

From Disputations to Dialogue – An Inquiry into Forms of Religious Communication in Japanese Buddhism and European Christianity

1. Introduction: A new term for an old matter

The modern use of the word “dialogue” was mainly coined by the philosophers of religion Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner in the beginning of the 20th century. Then, owing to developments of Vatican II and the World Council of Churches (WCC) during the 1960s, the concept of dialogue with other religions evolved as an important task of the Christian churches. For example, a number of Christian study centers in East Asia began to engage in dialogue with Asian religions. While thus interreligious dialogue had become mainly a concern of religionists, the terror attack on the Twin Towers in New York September 11, 2001, changed the situation again considerably. Now, interreligious dialogue became also a concern for politicians, business-men and bankers, as well as for mass media. In other words, interreligious dialogue extended from a mainly religious matter to a public concern. Another factor for such a development was the recent fundamental change of Europe from mainly “Christian countries” to multireligious societies. Owing to international migration, the more than 1000 years old “Christian occident” came to a sudden end in less than thirty years. This resulted in racial and religious tensions in a number of European countries. Politicians now discovered that interreligious understanding is a requirement for creating and maintaining social peace among different peoples and religions. Hence, during the shift from the 20th to the 21st century the political, social and economic implications of interreligious dialogue became apparent.

Such a recent emergence of “interreligious dialogue” leaves the impression that this concept seems to be new and modern. However, is this really the case? A historical examination of Buddhism and Christianity reveals that the practice of intra- and interreligious communication existed in both traditions from early on. This occurred in form of disputes or disputations, but in a few cases it was even called “dialogue.” Thus, interreligious communication is not something new and heterogeneous for these religions, but belongs essentially to their traditions. Today, these old communication traditions have to be rediscovered, transformed, and adapted to the requirements of the present time. In other words, learning from the history of disputations can help to prepare for a more efficient and professional engagement in interreligious dialogue today. This is the purpose of a “theory of interreligious dialogue” which has to be developed by historical and systematic studies in close connection with actual practice of dialogue. The following essay is an attempt first to provide a general historical survey in the framework given by the title, and then to draw some systematic or theoretical conclusions. Hereby I hope to stimulate more specialized in-depth studies in the future.

2. Buddhist tradition of disputations in Japan

In Buddhism exists an old and widespread tradition of disputations about religious matters, which is called in Japanese *shuron*. Furthermore, we find here also the systematic training of young monks to enable them to effectively participate in such disputes. These disputations were practiced in the following cases: 1. in disputes with non-Buddhist believers or “heretics” (Jp. *gedo*), 2. in disputes about doctrinal matters among different Buddhist schools or sects, and 3. in disputes about doctrinal matters within a Buddhist school.*⁽¹⁾ It may be mentioned also that one method to train a Buddhist monk occurred in conversations with the master in form of questions and answers which is called *mondo*. The *mondo* best known in the West are those of Chan or Zen Buddhism. In China, Korea and Japan, famous *mondo* were recorded, collected, and printed for teaching purposes. But *mondo* as dialogical communication form for educational purposes exist also in other Buddhist traditions such as Tendai, Shingon and Pure Land Buddhism.

Examining the tradition of *shuron* in Japanese Buddhism, we find that these disputations were not a minor activity of Buddhists, but played a major and crucial role in its history. The first famous debate took place between Saicho, founder of Japanese Tendai Buddhism, and Tokuitsu, a scholar monk of Hosso, a Nara Buddhist sect, in 817 and subsequent years. The subject of the debate was the Mahayana “one vehicle” (*ichijō*) doctrine and the related question whether all living beings possess the Buddha nature (*bussō*). While Tokuitsu maintained that only some human beings possess the Buddha nature, Saicho argued that all living beings possess it, and that for this reason all beings have the potentiality to attain Buddhahood. It is obvious that the decision on this issue has a major impact on, and grave implications for, Buddhist soteriology. The same subject was again discussed in 963 between two representatives of both schools, Ryogen (Tendai) and Hozo (Hosso). This debate is called Owa *shuron* since it took place during the Owa period (961-964) of Japanese history.

