

Lecture

## **Inter-religious Dialogue**

### **in an increasing conflict situation**

delivered before the pastors' convention of the Eckernförde  
church district,  
on March 6th, 1991, at Barkelsby.  
(Expanded keyword concept)

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**Preamble.**

In a television report on the deliberations and debates of the 7th plenary meeting of the World Council of Churches in Canberra / Australia, one briefly faded in a transparent reading: "Any dialogue is a lie".

My answer is: Yes, any dialogue is a lie  
if it does "not proceed from faith", Rom.  
14,23.  
Dialogue from faith, however,  
today  
in following Jesus  
is what love dictates  
unrestrictedly.

### Layout of Lecture

I would like to give my opinion on the following problems:

- I. With reference to the question of capacity for dialogue.
- II. As to the subject: distance -  
differentiation and  
growing together.
- III. Remarks directed against the emergence of a new enemy  
image as regards the Islam and relating to a dialogue  
interrupted in May 1990 with indication of some reasons  
leading to this interruption.
- IV Concerning the emergence of a new, spiritual horizon:  
in the Inter-religious dialogue:  
Differentiating solidarity in a lived experience of  
faith.

## I. Capacity for Dialogue

### 1. What do I understand by it?

Human life lived together  
on earth - resolutely,  
persistently and  
courageously paving  
the way for one another,  
also with the various religious roots,  
the respective irrevocable independence and  
the obvious things inherent in faith, even  
if they mutually exclude themselves.

### 2. What is necessary therefore?

- 2.1. The acceptance of the necessity of living and growing together on the living space of the earth, narrowing due to population explosion.
- 2.2. The courage to live one's own faith as faith, and not to replace it by a certain doctrine or by dogmatics.
- 2.3. The determination of faith to open up to this new context of humanity and to orientate oneself towards it.
- 2.4. At the same time, it is imperative to listen to the Life-voice of one's fellow being, to perceive his vocation and his message, to comprehend it and not to close one's mind to the foreign life horizon and its implications.
- 2.5. This is hard work for generations to come, considered from all sides.

### 3. Consequences for one's own attitude

- 3.1. Extreme vigilance  
and self-control  
in conjunction with incessant, critical self-query why and whence my attitude proceeds from my faith, and not only from the tradition of my position.
- 3.2. Renunciation of self-protection, on the part of faith (defensive or aggressive).
- 3.3 The renunciation of a religiously founded system-imperialism (cultural - scientific - technical - etc.).
- 3.4. The renunciation of a religious absolutism of one's own position.
- 3.5. The renunciation of identification efforts as sim-

plistic attempts at adaptation or as hidden occupations ("with us, there is sufficient space for everybody", e.g. in Christianity or Hinduism, etc.)

3.6. The renunciation of exclusivistic walling-in.  
(Salvation, truth and justice, etc. are solely with us).

#### 4. Summarizing:

Dialogical living together as unconditionally lived  
frankness of love,  
**openes**  
from faith  
towards faith (Rom. 1,17);  
or as seen from another visual field:  
to confide  
in God's creative hands  
incessantly, in common and today.

## II. As to the subject: distance, differentiation and growing together.

Only some remarks:

1. Irresistibly, t w o apparently opposed processes are taking place in the o n e and o n l y world society.

First of all, a **to set up new profiles** of one's own position encompassing and penetrating all areas, including its traditional elements.

Secondly, the growing together of the various human groups and cultures into a universal structure of human society.

#### 2. 1)

The necessity of a most intensive and lively **setting up new profiles** arises from the inevitability, seriousness, force and depth inherent in the contacts of cultures, nations and also religions. Each individual of these major groups assumes a new life form, a new face and, while living together, also a new identity. Expressed in biblical language: God does not cease engraving His own image into each individual or collective human shape.

