

CLOSING REMARKS

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The Third Academic Meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism completed the work which had been programmed after a long preparation and with great efforts from both sides. The completion of the work certainly does not refer to the exhaustion of the agenda, or to the contents of our discussions on every topic, or finally to the fruits of our rich discussions envisaging the purification of the historical memory. The completion of our work refers more to the new spirit and the new prospects of our academic dialogue which, despite the circumstantial difficulties, is continued on a broader representative basis and with a clearer realism.

During the four days of our proceedings, we had the opportunity to become fully conscious of the fact that, despite painful historical confrontations and/or quarrels, the internal relation between Christianity and Judaism establishes positive presuppositions for a constructive dialogue in the interest of the faithful of the two religions. Our meeting as representatives of two related traditions, and the new spirit prevailing in the discussions on the topics of the agenda, specified the reciprocal interpenetration of continuity and renewal in the history of relations between the two monotheistic religions, which do have a particular understanding or interpretation of the plan of God for man and the world and, at the same time, refer to this plan differently in the total context of the faith and spirituality of their faithful.

The internal relation of the two religions exerts certain influences on the historical intensity of the frictions between Christianity and Judaism,

since such frictions are phenomena which presuppose an inner link and definitely not a distance. The historical confrontations demonstrated mainly the antithetical elements of both traditions, which nourished the polemic literature of both sides. Our mission is to project the common elements of both traditions, which nourish the religious experience and spirituality of our faithful. Undoubtedly, this mission is difficult and demands a lot of time, since it is not possible to purify in one academic meeting the distressing tensions and prejudices of nearly twenty centuries. Besides, as was already declared with clarity in our meeting, we too are in some manner the bearers of the influences of the polemic literature of the historical past, and we need to be appropriately prepared for a more responsible promotion of the goals of our academic dialogue.

As already stressed, Christianity presents its own perspective for the interpretation of its relation to Judaism. Thus this relation is interpreted as an appropriation as well as a perfection of Judaism in the Christian spiritual experience. Here the perspective of relation has positive and negative extensions. Judaism in its turn rejects this interpretation but, at the same time, has the historical responsibility to define the limits of its endurance over against the religious reality of Christianity, so that our academic dialogue can render fruitful not only the continuity, but also the renewal of the spirit which imbues the relation of both religions and their faithful. Christianity recognizes in the theology, anthropology and cosmology of Judaism basic elements of its own corresponding teaching, which are confirmed with a sincere respect not only for the Old Testament, but also for the spiritual experience of the "chosen people" in the framework of the divine plan of salvation of man. This is an important affirmation which pervades the entire Christian tradition and spirituality. Doctrinaire rejection of this Christian position on the part of Judaism not only does not build up, but on the contrary discourages any renewal of relations between both religions.

Our brief academic meeting has proved that the distance between continuity and renewal can easily be covered in our dialogue without affecting or changing the peculiar elements of the two traditions. The first encouraging steps have already been made in this direction. Nevertheless, renewal needs its own continuity. We have the right to hope and to believe that our aspirations will not be frustrated, since the goals of our academic dialogue will facilitate the successful eradication of the historical prejudices from the religious memory of our faithful.

The historical juxtapositions usually had a polemic or apologetic character, and their aim was to establish the superiority of each tradition over against the other, or to justify their peculiar elements, while simultaneously they confirmed their internal spiritual relation with their

unquestionable reference to the divine plan for the salvation of man. If this rapprochement was facilitated during the seventeenth century by the rise of metaphysical agony for God in view of the common problems which were caused by the contestation of the integrity in religious faith, it is certain that the contemporary agony over the sacredness of the human person and the integrity of creation is a far greater incentive for the rapprochement and the co-operation of both religions.

God and man are the two immovable poles, so to speak, for the divine plan as much as for the spiritual history of mankind. This dialectic excludes, on the one hand, any banning of God to an idle metaphysical inaccessibility, and on the other hand, any autonomous ideological annihilation of God after the prototypes of the anthropocentric indifference and the positivist atheism of our times. It is clear, however, that any one of these extremes not only distorts the relation of man with God or with the world, but also decisively alters the authentic content of the common religious faith concerning the unity and the brotherhood of the human race according to the rationality of the divine act of creation.

The consequences of these extreme interpretations were indeed disastrous in the history of Judaism as much as of Christianity. The presentations and discussions confirmed these disastrous consequences of historical deviations, which constitute negative examples for the present as well as for the future, since religious intolerance usually degenerates to persecution not only of those who hold contrary opinions, but also of the ideas which construct a fruitful dialogue in the spiritual history of mankind. The Minister of Education and Religion of Greece, Mr. G. Souflias, exposed with great clarity these effects during a recent speech:

In contemporary societies, wherever competition and rivalry are inevitable presuppositions of survival in the context of the last socio-political developments which brought the peoples much closer than they were in the past, we all need to take a stand on what unites us and to respect with understanding what separates us. This can be achieved through a dynamic and constructive education such as opens horizons in the thought of man without, however, holding him captive to designs and prejudices of the past. Only when we come to subordinate our individual interest to the general one, when we are able to consider the problem of others as our problem, when the powerful feel that they have a duty — and their own interest, I would say — to help sincerely in a symmetrical development of peoples and countries which are today confronted with insuperable problems arising from failures in their social organization, economy and education, only then we shall be able to rest assured that another holocaust of whatever form will not reoccur again in the world. Because next to the holocaust of human lives, there is the holocaust of ideas and of spirit, the holocaust of values, of the environment, of quality of life, etc.

I feel the innermost spiritual need to thank warmly both the distinguished speakers and the select intellectuals of both sides, because by their contribution they established in the spirit of mutual understanding the idea of the renewal of the perspectives of our academic dialogue. It was maintained with enthusiasm that this was the first real meeting of the representatives of both religions. Personally, I felt that we have been in this hall for two thousand years charged with the highest duty to purify the essential content of the two traditions from the circumstantial exasperations of our confrontations. We owe it to ourselves to live again briefly the experiences of these two thousand years in order to draw the necessary conclusions for the renewal of our continuity and to become conscious of the common responsibility for the future of mankind and of the world.

Therefore I consider it necessary to thank again Her Excellency, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Virginia Tsouderou, who with extraordinary generosity provided us with the ideal situation so that we could experience the diachronic reality of our traditions in this beautiful part of divine creation.

I would also like to thank the Central Jewish Committee for yesterday's evening reception, and again and mostly Dr. Riegner and Prof. Halpérin; Prof. Vlassios Phidas for his advice in the preparation of the Academic Meeting; Ms. Theodora Titaki-Nikolopoulos, Ms. Aggeliki Phidas, and Mr. Gary Vachicouras for their invaluable administrative services and unbroken vigilance for the successful organization and carrying out of our meeting.

As a token of participation of the people of God in following our work, I would like, following the request of the distinguished Greek artist Alikis Tombrou, to offer to Dr. Riegner and Mr. Singer an album titled "Jerusalem." I would like to thank as well the interpreters who were so fruitful and participated in the mutual understanding, without confusion of languages, or overcoming the confusion of languages.

I thank everyone, and again I wish a continuous renewal in the renewed continuation of our academic dialogue. Glory to God because of all things.

Thank you.

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