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Theological Approaches to Dialogue in Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity

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Introduction

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Ladies and gentlemen,
welcome to today's lectures.

I would like to take the next couple of minutes to introduce you to the Academy of World Religions and to give you a short overview of our basic approach, our goals, and activities.
I think we all agree, ladies and gentlemen, that one of the fundamental duties of public education is to offer people the opportunity of learning core capabilities, and among those specifically those core capabilities allowing them to fully participate in today's society, in this our society so deeply shaped by cultural, religious, and social variety. Scientific theology and Pedagogics of Religious Education have much to offer to the process of learning these core capabilities. But in order for them to do so, the university itself must pluralize itself in the religious field. That is our basic approach, and so far it is a unique one in the world of German academics. Because we not only want to see Islamic theology taught at university, as has been happening over the last two or three years in other German provinces, a development we are delighted to witness and a highly appreciated enterprise.
We want that, and we want more yet: we want to see the establishment of Islamic theology as a subject at German universities complemented by two additional elements, namely establishing the theology of additional religions, i.e. the theologies of Alevism, of Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. That is one thing; the other is that we aim for those theologies to not be taught side by side but to be taught together, and studied together with a strong focus on interconnectedness, which is why our two here present visiting professors, Anantanand Rambachan and Ephraim Meir teach part of their classes together. You will hear more about them presently. That is what we mean when we talk about a 'dialogue oriented approach to research and teaching'. We aim to establish this approach at all levels, since our society's increasing religious and cultural plurality means there is increasing demand in many ways of life and occupations for people who are trained in inter religious dialogue, and people who are skilled in communication between religious and non-religious organizations. During the last several years, this approach has been continuously evolved, in the process involving different stakeholders and working in diverse major international research projects. In June 2010, it was realized on an institutional level through the foundation of the Academy of World Religions.
So far, I have mainly talked about the theological aspect of the Academy's work, but it is by no means the only one as our work is strongly focused on the empirical level. In our research, we take up our own society's questions and study them using socio-scientific methodology. Our subject is not

only the fundamental dimensions of interreligious dialogue: we look at the problem zones that inevitably come into existence in an immigration society - I say inevitably because this is a rather normal process whenever small and big minorities are getting in connection with pre-existing systems.
Through this empirical research - that is, our research using socio-scientific methodology - , we aim to offer a practical contribution towards more harmonious cohabition in our multi-cultural and multi religious society.
Add to this the practical input: we do not only study dialogue but practice it in several aspects: inner-religious dialogue, inter-religious dialogue, and dialogue with other public stakeholders. Dialogue is not only our subject of research, but it is part of our lives in the academic field as much as in the public arena, which among other things has lead to a series of lectures that has brought us four times in two years now to the beautiful Kaisersaal of our townhall.
One of the determining factors of our work ever since the beginning has been the dialogue with religious communities. Starting in the early 1990s, Wolfram Weisse has worked diligently to create a close cooperation based on mutual trust between the University and several religious communities, among them Hamburg's Schura, the mosque communities' umbrella organisation, the Tibetan centre's Buddhist community, the Jewish, the Alevite, and the Hindu, communities. In the Interreligious Circle of Experts, which has been active for more than a decade by now, subjects which touch the areas of science and religious communities both are brought up for intensive discussion and exchange four times a year.
How do we finance these activities? Partly through government funding, partly through funding from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research we have raised for a project which has started this February and about which Wolfram Weisse will tell you a bit more in a minute. Of course we also receive funding from diverse public trusts: among others, we are members of the Stiftung Mercator Postgraduate Programme Islamic Theology, which does important work by supporting young academics. We also are proud to enjoy the support of the Veronika und Volker Putz Stiftung, and last but very much not least of the Udo Keller Stiftung Forum Humanum.
What are our future plans regarding our research? One focus is going to be on continuously developing and furthering innovative theological approaches in the world religions of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Alevism. Adding to the studies already executed, we are planning further empirical analyses of the 'Lebenswelten' of adherents of different religions inside our society. On February first 2013, the Academy of World Religions has started a major new research project financed by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research titled: 'Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies (ReDi). Interdisciplinary and Internationally Comparative Studies on the Possibilities and Limitations of Interreligious Dialogue.'
As you can see, there's a lot for us to do in the coming years, and we will continue to keep you up to date.

Thank you for your attention!