3. Thus, in the continuous creation, the creatio continua, arise new profiles of grace increasingly differing from one another. In this way, the outline of the individual figure becomes more and more detached from the life contour of the neighbour and the fellow being. This happens according as the different life forms or shapes are opening up to one another. Distance, therefore, does not continue to be a tragic evil and a reason for definitive seclusion and separation. But the distance also of religions becomes a challenge, an invitation and - from a Christian point of view - a commandment of God to adapt oneself with all one's might, while following the Gospel, to God's Universe growing together.

This remains valid even if the turbulences of this process are caused and influenced into the innermost recesses by the obstruction and fragmentation potency of the evil ( "Great power and much craftiness are his cruel armour..." ).

4. Thus, what is decisive has already been said as regards the 2nd process. Coinciding with the increasing differentiation of the individual is a complementary growth into a joint and allied whole. (Increasing and also accelerating "granulation" also of the religions, including their sub groups, in a complementarily effected solidarity of mankind.).

Formulated for a Christian: The voice of Christ leads his people into the two processes, creating them figures of grace in which he brings men towards the Lord.

III. Remarks designed to counteract the emergence of a new enemy image as regards the Islam and relating to a pre-maturely broken off dialogue in May 1990 with the indication of some reasons having led to this breaking off.

Concerning the problem: Threats and conflicts in the dialogic joint life of religions are restrictively treated here by me in the light of two experiences gained. The first of said experiences refers to the explosively growing enemy image on both sides: Christianity - Islam.

The second experience reports on our latest interreligious dialogue in May 1990 at Lunel, Southern France. For the first time after 8 preceding meetings, our bridging had to be broken off prematurely.

- 1.1. Triggered off by the Gulf War, but not exclusively, increasing uneasiness, insecurity and fear are affecting the relations of Christians towards Muslims.

According to what has been stated in sections I and II, we are perhaps confronted here with one of the great historic temptations which must be resisted by all means. I now speak on behalf of the Christian side. It is not my fellow's alien and perhaps also militant creed inspiring me with hostility against him and sometimes even with hatred! How could we otherwise remain in Jesus' discipleship? It is my or our fear of life, it is my or our will to power that tries to manifest itself or provide security, and impelling me to be my brother's enemy. Add to that the envy at the material or the spiritual wealth of the fellow-being.

The history of Cain and Abel is universalized in the mutual relations of religions and cultures.

- 1.2. In the struggle against the growth of a new enemy image it is essential to give more precise heed to what our Muslim brethren and sisters stand for and what their life horizon is like. I would therefore like to say something about the context of the Jihad.

1) Jihad simply means " the effort on the way towards faith". Thus, this also involves: struggle and finally war - " but not a "holy war" as a collective enterprise, but war as a continued endeavour towards faith and as an individual's activity". (Quotation from K.G. Simon, Islam, Geo-publishers, 1988, page 272).

2) To clarify our ideas and conceptions, I would like to translate a section relating to the Jihad, according to the opinion of a Muslimic author (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic life and thought, page 195).

" The holy war or Jihad does not simply imply the defense or expansion of the Islamic frontiers. This occurred at certain epochs in the Islamic history<sup>y</sup>. What is at stake is the incessant, inner war against everything that masks the truth to Man, and thus against everything that destroys

his inner equilibrium. This interior battle has been called "the greater holy war" by the holy prophet. It is an "invisible warfare" of the orthodox spirituality and the proper means of opening the regal way into the center of the heart. It is the battle that must be fought with absolute necessity in order to open the door leading to the way of inwardness. Without this "great struggle", human inclinations cannot be reversed, inclinations that turn Man off towards the exterior, causing him to abscond from the center. Without this struggle, the precious jewel hidden in the treasury of the heart can neither be found nor attained.

The Jihad resembles the other "pillars" of the Islam as a foundation of the Islamic society, such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and the religious tax. Like these it is an aid to reach the inner space. It cannot be dispensed with in the aspiration for inner life in its Islamic form."