Historians, however, claim that the rationale of this debate was not so much religious, but more political, since Ryogen used it as a tool to gain political and economic patronage by the Imperial Court and the court nobility.

Among the famous Buddhist debates in Japan is counted also the Ohara dangi or Ohara mondo, which took place 1186 in Ohara near Kyoto. Here, Honen, the acclaimed founder of the new Kamakura period Pure Land School (Jodo-shu) explained and defended his new teaching of the exclusive nembutsu practice (calling on the name of Amida Buddha as the sole way to certainly attain religious liberation) to acknowledged scholar monks of his time. Thus, the debate served the purpose to establish a new teaching tradition through public scrutiny by religious authorities.

During the following centuries, religious debates among the various Buddhist schools continued, as for example between the Pure Land school and the Nichiren sect. However, in 1615 the Tokugawa Shogunate prohibited these religious disputations by law because they served the aim, as it claimed, only to “praise one’s own [school] and destroy the others.” *(2) Legal prohibitions were repeated in 1663 and in 1716 as part of a number of government measurements to maintain public peace after a long time of civil war. These prohibitions are also an indication for a tendency that the original purpose of *shuron*, gaining clarity in doctrinal matters with soteriological implications by way of rational discourse (as in the cases of Saicho and Honen), was first occasionally (as in Ryogen’s case), and then continuously, replaced by the motivation to defeat the other school and gain public recognition and patronage. Such an abuse of religious debates probably also resulted in the remarkable Japanese proverb “Whoever loses (another version says, whoever wins) -- a religious debate is a disgrace for Shakyamuni.” This saying sharply criticizes the abuse of religious debates for selfish purposes.

The prohibitions of *shuron* during the Tokugawa Period (1603-1867) had long lasting effects on the relationship between traditional Buddhist schools from the Meiji Period (1868-1912) on until today. To my knowledge, in modern Japan no public religious debates took place among the traditional Buddhist schools. There had been attempts to establish communication and cooperation between Buddhists and Christians since 1896, but they were dragged into the nationalistic trend of the Russo-Japanese War time (1904-05) and had no lasting impact. The Tokugawa prohibitions of religious debates resulted also, as I assume, in the peculiar phenomenon that Japanese people today are not much interested in other religions or schools. It is such a disinterest (*mukanshin*), which preserves public peace among religions until today.

To summarize the findings of this section, we may conclude as follows: In traditional Buddhism exists an old tradition of religious disputations that aim at elaborating truth in doctrinal matters by way of rational and dialectic discourse. The guiding principle hereby is that of “victory or defeat” (*kachi - make*). Apart from deciding on religious truth we find also the motive of using such debates in order to gain patronage. Furthermore, the subsequent tendency to slander other schools and praise one’s own led to political prohibition of religious debates. One of its consequences is the widespread disinterest in other religions or other Buddhist schools which is characteristic for many Japanese today.

3. Disputations on doctrinal matters in European Christianity

The origin of Christian theology is the so-called apologetic theology. The word “apologetic” derives from Socrates’ *apologia* (defense) in Athens. Apologetic theology represents the formation of Christian thought in the early church by disputes with non-Christian philosophers and religionists of the Hellenistic and Roman world since the 2. ce. Responding to the challenges by non-Christian ideas and practices, the apologetic theologians formulated the Christian faith by using originally non-Christian ideas and methods in a modified way. Another step in the development of Christian theology in form of disputes about doctrinal matters relies on the Greek philosophical discourse called *dialogos* or dialogue. The best known are Plato’s writings treating philosophical subjects in the form of a dialogue between teacher (i.e. Socrates) and students. Another important inspiration for Christian dialogical literature became Cicero’s writings. Subsequently, the training in rhetoric and theoretical dispute became part of the theological education in monasteries and early European universities. Among the best known disputations on doctrinal matters in the Church history are those Martin Luther was involved in. He outlined his “theology of the cross” first in dispute with members of his own monastic order in 1518. Then, in public disputation with Johann Eck at Leipzig University in the following year, he explained his criticism of indulgence and the Roman papal claim for primacy. Thus, disputations as form of religious communication played a crucial role in the formation of the Reformation in Germany. In other words, not only important doctrinal matters of soteriological significance, but also the establishment of new teachings are proposed and examined through a dialectical process of religious disputations in public. Both aspects, as we saw before, can be found in Buddhist tradition as well. Furthermore, Luther introduced the catechism in form of questions and answers for edification of lay

