

# CHRISTIANITY AND ITS NEIGHBOUR-RELIGIONS: A QUESTION OF TOLERANCE?

## Impulses for the Education of Religion from the Experiences of ecumenical Dialogue

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### 1. Introduction

A far reaching change in perspectives is opening up: In a time of decreasing significance of Christianity in Germany (and in the whole Western world?) other religions are growing considerably in our countries. Today religions are present in Europe which in the past had to be researched by travelling and by the analysis of their teachings. The 'Foreign Religions' or 'World Religions' of the past are now 'neighbour-religions.'<sup>1</sup>

The distant religions of the past became neighbours for us primarily due to migration. Apart from the traditionally dominant Protestant-Lutheran Church and the small Catholic Church there are more than 80 different religions in Hamburg.<sup>2</sup> Also the global attribution to one of the 'World-religions' proves to be, in general, too simplistic. The Islam of the Turks in Hamburg, for example, shows a great diversity: The Alawis are significantly different to Sunni Muslims. New living forms of Christianity supplemented the traditional varieties of the Christian Churches: Pentecostal and prophetic Churches from Africa, Catholics from Latin America and Poland. Simultaneously the membership in the Protestant-Lutheran Church decreased from 90 % in the 1950's to 40% today.

It becomes more and more interesting and difficult to inquire into 'religion,' it becomes increasingly necessary to determine the relationship between the still dominant Christianity and the newly arrived neighbour-religions. Soon one realises that traditional classifications as 'the Christianity' (and what should this be?), 'the Islam', 'the Buddhism' etc. do not correspond with reality since the people of different beliefs consider the categories of our Western science of religion - with which they are classified - to be insufficient, partly even false.

The expression 'neighbour-religion' seems to me very suitable to bring attention to this new phenomenon of religious pluralization in our society, to throw light onto the religious beliefs of our neighbours next door or of classmates in school.

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- 1 M. Klöcker/U. Tworuschka: *Religionen in Deutschland. Kirchen, Glaubensgemeinschaften, Sekten.* München 1994.
  - 2 W. Grünberg/D.L. Slabaugh/R. Meister-Karanikas: *Lexikon der Hamburger Religionsgemeinschaften. Religionsvielfalt in der Stadt von A-Z.* Hamburg 1994.

The science of religion and ecumenics have to deal more than in the past with the religions in the national and local context. The cultural and religious variety within the schools challenges the didactics of religion.

It is questionable whether the continuation and retreat into a strict confessionalistic RE is an adequate response to this new situation. However, attempts to open RE for an intercultural and interreligious education - with regard to the composition of pupils, the selection of topics and holy books - are without definitive answers too. These attempts have an experimental character and still have to be grounded theoretically and empirically.<sup>3</sup> Hardly satisfying are hesitating compromises as in the recent memorandum of the EKD [the national board of the regional German Protestant Churches] titled 'Identity and Understanding'.<sup>4</sup> In my view they are updated versions of old models rather than opening ways for the future - for the future of heterogeneously composed classes with pupils from very different religious and world-view backgrounds and for the future of a Youth searching for fundamental answers to their questions on e.g. justice, environment and death.

As part of the necessary search for new concepts within the pedagogy of religions a fair amount of initiatives, resolutions and models have been started in the Federal Republic of Germany within the last few years. They are looking more or less for an interconfessionally open RE with tolerance for the other religions, orientated towards dialogue, some of them perhaps even aim for an interculturally orientated RE.<sup>5</sup> My collaborators in Hamburg and myself are involved in discussions for opening up RE. In numerous empirical inquiries we have found out that teachers and pupils favour RE in which pupils of different religious and world-view background participate jointly in one class.

Nevertheless there are fundamental questions on such an endeavour, for example: In our tendency to open up RE, are we adapting too much to societal change and thus undermining our own, characteristic (critical) potential of Christianity for the individual and for society? Does not the opening up to the other religions (and perhaps even world-views) relativize the truth claims of Christianity themselves? Does not such an opening-up cover up the claim to absoluteness which Christianity - as any other religion - implies? In light of the dissolving Christian tradition, should we not emphasise and describe anew what Christianity stands - or at least should stand - for in our present situation instead of opening up to other religions and contributing - under the cover of tolerance - to the increasing blurredness? Should not RE concentrate more on the preservation, penetration and adoption of Christianity? Is, thus, an open RE, led by the idea of tolerance and dialogue with the other religions and world-views, merely an adaptation to the general trend in the pedagogy?

These questions serve as background for our topic marked by two alternative questions: Is dialogue with other religions (within RE) from a Christian perspective

3 See the newer volumes by J.A. van der Ven/H.-G. Ziebertz (Eds.): *Religiöser Pluralismus und interreligiöses Lernen*. Kampen/Weinheim 1994 as well as I. Lohmann/W. Weiße (Eds.): *Dialog zwischen den Kulturen. Erziehungshistorische und religionspädagogische Gesichtspunkte interkultureller Bildung*. Münster 1994.

4 *Identität und Verständigung. Standort und Perspektiven des Religionsunterrichts in der Pluralität*. Eine Denkschrift der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, Gütersloh 1994.

