

Andreas Bsteh (Ed.)

Peace for Humanity

***Principles, Problems and
Perspectives of the Future
as Seen by Muslims and Christians***

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Gottfried Vanoni—Gerhard Luf—
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To
Dr. Alois Mock
Austrian Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs
Initiator and Patron of the Conference
with great respect
for his Endeavour towards Peace in the World

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Preface

“It is impossible to serve God without serving peace”. This is the essence of the discussions which took place at the International Christian-Islamic Conference, the proceedings of which are published in the present book.¹ Muslims and Christians from all over the world² came together to reflect upon their responsibility for the future of humankind, as members of two religious communities present in all parts of the world; and how they can contribute towards a peaceful life in a community of people from different backgrounds, i. e. of different cultural, religious, ethnic and national origins and often belonging to economies and civilisations that differ greatly with regard to their degree of technological progress. They all agree with the statement that what Christians and Muslims have in common is the “basic moral orientation of their lives towards God and the task to serve the propitious co-existence of all creatures. For Muslims and Christians, God is a ‘God of peace’. They know that whoever wants to serve him must serve the cause of peace.”³

The conference was organised upon the initiative of Dr. Alois Mock, the long-standing Austrian Foreign Minister, who for many years has not only gained insights into the complex conditions and interconnections required for regional and international peace, but during all these years has continued to be active himself in the cause of world peace, despite all the difficulties encountered. The conference was given an extensive framework that tried to do at least some justice to the world-wide spreading of the two religious communities in question. Moreover, it provided an ideal opportunity for joint treatment of the religious roots of peace from the Muslim and Christian points of view and of the question of the legal and political requirements for future peace for humankind. The Institute for Theology of Religions St. Gabriel was responsible for devising and implementing the theoretical concept that has already been

¹ The International Christian-Islamic Conference was organised upon the initiative of the Austrian Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Alois Mock by the Institute for Theology of Religions at the Theological Faculty of St. Gabriel from March 30 to April 2, 1993 in Vienna, with the motto that is also the title of the present book.

² See list of participants and their countries of origin below, pp. 284—285.

³ Final Declaration of the Vienna Dialogue Conference, see below, pp. 274—283.

mentioned above, as well as for formulating the general topic of the conference, developing the subjects to be discussed on the three conference days and inviting lecturers and participants.

Such were the preparations for an event that was equally of great political interest and scholarly appeal, a meeting which, because at the centre of political attention, was guaranteed unrestricted freedom of opinion and speech, a conference where the participants were not sent by mandate as representatives of a political grouping, but on the basis of their religious and academic competence and scholarship only.

In addition to two facts of fundamental importance, namely that the conference was personally initiated by the Austrian Foreign Minister and that its academic outline and design were in the hands of an independent Austrian academic institution, the mutual inspiration derived from the interrelated political and academic aspects, which had to be taken into account in organising the conference was best expressed in its opening session, when prominent political and religious leaders from both religious communities addressed their welcoming speeches to participants who had arrived from all over the world to take part in this conference, in this 'council of the sages'. In this sense, the opening evening also provided one of the focal points of the conference, and this fact is therefore also reflected in the present publication.⁴ It illustrated the existence of a worldwide public interest in intensifying a straightforward Christian-Islamic dialogue in the interests of maintaining or re-establishing peace. From the planning stage of the conference to the successful preparation of the present publication, the cooperation experienced between the Institute for Theology of Religions St. Gabriel, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Austrian embassies and representatives abroad provided a good example of independent political and academic institutions working together for the cause of peace in a highly efficient manner.

This book also includes a *detailed transcription of the discussions* which took place after each of the main papers had been presented at the plenary meetings of the conference, the point being that there was only one paper in the morning and one in the afternoon session, so that

⁴ For documentation see pp. 13—61.

ample time was left for plenary discussions after each paper. On the one hand, this underlined the importance of the issues treated in the papers, on the other, it took into account the authority of a plenary meeting of renowned theologians, legal experts, sociologists and political science experts from the great Islamic and Christian traditions of the different continents. Moreover, the scholarly nature of the symposium and the invitations addressed personally to each participant made it possible for them to express not the 'official line' of some particular group but rather to express their very own academic convictions and thus to take their own personal stand on various issues. The participants repeatedly made it clear, from the very beginning onwards, that they also saw their contribution to the conference in this light.⁵

Responsibility for the summarised transcription of the discussions formally lies with the editor of this book. He felt obliged solely to render the content of the various contributions of the discussions, which he had at his disposal in the form of a verbatim written record of the plenary discussions in the original language used by the speaker. The participants voted in favour of this means of proceeding at the outset of the conference; then, in the course of the subsequent evaluation of the conference, they were sent a copy of the editor's reworked version of the text of their contributions to the discussions, accompanied by a request for authorisation. None of the participants expressed any objection to the transcription of the discussion which they were sent; most of them directly conveyed to the editor (in some cases with very valuable detailed specifications of the relevant passages) their agreement, although with some of them it was only possible to conclude that they were in agreement with the version of the text presented to them according to the principle of *qui tacet consentire videtur*; the statement by Professor Cerić, who was impossible to reach by post at the time in question as a result of the political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, was read and approved by Dr. Balić. In the transcriptions of the discussions, the whole of the text which is printed after the name of a participant at the conference may be ascribed to the same until the next name appears (printed in italics) at the beginning of a new contribution to the discussion.

