

Andreas Bsteh (Ed.)

Buddhism
Questioning Christianity

Lectures – Questions – Interventions

Johannes Bronkhorst
Max Nihom
Lambert Schmithausen
Ernst Steinkellner
Tilman Vetter

Published by
St Gabriel Publications
Moedling 2010

The book was first published in German: A. Bsteh (ed.),
Der Buddhismus als Anfrage an christliche Theologie und Philosophie
(Studien zur Religionstheologie; 5). Moedling, 2000.

English translations by Ingeborg Bogensberger, Vienna,
in cooperation with Adrianne Nagy DaPonte, Boston

Title: **Buddhism Questioning Christianity**
(Christian Faith in the Encounter with Buddhism; vol. 1)

Editor: **Andreas Bsteh, SVD**

Cover Design: Eva Maria Meixner

Published by: St Gabriel Publications
Gabrielerstrasse 171
2340 Maria Enzersdorf, Austria – Europe
Tel.: ++43-2236-803-221; Fax: ++43-2236-803-4
E-mail: hss@steyler.at
Website: www.rti-stgabriel.at

Copyright: © 2010 The St Gabriel Institute for Theology of Religions
All rights reserved.

Printed at: Interpress Co. Ltd., Bécsi út 67, 1037 Budapest, Hungary

ISBN: 978-3-85264-623-7

Table of Contents

Preface, <i>Andreas Bsteh</i>	7
The Figure of the Buddha : In Buddhist Tradition and in the Light of Historical Research, <i>Tilmann Vetter</i>	11
Questions and Interventions	19
The Teaching of the Buddha : Middle Path – Eightfold Path – Four Noble Truths, <i>Tilmann Vetter</i>	49
Questions and Interventions	57
Equanimity and Compassion : On the Spirituality and Aim of Liberation in Early Buddhism, <i>Lambert Schmithausen</i>	95
Questions and Interventions	112
On the Genesis of Buddhism in its Historical Context : Proprium and Definition vis-à-vis Hindu Traditions and Jainism, <i>Johannes Bronkhorst</i>	151
Questions and Interventions	166
Buddhism: Religion or Philosophy? and On the Buddha-Nature, <i>Ernst Steinkellner</i>	197
Questions and Interventions	208
Man in Buddhism, <i>Ernst Steinkellner</i>	245
Questions and Interventions	257
Mahāyāna-Buddhism (Beginnings, Nature), <i>Tilmann Vetter</i>	291
Questions and Interventions	298
Compassion and Emptiness : On the Spirituality and Salvific Goal of the Mahāyāna, <i>Lambert Schmithausen</i>	339
Questions and Interventions	357

Buddhism and Tantra, <i>Max Nihom</i>	393
Questions and Interventions	400
Speakers and Participants	424

Indexes

Name Index	432
Anthologies	440
Selected Abbreviations	440
As to the Quotation of Canonic Sources	442
Source Indexes	
Buddhist Traditions	443
Hindu Traditions	460
Index of Sanskrit- and Pāli-Terms	461

Preface

Practised dialogue at all levels can lead the present world into a peaceful future. Humanity has good reason to be optimistic, and should feel invited and encouraged to follow this path of dialogue. Is this not, after all, a historic chance for all of humanity to reach a qualitatively new stage in its existence where people cannot only share material wealth with each other but above all the spiritual riches of this earth? This is a new chance that has been made possible by the existing network of global contacts, which is constantly expanding and growing in intensity. For the first time in its history, mankind finds itself able to share the same living space and cooperate with one another in making this a reality for all.

But are people prepared for this? Are they capable of responding positively to this new situation? Will the dynamism of this steadily developing global socialisation automatically turn into a promise for the future or will it be in vain? Or, by expecting too much of humans, will it even become a curse for mankind, causing conflicts between peoples, social groups, and individuals? Looking back to the past there may be cause for doubt, since conflicts arose far too often whenever people had to come to terms with those who were different (in whatever way) in a territory which up to then had been their own, or because these newcomers aimed at conquering their new territory and dominating it. Was not the former's 'normal,' spontaneous reaction to wall themselves off from all sides instead of opening themselves up to others? Did they not subsequently fight the newcomers and wage wars rather instead of developing new forms of peaceful coexistence – something they would not do unless forced to do so against their will, waiting for the first opportunity to seize power?

In the past religions – and more concretely, religious communities – played a major role in this context, to such an extent that one is inclined to agree with the well-known axiom that there can be no peace in the world without peace among religions. The method for achieving peace among mankind, notwithstanding all the lamentable litany of negative experiences in the past, is as simple as it is difficult: it is, and can only be, dialogue. Generally speaking, however, religions – like all other social groups in the his-

tory of mankind – have reacted in their encounters with other religious communities by behaving aggressively towards the Other, or by becoming defensive when they perceived that they were weaker. Examples of sharing with each other, learning from one another, and nobly striving in order to become worthy to approach the inexhaustible mystery of truth, can hardly be found.