5 K. Goßmann/A. Pithan/P. Schreiner: *Religionsunterricht in der Diskussion. Zur Situation in den jungen und alten Bundesländern*. Zeitschriften, Aufsätze, Bücher. Comenius-Institut, Münster 1993.

superfluous and thus a trendy luxury endangering Christian identity? Or is dialogue a theological requirement, grounded in the heart of Christian-ecumenical theology? It seems to me, one should concentrate on the last question since its answer is of fundamental and decisive importance for all the other questions.

Presently this question has either not been dealt with or only fragmentarily so. In the context of the present theology one may think of the different representatives of the Pluralistic Theology of Religions, in particular the North-American Catholic theologian Paul Knitter.<sup>6</sup> The background of these considerations could be relevant for our topic (and HG Ziebertz demonstrated this in a nice article),<sup>7</sup> even if many objections would have to be formulated and discussed. For example, whether the 'theocentrism' leads to an inner and outer circle of religions; whether really enough attention is paid to christology despite all the assurances of Knitter; whether the prerequisite for clear religious positions contains a new exclusivity to the disadvantage of those with less pronounced ideas on religious matters and of those who reject religious attitudes for themselves; whether these approaches pay sufficient attention to the historical dimension as much as to the every-day experiences of dialogue, whether the grief about failing dialogues is admitted, etc.

Yet unapplied to the question of the theological grounding of dialogue and the resulting impulses for the pedagogy of religions is the theological discipline which traditionally deals with the question of 'Christianity and neighbour-religions' or 'world-religions': the missiology and ecumenical theology. This deficit should be made good. In what follows I want to take a first step in relating recent approaches in the field of Protestant ecumenical theology.

I am fully aware that by referring to mission and traditional missiology I am bearding the lion in his den: Mission had not only the most intensive experiences with 'non-Christian' religions on the missionary field, it even represented in its history predominantly the spearhead of Christian intolerance. Rightly one might wonder what could be said on the topic of Christianity and tolerance in particular from the point of view of and with a view on mission? It is worthwhile, in my point of view, to acknowledge that in particular missiology developed new approaches in critical self-reflection. In reappraising historical burdens they showed new perspectives on the relationship between Christianity and the other religions, the neighbour-religions. A line of Protestant theologians of mission worked on such perspectives in the framework of ecumenics. In what follows I want to focus on an outstanding though - strangely - presently almost forgotten exponent of this line of mission and dialogue theology: Hans Jochen Margull. In order to illuminate the theological landscape of his time I want to depict the position of Georg Vicedom, another German theologian of mission.

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- 6 B. R. Bernhardt (Ed.): *Horizontüberschreitung. Die Pluralistische Theologie der Religionen*. Gütersloh 1991; R. Bernhardt: Zur Diskussion um die Pluralistische Theologie der Religionen, in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 43 (1994), pp. 172-189; Paul F. Knitter: *Ein Gott - viele Religionen. Gegen den Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*. München 1988; Paul F. Knitter: Katholische Religionstheologie am Scheideweg, in: *Concilium* 22. (1986), pp. 63-69; Paul F. Knitter: Wohin der Dialog führt. Grundfragen zu einer Theologie der Religionen, in: *Evangelische Kommentare*. (1990), pp. 606-610.
- 7 Hans-Georg Ziebertz: Interreligiöses Lernen. Herausforderung der interreligiösen Erziehung durch Theologien des interreligiösen Dialogs, in: *Katechetische Blätter* 116. (1991), pp. 316-327.

The approach of Hans Jochen Margull is not a strict, self-containing systematic-theological concept; rather it represents a consequent, radical position saturated by experience. In order to keep the depiction authentic I will give large room for citations and original passages. Finally I will briefly inquire into the impulses for the present pedagogy of religions.

## 2. Christianity and Neighbour-Religions: Hans Jochen Margull's position on mission and his experiences with interreligious dialogue

Let me start with some biographical data: Hans Jochen Margull, born in 1925 and studied theology after World War II. He completed his dissertation in 1958 with Walter Freytag on the topic of the 'Theology of Missionary Proclamation.' In 1961 he became chairman of the department on the questions of proclamation in the Ecumenical Council of Churches. In 1965-67 he was visiting professor in Japan, from 1967 until his death in 1982 he held the professorship for the 'missiology and ecumenical relation of the Churches' in the Department of Protestant Theology at the University of Hamburg. In 1971 he became chairman of the newly created department for dialogue of the Ecumenical Council of Churches. Margull developed his fundamental positions on mission during his dissertation and his work with the Ecumenical Council of Churches until 1965. He gained more intensive experiences with other than the Christian religion from 1965 onwards during his stay in Japan and in his interreligious encounters in the frame of his work on dialogue.<sup>8</sup>

- ◆ The notion of 'tolerance' plays only a minor role in the thinking of Hans Jochen Margull, though for him tolerance was an essential precondition for entering into dialogue. Nevertheless his whole endeavour for dialogue can be understood more sharply when seen in the light of the common distinction within the science of religion between a) *formal tolerance* (or weak tolerance), i.e. the 'mere not-infringing upon foreign religions' and b) *tolerance as regards content* (or strong tolerance), i.e. 'the positive acknowledgement of foreign religions as real possibilities in the encounter with the holy' (G Mensching).<sup>9</sup> Margull's endeavours and experiences with dialogue belong rather to the second type. Margull, however, points out that formal tolerance is not only a passive unimportant attitude as long it is inspired by the idea and respect that one must neither occupy nor offend the other religions. Formal tolerance is important because of its dimension of 'endurance' and suffering. Margull's approach disproves Mensching's statement - at least in its general form - that 'mystical religions are essentially tolerant whereas the prophetic religions imply intolerance

8 See his biography: *Hans-Jochen Margull: Zeugnis und Dialog. Ausgewählte Schriften mit Einführungen von Theodor Ahrens, Lothar Engel, Erhard Kamphausen, Ingo Lembke, Werner Ustorf, Wolfram Weiße und Joachim Wietzke*. Ammersbek bei Hamburg 1992 (abbreviated: "*Zeugnis und Dialog*").

