

Like a guide line - “Do not fear, have faith only”

A SHORT REPORT ON MY WORK IN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AFTER MY RETIREMENT IN 1976
GIVEN ON MY 80TH BIRTH DAY ON 13TH MAY, 1993 (*Translation by Halima Krausen*)

A. THANKS

1 . First of all I would like to thank you for coming here for my 80th birth day. With many of you I am connected through a long journey. You have been with me through all these years in many ways and helped me, even in difficult situations, to find the right direction.

For this I want to thank you.

I would also like to thank you for your signs of attachment, and looking forward to the surprises and discoveries your gifts will show in the future.

2. My wife had the idea that this day could be suitable to share with you part of what has come to me since my retirement in 1976. I take this up with pleasure, because year after year I am more filled with the idea with which I started the time of my retirement. What is the relationship between and Christianity and other great religions and ideologies?

The space to live on this earth has become small, especially because of the population explosion. We all live within a single wide horizon of experience which has spread to all continents. That is why we cannot and must not shut our eyes against this fact and ignore each other as if our neighbour were none of our business.

This is especially true concerning the deepest roots of human life, its inner direction and the goal of life. We are standing in front of the challenge of the mutual encounter of faiths in faith. Faith is a real, but finally in accessible anchor of the human being and his deepest secret in which the personal and the transpersonal aspects meet. For that reason it is the encounter of faith that reveals the different out looks, the wide spectrum of different lifestyles and the vast and unreducable wealth of actions, names and expressions. It is not only according to Christian belief that the whole has its local point in one single centre that is situated outside the range of our understanding and possibilities of speech. However, it makes itself visible, becomes a voice and becomes a neighbour, even the neighbour of the one who is a stranger to us and to whom we remain strangers. Therefore the encounters of faith are part of the narrow path of faith. Each of us necessarily lives within his family, his profession and his every day

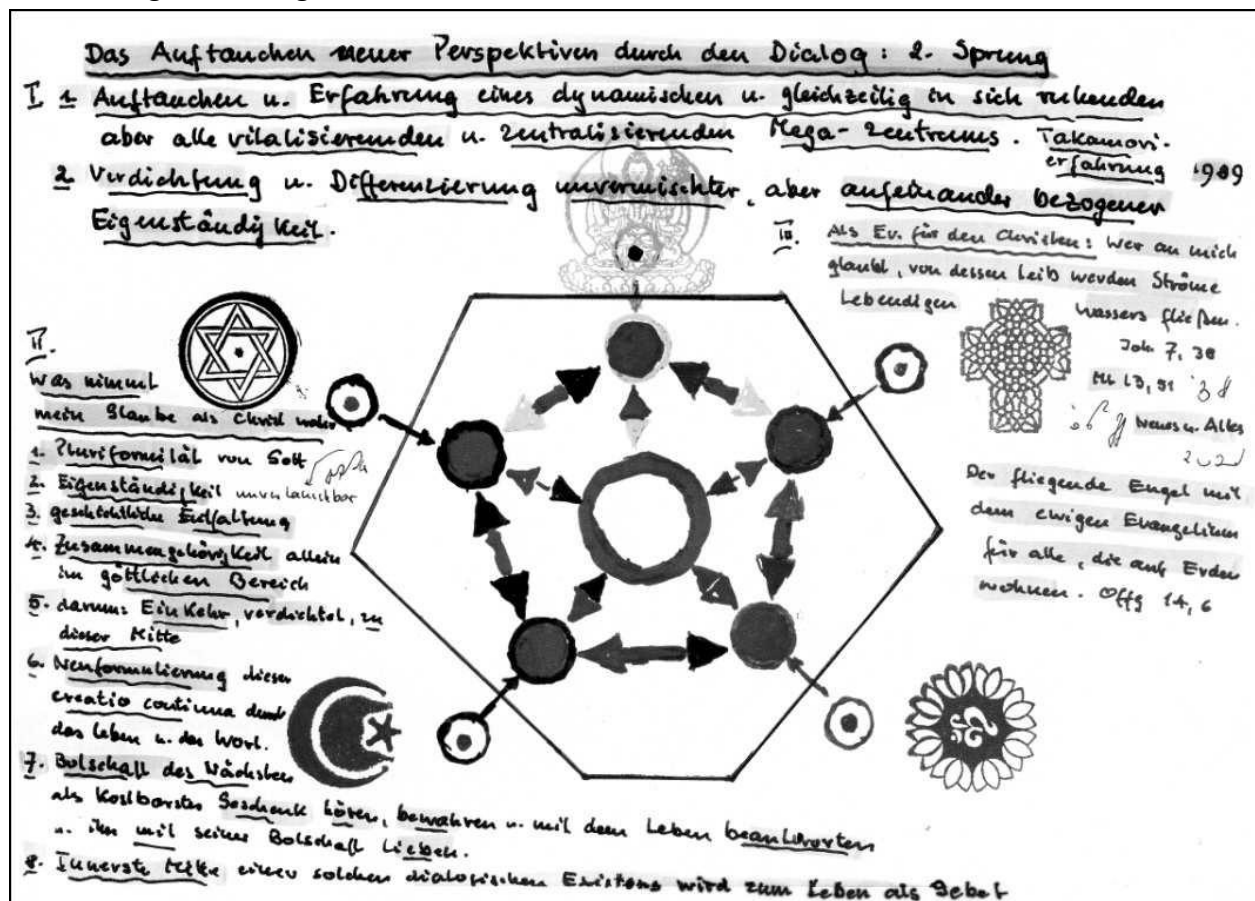
environment, heading that steep path of encounter which again and again turns his neighbour in to a stranger.

