

Address on the occasion of the funeral service of Dr. Udo Schaefer on the 6th of September 2019

Dr. Armin Eschraghi

Dear Sigrun,
dear Yasmin,
dear Manuel,
dear friends and relatives,

Just one week ago, on the 30th of August 2019, Dr. Udo Schaefer departed from this world. We are gathered here today to accompany him on his last earthly journey and to take our final leave of him. We do this filled with melancholy and sorrow, because his departure leaves a gap; because – as many of the friends remarked in their letters of condolence – “an era has come to an end.” We are steeped in gratitude for his many decades of selfless service. And we find solace in the certainty that his departure from this world is the fulfillment of his own most ardent wish. With increasing age, and given the physical infirmity under which he was suffering, he looked forward to his departure for the next world with ever increasing yearning.

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), whom he so often cited with pleasure, had the following to say about death:

Death is and remains something negative for us – the cessation of life: except that it must also have a positive side, one which remains hidden to us because our intellect is totally incapable of grasping it. Thus we are well aware of what we lose through death, not, however, what we gain through it.¹

There can be no doubt that Udo Schaefer faced the termination of his earthly life with equanimity and, in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, “with hope and expectation,” not unlike “the goal of any journey.”² The metaphor of the journey is also found in the Bible:

Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master.³

And in the second letter to the Corinthians is written:

¹ Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, 2 Vol, 1851. Second volume, Chapter 10. On the doctrine of the indestructibility of our true being through death

² Cf. Lady Blomfield (ed.), *‘Abdu’l-Bahā in London. Ansprachen und Gesprächsnotizen*, London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982, p. 96

³ Gen 24,56 (KJV)

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.⁴

In the Koran, which Udo Schaefer studied thoroughly and from which he often quoted, the return of the soul to God is expressed in the following words:

"O thou soul, in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord,- well pleased thyself, and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then, among My devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven!"⁵

Bahā'u'llāh describes death as a "Messenger of Joy" and as "Glad tidings of light."⁶ We have just now, during the recital of prayers, heard further statements from Him proclaiming the glorious condition of the soul following the death of the body. Such assurance imparts strength and comfort and supports us in our struggle with suffering and death.

Udo Schaefer was born in Heidelberg on the 19th of October, 1926, the eldest of five children. (His brothers Armin and Lothar are with us today, Helga and Tilbert have already departed from this world.) It was the time between the two World Wars, a time which for so many was characterized by austerity, deprivation and hunger. His father, a professional musician – a violinist in the Heidelberg Symphonie Orchester, later in the Chamber Orchester of the Electoral Palatinate (kurpfälzisches Kammerorchester) – just managed from one engagement to the next to eke out a living for himself and his family.

Udo Schaefer had vivid memories of the Nazi takeover in 1933 and of the twelve years of dictatorship and war which followed. As a child and youth he had stared deeply into the ugly visage of totalitarianism and of despotism, of racism and agitation against Jews and dissenters. His demeaning experiences in the Hitler Youth and as anti-aircraft crew member in Mannheim topped it off, and he developed a lasting repugnance for indoctrination and demogogy. He saw himself as the born pacifist, and with various ruses and a goodly portion of audacity he managed to dodge military drill and, above all, to avoid being sent to the front lines, for example by signing up as a musician in a military band, where he learned to play the French horn.

His affinity to music wasn't motivated solely by such pragmatic considerations. Quite the contrary: he considered music to be "the elixir of his life;" and in 1948, after the war was over, he decided to study musicology. In the course of time, however, he became aware that he lacked the necessary qualifications to keep pace with those of his fellow students who were frankly more gifted, and the prospects of a career as professional musician gradually lost their appeal. And so he decided, in 1950, to switch subjects and from then on to study jurisprudence. Nonetheless, he never thought of the years he had spent studying music a waste of time, for he drew upon them for the rest of his life. He played piano from his youth until far into adult life. He attended concerts and opera performances, and music was for him a source of consolation and an integral part of

⁴ 2 Cor. 5:1; Hebr. 13:14: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

⁵ *The Meanings of the Holy Qur'an, by Abdullah Yusufali, Surah 89, 27-30*

⁶ cf. *The Hidden Words, Arab.* 32, 33

his intellectual life. It was their common love of classical music which brought Udo and Sigrun together, and he passed his passion for music on to his children, both of whom, much to his joy, excel as performers.

