

A CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX / JEWISH ENCOUNTER

Lucerne, Switzerland 16-18 March 1977

On 16-18 March 1977, representatives of the Orthodox Church and of Judaism met in Lucerne, Switzerland, for academic theological discussions. The encounter took place under the auspices of the Theological Faculty of Lucerne and was co-sponsored by the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy, Geneva, and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, which is comprised of the World Jewish Congress, the Synagogue Council of America, the American Jewish Committee, the B'nai B'rith/Anti-Defamation League, and the Jewish Committee in Israel for Interreligious Consultations. The subject was "The Law in Christian - Orthodox and Jewish Understanding."

The following persons participated in the colloquium:

On the Jewish side: Rabbi Balfour Brickner, New York; Dr. Ernst L. Ehrlich, Basle; Mr. Abraham Karlikoff, Paris; Mr. Michael J. Klein, Geneva; Dr. Pinhas Peli, Jerusalem; Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, London; Dr. Gerhart M. Riegner, Geneva; Rabbi Elie Sabetai, Athens; Mr. Zachariah Shuster, Paris; Professor Shemaryahu Talmon, Jerusalem.

On the Christian-Orthodox side: Mr. Georges Lemoupolos, Chambésy; Father Jean Renneteau, Paris; Professor Dr. Damaskinos Papandreou, Metropolitan of Tranoupolis; Bishop Seraphim, Zurich; Pastor Emanuel Simantirakis, Zurich; Dr. Basilios Stoyianos, Thessalonike; Professor Dr. Demetrios Theraios, Chambésy.

Regrettably, due to illness Archpriest Professor Alexei Kniazef was unable to participate and deliver a paper as planned.

On the Christian-Roman Catholic side: Professor Rudolph Erni, Lucerne; Professor Rudolph Schmid, Lucerne; and Professor Clemens Thoma, Lucerne.

For the World Council of Churches: Dr. Franz von Hammerstein.

The session was opened by Professor Dr. Victor Conzemius, Rector of the Theological Faculty of Lucerne. After the Rector's welcome, Metropolitan Damaskinos Papandreou explained that this meeting had come about as a result of a lecture he had given in Zurich in 1976 before the Swiss Society for Christian - Jewish Friendship on the theme "The Claim for Absolution of Both Christianity and Judaism and the Necessity for Dialogue between Them." His lecture had had a positive reaction from the Jewish side. Earlier, encounters of this kind had been encouraged by the resolutions of the first Presynodal Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy, in November 1976, as well as by the Christmas message

from Patriarch Demetrios I. Metropolitan Damaskinos stressed the academic character of the Lucerne encounter.

Next, Dr. Riegner greeted the participants in the name of the Jewish delegation and recalled various points of contact in the history of both communities. Metropolitan Damaskinos presided over the sessions on the first day. In the morning, Professor Talmon gave the first lecture, on the theme "The Torah as a Concept and Vital Principle in the Hebrew Bible." He emphasized that Torah covers much more than ceremonial Law, being concerned with the entire spectrum of human life and moral conduct based on faith. Through misinterpretation of the Jewish concept of Law, the Jewish faith had been stigmatized and much harm had been done. Torah and Law, as understood in Judaism, preserved the connection between God and man, between man and man, between the center of society and its periphery. "Seeking God" was equated by the prophet Amos with "seeking the good and the right."

In the afternoon of the same day, Professor Schmid spoke on the subject: "A Roman Catholic View of the Law." He stressed that in light of contemporary biblical exegesis, the concept of Law had been released from the disastrously restricted interpretation of the past. He analysed the development and meaning of the purity legislation and said that, in the light of Jesus' teaching, the Law is to be seen not as an absolute, but rather as an instruction demanding a response which God's people must render anew in every age according to the revelation of God Himself. If this inner dynamic was taken seriously, the Jews and Christians, though they may not come to the same conclusions on all points, could live together in mutual respect and love.