Introduction

Wolfram Weisse

*The research project **ReDi: Religion and Dialogue in modern societies***

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

both the public and the academic debate on the importance of religion in Germany have undergone dramatic change over the past ten years. Whereas scholars used to assume that the importance of religion in the public sphere would diminish in a natural process, we have lately seen a marked increase in both the public and academic interest in the subject. Both in Germany and throughout Western Europe, rather than the continuing secularisation long taken for granted, we are seeing a countervailing and more forceful process of religious pluralisation.[1] The growing relevance of religion is demonstrated not least by the fact that philosophers of note such as Jürgen Habermas have rediscovered it as a subject and emphasised the importance of religious tolerance in a multicultural society. Politicians, too, increasingly refer to religion both as a source of social cohesion and a potential for social conflict.

It is against this background that we have intensified our academic research and our debates on interreligious dialogue on two interrelated levels, the theological level and the practical level. In this context we started in February 2013 our new research project "Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies (ReDi). Interdisciplinary and Internationally Comparative Studies on the Possibilities and Limitations of Interreligious Dialogue", supported by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research. The aim of this comprehensive research is to address the fundamental questions of interreligious dialogue both regarding its possibilities and limitations. Its interdisciplinary approach including theology (and the humanities in general) along with social science and education has been chosen to study complex phenomena of interreligious dialogical activity with regard to their impact on social processes of integration and peacemaking and thus gain practically applicable insight for their realization.

We are currently working in our study on two levels parallel: That of dialogical theology and that of a dialogical practice. At the first level of dialogical theology, our project intends to identify and explore the potentials and limitations to dialogue in different religious traditions in order to base an open, dialogical theology on extant approaches of openness to pluralism. This work is undertaken by a team of experts from different religious traditions including Hamburg-based

[1] Cf. Peter Berger & Wolfram Weisse (2010) Im Gespräch: Religiöse Pluralität und gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt, in: W. Weisse/H.-M. Gutmann (Hg.) *Religiöse Differenz als Chance? Positionen, Kontroversen, Perspektiven*, Waxmann: Münster, 17-26.

researchers and cooperation partners from both within Germany and abroad. The dialogical theology thus developed will refer back to empirical findings by integrating theological conceptions of laypeople, especially young people, rooted in the everyday experience of religious pluralism and living dialogical practice. A further aspect will be to study what impulses interreligious dialogue may gain by integrating gendered perspectives.

At the second level of research, that of dialogical practice, the project will deploy empirical surveys to explore the possibilities and limitations of living dialogue between people from different religious and cultural backgrounds and to study the forms, functions and potentials of dialogical practices.

Tonight we will focus on dialogical theology. We are happy to introduce you to three distinguished colleagues and pioneers in the field of dialogical theology. All of them are committed to promote the dialogue of theologies and are internationally leading the debate.

Dr. Anantanand Rambachan is Professor of Religion, Philosophy and Asian Studies at Saint Olaf College, Minnesota, USA. He is "Forum Humanum"-Visiting Professor for Hinduism and Dialogue at the Academy of World Religions of the University of Hamburg. We would like to thank the "Udo Keller Foundation Forum Humanum" that enables us to invite leading scholars in the field of dialogue and religion to our Academy of World Religions. This summer term we were able to invite our colleague Prof. Anantanand Rambachan to Hamburg and we sincerely hope, to have him visit the Academy of World Religions also in the years to come.

Dr. Ephraim Meir is Professor of Jewish Philosophy at Bar-Ilan University Ramat-Gan/Israel. And he is at the same time "Emmanuel Lévinas"-Visiting Professor for Jewish Dialogue Studies and Interreligious Theology at our Academy of World Religions of the University of Hamburg. We would like to thank the "Veronika and Volker Putz-Foundation" for providing the resources to invite our colleague Ephraim Meir year after year to our Academy ensuring that he can enrich our teaching and research team in Hamburg regularly.

Dr. Reinhold Bernhardt is Professor for Systematic Theology (Dogmatics) at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He is member of the International Advisory Board of our research project "Religion and Dialogue in modern Societies" (ReDi) at the Academy of World Religions of the University of Hamburg. We appreciate his support and contributions very much.

I am very happy to be able to announce the lectures of our colleagues tonight: We are in the privileged position to be able to enjoy three fascinating lectures on dialogical theology in one and the same public event. This will give us the unique opportunity to gain an in-depth picture of the same topic by colleagues, who are rooted in different religious traditions and who are willing not only to share their perspective but who are also participating in a research endeavor directed towards the same aim: To contribute to the foundation of dialogue in their respective theology, and to find avenues for a cooperative effort in this field.

