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*Islam*  
*Questioning Christianity*

Lectures – Questions – Interventions

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In general we quote the Qurʾān from: Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The meaning of the Glorious Qurʾān. Text, Translation and Commentary*. Beirut–Cairo, <sup>3</sup>1938.

The relevant names and technical terms are, as a rule, rendered according to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 12 vols. Leiden etc., 1960–2004 (= EI<sup>2</sup>).

The books of the Bible and their abbreviations see below p. 10.

## Preface

Islam and Christianity are two major religious, cultural and social forces in our world. About half the world population is either Christian or Muslim believers. Their religious communities are not only present in certain segments of humanity but constitute, in modern terms, global players.

Their responsibility for the future development of our world, which they share in various ways with all other religious and non-religious traditions and ideologies, is therefore of high importance. First of all, they should feel called together to keep mankind's religious resources alive, so that the garden of our world does not turn into a desert and man is prevented from becoming a one-dimensional being that loses his relation to the mystery in him, in the depth of his existence, and above him, in the beyond of all worldly being, that is to God, who is the Lord of history and who will call us to give account for what we have done or left undone in our earthly lives.

At the same time, it is necessary to promote a sense of joint responsibility in our world in the face of all the various earthly concerns, first in our own communities and then quite in general. God wants us to solve the problems in the fields of agriculture and technology, medicine and economic affairs, ecology and handling of resources, and so forth, but today and in the world of tomorrow only joint actions will be able to respond to these issues that face humanity.

But how can we gain common ground after centuries of manifold rivalry, misunderstanding, fighting and mutual suspicion? There seems to be no other way than to define our various identities no longer against each other but towards each other, and to open them up to each other. For this reason, Christian theologians asked well-known experts in Islamic studies to explain the religious, cultural and social aspects of Muslim identity as they were originally established and historically developed, and to give them the opportunity to reflect for themselves on the Christian faith in encounter with these tenets of the Islamic faith tradition.

"Islam Questioning Christianity" is therefore the title of the first volume on the encounter of Christian faith with Islam. The figure of Muḥammad, whom Muslims believe to be "the Seal of the Prophets", and the Qur'ān as the ultimate Word of God, human responsibility for the world as seen by

Muslims, Islam as religion, society and culture, and the experience of transcendence in Islamic mysticism, are some of the subjects dealt with in this book by scholars of Islamic studies. Each lecture dealing with one of these central aspects of the Islamic faith is followed by extensive discussion. This tries to clarify many of the questions Christians raise in the encounter with Muslims and deals with the historical dimension of the Islamic tradition, opening up significant, deep insights into the spiritual world of Muslim mysticism, prayer and devotion. This evokes a constant response by Christians, who want to achieve a better understanding, who are critical in their attitude and at the same time empathetic, who want to learn and open up as Christian believers to their contemporaries, who search for possibilities of lived commonality in dialogue and joint responsibility in the face of all the problems in our present world.

The outcome of this way of dealing with one of the major challenges and tasks of modern times is presented in this first volume. It is deepened in the second volume which, methodologically, begins the other way round, with Christian theologians and philosophers presenting the thoughts which they hold to be important in the encounter with Islam and, by doing so, opening up a wide platform for discussion with all the participants in the symposium.

From their experience in the field of dialogue with believers of other faith traditions, the St Gabriel Institute for Theology of Religions developed this preparatory initiative to foster a genuine encounter of faith with faith. These reflections *in the anteroom of dialogue* are intended to help prepare the soil for a fruitful dialogue between Christians and other believers on the basis of their commonalities and differences in faith.

From the very beginning, it was Professor Adel Theodor Khoury who joined and encouraged us in this project. We are most grateful to him and to all who made it possible, in particular to all the speakers and participants in this initiative, who together elaborated its original outcome and were ready to revise and authorize all the texts that had first been published in the German edition of this book. After its publication in Arabic<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> A. Bsteh – A. Th. Khoury (eds.), *al-Islām yusā'il al-masīḥīya fī šu'un al-lāhūt wa-l-falsafa* (al-Masīḥīya wa-l-islām fī l-ḥiwār wa-t-ta'āwun; 13). Jounieh, 2000; A. Bsteh – A. Th. Khoury (eds.), *al-'Aqīda al-masīḥīya fī liqā' ma' al-islām* (al-Masīḥīya wa-l-islām fī l-ḥiwār wa-t-ta'āwun; 16). Jounieh, 2002.

the English translation of these two volumes on Christian-Muslim dialogue was carried out by Mrs. Ingeborg Bogensberger in Vienna in cooperation with Ms. Carol Bebawi in Birmingham. The editor wishes to express his heartfelt gratitude for their admirable and most careful work.

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.

More than 40 years have passed since the Second Vatican Council promulgated its *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* “*Nostra aetate*”. Its sincere pastoral concerns in the face of the emerging new global order in our world inspired the Fathers of the Council to take a stand on the relationship to other religious traditions. The increasing contemporary relevance of this document, whose third chapter expressly refers to Muslims, is beautifully and somewhat prophetically mirrored in its preamble:

“In our times, when every day men are being drawn closer together and the ties between various peoples are being multiplied, the Church is giving deeper study to her relationship with non-Christian religions. [...] For all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole race of men dwell over the entire face of the earth. One also is their final goal: God.”

The joint endeavours of those who were originally engaged in this project and those who have now cooperated to make it accessible to the English-speaking world are intended to serve these very aspirations.

Andreas Bsteh, SVD

St Gabriel, March 2007