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# *Hinduism* *Questioning Christianity*

Lectures – Questions – Interventions

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*Published by*  
**St Gabriel Publications**  
**Mödling 2007**

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## Preface

A joint undertaking of scholars in the fields of Indology and Christian theology lasting over several years is published in these two volumes under the general topic "Christian Faith in the Encounter with Hinduism." Well-known authorities in the field of indological research together with experts in Old and New Testament exegetics, history of dogma, ethics and moral theology, philosophy of religion, and other theological and philosophical disciplines made a concerted effort to make one another more familiar with the multifaceted situation of a sincere Christian-Hindu dialogue.

It is therefore a project *in the anteroom of dialogue*, in the interest of people who have a share in a qualified and authentic encounter of Christian faith and Hindu religious traditions and who, in this context, are aware of the indispensable need for intensive and hard work to make this dialogue fruitful and enriching for both sides. The statement in the Book of Genesis that man shall eat his bread by the sweat of his face, is not less valid with reference to the bread of dialogue in human life in general, and in particular to the bread of dialogue between believers of different religious communities. How else should we be in a position to identify common concerns and approaches and learn to understand and respect differences of various natures rooted in both faith identities of the partners in dialogue? How else should we be enabled to interiorize areas of merging horizons and overlapping perspectives in both our religious traditions in their encounter with transcendence, in their striving for salvation?

Our awareness of the usefulness, or even need for such an undertaking resulted from years of experience in the dialogue with believers of Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim traditions in St Gabriel.<sup>1</sup> In these direct encounters people met with great openness for each other, aware of the urgent need for a new togetherness in a common responsibility for our world and that of our children and children's children. We all were convinced that we will have to learn a lot to do justice to this upcoming new pluriform

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<sup>1</sup> Published in A. Bsteh (ed.), *Der Gott des Christentums und des Islams* (Beiträge zur Religionstheologie; 2). Mödling <sup>2</sup>1992; *Erlösung in Christentum und Buddhismus* (Beiträge zur Religionstheologie; 3). Mödling <sup>2</sup>1992; *Sein als Offenbarung in Christentum und Hinduismus* (Beiträge zur Religionstheologie; 4). Mödling <sup>2</sup>1992; *Hören auf sein Wort. Der Mensch als Hörer des Wortes Gottes in christlicher und islamischer Überlieferung* (Beiträge zur Religionstheologie; 7). Mödling 1992. Arabic edition, Jounieh <sup>2</sup>1999.

situation on the one hand and our own cultural and religious identity on the other. To do justice to a new worldwide living space for all, the emerging 'global village' with its promising and at the same time threatening aspects is certainly not only a matter of good will, but demands serious efforts from all sides.

Abstract, general formulas, especially in the religious field, will not suffice. They would only lead to vehement reactions from the side of our religious communities, to fundamentalisms, accusing the proponents of such generalizations to do away with the 'true faith' and construct new Christianities or other artificial faith buildings instead. In the long run, there will be no other way to attain a peaceful togetherness with people of other faiths and weltanschauungen in the future world than to be faithful to one's own identity and, therein to open up for the dialogue with other faiths. Dialogue will be the only way to this new unity in a diversity that is of top priority on our way towards the future.

The basic approach to dialogue will always be first to listen to the other. In a first step we therefore wanted to learn more about the Hindu religious world and in which way we could make ourselves well disposed for a sincere dialogue with people coming from this complex of Hindu traditions. We have consequently chosen "Hinduism Questioning Christianity" as the general topic of this our first symposium. The reader will find the sequence of papers the way they were presented by the invited Indologists. Each paper was followed by intensive discussion in the study groups which led to a concluding plenary meeting. Both paper and ensuing discussion form a unity, and let the great conceptions and positions of the Hindu history of ideas become a questioning of Christianity. Papers without the corresponding questions and interventions, and vice versa will not mirror the original impulse which led to this kind of scientific undertaking.

For their publication in the original German edition, of course all the papers were authorized by their authors. In addition, each and every contribution to the discussions, as rendered by the editor, were submitted to the participants for authorization: many texts were then released for publication intensively revised, shortened or extended, specified and updated. In sum, all papers and discussions have been authorized the way they were published in the German edition of the books. In close cooperation with the translators, the editor tried his best to guarantee, sentence by sentence and word by word, that the English text comes as close as possible to the

text of the German edition, without being able once again to submit all these translated texts to their authors. Therefore the responsibility for the fidelity of the English texts to their original presentation rests with the editor, in close cooperation with the translators.

The present publication is accompanied by our strong wish that it may become fruitful in the context of all the many other serious efforts to promote and spread the spirit of dialogue. For the world of tomorrow will be peaceful to the degree it will be shaped by the spirit and practice of dialogue in the various fields of human coexistence, last but not least in the domain of the relations between the various religious traditions. Let us share the riches of our religious heritages, let us inspire each other in our common striving for salvation.

A word of sincere thanks is again due to the lecturers in and participants to the symposium and for their extensive cooperation that made it possible to present highly qualified texts for publication. Equally, sincere thanks to Prof. Francis Clooney SJ for his supportive interest in the project and to all who have contributed to the major translation work, in particular to Mrs. Ingeborg Bogensberger, Vienna, Mr. John Mercer and Ms. Adrienne Nagy DaPonte, Boston, and to all cooperators in our Institute for Theology of Religions.

Andreas Bsteh, SVD

St Gabriel, March 2007