Christians as well as for priests. Such a dialogical teaching method, again, resembles that of Buddhist *mondo*, even though there are also some differences, which cannot be elaborated here.

Apart from these intra-Christian dialogical forms of theological discourse and teaching, we find in European medieval literature also important books portraying conversations among Christians, Jews and Muslims.*⁽³⁾ One of the earliest book treating such a dialogue is *Kitâb al Chasâri* (Book on Khazars) written by the well known Jewish poet and philosopher Jehuda ha Levi (ca. 1075-1141). This book in Arabic language elaborates an historical event, the conversion of the king of the Khazars (a Turkish tribe) to the Jewish faith, in a fictious way. The first part portrays the conversation between an Aristotelic philosopher, a Christian theologian and a Muslim theologian. In the second part, a Jewish theologian appears and explains to the tribe's king that the Messiah will remove the gap between Israel and the other peoples and that he will unite both under his blessed rule. Around the same time, the Catholic reform theologian Abaelard (1079-1142) wrote the treatise *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Judaeum et Christianum*. *⁽⁴⁾ His concern is to search for religious truth by a rational, dialectical method. It should be mentioned that both books promote religious tolerance during the time of reconquista (expulsion of Muslims from Spain), the persecution of Jews and heretics, and the preparation for the second crusade.

Raymundus Lullus (1232/33-ca.1316), a Catalan, who had studied Arabic and Islam and had been involved in religious disputations with Muslim theologians in Tunis (North Africa), wrote the treatise *Libre del gentil e dels tres savis* (Book about a heathen and three wise men).*⁽⁵⁾ A philosopher, not believing in any of the three monotheistic creeds, requests from three wise men, a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian, to convince him of the truth of their respective religion. Even though the outset of the book seems to portray the competition of the three religions in front of an impartial philosopher, the end remains open and no definite answer is given to the question as to which one would be the superb religion. In other words, here the principle of "victory or defeat" of religious disputations is overcome. Lullus' concern was to reach a unity (*concordia*) among the three religions in order to stop religious wars. Such a *concordia*, he believed, could be attained on the basis of the common belief in one God. The author wrote this book in a respectful tone towards the other religions.

In quick reaction to the Muslim conquest of Constantinopolis in 1453, only a few months later the important theologian and philosopher Nicolaus Cusanus (1401-64) wrote the book *De pace fidei* (On peace based on faith).*⁽⁶⁾ The loss of the "Second Rome" meant a deep shock for the Christian world and suggested to launch another crusade. In quick response to this precarious situation, Cusanus suggested that dialogue among religions would be the only alternative to religious war. His solution consisted of the formula that Judaism, Islam and Christianity differ in their religious rites or rituals (*ritus*), but they share a common worship (*unitas veri cultus*) in one God. Therefore, these religions should achieve peace (*concordia*) among themselves on earth so that the Creator in heaven would be praised by all. Both, Lullus and Cusanus, aim at achieving religious peace among the three monotheistic religions on the basis of a common belief in one God. These suggestions for a solution of religious conflicts were extremely progressive at the time, and they need to be considered still today. However, since these books treat monotheistic religions, in situations where other religions such as Buddhism are involved, search for other theoretical models of solving possible conflicts is needed, as we shall see in the next section.