The decision to study jurisprudence proved to be the right choice. The discipline fit him to a tee, and despite sheer insurmountable challenges on account of his financial situation, problematic housing conditions and ever-recurring health problems, he managed to prevail. He once attested himself a “not very robust constitution,” albeit coupled with “considerable resilience...” This circumstance proved time and again to be useful, not least during the later stages of his life.

In 1952, Udo married Sigrun, the great love of his life. To him she was, in his own words, “my greatest fortune.” From the very beginning, the young pair had to withstand many challenges, from conflicts with members of the family, through intolerable housing circumstances, to difficulties with health and with profession. Yet they stuck together and built a life and home for themselves. Udo never tired of praising her for her never-failing support and for her willingness to forgo things for his sake. But for her energetic backing he never would have been able to complete his studies, and his many later activities would have been impossible without her.

Two children issued from this marriage, Yasmin and Manuel. His fatherly pride for both of them and for their partners in marriage, Georg and Farnaz, was apparent to everyone who knew him closely. The same applies to the three grandchildren, Samira, Neysan and Miriam. Thanks to Samira and her husband Johannes, Sigrun and Udo were also blessed with two great-grandchildren, Jonathan and Jakob.

In 1957 Udo Schaefer earned his doctorate in law through the submittal of the first and, for decades, only judiciary dissertation on the Bahā'ī Administrative Order. The work, which wasn't published until 2004, is today a document of historical significance. From the end of the 1950's onward, Schaefer was active professionally, first for a short time as judge, then as public prosecutor, and ultimately as senior public prosecutor in Heidelberg. His purview was penal law, including so-called “political processes,” so that in the 60's and 70's he effectively acquired the role of representative of the state – making him a target for the animosity of the militant leftist scene, which had set the entire country in turmoil and for which Heidelberg was one of its main strongholds. And so he stood at the cutting edge of the confrontations and became the recipient not only of defamation and sundry verbal attacks, but also of outright threats. During these years he came once again to experience how ideological blindness leads to hatred, brutality, violence and destruction. Later he would often grinningly remark on the irony of history that some of those with whom he had crossed swords in court in those times went on to pursue careers in commerce and politics – including a Federal Minister of the Interior.

As public prosecutor, Udo Schaefer was respected and feared by adversaries in court, of whom one remarked years later to a common acquaintance, whilst conveying his greetings, that Udo had been a “tough dog” (“harter Hund”). Udo Schaefer took that as a compliment – although he was never particularly predisposed toward dogs. He enjoyed a high reputation among his colleagues. His briefs containing the grounds of appeal were invariably successful, and his prosecution's speeches were considered worth hearing on account of their eloquence and for their characteristic style – qualities which are incidentally also reflected in his books. Thus it often

came to pass that colleagues would gather in the courtroom to eavesdrop during his plea. He retired in 1988 – but that isn't to say by any means that he set himself to rest. Quite the contrary: for a further three decades he dedicated his energy to serving the Bahā'ī Community to an even greater degree than before.

Looking back, Udo Schaefer identified “two existential decisions” to which he “owed his good fortune”: his marriage with Sigrun and his acceptance of the Bahā'ī Faith. Udo Schaefer's childhood environment was not particularly religious, and he considered himself a non-believer. His parents had already turned away from the Roman Catholic Church in the 1930's. However, he maintained a close relationship with one of his father's sisters, Aunt Berta. She had supported him during hard times, and being very devout herself, she was perturbed by the fact that her nephew Udo wasn't at all religious; and so she prayed regularly that he might find his way into the fold. In a certain sense, this prayer was to be fulfilled: one day in the summer of 1947, Aunt Berta brought a newspaper announcement to the attention of her brother, Udo's father, which she thought might be of interest to him: a forthcoming public talk about “the Bahā'īs.”

From then on, the Schaefers attended talks given by the community, of which Udo's parents were to become members as early as autumn of the same year. Udo, too, soon became enthusiastic, once he overcame his initial reticence: he was, as he explained, already “moved by the spirit of faith” but still “in need of critical dialogue” to find out what just he was letting himself in for. It was characteristic of him throughout life to distinguish clearly between religion and maudlin sentimentality, between loyalty and blind obedience. For him, appreciation for the true dimension and profundity of religion was to be achieved through true spirituality coupled with critical and impartial examination and reflection and through rational arguments. He felt that, when embracing a religion, one must be wary of abandoning one's sense of reason and in particular of forfeiting sovereignty over one's own conscience („Gewissen“). It was a stroke of good fortune (or was it destiny?) that Hermann Grossmann (1899-1968) was there to respond to his questions with extensive knowledge, wisdom and patience. Udo Schaefer joined the community on the 7th of January, 1948. A few years later, the aforementioned Aunt Berta followed suit.