9 Gustav Mensching: "Toleranz. I. Religionsgeschichtlich", in: *RGG*<sup>3</sup>, Vol. VI, Tübingen 1962, p. 932 f. G. Mensching: *Toleranz und Wahrheit in der Religion*, Hamburg/München 1966. Thomas Krobatz: Zum Toleranzprinzip im ökumenischen Streit um die Wahrheit, in: *Veritas et Communicatio. Ökumenische Theologie auf der Suche nach einem verbindlichen Zeugnis*. FS U. Kühn, Göttingen 1992, pp. 40-64. F.W. Graf: Bedingungen der Toleranz. Protestantismus und multikulturelle Gesellschaft, in: *Evangelische Kommentare 1/90*. pp. 10-13 and L. Kolakowski: Toleranz und Absolutheitsansprüche, in: *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*. Vol. 26, Freiburg 1980, pp. 5-38.

in the form of their claim to exclusive absoluteness.' Margull's concept uses the dimension of tolerance and puts new light on it. More important however is that, in the understanding and experience of Margull, dialogue exceeds the fundamental concern of weak and strong tolerance. This has yet to be shown.<sup>10</sup>

### *G Vicedom's Concept of Mission Theology*

In order to give an impression of dominant positions within German Protestant missiology at Margull's time and in order to gain distance and depth to the approach in the body of this article, I want to portray the position of Georg Vicedom, rather a representative of main stream thought at Universities in the Federal Republic of these days. A little older than Margull, Vicedom was missionary in New-Guinea for ten years. Later he became professor of Missiology in Neuendettelsau. In 1965 he published a small book titled *Tolerance and Witness in our encounter with dissenters*.<sup>11</sup> Vicedom starts in denouncing the - in his view dangerous - pluralism of our society which originates in the increasing egoism of the individuals:

"Contemporary Man does not ask for the truth as such but for the truth which only has meaning for himself in his situation... Since our theology follows this development and no longer dares to confront man with God's revelation, the searching man has to borrow from foreign religions".<sup>12</sup>

In this alarming situation Vicedom demands an absolute certainty in one's own Christian belief as a precondition for religious tolerance. He condemns dissenters and takes only superficially note of members of other religions within a distanced and limited formal tolerance.<sup>13</sup> Vicedom understands tolerance in the light of a theology and Church which have God and truth - understood as independent of time and situation - at their disposal.<sup>14</sup> Religions other than the Christian religion are branded as 'directed against God Himself'.<sup>15</sup> Their members are tolerated only insofar as the 'non-Christians' are human beings 'which already belong to God' and thus have to be opened up for the gospel and won for Christianity:

"Tolerance does not mean to renounce witnessing but to pass on the gospel to the non-Christians".<sup>16</sup>

The religion of those to whom the Christian faith should be 'passed on' appears only as a repulsive and dangerous background. It is not necessary to become acquainted to them and to their life; one knows the answers even before one has heard their questions and opinions.<sup>17</sup> They are classified as enemies who might still escape one's

10 Mensching: "Toleranz. I. Religionsgeschichtlich", in: *RGG*. Vol. VI, Tübingen 1962, p. 933.

11 Gerog F. Vicedom: *Toleranz und Zeugnis in unserer Begegnung mit Andersdenkendes*. Bad Salzufflen 1965.

12 Vicedom, op. cit. pp. 2-3.

13 Op. cit. p. 4.

14 Op. cit. p. 13.

15 Op. cit. p. 9.

16 Op. cit. p. 10.

17 Op. cit. p. 15.

own but definitely not the final judgement.<sup>18</sup> The own claim to absoluteness becomes quietly the pivot of one's understanding of tolerance:

“Christian tolerance is - just as the Christian claim to absoluteness - given with the singularity of the gospel”.<sup>19</sup>

In the certainty of his belief and God, Vicedom does not look for dialogue with ‘non-Christians’ (this only in non-committal form with other confessions,<sup>20</sup> but endeavours the conversion to the own mission (society) and Church.

For Vicedom, the will of God is entailed in the Church and it should - by means of the mission societies - be passed on aggressively to the world and the religions. In simplified terms, the sequence reads: God - Church - world.

### *HJ Margull's concept of Mission Theology*

In drawing on the Dutch mission theologian JC Hoekendijk, HJ Margull reversed this sequence. Now it reads: God - world - Church. This indicates the fundamental theological change. This has yet to be explained.