4. Disputations between Christian missionaries and Buddhist priests in Japan during the 16./17. centuries.

Owing to certain historical developments, the geographical distance between Japanese Buddhism and European Christianity eventually was bridged and a direct encounter between the two religions was facilitated. It is most interesting to observe that after the arrival of the first Jesuit missionaries in Japan in the middle of the 16. century, they quickly became engaged in disputations with Buddhist priests,*⁽⁷⁾ apparently because both independently were trained in this form of communication. The Jesuits employed disputations as means of mission, and perceived it as a supplement to mission sermons. As we saw, both religions possessed old traditions of religious disputation as a means to find out religious truth(s) in form of rational and dialogical discourse. Therefore, to a certain degree a common ground for the encounter between the two religions existed already. One disputation between P. Cosme de Torres and Buddhist priests occurred as early as 1551 in Yamaguchi. Another disputation between P. Luiz Frois and Buddhist priests was held 1569 in the presence of Shogun Nobunaga, the supreme military ruler of the time. This high level encounter is recorded in both, Jesuit and Japanese sources, which contradict each other in attributing the final victory of the disputation. The subjects of discussion introduced by the missionaries was the teaching of one God, the creation of heaven and earth, the salvation by Christ, the Trinity, the immortality of the soul, and so on. The

teachings of monotheism, creation, Christology, Trinity and soteriology proved to be significant dividing lines between the two religions.

Apart from engaging in religious disputations as proselytizing and apologetic tools, the missionaries also wrote a Japanese catechism in form of questions and answers for the education of the converted. One Japanese Christian, Fabian Fucan (ca. 1565-1621), wrote a treatise explaining the Christian teaching in dialogical form. In this book entitled *Myotei mondo* (Myotei dialogue), two women discuss the truth of the Christian faith and the falsehoods of Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The same author, after having become an apostate, employed this dialogical style again when he wrote a refutation of Christianity entitled *Ha daiusu* (Deus destroyed).*(8)

This section leads to three conclusions. First, in the real and fictional disputations between Christian and Buddhist priests in Japan during the 16./17 centuries, the dominating principle was "victory or defeat," a common trait shared by both traditions. Second, an investigation of the disputations between the Jesuit and Buddhist priests in Japan further leads to the interesting observation that whereas the Jesuits tended to define significant differences between the two religions, the Buddhists displayed an inclination to inclusivism. Through the notion of *hoben* (skillful means) they quickly identified the Christian God with Buddhist deities.*(9) The reason for this divergent tendencies seems to lie in the respective religion as well as in the difference of cultures. By identifying indigenous deities with foreign Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (*honji suijaku*) and by amalgamation of their respective beliefs (*shinbutsu shugo*), Buddhism could establish itself in Japan from early on (Nara and Heian periods). Further, even the recently evolving Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the 20.c. reveals those characteristic tendencies of Buddhist inclusivism and Christian exclusivism. Third, returning to the 16./17. centuries, even though the foreign missionaries initially had been welcomed by Buddhist priests as their Indian counterparts since they came from the West, they did not respond with equal kindness, but decided right from the beginning to pursue a "replacement theology." The reason for their confrontational approach was that they explicitly did not acknowledge a "natural knowledge of God" among Japanese religions, as it is maintained in the traditional Christian teaching of the *lex naturalis* or the *revelatio generalis*. This is important to notice, because -- in comparison -- Jesuits in China, such as Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), pursued such a theological approach by identifying the Christian God with *tianshu* (Lord of Heaven) and *shangdi* (Sovereign on High) found in early Confucian scriptures.*(10) Thereby they were able to bridge the gap at least between Chinese Confucianism and Western Christianity, even though they maintained a negative attitude towards Buddhism and Daoism. Ricci's major work *Tian-shu shi-yi* (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven) is written in form of a treatise or disputation (*Jun*) and consists of dialogues between a Chinese and a Western scholar. It is obvious that the different approaches in Japan and China had a major impact on the success of mission work respectively. Christian mission approach in Japan during the 19./20. centuries again centered on Christology (i.e., the *revelatio generalis*) as the sole access to soteriology. Thereby they maintained a confrontational attitude, which did not allow for mediation and bridging gaps between different religions.