In his more than seventy years as a Bahā'ī, Udo Schaefer rendered outstanding services in a variety of areas. His juridical expertise served the community well; his dissertation, which introduced the Bahā'ī Faith to a large number of jurists, has already been mentioned. In the course of time he texted the constitutions of local Spiritual Assemblies as well as that of the National Spiritual Assembly and maintained a vast correspondence with fiscal authorities and register courts throughout Germany – in parallel, note, with his time-consuming professional activities.

It is thanks to him that the local Spiritual Assemblies didn't lose their status as registered associations, and therewith their legal capacity, when in the 1980's the Regional Appeal Court of Stuttgart judged that their subordinate status as stipulated in the National Assembly statutes was contrary to law. This ruling wasn't overturned until Udo Schaefer first suggested, then actively supported, a constitutional complaint. The decision of February 1991 by the Federal Constitutional Court has been known since then among experts in constitutional law and students of law as the “Bahai decision.” The Universal House of Justice commissioned a translation of the

ruling into English, which it then distributed to National Spiritual Assemblies the world over. The structure of the German Community and its institutions, in the form which we now know and take for granted, is to a significant extent the legacy of Udo Schaefer.

His exertions on behalf of the Bahā'ī Community, which he always undertook voluntarily and with considerable investment of time and personal sacrifice, encompassed many other areas as well. He served all in all fifteen years on the National Assembly. He travelled throughout Europe and beyond, not infrequently under adverse conditions, in order to deliver talks and hold seminars at community gatherings and public events, speaking in German and English. His presentations were always assiduously prepared beforehand. He deplored the habit of some speakers to show up totally unprepared before an audience and speak off the cuff, devoid of concept and structure, "like a crier at a fish market." He represented the community at numerous important and official occasions and came into personal contact with many public figures.

A particular highlight was a visit to Teheran in 1994, where, as a member of a German government delegation, he took part in a "Dialogue for Human Rights". Taking the floor, he severely criticized the attending Ayatollahs on account of the persecution of the Bahā'īs. And he wouldn't let himself be intimidated when, in a retort which followed, he was declared a "kāfir" (unbeliever) and blatantly accused of being a spy and a criminal. In light of over two hundred death sentences against Bahā'īs which had recently been carried out in Iran, it is unnecessary to stress what degree of courage such an appearance demands.

Udo Schaefer was a defensor fidei, a defender of the Faith, his whole life long. In the 1950's, when in the wake of the death of Shoghi Effendi there was fear of a schism in the community he was presumably the first to write to Mason Remey, cogently refuting the latter's impudent claim to the Guardianship. For those of us who can view things with the wisdom of hindsight it is hard to appreciate the crises and challenges of that early period; we are but scantily aware of the meritorious exertions of those who mastered the situation and paved the way for us, to whom so much seems so self-evident.

The most important of the lasting witnesses of Udo Schaefer's life's work are without doubt his many published books and articles. In addition, there exists a copious correspondence with friends and institutions extending over decades, made up in part of letters – some up to eighty or more pages in length – of profound content expressed in language of high literary value.

Shortly after accepting the Bahā'ī Faith, Udo Schaefer was confronted with critical questions from his brother-in-law, a protestant theologian. Since it greatly displeased him to find himself in an argumentatively inferior position, he began to busy himself – parallel to his study of the Bahā'ī Writings – with Christian theology, later also with philosophy and with Islam, and in the course of time he amassed a profound knowledge. Even in the early years he never shied from contending with theologians and religious scientists, to put the record straight in the face of their misrepresentations – partly made in ignorance, partly with hostile intentions – of the Bahā'ī Faith. This correspondence includes his cordial exchange of letters with the famous religious scientist Gerhard Rosenkranz, but also his exchange of blows with Kurt Hutten, the founder of the "Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen" (EZW, Protestant Centre for Questions of World-View).