Dr. Ehrlich presided over the meetings on 17 March, the second day of the encounter. At the morning meeting, Rabbi Rabinovitch spoke of "The Law in Rabbinic Judaism." He emphasized the flexible character of rabbinical interpretations of the Torah, which allowed for a pluralism of views within Judaism. At the afternoon meeting, Professor Stoyiannos spoke about "The Law in the New Testament from an Orthodox Point of View." He said it would be a mistake to sweep existing disagreements under the table in the name of ecumenism, and he analyzed the historic evolution of the problematic and the answers given to it, including the Christological interpretation of the Law. The Eastern Church Fathers, he recalled, were interested not so much in the problem of justification

as in the metamorphosis of man through Christ. To them, the Law was one part of the whole Scripture, a part of the mystery of Divine Economy for the salvation of man in Christ.

All the lectures gave way to lively discussions which were marked by frankness and sincerity.

On the evening of the second day, the participants were invited by Dr. Walter Gut, Director of the Department of Education of the Canton of Lucerne to an official reception in the old Town Hall.

At the last meeting, on 18 March, the discussions were summarized, and it was decided to carry on the work in a similar meeting the following year on a theme yet to be defined.

Summary Minutes

16 March 1977 - Chairman, Mgr. Damaskinos

Professor Dr. Victor Conzemius, Rector of the Theological Faculty of Lucerne, greeted the representatives of the Orthodox Church and of Judaism in the name of the Faculty. He observed that many participants had come from overseas and other distant places. Some participants, such as Metropolitan Papandreou, were old friends and members of the faculty. He was happy that the group had honored a small university as the site of its encounter and he hoped that their choice would further the participants' readiness to dialogue and stimulate the exchange of views.

The Rector then informed the meeting that the Bishop of the Diocese, Dr. Anton Hänggai, for reasons of health, was unable to welcome the group personally, and he conveyed the Bishop's greetings and best wishes for the success of the conference.

Professor Conzemius concluded with a story from the Tales of the Hassidim which he admonished all to keep in mind during the debates:

Rabbi Baer of Radoshitz at one time asked his teacher, Jacob Itzhak, the Rabbi of Lublin to show him a universal way of serving God. The Zaddik replied: "It is impossible to tell men which way they should follow. For one can serve God through study or through prayer, through eating and through fasting. Each man should consider which way his heart leads him and then he should pursue this direction with all his might."

The next speaker, Mgr. Damaskinos, welcomed the participants as a member of the Faculty. He expressed his pleasure that the Faculty, distinguished by a harmonious cooperation between Catholics and Orthodox, was to be the scene of an important academic dialogue on the Law in Orthodox Christian and Jewish understanding. This meeting owed thanks to Dr. Riegner and the the World Jewish Congress, for its organization in cooperation with the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He said it had been spurred by a lecture he had given in February 1976 at the Jewish-Christian Swiss *arbeitsgemeinschaft* in Zurich, in which he had stressed the need for Jewish and Christian common endeavor. His lecture had provoked positive comments at the Orthodox Center and had been quoted in the doctoral thesis of Miss Birgit Helwig, Berlin, on the relationship of the Orthodox Churches to Judaism. In his lecture, as quoted by Miss Helwig, he had pointed to the divergent interpretations by Jews and Christians of God and the Law in the history of Salvation and had stressed that Jesus had explicitly denied that he wanted to abrogate the Law rather than to fulfill it. A closer scrutiny of the Qumran manuscripts could also, in the future, throw light on St. Paul's intent regarding Rabbinical Law. The issue was significant in the controversy between Judaism and Christianity and had therefore been chosen as the topic of the current dialogue which was welcomed by Orthodoxy. He recalled that the first Pan-Orthodox (Pre-Synodal) Conference held in 1976 in Chambésy had formulated the wish to cooperate with other faiths with a view to eradicating fanaticism and to furthering reconciliation among men and they are reflected in the idea of Law in post-biblical literature mankind without distinction as to race or religion. The decision to cooperate with non-Christian faiths had inspired Patriarch Demetrios I's Christmas message to men of all religions, heads of states, directors of international organizations, men of spirit and culture of all trends, enjoining them to work for religious freedom and tolerance in the new year.

Mgr. Damaskinos declared that at this meeting theologians of both religions should engage in academic discussions. They should assess their own faith while being ready to listen and, if necessary, to reformulate their thinking. Understanding could not be brought about by silencing or glossing over contradictions. If basic differences were brought to light, they should become the object of a lively discussion, without polemical self-assertion nor recrimination.

