

Despite the considerable advances and successes achieved by medicine in our age, leprosy, which has been known to us from biblical times, still remains one of the scourges of mankind. Even today, more than ten million people in the world are afflicted with the disease, mainly, of course, in countries in the Third World. Leprosy does not only inflict physical decay and torment on the sufferer, but, as the German term for the disease, *Aussatz*, indicates, it also means exclusion from society. It is therefore all the more significant that, for the first time in the history of the fight against leprosy, the rigorous implementation of a treatment programme has succeeded in eradicating the disease from a whole area, namely Malta, formerly the last stronghold of leprosy in Europe. To mark this occasion, this symposium is being held here in Würzburg, the seat of the German Leprosy Relief Association, with the aim of providing an opportunity for the exchange of experiences concerning the use of multidrug therapy, which was so successfully employed in Malta. I am very pleased that Würzburg has been chosen as the venue for this symposium, not only because the German Leprosy Relief Association has its seat here, but also because the Würzburg Faculty of Medicine can look back on a far from undistinguished past. Names like Siebold, Döllinger, von Koelliker, Rinecker, Rindfleisch and Virchow testify to the high standard of the work carried out by the Würzburg Medical Faculty. At the same time such prominent figures in the field of medicine also serve as examples for all those who have committed themselves to serving man with all his ailments, illnesses and diseases.

In connection with the theme of this symposium, we would do well to remember that the foremost task of medicine is to alleviate human suffering. Today it is particularly important to bear this in mind in our affluent society with its growing tendency to turn medicine into soulless technology and inhuman machinery. The struggle against leprosy may serve here as an example of how the doctor can act as a human being rather than functioning like a technician, even though, of course, he cannot perform his tasks adequately without having recourse to the results of technological and pharmacological research. Successes in the fight against leprosy do not necessarily hit the headlines in the media, but

they are, nevertheless, at least just as important as a heart transplantation. Such success as achieved by multidrug therapy demonstrates to the world how highly beneficial the results of medical research can be for humanity.

I am extremely impressed by the fact that medical research scientists and doctors from so many countries in the world have joined together to achieve this common success in the fight against leprosy and I am proud that so many have found it possible to attend this conference here in Würzburg.

I could think of no better wish for myself or one of my successors that to be able to announce here in Würzburg in the foreseeable future that another country has finally been freed of the scourge of leprosy.

I should like to extend a warm welcome to all those participating in this symposium and to wish the conference every success.

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