It is of utmost of importance to try not to avoid these encounters. It seems to me that, for a Christian, his own roots are flow of strength, being set free day after day, drives him to continue the work of love, like a permission that continually opens up new horizons.

3. I would like to give you a short introduction in three steps in to what I have found on this way, and to tell a little of what happened to myself in the process.

1. I have been introduced into the life horizon of other religions. (see the diagramme about Dialogue)
2. I have met people from other religions who have come close to me with their faith and through their faith. I would like to explain this with some few examples.
3. I have met myself in a way unknown to me in its depth and consequences.

Diagramme Page 3.



The appearance of new perceptions through Dialogue.

1. Emergence and experience of a dynamic and at the same time stable but all vitalizing and centralizing Mega Centre.
2. Concentration and differentiation of unmixed but interrelated individual units within the totality of mankind.

Hexagonal Line;- global horizon of experience, indissolubly connected through a unity rooted in the transcendent.

B. II

I did not remain alone on this path but met people from other religions who with their very roots in their different faiths have come close to me.

1. Starting from our first meeting at Altenhof 1980 in the dairy building on a book shelf in the room with the fire place there was a note saying UNMIXED, but INDIVISIBLE thereby we wanted to keep in mind that our living together was not meant for mixing the contents and out lines of our faiths nor for leveling the differences or separation from each other or disembarking from the one boat in which humanity is sailing, but for meeting the challenges of our times only with the qualified of each single one but jointly.

2. In order to clarify to this I would like to tell about my acquaintances with **non Christians** who have left a deep impression on me.

Looking for a Muslim partner I met right in the beginning Imam **Mehdi Razvi** who is working at the mosque in Hamburg, Schöne Aussicht. Coming from an Indian family of land owners, he lost his property after the independence in 1948 and had to immigrate to Pakistan. He has been living in the federal republic for a long time.

Meeting him for the first time in Hamburg I asked him if he knew a Muslim who could share our journey with us. We pondered over that for quite a while. Finally he said quietly “maybe I could do that myself” Since then we are connected by a deep inner relationship, each of us being blessed by the mutual spiritual friendship.

He attended our meetings regularly at Altenhof and introduced us to the Qur'an and Islamic faith. Imam Razvi could not take part in our overseas meetings because of bad health. Instead of him his student **Ms Halima Krausen**, a Muslim Theologian and Lecturer joined us. She has

specially accompanied helped us during our very intense encounter with Muslim faith and prayer in Kashmir/Pakistan led by **Sheik Rashid**.

