspect, but that we Jews are a living and creative community today. As Prof. Werblowsky pointed out, Christians cannot understand us if they imagine us to be a fossil of two thousand years. When we approach it this way, when we try to discover who is the other side, and when we analyze what are the basic tenets and the aims of the other side, how they regard the work and what is their vision, then we can make real progress.

There is also another important lesson. We have to understand each other as the other understands himself and not as we would want him to be. Unless we do this, we will not make any progress. We have to understand each other as we ourselves identify ourselves, as you yourselves identify yourselves. This is the second condition to make any progress in our relationship.

I shall not go into details of the discussion. But I would like to refer to one statement which was made by Prof. Stylianopoulos. He accepted — and I think the great majority of the modern Christian world now officially accepts this — that the “Old” Covenant has never been abolished. If this is accepted as a basic concept, then this has very serious consequences for your theology and you cannot completely ignore it. What does it mean that the Old Covenant has not been abolished? What does it mean for a Christian? How can a Christian, if this is true,

now say "We are the New Israel"? This is no longer possible. There is a certain consequence which has until now been avoided in most Christian theological works. I think when we take ourselves really seriously, we will have to draw some consequences on both sides in some of the fundamental concepts.

We have also learned, and I noted it already after the lecture by Prof. Elias Oikonomou, that there exists a certain dynamic in the Orthodox theology and the Orthodox community, as much as in ours. This was new and encouraging to hear. We Jews still also have prejudices which do not correspond to the reality. I was also very encouraged by the fact that there were a number of interventions by Orthodox members of this colloquium who made very constructive proposals particularly during the last hours. There were several proposals which showed that not everything is frozen and we are able to go with the times. And we can make progress in our relationship if we are both taking ourselves and our opposite partners seriously.

Let me say another word in reply to what a number of you have said on the situation in the Middle East. I assure you that we take the situation as much to heart as you do. We are convinced of the necessity to come to a peaceful solution and to advance in the peace process. You would be surprised, with regard to some of the criticism and aggravations you have expressed, that they are shared by many of us on the Jewish side. Half of Israel at least, and most probably a greater part, is seeking to advance in the peace process. They are taking the peace process seriously and are trying to come to terms with the minority. I am very happy that in the last year or so, the Israeli government has ratified the U.N. human rights conventions, and I have personally had something to do with this. This is a very important development and will certainly have great consequences also for the minorities in Israel. And believe us that we are as much concerned with these problems as you are and that the best thing to do is to help the moderate forces on both sides to make progress and advance toward real peace. And I say this with the full responsibility of a man who has worked over the last fifty-six years every day and night for peace and for the betterment of the human condition.

Let me say finally, I believe this meeting was from an intellectual point of view a great success. We have heard very fine presentations. We have had excellent reactions to them. I rarely attended a symposium, an academic conference, of such a high level. I am most grateful and I want to thank all who contributed and all those who presented papers. We will print the papers and try to print something of the discussions, and that will be a lasting tribute to all those who have participated in the encounter.

Without again paying tribute to my neighbor, I must say that

Metropolitan Damaskinos has been the soul of this meeting and he has, with his great courage, his great vision, led us to the moment where we are today. I think he shares with me the great optimism which came out of this meeting; that we are on the right road, that we are right to continue on this road to contribute to a greater understanding, first between our two communities, but also to contribute the constructive service of both of our communities to the peace of the world.

Let me finally thank all of those who have helped to make this meeting so fruitful. My first thanks go to the Greek government that has received us with great graciousness and has put us into the wonderful surroundings of this hotel; the beauty of the landscape which we saw from morning until evening has certainly inspired the harmonious spirit which has developed during this meeting. I want to thank officially on behalf of the Jewish delegation the Greek government for the gracious reception and for the financial contribution it has made. Let me also thank all those who have helped in the technical success of this meeting: all my friends here, the translators and the secretaries here in the hall and outside in the small room, the very gracious ladies. I must say we have been treated very nicely, with great charm and graciousness that we will not forget. And special thanks to Mr. Gary Vachicouras, the assistant of Metropolitan Damaskinos, who has been a wonderful comrade during these days, but also a helper in every technical problem which we had to face. He has helped us to overcome them and he has played a great part in the success of this meeting.

Thank you.

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