Let me emphasize our gratitude and appreciation that all of them are supporting our aim to develop a Dialogical Theology as long term partners in this research. They are now participating in a conference on "Religion and Dialogue in modern Societies" within the research project mentioned earlier.

And now I am looking forward to your presentations, dear colleagues, and to our discussion afterwards.

Lecture

Ephraim Meir

Interreligious Dialogue in a Jewish Perspective

One of the great achievements of the Hamburg Academy of World Religions lays in its promotion of the development of interreligious theology as a new, emerging discipline. Interreligious or dialogical theology is a novel way of relating to different religious groups in society and admitting that neither exclusivism, inclusivism, nor tolerant pluralism is enough. It learns from and with people who live and think differently, in bookless moments. Interreligious theology is grounded in the living dialogical praxis of people of different cultures and religions. It investigates both the incommensurability of religions as well as the comparability between them: it creates bridges.

In the following I offer a Jewish perspective on interreligious theology. I point to elements in the thoughts of four towering Jewish thinkers who contribute to the construction of such a theology; their ideas on dialogue are inspirational for present day interreligious dialogue and theology. What is common to Martin Mordechai Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Emmanuel Levinas is that they favor a novel attitude that enables people to listen carefully to others, and also to organize their lives around what is ineffable, ungraspable, and beyond pure reason. They were unable to perceive of a relationship with God not interwoven with a relationship with other human beings.

1. *Martin Mordechai Buber*
The Relevance of Presence in I and Thou

Buber's philosophy as written down in I and Thou conceives of the dialogue with other human beings as that which leads to the uncovering of a depth in which one receives a glimpse of the eternal Thou. In relating holistically to the other, not in a partial or objectifying manner, one overcomes the traditional subject-object scheme and enters into a meeting with another subject. The I becomes I-you in relation to the other: in the relationship, the I becomes an I committed to the other in pure presence. This I as I-you is to be distinguished from an I as I-it, who relates to the other in a partial way, using, classifying, and objectifying him. Buber was concerned about the steady growth of I-it and wanted to promote the emergence of I-you, of what he calls the "Between-Person" (Zwischenmensch). Eventually, a mutuality may come into being, changing the relationship (Beziehung) into a meeting (Begegnung).

Buber did not immediately apply his dialogical thought to the interreligious dialogue because he was more interested in religiosity than in religions. However, in the third part of his I and Thou, he writes on the necessity of religions, which all create "a new form of God in the world" to the degree that they relate to their living source, the ever-present Thou. Human beings may not always be

present, for it happens that I am present and make the other present by relating to him or her, or that I am less present and that the other makes me present. Only God is always present. It is a Divine gift that a human being is really present to another one, and, in this way, is in contact with the eternal Thou.

One may learn from Buber that one really meets another human being only when one is present for the other, making him or her present without preconceived ideas, without classifying and objectifying, and without functionalizing or admonishing. Such an attitude and the realization of the "Between-Person" are cornerstones for the realization of interreligious meetings and theologies.

Two types of faith

Buber's dialogical power came into expression in his Two Types of Faith. In this study of Jesus and early Christianity Buber told Jews that Jesus was one of them, whereas Christians were invited to return to a Christianity that sees Jesus as a Jew and works more with emuna, relating trust, than with pistis, dogmatic belief. One of the great thoughts in this book concerns the interaction between Jews and Christians: Christians may learn from Jews the meaning of a collective and Jews may learn from Christians the meaning of being an individual.

2. *Franz Rosenzweig*
Dialogical theology and hermeneutics

Franz Rosenzweig is another Jewish thinker who contributed to the construction of a dialogical theology. In the third part of his Star of Redemption, he puts Christianity next to Judaism: the twin religions give different answers to the divine revelation, which is the address of God to man that "thou shalt love." One may regret that Rosenzweig described only two responses to this Divine revelation, but in any case he deemed that there was more than one religion that responded to revelation. Christianity and Judaism are also interrelated. Judaism, he proposes, is the fire, and Christianity the rays. Without the fire, the rays are extinguished. Yet, Jews have to acknowledge that they are not the only ones who respond to the divine revelation. There is a complementary and critical relationship between Judaism, concentrating upon itself, and an always-expanding Christianity.