This approach can be found already in Margull's work on the ‘Theology of Missionary Proclamation’ published in 1959:

“Missionary proclamation is (therefore) not at all the new and partly nervous attempt of the Churches to confront with extraordinary means a pressing reality. Missionary proclamation has nothing at all to do with the saving and preservation, for example, of the common religiosity or of the *Volkskirche* [the universal membership in Church] (which is only one possible form of Church). Missionary proclamation, as I understand it, is also more than the *Volksmision* [the mission to all.] It grounds in the mission which is directed particularly for the whole world of God”.<sup>21</sup>

Later on in the text he gives a more pointed statement: “Jesus Christ is the missionary! And the church, i.e the church in its present state itself is one, if not *the* greatest problem for the missionary proclamation”.<sup>22</sup> Margull does neither perceive the situation with fear nor react in withdrawing into the putative strong bulwark of the Church. He analyses human kind and church without any inhibition and does not project the necessary change onto others. Margull demands a conversion of church and parish with the challenging question:

18 Op.cit.: p. 10 "Wir Christen haben wohl über unseren Glauben zu wachen, wir können aber das Gericht über die Andersgläubigen nicht vorwegnehmen. ... Das Gleichnis vom Unkraut unter dem Weizen lehrt uns, daß nicht unser gewaltsames Eingreifen, sondern Gottes Erntestunde entscheidend ist. Das soll uns aber nicht gleichgültig gegen die anderen machen. Der Hausvater und seine Knechte wissen jedenfalls, wer der Feind ist und was Unkraut ist - was wir oft nicht mehr wissen."

19 Op. cit. p. 10.

20 Op. cit. p. 15.

21 Hans Jochen Margull: *Theologie der missionarischen Verkündigung. Evangelisation als oekumenisches Problem*. Stuttgart 1959, p. 9.

22 Op. cit. p. 10.

"How must a parish be structured in order to avoid hindering the proclamation of the gospel?"<sup>23</sup>

Criticism on Church and hope for renewal can be found in his lecture of 1965 titled *The Church stands in the way of itself*. Here he underlines in staccato:

"What we do is not for us. What we do is completely for others. The Church exists for the world... There is no Church for us. The Church is Church for others".<sup>24</sup>

Not retreating into the Church but the movement of the Church to the people should be in the centre. The services are not limited to the relation of God and Church but happens between world and God:

"In the service the world is not outside, and woe betide anyone who wants to keep it outside! He would want to keep God for himself and to make the Lord of the world to the deity of our temple".<sup>25</sup>

The *missio dei* which is meant for the whole humanity became apparent as the centre of his theology. For Margull the acts of God towards the whole world demand to see the whole humanity as the recipient of His historical and present acts and to put the church in the third place,<sup>26</sup> as in the above mentioned sequence: God - world - Church. The Church has thus not a monopoly to determine the will of God: What God wants to tell people in their specific situation can be heard in dialogue with the world, in encounters and conversations; in dialogue with the people, with 'the other', the dissenters, the people with other or without beliefs - for which the Church has to be there.<sup>27</sup>

So far the general characterisation of Margull's mission theology is this: Starting out from the heart of the *missio dei* it shows the link of the Christians to the world and the indispensability of dialogue within the Church<sup>28</sup> and of the encounter with people of different religious, even atheistic background.<sup>29</sup> Neither 'weak' nor 'strong' tolerance denotes sufficiently this approach. The other religions are neither taken formally nor seen as 'real possibilities of the encounter with the Holy', as Mensching suggests. The others are indeed a point of reference for God's acts and necessary

23 H.J. Margull: Missionarische Gemeinden. Ökumenische Arbeit zu Strukturfragen, in: *Zeichen der Zeit* 17. (1963), pp. 273-282, cited on p. 277, Printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 106-124, cited on p. 114.

24 H.J. Margull: Die Kirche steht sich selbst im Wege. Referat beim Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag Köln 1965, Printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 135-146, cited on p. 137.

25 Op. cit. p. 142.

26 H.J. Margull: Gemeinde für Andere, in: *Mission als Strukturprinzip*. Ein Arbeitsbuch zur Frage missionarischer Gemeinden. Ed. ÖRK, *Referat für Fragen der Verkündigung*. Geneva 1965. Printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 125-134, particularly p. 129.

27 H.J. Margull: Missionarische Gemeinden..., und Gemeinde für Andere ..., particularly p. 127. See also I. Lembke/J. Wietzke: Anstöße zur Kirchenreform - "Mission als Strukturprinzip", in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 95-98, particularly p. 95.

28 H.J. Margull: *Die Kirche steht sich selbst im Wege*..., p. 143: "Lassen Sie uns den Gemeindegottesdienst am Sonntagvormittag aufs Gespräch hin anlegen, auf das Gespräch unter uns selbst und das Gespräch mit unseren Mitmenschen in der Woche. Denn nicht im Monolog und schon gar nicht in Form von Behauptungen will das Evangelium veründigt sein, es will sich im Gespräch mitteilen, im Dialog, wie ihn Jesus führte. Das Gesetz kennt kein Gespräch. Das Gespräch, die Befreiung zum Gespräch ist Zeugnis für das Evangelium".

29 H.J. Margull: Missionarische Gemeinden, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. particularly p. 116 ff.

partners in dialogue in order to determine the specific *missio dei*. To say it more pointedly: The *missio dei* discloses itself only in dialogue.

### *Margull's Theological Cornerstones for dialogue*

In the frame of his experiences with dialogue, in particular as of 1971 as chairman of the newly created department for dialogue of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, three theological cornerstones received central importance for Margull.