- 1.3. Proceeding from the very differently structured Christian context, we may - as an analogous statement - think of the spiritual armament (Eph.6,10 ff) or of "and of one mind struggle with us for the faith of the Gospel" (Phil. 1,27) or " I have fought the good fight, I have accomplished my course, I have kept faith (2 Tim., 4,7).

The theme : "Struggle and Contemplation" formulated by Frere Roger Schutz and taken up in the latest church development also forms part of this context.

- III.2. The subject "Threats and Conflicts" also comprises the second experience about which I would like to report, i.e. the breaking-off of our latest dialogue in May 1990, caused by a dialogue-internal conflict that could be neutralized only by the interlocutors' departure. I would like to give an account thereof and cite some reasons leading to this breaking-off.

- 2.1. There are very many different possibilities of conducting an interreligious dialogue.  
Hitherto, we had regarded our eight meetings according to the "Altenhofer model" as some sort of living together where the different religious traditions could meet one another in their unmixed form and in their lived faith, while trying to mutually open up as an inseparable group.



This ninth dialogue had also been planned that way.

- 2.2. In search of a Jewish partner Mrs. Heidi Haltmar, our hostess for this dialogue, had come across rabbi Leonard Sztienberg from Montpellier. Rabbi Szteinberg founded an Institute of his own for interdisciplinary dialogue between the Sciences and Religion. He had not yet participated in one of our meetings. Essentially, he considers a dialogue to be subject to the guide line of a "provocative" dialogue and conducts it accordingly. Naturally, the theologic-exegetic argumentation occupies a prominent position, on his side.

This kind of "provocative" dialogue prevailed in the rabbi's dominating form of speech. The Muslim interlocutors thus receded into the background and the Buddhistic interlocutors were almost excluded, since this way of argumentation was alien to them.

- 2.3. Due to the pressure exerted by this one-sidedly tied discussion network, the inability to listen to each other was developing in stages, resulting in a decline of listening capacity and readiness for listening. This went so far as personal discrimination which, however, as such was not perceived. The Buddhistic monk Ananda with high Buddhistic consecrations was not addressed to by the rabbi using the usual names known to all of us since the beginning of our meetings in 1979. Thus, he was deprived of his biographical and spiritual identity and deliberately and "provocatively" for the other participants called "Rudi", i.e. the first name that Ananda as a native of the Netherlands had been given by his parents.
- 2.4. These problems were rendered more complicated by language difficulties. Rabbi Szteinberg made almost exclusive use of the French language. Sheikh Raschid, our former host from Pakistan, only spoke English. Consequently, all statements had to be translated (without simultaneous interpreting, of course). This cost much time and energy, while leading to obvious abbreviations of understanding.
- 2.5. The most important reason for breaking off this meeting, however, was another one. Rabbi Szteinberg off-hand rejected joint praying, meditat-

ing and keeping silence as a kind of "self-suggestion". Our hostess, Mrs. H. Haltmar, fully sided with the rabbi. Thus, the increasingly most important dimension of our meetings had been cancelled on the very first day. (In the last section of this lecture, I am going to report more about it). Due to an imminent operation my wife had to undergo in Hamburg, I was myself prevented from travelling to Lunel, our meeting place, during the decisive fortnight of our gathering. When after several telephone conversations the critical situation became evident, I managed to depart in a small time gap. But it was too late to reverse the whole course. I succeeded, however, in re-establishing the joint prayer and silence periods in which Mrs. H. Haltmar and rabbi Szteinberg consistently did not take part.

- 2.6. Any relations were broken off when rabbi Szteinberg together with our hostess left the latter's own premises out of protest against the attitude of some of our interlocutors informing us to the effect that they did not want to return. This, of course, meant that as guests we had to quit the house. After we had clearly and unmistakably promised that each of us would travel home as soon as possible, Mrs. Haltmar and rabbi Szteinberg returned to the premises.

In the last hours one lived together at Lunel deep consternation and insults were interwoven with spiritual contacts and reconciliations which, according to rabbi Szteinberg's words, were of much greater importance.