Translating

Rosenzweig was also a master of translation. To Gritli Rosenstock-Huessy, a Christian woman, he explained that for a Jewish family, Shabbat evening is something extraordinary; Shabbat evening, he writes, is a kind of family festival ("Familienfest"), like an anniversary. Franz made the singularly Jewish language understandable to Gritli; this was possible because of their openness to each other in trans-difference. Rosenzweig developed an entire hermeneutical method in order to explain his own world to religious others. The art of translating and the readiness to share a common world, with all the differences that exist within it, is crucial in any interreligious dialogue.

Bible in German translation

Buber and Rosenzweig cooperated in the extraordinary project of translating the Bible. Expressing the Hebrew world in German terms without losing the specificity of the Jewish experience is exemplary for any interreligious dialogue. The Buber-Rosenzweig biblical translation was an act of peace.

3. *Abraham Joshua Heschel*
No Religion is an Island

Abraham Joshua Heschel is my third source of inspiration for the construction of a dialogical theology. In his famous 1965 lecture "No Religion Is an Island," this influential neo-Hassidic thinker formulated some basic thoughts that are of great importance for interreligious dialogue. He considers that the dynamics needed in the dialogue between religions are reverence and humility. Al-

though Heschel concentrated mainly upon the Jewish-Christian dialogue, one may apply and transfer his prophetic words on dialogue in reference to other religions and worldviews as well. His voice remains of crucial importance for the theory and praxis of present day interreligious dialogue.

In "No Religion Is an Island" Heschel writes that religion is not an end in itself, but is a means; religion becomes idolatrous if it becomes an end. God the Creator and the Lord of history is above all, and therefore "to equate religion and God is idolatry." He warned that one should not confuse religions with God Himself: God as perfect reality is not religion, which is our imperfect understanding of the ineffable reality.

It is a fact that many in the past and even in the present are ready to be killed for their faith; there were and are people ready to kill for this as well. Understanding a separation between religions as houses of God and God Himself as did Heschel prevents one from making one's own religion absolute. In his depth-theology, Heschel made his listening and reading public sensitive to the Divine by calling them to develop a sense of indebtedness, wonder, and mystery. Respect for the faith of the other in his eyes was more than a political or social imperative, it was the necessity that follows from the fact that God is greater than religion and that each theology is finally rooted in what he called "depth theology," which provides a common ground for all religious people.

Reparation of the world

Religions in Heschel's view have a soteriological function in that they fight against lack of solidarity, indifference, poverty, and injustice. His own fight for the human rights of blacks in the United States and his courageous anti-Vietnam War position were the result of his deep religious engagement. Heschel's depth-theology is exemplary for a dialogical theology that reflects upon the relationship between religiosity and the world.

4.*Emmanuel Levinas*
The concept of difference

Levinas focused upon an aspect of the nature of relationship that might be of utmost importance for a sound understanding of interreligious dialogue and theology. He made it clear that a relationship is only possible on the basis of the recognition of the other's exteriority and alterity, without expecting reciprocity. In Levinas's ethical metaphysics, difference—alterity or exteriority—is the main constituent of any relationship. In other words: I am only relating to the other's difference out of respect for him, in obedience to the infinite, ethical demand, "Thou shalt not kill," that comes from his or her face. Levinas's insight made it possible to think about God in terms of Infinity, urging us to act and to answer the other's call. This is of crucial importance in the construction of a future dialogical theology, since this theology is more than a science. It is first of all a wisdom that discusses a prescriptive or normative element, namely, the uniqueness of each and every human being who asks to be listened to, honored, and respected.

It is not enough to respect cultural differences between human beings when it comes to interrreligious dialogue. Levinas taught us that what really makes a difference in this meeting is ethical response to the alterity of the other, whose otherness is never to be neutralized by my own totality. Exclusivists, but also inclusivists, totalize the other. Pluralists are liberal; their adagio is "live and let live." In itself the pluralist, liberal position is commendable, but still far removed from the position of the dialogical person who finds his own uniqueness in the response to the appeal and challenge coming from the other.

5. *Towards a dialogical theology*

A growing "theology in the plural" revolutionizes our thoughts. We are no longer talk-

ing solely about religions living side-by-side as "sons" of the one Father-King, as was the case in Lessing's well-known ring parable. There are more than three religions; there are world religions with millions of followers and there are numerous small, regional religions with a small number of adherents. All religions are, in Heschel's words, "the will of God." The anthropological consequence of this is well formulated by Paul Knitter of the Union Theological Seminary in New York, who writes that "to be religious today means to be religious interreligiously."