#### 1. *Incompleteness and unfinishedness of all religions:*

Margull considered all religions as incomplete and unfinished.<sup>30</sup> The truth in the religions is historically mediated, the religions have an open future. In dialogue he came close to a position which linked the truth of religions to persons and their relationship. The de-objectification of the religions implied the de-objectification of the neighbour: "That man whom I encounter for example as *Muslim*, cannot be defined from the outside by 'the' Islam or even by means of my knowledge of Islam. He must show himself as Muslim and in this way he can show Islam as a belief of complete devotion and thus no longer merely as a system - as a trial and assurance for himself, only as a question of this faith to my own faith and tradition in which I believe."<sup>31</sup>

#### 2. *Claim for absoluteness, universality and particularity:*

With regard to its own history the Christian mission failed in its aim to verify the claim to absoluteness of Christianity. The Christianization of the whole world could not be achieved, other religions have not died out but were partly strengthened. For Margull the claim to universality was the 'the essential problem'.<sup>32</sup> The undividable claim to truth of every religion contains a claim to absoluteness which he considered rightly grounded in the subjective certainty of salvation. Objective claims to absoluteness prove to be particular in light of the different claims to absoluteness of each religion.<sup>33</sup> Claims to absoluteness and faith also exists elsewhere. The fact of the continuing existence of Judaism, of the emergence of Islam after Christianity and of the ongoing viability of the Indian religions proves two points: 'Christianity is and will be a particular religion.' *And*: 'The religions are not at our disposal and cannot be utilised for the Christian truth. To put an end to them theologically is undignified shadow-boxing.

30 H.J. Margull: Der Dialog von Ajaltoun/Beirut, in: H.J. Margull/S.J. Samartha (Eds.): Dialog mit anderen Religionen. Material aus der ökumenischen Bewegung, Frankfurt/Main 1972, pp. 74-89, printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 255-272, particularly p. 270.

31 H.J. Margull: Der "Absolutheitsanspruch" des Christentums im Zeitalter des Dialogs. Einsichten in der Dialogetherfahrung, in: *Theologia Practica* 15. (1980), pp. 67-75, cited on p. 75, printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 297-308, cited on p. 307.

32 H.J. Margull: Ist das Christentum dialogfähig? Partikularismus als Gefahr - Universalität und Partikularität als Problem. Öffentliche Vorlesung am 20.11.1975 in Tantur, in: *Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies*. Yearbook 1976, pp. 33-46, particularly p. 33, Printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 343-356, particularly p. 343.

33 H.J. Margull: Der "Absolutheitsanspruch" des Christentums..., *Theologia Practica*. p. 72, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 303.



Rather it is important to tell, for example, in an Islamic way those issues which Christianity has to state towards Islam.<sup>34</sup> The realisation of the fact that Christianity is - as all universal religions - a particular unit appears in dialogue as a fundamental 'offence to the Christian self-consciousness'.<sup>35</sup> The fact of religious history that also Jews and Muslims talk about Jesus induced Margull to admit: "We Christians are thus confronted with the - for us - difficult, almost unbelievable historical fact that not only our tradition is particular but even the one in whom we see grounded the universality of God and of our Christian faith. We are confronted with the particularity of Christ Jesus. This particularity is known in the science of religion, it becomes acceptable in scholastic distance. In the subjectivity of Christian faith, however, the particularity of even Christ Jesus provokes a deep grief. It opens up a wound."<sup>36</sup>

### 3. *Grief and wound*

That brought us to the third point, the experience of grief and wound. The grief about the Christian particularity is like the grief which the other religions have to endure in light of their particularity. Real dialogue could consist of the common endurance of the respective griefs.<sup>37</sup> Mutual awareness, exchange and dialogue are of importance on those issues which Margull denoted the cataracts of the present historical situation of humanity: "To mention the most eminent: The genocide on the European Jewry, the anti-Semitism of Christianity, the mentality of eradication between communism and Christianity, Western imperialism, the low regard if not contempt towards non-Christian traditions, the danger for global peace. Sin and Justice at least for the Christians. Dialogue which begins at these wounds, with these wounds, in order to bandage and to unite these wounds, and to avoid further wounds."<sup>38</sup> As we see, mystical union is here not of prime concern neither are the acceptance and toleration of other religions. Rather it deals with accepting history, bearing the grief of one's respective particularity, enduring jointly this fundamental offence and the dialogue about the real wounds.

### *Interreligious Dialogue: Encounter of people in respect and equality*

The decisive starting point for dialogue consists, according to Margull's experiences, not in the differences of the particular religious traditions but in the common grounds of the people, since all mankind are an image of God.<sup>39</sup> Decisive for him were the *personal* encounters with other believers, for example within the field of Buddhism:

34 Op. cit., *Theologia Practica*. p. 73, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 304.

35 H.J. Margull: Zu einem christlichen Verständnis des Dialogs zwischen Menschen verschiedener religiöser Traditionen, in: *Evangelische Theologie* 39 (1979), pp. 195-211, cited on p. 206, printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 309-329, cited on p. 321.

36 Op. cit., *Ev. Theol.* p. 209, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 325.

37 Op. cit., *Ev. Theol.* p. 209, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 326.

38 H.J. Margull: Verwundbarkeit. Bemerkungen zum Dialog, in: *Evangelische Theologie* 34. (1974), pp. 410-420, cited on p. 413, printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 330-342, cited on p. 334.