This initiative wishes to join itself to all who are aware of this new situation and endeavour to meet the challenges posed by it at the local, regional, and international levels. It was in this context that the Second Vatican Council adopted the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. This document states since “in our times 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.”¹

After inspiring and stirring symposia on the encounter of Christianity with Islam² and the Hindu religious traditions³, this time eminent scholars of Buddhist studies were invited to explain central issues of Buddhist traditions to their colleagues in the various fields of Christian theology. The Christian theologians then dealt with these issues from the perspective of their areas of specialisation. It was neither academic curiosity nor a diplomatic interest in enabling the best possible coexistence of religions, but a certain zeal, a joint search for truth, a profound respect for the fidelity of believers to their traditions and faith communities, and a spirit of common responsibility in the face of current developments worldwide, particularly our responsibility for the religious heritage of mankind, that were the driving forces which inspired all the participants in these international gatherings.

At the beginning of this first of two volumes on the encounter between the Christian faith and Buddhism, the reader will find a concise presentation of issues concerning the historical origin of Buddhism, the figure and teaching

¹ Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, “*Nostra aetate*,” para. 1.

² The conference proceedings were published in: A. Bsteh (ed.), *Islam Questioning Christianity* (Christian Faith in the Encounter with Islam; vol. 1). Moedling, 2007; and A. Bsteh (ed.), *Christian Faith in the Encounter with Islam* (Christian Faith in the Encounter with Islam; vol. 2). Moedling, 2007.

³ See A. Bsteh (ed.), *Hinduism Questioning Christianity* (Christian Faith in the Encounter with Hinduism; vol. 1). Moedling, 2007; and A. Bsteh (ed.), *Christian Faith in the Encounter with Hindu Religious Traditions* (Christian Faith in the Encounter with Hinduism; vol. 2). Moedling, 2007.

of the Buddha (Tilmann Vetter), and a reflection on the spirituality and aim of liberation in early Buddhism – examined in the tension between equanimity and compassion (Lambert Schmithausen). This is followed by an investigation into the genesis of Buddhism in its historical context, with special reference to its relation to Hindu traditions and Jainism (Johannes Bronkhorst).

In its middle part the book deals with selected topics of particular interest for the Christian-Buddhist encounter: the question of whether Buddhism is a religion or a philosophy, the Buddha-nature, and the Buddhist concept of man (Ernst Steinkellner). The book then focuses on Mahāyāna-Buddhism – its beginnings and nature (Tilmann Vetter), as well as its spirituality and salvific goal (Lambert Schmithausen). The final part examines Tantric Buddhism (Max Nihom).

The most significant results of this symposium, as was the case with all the other religious-theological symposia held at St Gabriel during the past years, were not so much the lectures themselves, since they aimed at providing inspiration and impulses to the participants, which were then developed in the various study groups and plenary discussions of the symposium. It is rather the lectures together with the discussions subsequent to them which were, in their ensemble, the characteristic fruits of this initiative in the service of a sincere dialogue of the Christian faith with other religions. It is the aim of this series of books to disseminate these fruits.

Sincere gratitude is once again due to the speakers of the symposium. Present during the whole period of the symposium, they were ready as Buddhologists to take part in this interdisciplinary undertaking alongside Christian theologians, in order to introduce them to the cosmos of Buddhist religious ideas and approaches. They were also willing to discuss the various issues, which were presented in the lectures, and contributed substantially to the publication of the conference papers.

As for the English edition of the present book, the editor is most grateful to Mrs. Ingeborg Bogensberger, Vienna, and Ms. Adrienne Nagy DaPonte, Boston, for their wonderful work of translating from the original German edition. Working in close cooperation with the translators, the editor tried his best to guarantee, sentence by sentence and word by word, that the English text be rendered as faithfully as possible to the German edition. Since it was not possible to submit the translated texts to their authors once again, responsibility for the fidelity of the English texts to their authorized original versions rests with the editor.

Neither the organization of the religious-theological symposia nor their publication would have been possible without the excellent and highly qualified team at the St Gabriel Institute for the Theology of Religions. In this connection the editor feels particularly obliged to mention Ms. Gertrude Gruber, Ms. Petra Gerl and Mag. Brigitte Sonnberger. Sincere thanks also go to the Society of the Divine Word, which welcomes and supports our work in the interest of the dialogue of Christianity with other religions. Last but not least, our heartfelt gratitude also goes out to the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, which continues to substantially support our institute's efforts to promote the spirit of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, in keeping with long-standing Austrian cultural policy.

In sum, it is the purpose of this interdisciplinary enterprise in the realm of religious studies and theological field research to help lay the groundwork for a fruitful encounter between the Christian faith and non-Christian religions. Having emerged from the experience of direct dialogue with believers of other faith traditions and accompanied throughout the years by this experience, it is nonetheless a project in the *anteroom of dialogue*. As such it is held indispensable for a fruitful encounter between believers of various religious traditions in general, and between the Christian faith and non-Christian religions in particular. Finally, we hope that it can help foster "unity and love among men, and even among nations," and urge us to give consideration "to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them."⁴

Andreas Bsteh, SVD

St Gabriel, February 2010

⁴ Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, "Nostra aetate," para. 1.