

Remembering Bishop Krister Stendahl

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, April 16, 2008

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding mourns the death of Krister Stendahl, Emeritus Lutheran Bishop of Stockholm, professor and dean emeritus of Harvard Divinity School, writer and teacher, and an esteemed founding member of the Advisory Board of the Tanenbaum Center and 1996 recipient of the Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Award for the Advancement of Interreligious Understanding.

With the passing of Bishop Krister Stendahl, we have lost one of the intellectual and spiritual giants of the twentieth century. Krister Stendahl established many of the ground rules for fruitful interreligious dialogue, and is responsible for much of the progress toward mutual understanding and respect that has enriched the lives of following generations of religious leaders, theologians and scholars.

Through his monumental contributions in Pauline studies, his undeniable credentials as theologian and New Testament scholar and his own towering presence, he brought a new perspective to early tensions in the Christian-Jewish separation, and the ensuing interest in Jewish Studies that emerged from his own scholarly findings brought him into the Jewish-Christian dialogue as a major figure.

Stendahl's three rules of religious understanding, originally issued in Stockholm, Sweden in 1985, and repeated many times by many others, stand as simple but elegant ground rules of dialogue:

- If you want to understand another religion, ask its adherents, not its enemies.
- Don't compare your best to their worst.
- Leave room for "holy envy" -- which he defined as finding some aspect of another religion that you admired and honored, but accepted that it was not yours, that it belonged to a separate faith community.

No one has said it better. We honor his memory.