39 H.J. Margull: Zu einem christlichen Verständnis ..., *Ev. Theol.* p. 199, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 313 f.

“My knowledge of the multiple forms, rambling and profound field what I simplified called Buddhism, is definitely much more limited than my respect to a couple of people which we call Buddhist rather they themselves.”<sup>40</sup>

In his dialogical endeavours the notion of ‘encounter of people’<sup>41</sup> and encounter-like dialogue<sup>42</sup> receives a central status. People should not be classified from outside, even not by their formal membership to a particular religion. The theological reflections should rather intend ‘to focus on the human beings which are not necessarily defined by one of our already defined religions. Nevertheless they can be understood - in keeping their peculiarity and freedom - within the structure of a religious tradition.’<sup>43</sup> Following Buber Margull demands as a precondition for the objective ‘living mutuality’ the ‘simple experience that nothing less - and maybe nothing more causing grief - than equality and respect are the preconditions for *real* dialogue.’<sup>44</sup> Therefore, he rejects the concept of a dialogue *with* the other religions, in particular since this concept in its tendency draws on the superiority or at least dominance of one's own position. Margull demands a Christian understanding of the dialogue *between* the persons belonging to different traditions.<sup>45</sup>

The immediate cause for dialogue is often in fields of societal conflict.<sup>46</sup> It has its limits which can induce silence, silence in dialogue.<sup>47</sup> There are opportune and inopportune times for dialogue. Despite high objectives dialogue sometimes cannot go beyond the fundamental respect of the ‘other’<sup>48</sup> These experiences are distressing but not fundamental limitations. His experiences allowed Margull to invalidate the widespread fears with regard to syncretism and uniform global religion as a result of interreligious dialogue. Syncretism is not the result of such encounters but the product of prejudice.<sup>49</sup> Where people interest themselves in e.g. Buddhism, it cannot be explained in the frame of syncretism but it occurs, generally, out of frustration about the Church.<sup>50</sup> And the idea of a uniform global religion never appeared in the processes of interreligious dialogue.<sup>51</sup>

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- 40 H.J. Margull: Die Herausforderung der Kirche durch den heutigen Buddhismus, in: *Religion, Mission, Entwicklung*. Stuttgart/Berlin 1973, pp. 52-63, cited on p. 52, printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 273-287, cited on p. 273.
- 41 Op. cit.: *Religion, Mission...* p. 52, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 273 und H.J. Margull: Ethos des Dialogs, in: *Missionsjahrbuch der Schweiz* 1973. pp. 101-104, cited on p. 101, printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 288-296, cited on p. 288.
- 42 H.J. Margull: Der "Absolutheitsanspruch" ..., in: *Theologia Practica*. p. 73, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 305.
- 43 H.J. Margull: Zu einem christlichen Verständnis des Dialogs ..., in: *Ev. Theol.* p. 196, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 310.
- 44 Op. cit. *Ev. Theol.* p. 197, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 310.
- 45 Op. cit. *Ev. Theol.* p. 195 f., *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 309 f.
- 46 H.J. Margull: Der Dialog von Ajaltoun ..., *Dialog mit anderen Religionen*. p. 78, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 259.
- 47 H.J. Margull: Verwundbarkeit, *Ev. Theol.* p. 419, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 340.
- 48 Op. cit. *Ev. Theol.* p. 414, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 335.
- 49 H.J. Margull: Der interreligiöse Dialog, in: *Zeichen der Zeit* 36. (1982), pp. 209-212, p. 210, printed in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 357-367, bes. 361.
- 50 H.J. Margull: Die Herausforderung der Kirche ..., in: *Religion, Mission ...* p. 59, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 281.
- 51 H.J. Margull: Der Dialog von Ajaltoun ..., in: *Dialog mit anderen Religionen*. p. 74, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 255.

Margull sees interreligious dialogue as an 'expectant and obliging talk at an open encounter of people of different religious backgrounds with equal rights.'<sup>52</sup> The fundamental preconditions for dialogue appear thus to be extremely ambitious. In the interreligious talks Margull experienced, however, the consequences resulted from the historical burden of dominant Christianity:

"Dialogue means for us, first of all, to listen for long stretches because we, in particular, have to overcome the stigma of being unable to listen."<sup>53</sup>

With this, Margull underlines the necessity - grounded in our past history - to give precedence to the others and to stay voluntarily in the background. He refutes the notion of a narrow Christian identity which fades out world and world-religions as a 'circular tower of monologue.'<sup>54</sup> It cannot be at stake to understand the 'other' from our centre but 'to understand the other as he understands himself.' This phrase represents - in acknowledgement of the difficulties and limitations to understand the other from the centre of the other - the brief formula of the 'ethos of dialogue.'<sup>55</sup> People of other traditions should 'from the beginning participate in our theological reflections',<sup>56</sup> they should 'became a substantial part of our reflections on faith.'<sup>57</sup>

Encounter and dialogue are thus central parts, even the heart of theologising. They are not merely luxury which one may afford or not or which could find its justification in a united religious front against secularism.<sup>58</sup>

Tolerance in the initiation of dialogue<sup>59</sup> and dialogical events on which Margull reflects are neither ignorant toleration nor limitless acceptance but a mutual-approaching with questions and counter-questions to one's own person and tradition from the perspective of other religions, and vice versa. This initiates a process of mutual understanding, of speaking up mutually for the respective other; a process which enriches, demands - and wounds.