Communication and untranslatability

Diversity in approaching the Ultimate is not only to be tolerated, it is to be celebrated. Within religions, one may frequently hear the claim that only their adherents can understand what a particular religion is about: only Jews understand Judaism, only Christians understand Christianity, and so on. I disagree with this standpoint, since I believe that communication between people is possible and, therefore, notions and ideas belonging to one religion are to a certain extent comparable to and translatable into terms and ideas akin to those of other religions. Of course, there are untranslatable elements in one's own religion. Yet, the uniqueness of a human being does not prevent the lofty possibility of communication. On the contrary: it is the alterity of the other and his or her ethical demand that makes possible an attitude in which one affirms and transcends differences. It is the openness and readiness to understand the others in one's own terms and also to translate one's own words into terms understandable to the other, that make it possible for both to start to listen to each other.

Confronted with passages that hurt the outsider, there is always the possibility of reinterpreting those passages in a dialogical way and restructuring and reimagining traditions. Interreligious theology presupposes that something new can be learned from the other's approach of the Divine. It further presupposes that, if I do not open myself up to the other's understanding of the Ultimate, I may miss an aspect of religiosity that is relevant to my own religious life. The diversity of human beings as well as one's own self-understanding demand that we leave behind a parochialism that does not contribute to an intercultural and interreligious dialogue concerning what touches the depth of our human existence.

The four Jewish philosophers mentioned above reflected on a dialogical existence that is the basis for a dialogical theology that is not a kind of syncretism or another name for a unifying global religion. They offered building stones for an interreligious theology that takes into account diversity, but does not limit itself to multiculturalism, in which one exists alongside another. Dialogical theology is rather the intellectual account of true intercultural and interreligious meetings, and discusses a multiplicity of aspects of trans-difference. Dialogue between religions is necessary in order to establish an enduring peace between people, races, and nations. If one knows and appreciates the other's religion, a basis is formed for a coexistence that must not be left to an elite of intellectuals or to economists and politicians.

Lecture

Anantanand Rambachan

Hinduism and Dialogue

In ancient Greece, the agora or the public square was the common space where the community gathered to discuss matters of shared concern. The public square was the vital center of civic, religious, artistic and athletic life. Although most nations today may not have an easily identifiable physical space for dialogue on matters of civic importance, the public square remains a useful metaphor for our reflection on the nature of dialogue among religions in our communities and for the dialogue between religions and secular agencies and world-views. We may think of the public square as the physical, psychological and, with the development of the Internet, the electronic space, where the significant issues of our common life are discussed and considered.

One of the most important and challenging features of our contemporary public square is that it is an intensely diverse one of religions, ideologies, ethnicities, and cultures. Our concern is especially with the religious diversity of the public square. In ways unimaginable in the ancient Greek agora, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians and practitioners of indigenous traditions occupy our public square. Within every one of these traditions, there is also a diversity of voices. The presence of such different religious voices in our public squares is historically unprecedented, a fact that makes the ReDi project a necessity of our times.

In many nations and communities the political and social tensions of this diversity are evident. Legal and constitutional frameworks and systems that developed in historical circumstances of religious homogeneity or minimal diversity are now challenged to respond to this new religious reality and to extend to other religious communities the rights and privileges hitherto enjoyed by the majority community. The public square we are recognizing, slowly in some parts of the world, more rapidly in other places, must become an inclusive square where practitioners of all religions enjoy the same rights and privileges guaranteed by the state. This, for example, is the intent behind what we speak of in the United States as the Establishment Clause (Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion). The Founders in the United States wanted to avoid a state-sponsored dominant religion and to guarantee the freedom of religion in the public square. This effort to create a legally inclusive public space is ongoing in many parts of our world, with greater difficulty and divisiveness in some parts than others. Many traditions are unwilling to relinquish hegemony in the public square.

This work of creating an inclusive public square where diverse religious voices enjoy equal rights and opportunities cannot be left only in the hands of the state and secular agencies. Religious rights and freedoms in the civic sphere are best guaranteed when the religious traditions sharing this space promote and articulate a theological pers-

pective that fosters mutual respect and a value for religious diversity. The civic guarantee of religious freedom becomes more profound and meaningful when complemented and enriched by a theological affirmation of this diversity and a support for dialogical engagement among religions in the public sphere. The theological approach, while not necessarily conflicting with the legal, enables us to go beyond the legal and pragmatic and to affirm a value for religious diversity and interreligious dialogue that is rooted in the core teachings of our traditions. A civic affirmation of diversity that is not complemented by theological ones causes resentment and anxiety in the public square.

