

Andreas Bsteh (Ed.)

*Christian Faith  
in Dialogue with Buddhism*

Lectures – Questions – Interventions

Wilhelm Dupré  
Herbert Frohnhofen  
Hans-Jürgen Greschat  
Martin Karrer  
Elmar Klinger  
Karl-Heinz Neufeld  
Heinrich Ott  
Richard Schaeffler  
Gottfried Vanoni

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## Preface

The second volume on the encounter of Christianity with Buddhism presents papers by Christian scholars. The Buddhologists who were invited in volume 1 to introduce Christian theologians to the main aspects of the Buddhist self-understanding, are now followed in volume 2 by experts on the history and philosophy of religion, systematic theology, Old and New Testament exegesis, and Christian spirituality, who reflect on the rich and demanding encounter with Buddhism from their Christian perspective. All the papers were accompanied by extensive discussions, which offered abundant opportunities for the participants to raise further questions, clarify misunderstandings, deepen and amplify their knowledge, and arouse curiosity for learning new things.

The sequence of topics presented and discussed in the presence of Buddhologists, who also participated in the first symposium, is opened by "Understanding and Comparing," in which *Hans-Jürgen Greschat* discusses his observations on the encounter between Christians and Buddhists from the perspective of the history of religions. After this *Wilhelm Dupré*, an expert on the philosophy of religion, stimulates systematic reflection on "Experience and Revelation." He maintains that the problem of experience is inadequately presented if it is framed outside the formation of tradition. This is ample reason why the latter should be made the focus of interest.

In his lecture on the experience of Israel, condensed in Isaiah's figure of the 'servant of God,' *Gottfried Vanoni* presents his Old Testament comments on "Election, Suffering, Vicariousness," with special reference to the fourth hymn of the servant of God in Is 52/53. Subsequently, *Karl-Heinz Neufeld's* exposé on "Many members but One Body" examines the question of the individual and social dimensions of salvation from the standpoint of systematic theology. He concludes that the community is the way of salvation for Christian believers. In this connection, it was also noted that raising the question of the 'personality of God' would be of substantial interest for a fruitful dialogue between Christian and Buddhist believers. Thus, *Richard Schaeffler* was asked to consider this subject at our symposium and present a lecture on it, which he entitled "Is God 'the Absolute'? Is 'the Absolute' God?"

*Elmar Klinger's* paper on Christological insights from a Buddhist perspective, entitled "In Search for the True Self," led to intensive and fruitful discussions.

No less so did the lecture of *Heinrich Ott* on “Mysticism as a Test Case of Faith,” which deals with the fundamental question of whether and to what extent the unexperienceable can be experienced. The preceding symposium established that in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue, special attention should be paid to the understanding of the terms ‘death’ and ‘deathlessness.’ *Herbert Frohnhofen* presents his stimulating reflections on this in a paper entitled “Attaining Deathlessness while Alive? The Way of Jesus and Our Way.” These reflections were then taken up extensively in the subsequent discussion.

Finally *Martin Karrer*, writing from the perspective of New Testament exegesis, focuses on the tension created when Christians and Buddhists think about their individual relationship to the world and time. In “In the World Outside the World,” he arrives at the general conclusion that “today’s religious encounter calls for a living reception of the New Testament for our time, and dialogue must not be based only on the New Testament; in this way even knowledge of the New Testament will be enriched.”

The expert discussions that followed each lecture not only contributed to substantial clarifications of the issues articulated in the lectures, but also broached additional topics on numerous occasions. For this reason, our Institute decided from the very beginning of the symposia to include the discussions in these publications, which – before going to press – have always been submitted for revision and authorization to the individual scholars who contributed to them. And in order to assist in finding all the relevant statements and questions on the various issues of the Christian-Buddhist dialogue which were dealt with, an extensive *index of subjects* has been added to the various other indices. The reader is invited to make use of the different indices added to both volumes, particularly of the “Index of Subjects” in volume 2, whose primary aim is exactly this interlocking of the various motifs and lines of thought in both volumes.

The initial idea for such a religious-theological undertaking originated from the academic tradition of St Gabriel, which was inspired by the open approach of Vatican II to the other great faiths of the world. When we started the first round of encounters in the 1970s with leading Christian theologians and eminent scholars from the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions, it soon became clear that any sincere and far-reaching initiative in the field of interreligious dialogue calls for an intensive, scientific study of one’s own religious identity and the identity of other believers. This study should be conducted before or parallel to these direct encounters.

It is in this context that the six international religious-theological symposia in the 1990s on the encounter of Christianity with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism took place. These conferences were prepared, organized, and then evaluated by our St Gabriel Institute for the Theology of Religions, in cooperation with all the speakers and participants during the past years.<sup>1</sup> What followed were the publication of the conference proceedings in German, a part of them in Arabic<sup>2</sup> and Japanese<sup>3</sup>, and now the entire six-volume set in English. This second volume on the Christian-Buddhist dialogue concludes the English edition of this encyclopaedic *œuvre* in the anteroom of dialogue.

Sincere gratitude has already been expressed in the preface of the first volume, “Buddhism Questioning Christianity,” to everyone who made possible what has been accomplished, especially to Ms Adrienne Nagy DaPonte, Boston, for her revision of the major part of the translations in both volumes. We would also like to thank Ms Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek, Vienna, and Ms Carol Rowe, Sheffield, for revising certain parts of the second volume.

May God lead our world into a future guided by the spirit of dialogue, and accept this humble initiative as one of the many efforts worldwide to promote peace and mutual understanding among humans – and particularly among religions.

Andreas Bsteh, SVD

St Gabriel, April 2010

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see, *inter alia*, the homepage of our Institute: [www.rti-stgabriel.at](http://www.rti-stgabriel.at).

<sup>2</sup> Namely the two volumes on *Islam Questioning Christianity and Christian Faith in Dialogue with Islam: al-Islām yusā'il al-masīhiya fī shu'ūn al-lāhūt wa-l-falsafa* (al-Masīhiya wa-l-islām fī l-ḥiwār wa-ta'āwun; 13) and *al-'Aqīda al-masīhiya fī liqā' ma' al-islām* (al-Masīhiya wa-l-islām fī l-ḥiwār wa-ta'āwun; 16), ed. by Andrāwus Bstih – 'Adil Tiyyūdūr Khūrī, Jounieh (Lebanon) 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See the two papers presented by Lambert Schmithausen in the first of these volumes on Christian-Buddhist dialogue: “Equanimity and Compassion: On the Spirituality and Aim of Liberation in Early Buddhism,” and “Compassion and Emptiness: On the Spirituality and Salvific Goal in the Mahāyāna.” Both also appeared in Japanese under the titles “Chōzen to Dōjō. Shoki-bukkyō ni mirareru seishin-sei to kyūsai (ri) no muketeki” (超然と同情初期仏教にみられる精神性と救済(利)の目的), trans. by Naoki Saitō 斎藤直樹, *Tetsugaku* 哲学 108 (2002) 67–99; and “Rembin to kūshō. Daijō ni okeru seishinsei to kyūsai (ri) no shūkyoku” (憐憫と空性: 大乘における精神性と救済(利)の終極), trans. by Naoki Saitō 斎藤直樹, *Tetsugaku* 哲学 109 (2003) 71–100.