

Opening remarks at the 11th Marcel Grossmann
meeting at the Freie Universität Berlin

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I should explain my presence here since I have only a nodding acquaintance with the main themes of this meeting.

I gather that Marcel Grossmann had an important role to play in science; his influence on young Einstein has been reason enough to celebrate him. The Grossmann meetings have now become an institution and have a life of their own. The meetings have been held once every three years for some thirty years now, and their proceedings have been

published with care and with a sense of continuity. The common factor among all these meetings is, of course, Remo Ruffini. He holds it together.

The meetings were started as a joint effort between Ruffini and Abdus Salam. You will perhaps recall that Salam directed, in Trieste, the International Centre for Theoretical Physics---or ICTP as it is commonly known---for almost thirty years since its inception in 1964. The first two Grossmann meetings were, in fact, held at ICTP. The prefaces for the proceedings of the first two meetings were written jointly by Ruffini and Salam. And Salam was involved, though less directly, in the organization of the next two meetings. As Salam's successor at ICTP, it is thus clear that I have an institutional connection to the Grossmann meetings; in addition, Remo Ruffini is a friend. These are two good reasons for me to be here. I am pleased about it, I offer my

support in any way possible, and also say a few more words.

It is amusing to make a comparison between the very first Grossmann meeting in 1975 and this one. The number of participants at the first meeting was about 150. For this meeting, on the other hand, more than 150 people serve on the international coordination committee alone. The registered number of participants is about one thousand. Several parallel sessions are planned at this meeting, while such an arrangement was not necessary in 1975---and did not exist. The meeting is now much wider in scope than that in 1975, and new subfields have come into being. It is obvious, altogether, that the evolution has been quite successful.

At the first meeting, there were some outstanding people who shaped the subject the way it is now; even with a poor to partial knowledge of the field, I can recognize outstanding names at this meeting who

have similarly contributed to the broad field covered by it. Fortunately, this aspect has not changed.

Nevertheless, I am tempted to make a somewhat orthogonal remark. In the Preface to the proceedings of the first Grossmann meeting, Ruffini and Salam wrote as follows: "... If one may select one set of lectures for mention, perhaps the most outstanding were the lectures on cosmology by E. Lifschitz: all the participants, we are sure, will keep in their memory the three superb lectures he delivered, and even more, the passionate discussions following each lecture. This was a splendid example of strong interaction between the speaker and the audience, leading to flashes of unsuspected insights ...” That was in 1976, thirty years ago. Will the business of this meeting produce something comparable, to be remembered in the same vein for its lucidity and leisurely impact? I hope so. I hope that we have not lost track of the fact that the best science, at least in

theoretical and mathematical physics, often needs a leisurely pace for absorbing great ideas. These days, we seem to crowd too many things in short spaces of time. Of all the people, I should know this well, considering how things have evolved at ICTP itself.

This remark aside, the present meeting has all the hallmarks of being tremendously successful. I wish to close by thanking Professor Remo Ruffini for this opportunity to say these few words. Arrangements for a meeting like the present---no matter how many people serve on various organizing committees---always fall on the shoulders of a small number of people. In this instance, this dubious distinction seems to have gone especially to Professor Hagen Kleinert. I thank him for his brave adventure and the Freie Universität for hosting it.

And thank you for your attention.