It is in this context that I will identify, briefly, six theological perspectives and values from the Hindu tradition that I believe can contribute to mutually respectful and enriching interreligious dialogue in the public square. I offer these with the self-critical acknowledgement that the tradition has not always faithfully adhered to these values and that some of these are shared with other traditions.

1. The first theological insight is the affirmation of the equal worth and dignity of each person in the public square. This dignity and value proceeds from the vision that every human being embodies equally and identically the divine spirit. An institution or religious leader does not mediate this divine reality in the heart of every being and it is not circumscribed by religious identity, ethnicity or nationality. It follows naturally from the fact of the unlimited nature of the divine. In the public square, this requires a reverential respect for and attentiveness to every participant. Such mutual respect in the public square is quite different from anything that can be enforced or commanded legally. It is offered spontaneously from the heart that is awakened to seeing God in all.

2. The second theological insight from the Hindu tradition is the basic value for religious diversity. The different theological traditions in Hinduism are spoken of as darshanas or ways of seeing. Although ultimate reality, the one Being, is the common referent of these traditions, the different ways of seeing reflect the differences in our temporal, spatial, and cultural locations as well as our identities, individually and communally. Religious diversity is an expression of our human diversity and experiences and should not surprise us. This does not mean that our theological differences or particular commitments are unimportant. It does mean also that all ways of seeing are equally valid. [The classic metaphor of the five blind men who touched various parts of an elephant and described it differently captures well this human reality. One touched the tail and described it as giant broom, while another touched the leg and described it as a pillar and so on. Each advanced a reasonable description of the elephant, but each was limited by the partiality of his window of experience.] In the public sphere, this means that we do not negativize the fact of diversity, seek hegemony or hope for its eradication. We engage our differences mindfully to understand better the particularity of the other and ourselves.

3. The third theological insight from the Hindu tradition is the necessity of humility when we participate in the public square. This has its roots in the acknowledgement of the limits of human language and all symbolic systems of communication. The divine is always more than can be defined, described or understood with finite symbols and language. Our ways of speaking will, of necessity, be diverse as we use finite symbols to speak of the infinite. The consequence is an epistemological humility. In the public square, this means that we resist possessive claims about the ownership of truth in its fullness and that we exemplify a humble openness to the voices and insights of others that fosters mutual learning. We resist

the denunciation of other voices merely because these are not the voices of our own tradition. We learn to profess our commitment with openness.

4. The fourth theological insight from the Hindu tradition is the necessity for the practice of hospitality in the public sphere. The practice of hospitality is deeply valued in the culture of the Hindu tradition. Ritual worship in Hinduism is essentially the practice of hospitality to God who is thought of and honored as the supreme guest in our midst. This honor of hospitality is then extended to the human guest, in whom we are asked, by the scripture, to see God, the supreme guest. In the public forum, hospitality means that the newcomer to the square is welcomed and valued and not regarded with mistrust and suspicion or marginalized for being a stranger in our midst. In the stranger, we recognize the presence of the One we value above all else. Hospitality offerings to God always include important life-needs such as food, clothing and water. This suggests powerfully that our hospitality to the stranger in our midst must include consideration for his or her survival needs.

5. The fifth theological insight defines the proper mode of religious sharing that occurs in the public square and there are two points to be highlighted here. The first is that religious teaching is imparted only in response to a request from the receiver for such teaching. Traditional Hindu teachers imparted instruction when requested to do so by their students. This approach minimized aggression and disregard for the religious needs of the receiver on the basis of apriori assumptions. Second, interreligious dialogue requires the mutuality of giving and receiving. It does not flourish if one partner thinks of himself as having everything to give and nothing to receive. The generosity of giving must be complemented by the humility of receiving. Dialogue is impossible if one's theological conclusions does not allow one to receive. You cannot give your hand in friendship to another without receiving his hand.

6. The sixth theological contribution from the Hindu tradition to dialogue in the public square is the necessity for a commitment to the practice of non-violence or ahimsa. Non-violence is regarded in the Hindu tradition as the supreme ethical value. In listings of ethical values non-violence precedes even truth since a commitment to truth does not necessarily exclude the intention to hurt and inflict suffering. The centrality of non-violence for the Hindu tradition is rooted in a vision of life's unity and the sacred worth of all beings. It is rooted also in the acknowledgement of our fallibility and limits as human beings. In the public square, the value for non-violence expresses itself in a mutual commitment to engage differences dialogically, to respect the moral integrity and freedom of those who differ from us and to refrain from the use of militant and threatening words and actions as tools of persuasion. The public square is a place for sharing and not the defeat and humiliation of those who disagree with us. A violent public square will never be a space conducive to interreligious dialogue and learning.