It was always very moving for me when Imam Razvi suggested texts from the Qur'an and for us to be used at the meetings where there were no Muslim participants and in great trust permitted me to recite them in his place in our prayer and meditation sessions. This happened in a silent way in mutual intercession and blessing.

3, I could tell much about my encounter with **Hindus**, but I want to confine myself to two little stories.

- The family and host of our Hindu partner the Advocate **Govindh Bharathan** has for me become a kind of home in India. "You could actually move in with us and stay for the rest of your life, and we would look after as good as we can." And I know that these were not just words.
- We visited an Indian saint, highly venerated by many Indians and non Indians **Matha Amrithananda mai** "mother of immortal bliss". She lives in a fishermen's village in the woods between the back waters and the shore of the Indian Ocean. She invited us for conversation to her room in her big Ashram. We sat together on the floor, looked at each other in spiritual cheerfulness, laughing happily. Then she said to me, "you must be like an ant, that, crawling on the beach, can certainly distinguish between a grain of sugar it finds and a grain of sand." Later on, I came to a better understanding of what she probably meant: You must search for your sustenance and distinguish it from the stones around you. They won't turn in to bread!

4, From my experience of living with **Buddhists** I would like to pick up two examples:

- **Olande Ananda**, a born Dutch man now since many years a Buddhist monk with higher ordinations, is busy in countless meetings all around the world through his own example and teaching others to walk along the path of Buddha especially by guiding them in meditation. You have the impression that he has friends everywhere, and he helped us many times to find people and meditation centres where we could meet and live together [for example in Japan and last year in Bali]. The greater part of the diaries that have been written at each meeting are from his pen. In the course of our last dialogue in Bali I said to him, "you are yourself a bit of living dialogue." Whether we spent the night at a pricey residence or were sitting together on the beach in the early morning for our meditation Ananda always within a very short time got in touch with the people

around us, his behavior never being artificial or stiff: he always remained himself and free.

- **Deepal** is a very young very pious Buddhist working as a Clerk in Colombo (Sri Lanka) Sri Lanka he got married and he is very close to me. He knew that after the death of my son Johannes many things were difficult for me. At each of our prayer times he sat by my side, quietly singing to me an ancient blessing when it was his turn.

“ may all those suffer be free from suffering”

“may all those who are in sorrow be free from sorrow”

“may all those who are in fear be free from fear”

(Metta Bhavana)

Together with his voice his words found there comforting way in to my heart.

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B-III Finally I would like to summarize *the changes* that have taken place within myself.

1. Within my faith, new accents have been set. Formerly my attention was mainly directed towards the statements that are transmitted within my own religious tradition, e.g in the Apostolic Creed, in exegeses and in dogmatics. Now life is more concentrated in Faith itself. It is ever new turn towards the centre from which faith lives, and being embraced by the nearness and secret of God in His living presence and the voice of Jesus with the Word of the Father. “Do not fear, have faith only,” said Jesus to a man with the sick child (St Mark 5:36). Faith becomes a process of living encounter. I must drop what I wanted to cling to; and search for what I cannot find except when it comes to meet me. During the search the faith in God is anchored more deeply. The possibility to measure faith gets lost, because God’s ways are not measurable. The claim to insight and competence to judge in what ways of faith God is found or revealed gets lost. But faith gains the freedom that transcends the horizons that are known to us. It gains a poverty full of promise and a depth that is filled with luminous clarity.

2. My understanding of *Love and* charity has also changed.

Formerly I was not able to differentiate between love and kindness. Later on, I want to “ Love my neighbour as I love myself.” But I remained a prisoner of my concepts tied up with myself. Now, specially in the relationship with my wife, I begin to discover more precisely that

important relationship is not the relationship between two neighbours but that they *are independently but undissolubly related to each other, living from God's power* and by this very fact are carried and loved.

Through this re arrangement of relationships, basically open space for encounter and final responsibility comes in to being. And it is in to *this* space that you have to look for the work of Love and the ways of truth according to Jesus's instruction, " Love your neighbour as your self".