Tolerance should lead to a meaningful discussion but tolerance, as Goethe had said, should be a passing thing and must change to recognition. Merely to tolerate was to offend. He quoted Gregory of Nyssa who had said that "the way is not impossible; the impossible itself can become the way towards the common Father."

Dr. Riegner said it was his pleasure to greet the Rector and the assembly in the name of the Jewish delegation. He expressed his gratitude to the Theological Faculty of Lucerne for providing the framework in which this first encounter could take place and he thanked especially the Rector and Professor Thoma for their help.

Dr. Riegner pointed out that this meeting was the first encounter between Jews and Orthodox Christians on an international level. He recited the traditional Jewish blessing *Shehecheyanu ve'kiyemanu vehigianu*, a praise to God that it has been given to us to live to the present moment. He also noted that the encounter was part of a series of meetings which had developed during the last years into a permanent institution. He cited the Permanent Liaison Committee between the world Jewish community and the World Council of Churches and the Permanent Liaison Committee with the Catholic Church. The meeting signified the foundation of a new relationship with the Orthodox Church, which he hoped would be strengthened.

Dr. Riegner remarked that the occasion stirred emotions on both sides as they represented two of the oldest communities in the world, the Jewish people and Orthodox Christianity which, especially in the Holy Land, felt that it was pre-eminent in the origin of the Christian Church. Each community perceived itself to have come from the same geographical region and to have taken much from that region into its life, its convictions and religious thought. Their liturgies had much in common, and anyone who had participated in an Orthodox festival was reminded of Jewish rituals. Many imponderable elements were common to both Judaism and Orthodoxy and played a role both in their common and separate histories. He reminded the gathering that there also were less pleasant memories in their common history but would not dwell on those as the purpose was to overcome the problems of the past. The Jewish side was grateful that, thanks to informal conversations started with Mgr. Damaskinos, the stage of an academic encounter had been reached. He hoped that further encounters would be organized and that the personal contacts made in Lucerne would facilitate a really new relationship be-

tween Jewry and Orthodox Christianity. He hoped that the meeting and the lecturers would be blessed and that they in turn would be a blessing for both communities.

Dr. Riegner introduced the Jewish participants and Mgr. Damasinos the Christian participants.

Next Professor Talmon spoke on the subject: "The Torah as a Concept and Vital Principle in the Hebrew Bible."

SHEMARYAHU TALMON

TORAH AS A CONCEPT AND VITAL PRINCIPLE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Professor Papandreou has described our colloquium as an academic discussion among theologians and scholars of various religious persuasions, modes of faith and thought. This description is justified by the composition of the gathering assembled here in Lucerne and especially by the fact that this assembly is taking place in the Theological Faculty of the university. It is thus essentially a legitimate and perhaps also appropriate description. But let me suggest a slight correction, based on Jewish usage, which expresses an idea that I am going to develop in my detailed argument. According to Jewish tradition, every *Sichat Talmidei Chachamim*, i.e. every debate among sages or among students aspiring to become sages must have as its end not the mere elucidation of theories in the form of a scholastic exercise, but should—at any rate ideally—lead to practical conclusions. The discussions of sages result in decisions affecting everyday life. They concern the life of the individual and of society, even though on the surface they may give the impression of dealing with abstract notions in which the disputants aim at proving their astuteness and their consummate skill in the art of hairsplitting. Virtuosity in the contest of wits is regarded not as an aim, but as means of clarifying principles and formulating practical rules which serve to regulate everyday life, and of making manifest the attitudes of the disputants and of the community which they represent.

We should adopt these guidelines in our present discussions. Our colloquium, a conversation between qualified representatives of Orthodox Christianity, the Roman Church, and various streams in Judaism, must not become the arena for an intellectual contest in which we try to convince one another to accept our own particular interpretation of articles of faith which spring from a common root, viz. the Hebrew Bible which is the Old Testament of the Church. Furthermore, we cannot content ourselves by confronting one another with the intrinsic and methodological correctness of our respective ideas about the subject we have undertaken to examine: Law in Judaism and in Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity. Even if we who are assembled here succeed—as it is to