The contemporary public square is not to be thought of as " my square," or " your square," but as "our square." Excluding voices in the public sphere, done in the name of religion or secularism, guarantees that the public square will not be a place where the common good can be pursued in earnest. An exclusive public square cannot be the space where we pursue an inclusive common good. This can be pursued only in a public square where our commitments include a value for the equal worth of all human beings, humility, hospitality, non-violence, the affirmation of the value of religious diversity, and the willingness to give and to receive. The character of our public square is a responsibility that we all share and a precious legacy to future generations. It is sacred ground that we must enter respectfully.

Lecture

Reinhold Bernhardt

Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Dialogue in Christianity

Within only a few decades the Christian view of other religions has undergone a radical change in the ecumenical movement.

The international missionary conference in Tambaram, India, in 1938 insisted that the biblical faith, based on God's encounter with humankind in Jesus Christ alone, is different from all other forms of religious faith. Karl Barths Christozentrism which was adopted by Hendrik Kraemer's missiology created the theological foundation of this position. Kraemers book The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World became the preparatory study book for the missionary conference in Tambaram. He maintained that the only true way to know the revealed will of God is by responding to the divine intervention in history in Christ. As a consequence there is a deep discontinuity between the gospel and other religious traditions. Even if Christianity as a religion is as human as any other in relation to God it has a unique status, in so far as it had become the vehicle through which the unique revelation of God is lived and pro-claimed.

From a position like that an interreligious dialogue can only have the purpose to give witness to the Non-Christians about the unique revelation of God in Christ. As Paul Knitter once puts it, it is a dialogue between a cat and a mouse. Regarding the truth it is a "one-way-traffic". The divine truth is mediated only through Christ and received only in the Christian faith. The Holy Scriptures of other religious traditions need to be conceived as human attempts to strive for divine truth but those attempts are in vain.

But already at Tambaram there were dissenting voices (like those of A.G. Hogg, H.H. Farmer, T.C. Chao). They were convinced that there was a "two-way traffic" between God and the human soul in the religious life and experience of Non-Christians. Thus, although the Tambaram report leaned heavily towards Kraemer's views, it acknowledged that "Christians are not agreed" on the revelatory character of other religious traditions and identified this as "a matter urgently demanding thought and united study" within the ecumenical movement.

About 50 years later the voice of the Ecumenical movement sounded very different. The General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Canberra in 1991 issued a call to 'Recon-ciliation with Those of Other Religions'. I quote from the declaration: "The Bible bears wit-ness to God as the ruler over all nations and peoples, whose love and concern is extended to all of humankind. In the covenant with Noah we see a covenant of God with all creation. We recall the covenant which God made with Abraham and Israel. In

the history of this covenant we are promised that we will recognize God through Jesus Christ. We are also aware that others bear witness to having experienced God in another way. We are witnesses to the truth that salvation is in Jesus Christ, and we are also open to the witness of others who encounter the truth differently." What is called for is a 'culture of dialogue' as a way of reconciliation, a dia-logue which overcomes ignorance and intolerance.

That is the position which is held by the WCC until today. In the 2003 issued "Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions" the WCC declares: „We are witnesses in a world where God has not been absent and to people who do have something to say about God. We meet people who already live by faiths that rule their lives and with which they are at home. ... Christians need to open themselves to the witness of others, which is made not just in words but also in faithful deeds, in devotion to God, in selfless service and in commitment to love and non-violence."

The paradigm-shift in the Christian theology of religions was brought forth by a number of historical developments which cannot be described in detail here. I will concentrate on the question on how the basic theological assumptions changed in that process. I would like to point out three theological concepts which made it possible to establish a dialogical theology of religions:

(1) First and foremost the widening of Christocentrism to a trinitarian approach. The trinitarian approach bears potential for a universal view on the revelatory presence of God in the World and thus in the history of religions. It allows to concede that one "cannot set limits to the saving power of God" (as the „Commission on World Mission and Evangelism" in San Antonio 1989 stated). It allows to understand the plurality of religious traditions as the result of the manifold ways in which God has related to peoples and nations.