Formerly I was told many a times, " you and the good Lord." For a long time I was not really able to place this remark. Now I see better the corrective help hidden in it. It was meant to differentiate more clearly between the fields of mutual relationships and to put them in to a light corresponding to a multi dimensional wider order. Within this, steps are possible which – in nearness and distance, in crisis, injury, gratefulness- enable to heal wounds, relieve despair, open new doors, and spread peace.

This is not only true with the people I meet in my everyday life, not only within the greater framework of Christian denominations, but also for the wider horizon of the coexistence of the various cultural spheres with their different religions and world views. *Love* remains the deepest, most basic process of life. There is no explanation or definition for it.

It is a kind of disembarking from your own boat,
Being transferred to another one which we do not yet know.
The heart awakens.
It finds itself in a current that pervades all things.
It connects us with the life of our neighbour in a way that his life becomes as important as our own.
Love openness up regardless of the cost.
It begins again and again, flowing out of the source of the origin.
It hides because otherwise it cannot work.
It wants to be found, because only thus it can transmit what is meant for life.
It wants to be known but it does not exhibit itself.
It is shy and does not press its neighbour.
If it is pressed, it withdraws, because it is unable to defend itself.
It does not prove itself when challenged.
It is courageous, not recoiling from any task given to it to serve life and truth.
It does not allow itself to be fixed,
because it has fixed its own course.
It has many faces, but it is always only the one heart.
When exploited, it allows it to happen.
It is silent against accusations, doubts, and meanness.

Love covers its gifts because you should discover them.
It rejoices for all life time at love.
It weeps about misunderstandings, refusals, treachery.
Love has a long breath.
Even if all is take away that belongs to it
It finds itself moving in ever new beginning.
Love remains with you even if death interferes.
And it wakes up to the image
According to which it was created.
Love finds you, even if you plunge down and are unable to live any more.
It takes your hand
and goes to the next step along with you.
But you must call it.
How could it otherwise lift you up?
And how could otherwise your heart remains with it?
Its power is unlimited, but only where it is able to give itself.
That is why it longs for knife that cuts off the wild truths.
Love is to wake up in to the faith of Love.
It is being created afresh together with your neighbour.
That is why it outgrows everything that is measurable.
Unending is the song sung by Love.
It flows out of God's own heart.
Therefore, the Prayer of the heart
becomes the source of Love.

3. I would like to add something concerning prayer.

Even in this field similar changes have taken place, comparable to what I said about faith and love.

- **Prayer** happens more and more as an inner breathing. It is an encounter, a kind of arrival of God in the soul, in the heart, and in one's whole life. It is an arrival of God's presence and being filled with it. It happens in a silent and deeply living communication. For me, prayer thus becomes inner most process of life.

If for any reason this communication does not take place I am all of a sudden like a struggling fish thrown on dry land.

- For some time now I have been trying to **sit cross legged** in the small living room upstairs for about one hour before supper. With this I do not follow a fixed ritual. It is a quiet listening, and silent speech. In this process I try to drop all thoughts that keep on pushing me. I try to direct my inner attention towards the One whom I call upon

Fixed prayers become secondary. There is a special **emphasis on short invocations** like for example the beginning of the Our Father. These invocations gains depth and intensity. Their current widens. I could also say that my ever day life is reflected more and more intensely in prayer. In the course of this life span I often look up Biblical texts. Recently it was in the first place texts from Isaiah,(from chapter 40 onwards) or passages from Jesus's farewell speeches in the Gospel of St John.

- This does not turn in to a routine. I could rather say the contrary. **Everyday I have to start a fresh** because inner path ways have become obstructed and blocked. For this reason, again and again the temptation arises to escape in to a method or program or just to revert to day dreaming. But "breathing" is something different. I often have difficulties with prayers that make me feel that they are recited, not said from the heart. This is like wise the case with prayers I describe as mind prayers, because they seem to me thought up in the mind and not prayed.
- My ways of Inter Religious Dialogue have lead me year and year with inner necessity to this kind of praying life. It is therefore easy to understand why the Dialogue as an encounter of prayer, meditation, and silence increasingly gains importance for me.