⁵ See below p. 95.

Subsequent to the last Symposium on Theology of Religions held at St. Gabriel, at which the subject under discussion was "Man as the Listener to the Word of God in Christian and Islamic traditions"⁶, one of the speakers present, Professor Mahmoud Zakzouk, Dean of the Theological Faculty of al-Azhar University in Cairo, wrote to the editor of the present book that one might choose 'Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam (from the theological and historical points of view)' as the title of the next conference. And in fact, this was quite appropriate, especially since the first Christian-Islamic encounter in St. Gabriel in 1977 had borne the title "The God of Christianity and Islam"⁷ and the central focus of interest at the second, as already mentioned above, had been man's personal vocation as "listener to the Word of God". Yet, according to the original planning schedule for the St. Gabriel Symposia on theology of religions, further encounters with the Hindu spiritual world and with Buddhism should have been given precedence. But the topicality and urgency of the request made by Foreign Minister Dr. Mock came, after some initial hesitancy, to play a large role in finally giving priority to the conference which is the subject of the present book, and thus to take up in a quite unexpected manner the above mentioned suggestion of Professor Zakzouk.

As may be seen from the dedication of this book, the Institute for Theology of Religions St. Gabriel feels obliged to express thanks first and foremost to the Austrian Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Alois Mock, both for his reliance on the Institute by entrusting it with the academic planning, execution of the conference and the publication of its proceedings, and in the financial assistance which he placed at our disposal.

Sincere gratitude is also due to the ladies and gentlemen at the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Vienna, especially to Dr. Gerhard Rainer,

⁶ See the 6th Symposium on Theology of Religions on the subject of "Listening to His Word. Man as the Listener to the Word of God in Christian and Islamic traditions", published in Volume 7 of the series "*Beiträge zur Religionstheologie*", under the title: "*Hören auf sein Wort. Der Mensch als Hörer des Wortes Gottes in christlicher und islamischer Überlieferung*", Mödling 1992.

⁷ Published under the title "*Der Gott des Christentums und des Islams*", as Volume 2 of the "*Beiträge zur Religionstheologie*", Mödling 1978.

Deputy Head of Division, as well as the Austrian representatives abroad. The extremely cordial willingness on the part of the responsible offices of the Ministry to work together with the Institute for Theology of Religions St. Gabriel serving the appointed task, played an important role in the successful organisation of the event and also in the publication of the proceedings of this international dialogue conference.

Our sincere thanks are also due to the Austrian National Library for lending us two very precious editions of the Bible and the Qurʾān, both of which were displayed in the plenary room of the Conference Centre of the Vienna Imperial Palace during the conference.⁸

In all matters concerning the academic preparation and organisation of the conference as well as the academic publication of its proceedings, we were assisted by Prof. Dr. Adel Theodor Khoury, whose life's work has been devoted to attempting to bring about a sincere dialogue between Christians and Muslims and a new kind of partnership between the two religious communities. Without his generous and ever encouraging help, the whole endeavour would hardly have been possible. Thanks may furthermore be expressed to the Vikas Publishing House in India and in particular to its Chairman and Managing Director Mr. C. M. Chawla, who kindly agreed to publish the book for the English speaking world in close cooperation with our Institute.

The editor owes thanks to Mr. Peter Waugh, Mag. Ingeborg Bogensberger and Professor Karl-Heinz Pöschke in regard to the English edition of the book, which is composed of texts that were already available in English and of others which had to be translated from German into English. All texts of the book first published in German⁹ were authorised by all the speakers and by the participants of the Conference to whom passages of the plenary discussions refer. For the English edition, only the six main papers presented at the Conference were again sent to their authors

⁸ The editions mentioned are the Cod. mixt. 813, a handwritten calligraphic Qurʾān from Iraq, dating from the end of the 13th century, and the Cod. Suppl., gr. 107, a *Tetraeuangelion*, which was transcribed in the late 13th century (from an original dating from the 11th century) on the Greek island of Rhodes.

⁹ A. Bsteh (ed.), *Friede für die Menschheit. Grundlagen, Probleme und Zukunftsperspektiven aus islamischer und christlicher Sicht* (Beiträge zur Religionstheologie; 8), Mödling 1994.

for approbation. The quotations of the Qurʾān are generally taken from *Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The meaning of the Glorious Qurʾān. Text, Translation and Commentary, Jeddah 1413 AH, Vol. I/II.*

In the words of the Austrian Foreign Minister, Dr. Alois Mock, on the opening night of the conference¹⁰, it is the task of politics to master everyday problems and challenges. “But of course politics is also obliged to tackle the fundamental questions of ethos and humanity; otherwise it loses its ability to open new perspectives; otherwise it becomes politics without hope.” In this spirit, may the Vienna Dialogue Conference have made its contribution — also in the form of the present publication, whose aim it is to make it available to the English speaking world.

Andreas Bsteh

St. Gabriel, April 1995

¹⁰ See below pp. 15—19.