This leads us far beyond the concepts of tolerance as in the above cited definition of Mensching which differentiated a formal dimension from one with regard to content. In Margull's understanding dialogue is not only the toleration of the other but the *fundamental dependence and reference to the 'other.'* Toleration is not an attitude nourished by a consciousness of superiority or absoluteness towards others but exists in the light of God's commitments to all people, of the mutual dependence, in respect, in acknowledgement of and the work on equal rights, in grief, distress, and vulnerability.

Dialogue thus moves into the centre of theology and of theological processes, it becomes constitutive for Christian self-understanding which considers truth not as (its

52 H.J. Margull: Der "Absolutheitsanspruch", in: *Theologia Practica*. p. 67, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 297.

53 H.J. Margull: Die Herausforderung der Kirche ..., in: *Religion, Mission ...* p. 63, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 287.

54 H.J. Margull: Zu einem christlichen Verständnis des Dialogs ..., in: *Ev.Theol.* p. 210, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 326.

55 H.J. Margull, Verwundbarkeit ..., in: *Ev. Theol.* p. 418, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 339.

56 H.J. Margull: Zu einem christlichen Verständnis ..., in: *Ev. Theol.* p. 210, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 327.

57 Op. cit. *Ev. Theol.* p. 208, *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 323.

58 H.J. Margull: Ethos des Dialogs, in: *Missionsjahrbuch*. p. 101, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 289.

59 H.J. Margull: Ist das Christentum dialogfähig ?, in: *Yearbook* p. 43, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. p. 353.

sole) possession, which restricts the search for truth not to its own tradition but regards itself as depending on the questions and answers of people of other religious convictions. Dialogue becomes indispensable for the own self-understanding.

I have to stop here, although I just want to remark that in 1975 in Nairobi the general assembly of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches refused this tendency.<sup>60</sup> The times were not yet ready for such a far-reaching concept. Margull wrote disappointedly that the majority of the Church representatives shied away from this approach and preferred to orientate themselves towards the claim to Christian absoluteness.<sup>61</sup> The following official discussions of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches, however, picked up some important aspects<sup>62</sup> - the sting of Margull's position - so saturated with real experiences - stuck and sticks tightly. The topic of 'Christianity and neighbour-religions' still is a hot potato within the Ecumenical Council of Churches, repeatedly dealt with and immediately dropped.<sup>63</sup> I cannot elaborate this here. I think, however, that the present ecumenical movement can also receive important impulses by taking up Margull.<sup>64</sup>

### 3. Impulses for the education of religion from the experiences of ecumenical dialogue.

I am aware that it is impossible to draw immediate conclusions from the depicted experiences and reflections of Margull for the practice of interreligious exchange on parish and school levels. The background of his reflections may, however, - insofar we share them at least in their tendency - give impulses for an interreligiously open RE in schools.

On a fundamental level, we receive clear and challenging answers to the questions I posed in the beginning. Dialogue with other religions and world-views represents -

- 60 H.J. Margull: Die beschränkte Suche nach der Gemeinschaft. Zur Sektion III: Auf der Suche nach Gemeinschaft - Das gemeinsame Streben der Menschen verschiedenen Glaubens, verschiedener Kulturen und Ideologien, in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 25. (1976), pp. 194-202.
- 61 "Im ganzen kann man sagen, daß die Mehrzahl der Teilnehmer der Versammlung von Nairobi ratlos und zum Teil verständnislos vor Fragen des Dialogs stand und in der allgemeinen Identitätssuche, die im Ökumenischen Rat gegenwärtig anhängig ist, dann auf das Einfachste zurückgriff, nämlich den Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums". Thus formulated Margull in a personal letter, R. Friedli: Zum Dank an Prof. Hans-Jochen Margull, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 66. (1982), p. 293, according to E. Kamphausen: Verwundbarkeit. Zum Verständnis des interreligiösen Dialogs im theologischen Denken H.J. Margulls, in: *Zeugnis und Dialog*. pp. 247-254, cited on p. 251.
- 62 Important pointers like the term "Verwundbarkeit" (vulnerability) although somewhat relativised are to be found in the "Leitlinien zum Dialog mit Menschen verschiedener Religionen und Ideologien" which was accepted by the WCC in 1979 and published in: U. Berger/M. Mildnerberger (Hgg.): *Keiner glaubt für sich allein. Theologische Entdeckungen im interreligiösen Dialog. Ein Studienbuch*. Frankfurt/Main 1987, pp. 65-81, vgl. zu "Verwundbarkeit" p. 74.
- 63 Eugene Stockwell: *Missionsfragen für heute und morgen*: J. Wietzke (Ed.): *Dein Wille geschehe. Mission in der Nachfolge Jesu Christi. Darstellung und Dokumentation der X. Weltmissionskonferenz in San Antonio 1989*. Frankfurt/Main 1989, pp. 200-217, particularly p. 213 f.
- 64 Th. Wieser (Ed.): *Ökumene - Quo vadis? Ein Dialog unterwegs zur Zukunft der Ökumenischen Bewegung, dü-texte 44*. Hamburg 1989; J.H. Pranger: *Dialogue in Discussion. The World Council of Churches and the Challenge of Religious Plurality between 1967 and 1979*. IIMO Research Publication 38, Utrecht-Leiden 1994; Theo Sundermeier (Ed.): *Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen. Plädoyers für eine interkulturelle Hermeneutik*. Gütersloh 1991; Dietrich Werner: *Mission für das Leben - Mission im Kontext. Ökumenische Perspektiven missionarischer Präsenz in der Diskussion des ÖRK 1961 - 1991*. Rothenburg 1993, particularly pp. 420-427.