The climax of his apologetic work was the book “Desinformation als Methode” (1995) which he wrote together with Dr. Nicola Towfigh and Ulrich Gollmer. Their objective was not simply to correct misunderstandings of the Bahā’ī teachings from the Christian perspective but to debunk a campaign of malicious distortions and defamations of the Bahā’ī Faith which for years had gone unanswered, resulting in lasting damage to the reputation of the Faith and an extremely negative impact on public perception. This work marked a turning-point in relations with the EZW. What is more, it considerably enhanced the reputation of the German Bahā’ī community, which is nowadays taken seriously in interreligious dialogue to a degree which would have been inconceivable twenty years ago. The Universal House of Justice highlighted the book as one of the achievements of the current Plan and commissioned its translation into Persian and English.⁷

In addition to his apologetic works and contributions to interreligious dialogue, Udo Schaefer authored numerous seminal studies of aspects of Bahā’ī teachings. His writings are systematic and analytic. Despite their sober diction they are not “neutral,” but based on the assumption of belief in the Revelation. Although they deal with theological questions – all of them have “confessional character” – they nevertheless maintain the standards of scientific method; and so it is not surprising that Udo Schaefer is occasionally described in reviews as a “religious scientist,” although he has never pursued formal studies in this discipline.

He has also done pioneer work and set new standards with his numerous contributions to the subject area “ethics, morality and values,” his final major work in this field being a comprehensive two-volume monograph in English.⁸ His books and articles have been translated into numerous languages, i.a. English, French, Spanish, Arabic and not least Persian. The last-named is especially significant, considering that a vast Bahā’ī secondary literature already existed in this language anyway. It is thus all the more remarkable that Udo Schaefer enjoys a high degree of recognition within the Iranian Bahá’í community and that his published works have all been translated into Persian. His systematic, thorough, clear and comprehensible manner of argumentation and expression is held there in particular esteem.

Bertold Brecht is said to have remarked, “No one is dead as long as he is thought of.” Measured by this criterion, Udo Schaefer has become immortal through his oeuvre. Quite aside from the profundity of their content, his works are one and all pioneer achievements and alone by virtue of their sheer existence historical documents of the early development of the German Bahā’ī community and its literature. To these we must add his active participation over many years in numerous translations of Holy Writ – a further field of accomplishment which he pursued right into the final year of his life, so long as he was physically able, with competence and dedication.

There is no doubt that his contributions will be known, read and cherished well into the future, for decades if not centuries. Coming generations and the course of history will judge those of his convictions which were met with reservation during his lifetime and which occasionally made

⁷ *Making the Crooked Straight. A Contribution to Bahā’ī Apologetics (2000)*

⁸ *Bahá’í Ethics in Light of Scripture: An Introduction, Volume I: Doctrinal Fundamentals, George Ronald, Oxford (2007), and Volume II: Virtues and Divine Commandments, GR, Oxford (2009)*

him the target of accusations. Many an unjust criticism will, despite the injury and sorrow it occasioned him, then fall into "oblivion, forgotten"⁹ and pale beside his achievements.

But what will future generations learn about the man Udo Schaefer? He talked with me about today's event some considerable time since. What he vehemently rejected was adulation, transfiguration and kitsch. Triumphalism and self-adoration were – certainly also for the above-mentioned experiences in early life – anathema to him.

If one wish to do justice to Udo Schaefer as person, his cordiality, his generosity and his hospitality deserve particular mention. He and Sigrun have received and entertained countless guests over the decades. May the guest book which they have maintained at least since 1971 be preserved for posterity! Udo's open-heartedness and blind trust have time and again given rise to distress and human disappointment. That there are people who, for whatever reason, can be devious and hypocritical is something which apparently doesn't easily occur to someone who is himself honest and upright to the core.

Udo was never embittered. On the contrary, he was an extraordinarily humorous person who laughed loud and often. He was, in his own words, "a friend of good satire, of wit and of everything which lightens the heart." In contradiction to that which one might expect from a great scholar and living legend, such witticisms didn't necessarily have to be "fit for children" or "politically correct." He was by no means stiff and formal in his dealings with others; quite the contrary: he was always at ease.