IV. About the emergence of a new, spiritual horizon in the inter-religious dialogue: differentiating solidarity in a lived contact of faith.

All our participants in our 8th inter-religious meeting in Takamori/Japan, from 01/06/1989 to 30/06/1989, consciously perceived the emergence of a new spiritual horizon.

In order to avoid lengthiness, I am just giving a brief report.

A. What happened in Takamori?

1. Every morning from 5 to 6 o'clock, we were meeting and praying in common basic texts of our different traditions. To this corresponded the praying listening to the voice

and words of our fellow's faith. In order that we might better listen and understand, we essentially adhered to the same texts, e.g. in Judaism the Israel scheme, for Christianity: the Beatitudes and for the Islam: the first sura; in part, the texts were also sung (Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism).

2. Since from Judaism and Islam, no partners could be present, one among us was lending his voice, always mindful of the fact that these words were "holy land" of another tradition, and that in a way it only was the outer wording which brethren and sisters of another faith had confided to us for reverential repeating. Starting point for the texts and their selection was a small text collection created in the course of our meetings.
  3. Interposed between these prayed texts were prolonged silence periods. And this silence always was an eloquent one where each of us was listening into the words, allowing them to take root in his inner recesses.
  4. A deepening capacity for listening also affected all further divine services and prayer times of these weeks, e.g. the participation in a Hinduistic or Buddhistic Puja, the Christian day time prayers including the celebration of the Eucharist.
  5. The joint practical work also came to be of special importance (dhyana in activity, to be approximately rendered by "every active, practical activity with a heart gathered in the middle or towards the whole"). Several hours a day we were working in the rice fields of the hermitage, assisted in rebuilding the meditation hall completely destroyed by arson or did house and kitchen work.
- B. For the identification of this spiritual horizon or "of the spiritual space".  
(Again in shortened form)

What mattered was

- 1) to live one's own faith,
- 2) to grant my fellow being the space to live his faith differing from mine,

- 3) and to listen to his message and thereof to miss as little as possible, not to ignore or avoid said message.
- 4) In the process, we gained an experience:

The faith,  
life rootage  
and the vocation  
of everybody as such are not "transportable".  
One can hand down only the currents of tradition, but  
not their origin, their present ground and not their  
promises. Consequently, (in a Christian formulation):  
The Gospel continues to be God's force,  
grace remains sola gratia,  
and faith remains a being - born  
from God

That YOU  
today  
from YOU  
cause me anew  
to be born towards you.

6. The efforts directed towards listening,  
understanding,  
analogous comparison  
and language finding  
are not renounced although constituting heavy work.  
But the decisive, dominant and constructive  
events occur outside of these efforts.
7. Another consequence:  
Our differences and everything we have in common find  
their proper (ontological) placement when they enter  
into their last competence, center therein and thus  
transcend.  
Everybody is "holy land".  
The bush burning before Moses without being consumed, as a  
place of divine self-revelation; 2 Moses 3.
8. In conclusion and summarily I would like to point to  
three behaviour patterns that became important to  
us.
  1. Everyone was asked to be there totally with him-  
self and without "producing" himself, thus adapting

himself to the structure of the divine presence occurring to **us**.

2. Everyone was requested to be critical towards himself and continue to be so, using great vigilance and discipline.

3. Everyone was asked to excuse one another with the attention of the heart and the readiness of the mind, to endure weaknesses and be on the lookout for the next joint measures.

- C. At Christmas, I sent you some lines as a greeting, lines which I would like to once more read to you as a kind of summarizing conclusion.

The door is open.

Why don't we pass through it?

We are fettered.

And yet do not find our prison.

We are wearing ourselves out  
in our work,

with our disappointments  
and amidst fears and threats  
that assail us.

Whenever we live peace  
against fraud  
and against the lie  
the fullness of time has come.

Don't be worried.

Each day has its message.

It brings the dead a new heart,  
and the despairing people a new hope.

Go beyond yourself  
into faithfulness.

Because truth you find only  
in him who does not lie.