Especially the first and the third article of the creed – the belief in God the creator and in the Holy Spirit – point at God's universal presence. In a statement, worked out by a WCC working-group in Baar, Switzerland in 1990, it reads: "This conviction that God as creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions makes it inconceivable to us that God's saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or groups of peoples. A refusal to take seriously the many and diverse religious testimonies to be found among the nations and peoples of the whole world amounts to disowning the biblical testimony to God as creator of all things and father of humankind." And then the statement of Baar quotes from a document on Mission and Evangelism which says: "The Spirit of God is at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are least expected. In entering into dialogue with others, therefore, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of Christ and the way God deals with humanity" (CWME Statement, Mission and Evangelism).

(2) The second theological concept which supports a dialogical theology of religions is the concept of covenant. The salvation-history as witnessed in the bible can be summarized and systematized as a history of different covenants which proceed from the universal to the specific. The Covenant with Noah was extending all over the whole creation. The Covenant with Abraham was much more restricted in its scope: It can be interpreted as including the Abrahamic religions, because the mythic origin of Islam is rooted in Ismael the son of Hagar and brother of Isaak. The Covenant with Moses refers to the people of Israel. And the so called "new" Covenant in Christ incorporates the Non-Jews into the chosen people.

If the relation between the different covenants is not understood in an exclusive

way so that the later invalidates the earlier but in an inclusive way so that the later specifies but also confirms the later, then a dialogical relation to the adherents of other covenants can be promoted. In relation to Judaism that move from an exclusive to an inclusive theology of covenant has made it possible to overcome the age-old model of substitution of the so called old covenant by the new covenant.

There are even voices in Judaism and Islam which claim that there is a plurality of covenants with different people. In his book "Opening the Covenant. A Jewish Theology of Christianity" (2007) Michael S. Kogan advocates a „multiple revelation theory".

(3) The third theological concept which supports a dialogical theology of religions refers to Christology. As we saw in dealing with the Christocentrism of Barth and Kraemer there are forms of Christology which do not lead to dialogical theology of religions, but to exclusive truth-claims. On the theological level it matters a lot if one focusses on Paul's proclamation of the "word of the cross and the resurrection" as decisive for the justification of the believers or if Jesus Christ is understood as the universal Logos of God, which "was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1) and which "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9).

A Christology which derives from a universalism, as developed by the gospel of John, probably will pave the way for interreligious dialogue more effectively than a Christology which proceeds from Pauls focussing on the centrality of the cross. That may explain why Protestants with their emphasis on the theology of the apostle of Paul tend to be more hesitant to dispose their faith in mutual openness to believers of other faith-traditions.

And even within Protestantism there are differences. While the Lutheran tradition emphasizes that the logos has become a human being, the reformed tradition claims that in Jesus Christ the logos performed an "assumption of the flesh". As a consequence the Lutheran theology focused more clearly on Jesus Christ as the one and only self-mediation of God while re-formed theologians like Zwingli were open to think that God could have manifested his spirit even outside the revelation in Christ, for example in Greek philosophers.

I will not go deeper in that Christological debates now. I intended only to show how different ways of understanding Jesus Christ in his relation to God leads to different approaches of theology of religion. And those different approaches correlate with different attitudes towards non-Christian religions on the theological level.

For establishing interreligious relationships characterized by mutual respect theological reflections do not seem to be of primary importance. More important seemingly are ethical, social and even political considerations. Pragmatic interests of coexistence seem to be most important. But we should not neglect the role of religious attitudes and theological reflections as a disposition of interreligious relations. If my faith makes me certain that my way to God is the only valid way ethical, social and even political considerations will not have the power to lead me into real dialogical relationships with adherents of other religions. To be prepared for a dialogical openness it needs not only openheartedness on a psychological level but also a religious mind-set which supports (or at least not suppresses) such an attitude.

Thus I regard it as one of the biggest merits of the "Religion and Dialogue in modern Societies"- project to bring the two dimensions together: The practical and the theological / dialogue of religions and theology of religions.

The discussions inaugurated by Samuel Huntington have shown that not only

economic and political factors are driving forces in forming interreligious relations (and conflicts!) but also religious and cultural factors. Interreligious dialogue is not primarily a practice of conversation but first and foremost an attitude of relating oneself to the religious other. For a religious believer that attitude originates from the center of his/her religious self-understanding. I am sure that the "Religion and Dialogue"-project will help to shed more light upon the interrelation between the practice of interreligious dialogue and its theological conditions of possibility. I hope and wish that this project may be on its course under full sail with a fair tailwind.

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Enjoying the academic dialogue after the presentations (from left to right):
Professor Reinhold Bernhardt, Professor Anantanand Rambachan,
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