In his writing, Udo was a proponent of straightforward language, both with regard to choice of words and language style, also in the figurative sense: he said what he meant, even at the risk of rubbing others the wrong way. In the words of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799) – "it is almost impossible to bear the torch of truth through a crowd without singeing somebody's beard."¹⁰ He pursued conflicts with pointed pen when he felt it necessary, and he could occasionally be polemical. Those who knew him better were aware that it was never his intention to inflict injury. He was unrelenting in his search for truth and the better argument. He did not match the stereotype of the dogmatic jurist, but instead accepted facts and arguments from others and was prepared to change his mind. But an apodictic "that is not correct" hardly convinced him.

It was a great honour for me, at quite an early age, to participate in the translation of Holy Scripture together with Udo, Yasmin and Uli Gollmer. It quickly became evident that collaboration with the famous and highly deserving author took place by no means in an atmosphere of debilitating awe and veneration. Instead, there very quickly developed a deep friendship. Consultation took place on equal terms, and Udo never attempted to have the last say on the strength of his experience, age or reputation.

He was extremely modest and unpretentious. He never gave the impression of expecting veneration or recognition, gestures of deference or indeed a posture of subordination – or that

⁹ cf. Koran 19:23

¹⁰ Lichtenberg, *Sudelbuch (Book of Aphorisms)* G 1779-1783. [G 3]

those around him should say only what he wanted to hear. Feelings of jealousy and envy, such as the fear that someone might “steal his crown,” were totally alien to him. Quite the contrary: he felt uneasy about having to quote so often from his own publications, as there was simply no other literature available. He was overjoyed whenever he met young people who showed interest in philosophical or theological topics, and he did his utmost to encourage and support them.

A man of Udo’s age has lived through changing times: through Nazism, the Cold War, the heyday of the Radical Left and of Islamist terrorism, of technological progress and the digital revolution, but above all through a fundamental shift, if not indeed collapse, of moral values. He dealt with this phenomenon in his writings and openly voiced his misgivings. Though to a permissive society some of his opinions ran the risk of being dismissed as “conservative” or “reactionary”, Udo Schaefer was unshakeable in his conviction that moral conduct is particularly in need of the clear orientation which he found in the Writings of Bahā’u’llāh. He was in no way out of touch with the times, but instead always well-informed about current events. Though his convictions occasionally clashed with those of the mainstream of society and may not always have been “politically correct,” they were not the product of resentment or mere conservatism, but the outcome of personal experience coupled with clear analytical assessment of contemporary issues and a firm grounding in the Holy Writ.

Udo was always keen to learn. His family, deeply moved, related to me that he reviewed his life with self-critical reflection right up to the end. Much of what he accomplished over the years had been undertaken out of a sense of duty, responsibility and self-sacrifice: a letter had to be finished, a manuscript translated or a lexicon article written – invariably under extreme pressure of time. Few would have been prepared to volunteer so much time for travel, public presentation, correspondence, meetings and so on, especially since all of this undoubtedly represented a constant burden for the family as well. His was the fate of the idealist aware of being called for greater things, and he took on duties and responsibilities not because he yearned for fame and recognition, but simply out of conviction and a deep sense of responsibility, lest an opportunity to do something for the benefit of the Faith be lost, since no-one else was prepared or able to take it upon himself.

Often during conversations, with increasing frequency in the last years, Udo stressed how much he owed to Sigrun. Without her, his works would never have come to be: without all the literature research in libraries; the tedious photocopying, typing, correcting, right up to working out the layout; maintenance of the entire correspondence with typewriter, later PC; the housekeeping; the entertainment of a continuous stream of arriving and departing guests; and toward the end, home care for Udo – which he had never wanted to burden her with. And yet the source of his vitality had always been his deep love for her. A few years ago, Udo wrote the following lines:

When I take stock of my life, I recognize that much of what I have undertaken has turned out well. Yet not everything was good. There is much that I would do differently if I were to live my life again – I am probably no different than most in this respect. I hope to experience a peaceful end, a gentle death and reunion with those whom I love, most especially with my dearest Sigrun – without her, life in the hereafter would not be the blissfulness I long for. I set my hope in the grace of God, which Bahā’u’llāh assures is greater than his justice.

When one reads this last sentence as a prayer, one might understand the following words of Bahā'u'llāh as the reply:

O son of spirit! With the joyful tidings of light I hail thee: rejoice! To the court of holiness I summon thee; abide therein that thou mayest live in peace for evermore.¹¹

¹¹ *The Hidden Words, Arab.* 33