according to the experiences and reflections of Margull - by no means a trendy luxury to be warned of, since it entails the danger to blur the 'own' Christian religion and to relativise the personal claim to truth. In the light of Margull's approach, the preservation of Christianity (or any other religion) by means of retreating into a truth conceived as a timeless essence of fixed doctrines delineates an impassable way. Radically, Margull regards dialogue as indispensable for the process of developing one's own religious identity, integrating historical awareness and the search for truth in justice which is necessarily connected with grief.

If Margull is right in seeing the *missio dei* directed towards the whole world and not primarily towards Church, far-reaching consequences result for the pedagogy of religions. The Christian parishes should seek the dialogue with other religions and world-views, with 'the world'. Many people in Church, theology and parish workers share this view and endeavour dialogue on this local level. The position of the Church is more reserved and even closed when it comes to RE in schools. Here, the background of a theology orientated towards the sequence 'God - World - Church' might encourage voluntary self-denial. In particular this could mean to renounce any confessionally structured RE and to use the influence on RE - granted by our constitution - primarily in order to support concepts and models of RE which are directed towards dialogue and for which general school pedagogy takes responsibility.

The depicted background of the ecumenical theology of HJ Margull cannot answer questions with regard to the adequate structure of dialogical RE, neither to the necessary differentiations according to age-groups which needs to consider developmental psychology and factors of socialisation. The background of Margull's approach challenges, however, the pedagogy of religion fundamentally and gives impulses. Some of them should be studied more concretely.

### *Impulses for the present education of religion*

1. The prime impulse from the mission theology and the dialogue experiences of Hans Jochen Margull is, in my point of view, the fundamental grounding of the encounter and dialogue of people of different religious traditions and convictions. Thus one should endeavour to give room for the possibility of encounter and dialogue in the central structure of RE. We have to inquire how a more than sporadic and superficial interreligious encounter can be facilitated in relatively homogenous classes with regard to the confession and religion of the pupils. My impression is that a multireligious (and intercultural) make-up of the classes provides the best preconditions with regard to dialogue and encounter in RE. A separation of the pupils according to confessions and religions would therefore no longer be desirable.
2. Within a religiously and culturally heterogeneous class the living religiosity should be in the centre, and not primarily the ascription of pupils to peculiar religions and doctrinal systems.
3. Fear of syncretism should not dominate the exchange of religious convictions. Any exchanges necessarily provoke questions to one's own religious traditions and thus, supports the development and intensification of one's own belief with regard to the respective traditions.

4. Differing claims to truth and absoluteness may appear in class-room dialogue. They cannot be reduced to a common ground of all religions.
5. Dialogue and encounter in school may lead to conflicts, even to a (temporary) breaking off. What does it mean for RE that there are opportune and inopportune times for dialogue?
6. The maxim of dialogue - to understand the other as he/she understands him/herself - can also apply to the envisaged dialogue in class. This holds also for the limit of partly not-understanding the other, of not-comprehending the other from the middle of his religious convictions and practice. This implies finally the endurance of realised though unsettled differences.

Those impulses refer to RE which cannot be characterised by 'formal tolerance' (which may be accompanied by ignorance and repression). Nor does 'tolerance as regards content' adequately denote what is meant by encounter and dialogue. The impulses of ecumenical theology refer to answers, some of which I mentioned above. They also raises new questions. For example, whether the orientation towards the religiosity of the individuals would lead to a dismemberment of the religions and to complete confusion. And how RE can touch on grief and wounds but also how and whether this could be cushioned.

This aspect refers to, in my point of view, two fundamental points:

1. Interreligious learning and dialogue in RE is implied in the heart of ecumenical theology, though it is not an easy, harmonious or harmless endeavour.
2. Dialogue in school is subject to specific conditions which have to be inquired into and reflected upon. One of these is that not all dimensions of interreligious dialogue may have equally to be realised within school. As much as we see the opportunities for dialogue for religiously and culturally heterogeneous classes, it is nevertheless important to avoid overloading RE with expectations, i.e. to investigate to parts of the desired dialogue the pedagogical work of the parishes might provide important contributions.

Apart from this there remains the question, which role world views should play in such a dialogue and which stimuli should be taken up from the field of philosophy (especially from the critical theory of the Frankfurt-School) and the social sciences for an adequate concept of dialogue. It seems to be particularly important, to analyse the socio-political frame, in which dialogue takes place and to define within this reference the aims, ways and the function of dialogue.

Impulses and new questions. A process of reflections was initiated, a searching endeavour has started which yet has to settle what exactly is meant by: An interreligiously open dialogical RE with mutual respect. Mission theology and the reflections - grounded in the experiences of ecumenical dialogue - of Hans Jochen Margull demonstrated how central is such a 'dialogue which starts in the encounter' - maybe this could be the best description of the opportunities for dialogue within school. This dialogue is not only central for the others, not only for the neighbour-religions but for the people in our neighbourhood and school and - not the least - for our own religion, for the development of our own religious identity, for learning processes in RE, and for theology at university.