I experience to be drawn together with familiar human beings from different non Christian faiths, in to a sphere of divine presence. Within my Christian faith **I can believe with certainty in the blessing that descends upon all of us**. At the same time this blessing meets each one of us individually and *his* place in the form of divine life.

The fear of loosing oneself

to betray the divine centre,

to escape from the gospel with Jesus' Word and his instruction,

to deny God's mercy, to mix, to choose, or to be disobedient to it,

all these fears disappears because they are caught up by God himself in God himself, are carried away and overcome.

However there arises a common joy about being found and setting out that each day discovers definite and exact steps without deception.

The Inter Religious Dialogue has become, for me, a ground pattern of waiting and praying for God's arrival with his man kind in this time of fear.

C. Thus my life becomes younger the older I become, because life grows towards to a centre to which the ancient is born a new.

I thank you whole heartedly to have given me an opportunity to tell you something of what has filled me during this all these years since my retirement since 1976. In the first place I have to thank my wife for having caused me to try.

Reinhard von Kirchbach

(In addition)

Encounter with non Christian Faith in different cultural spheres.

I start with some general remarks.

1. On my way to other religions and non Christian spheres of revelation, I met with very deeply rooted faith in many places in various spheres of life. My first and ever repeated effort was to listen to the life message of my neighbour with his faith, being an open as possible, without prejudices without omission and without suppression. The question of nearness and accessibility or remoteness of this message was secondary. In the foreground there was the attempt neither to avoid that message nor to narrow it down to the conditions of the accustomed frame work of my own life.
2. I was necessarily led to have faith in my neighbour's message within the living presence of God. By turning me to himself again and again and ever stronger in faith, pulling me in to the secret of his nearness, He integrated me into the life of that neighbour and his horizon of revelation. The neighbour's living space with its individual independence, its faith and its grace was thereby neither questioned nor veiled or ignored. On the contrary, it was lit up in a way hitherto unknown to me. The all pervading immediate and un seizing work of God in my neighbours life and the whole vastness of his existence were transferred in to my faith. The fact that the presence of God's work is unfathomable was in itself illuminious and urging motivation to let myself be pulled through faith more and more deeply in to the presence of God.
3. This encounter of our different faiths and at the same time our unity within the all pervading space of divine blessing became, not only for me, *something given* that was

perceived by each of us from his own angle, and where each of us found himself accepted, relaxed, and guided onwards. These changes took place without any further any reasoning or explanations from a centre that included all of us. We understood clearly that we had not become victims of deception or wishful thinking. We were all turned towards this centre again and again during our times of prayer and silence. From it there grew mutual trust and openness, understanding and forgiveness, patient behavior and hope. This happened even when we were tired, upset or hurt.

4. **We have met in a small group of people of different religious traditions about once a year** with a few exceptions, that is in all eleven times since 1980, for Inter Religious Dialogues in various regions. Each time the emphasis lay on that religious tradition that determines the cultural sphere,

In the beginning we had three meetings for two months each at my place in Altan Hof for about four weeks each we met twice in India, once in Sri Lanka, Once in Israel, Once in Pakistan once in Japan, once in the south of France with a French Rabbai. That last mentioned dialogue had to be broken off before hand, because the tensions within the group mainly caused by the dominating approach by the Rabbai, had become too intense. Last year we met again in Bali and (Indonesia) in a Hindu Gandhi Ashram and were guests of a Buddhist Meditation Centre.

Our meeting this year is planned for end of August/Beginning of September, again in Cochin/South India.

From the German speaking area I was mostly accompanied by Pastor Michael Möbius from Neumünster and Peter Fromm from Bonn. The participants varied each time because of many guests from the respective region.

5. **The most important basic experiences can be summarised in two sentences. They appeared very clearly for the first time in 1989 during our meeting in Japan.**

1. Transcendental, for us uncontrollable centre assembled us to a state of highest vigilance and vividness. In that process, the space of our unity widened in to an unfathomable dimensions. Thus growing, it gained nearness, reality, motivation, and profile.
2. At the same time there happened a condensation and unfolding of unmixable but interrelated independent entities. I have tried to show these processes in a diagram.

RvK