5. Interreligious relationships in Japan during the 20th century

Turning now to the situation in modern Japan, we have to broaden the scope of our subject since now new religions of Shinto resp. folk religious and Buddhist origins enter the stage of interreligious relationships. It has to be recalled that prohibitions of *shuron* during the Tokugawa Period (1603-1867) had the long-lasting effect that even in modern Japan no public religious debates took place among the traditional Buddhist schools. As mentioned before, there were attempts at communication and cooperation between Japanese Christians and Buddhists around 1900, but they had no lasting impact. Buddhism still carried not only the historical burden of the Tokugawa Period, but also that of a persecution during the 1870s. However, the new Japanese religions which emerged since the Meiji period, were not burdened by the old Tokugawa restrictions. Thus, they did (and occasionally still do) not refrain from attacking other religious organizations. An early exception was Oomoto-kyo, a Shinto-derived religion founded in the Meiji period. In connection with universalistic tendencies, such as promoting Esperanto, Oomoto established contacts and cooperation with other religions in China, Vietnam and elsewhere since the 1920s. Oomoto's attitude towards other religions is best expressed probably by a picture displayed at the "Grand Exhibition of Religions" in Kyoto 1930, which portrays people of different races sitting around a globe, and in the background (behind them) depicts the founders and deities of various religions such as Mohammed, Shakyamuni, Jesus, etc. In theoretical terms, Oomoto defined the relationship between different religions as a unity in diversity by the term *bankyō dokon*, meaning that the various religions have one common root. Since Oomoto leaders, at times, understood their own religion as revelation of this one root or truth, the Japanese (or Asian)

tendency towards inclusivism appears here again. One may not agree with such an inclusive formula, but at least Oomoto's attempt to relate to other religions in a positive way has to be acknowledged.

Since the 1960s, two new developments concerning interreligious relationships in Japan have to be mentioned. During this time, Rissho Koseikai, a Japanese lay Buddhist organization founded between World War I and II, became involved in interreligious and international peace activities. This resulted in the establishment of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and of the Niwano Peace Foundation. While these activities aim at interreligious *cooperation* with the purpose of achieving peace, also the endeavour in interreligious *dialogue* emerged during the 1960s on the Christian side with the purpose to achieve mutual understanding among religions in Japan.

As a result of the afore mentioned developments of Vatican II and WCC, the (Protestant) NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions (Kyoto, established in 1959), became pioneer for interreligious dialogue with Buddhists, Shintoists and representatives of Japanese new religions. This endeavour resulted also, for example, in intra-Buddhist dialogue in Japan, that is, representatives of different schools began to talk with each other. Catholic centers were founded subsequently, namely the Orients Institute (Tokyo, 1965), the Institute for Oriental Religions at Sophia University (Tokyo, 1969), and the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture at Nanzan University (Nagoya, 1975). Subsequently, cooperation between these four institutes was established being called Ecumenical Group for the Study of Interreligious Dialogue (EGSID). The NCC Center for the Study of Japanese religions was instrumental in establishing the annual Conference on Religion and Modern Society (CORMOS) together with representatives of Buddhist schools, Shinto, and new religions. It co-sponsored also the "East-West Religions Project" at the University of Hawaii since 1980, which stimulated the subsequently developing Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the USA. In a recent development, the NCC Study Center established the Interreligious Studies in Japan Program (ISJP) in order to enable Protestant and Catholic students from abroad to study religions in Japan (Shinto, folk religion, Buddhism, Japanese Christianity), experience interreligious dialogue, and reflect on the relationship with other religions in courses such as "Theology of religions" and "Theories of interreligious dialogue." The rationale of ISJP is the insight that interreligious dialogue requires systematic training if the detour of "trial and error" should be avoided. As mentioned above, in earlier times Buddhism as well as Christianity had trained young clerics systematically in the art of disputation, because this has to be acquired through a process of learning and experience. The significance of the ISJP lies in the establishment of a systematic training program in the long neglected art of dialogue for young people on the basis of a solid knowledge of Japanese religions and practical exposure to other religions. It is envisioned to include also Japanese and non-Christian students into ISJP, and to extend it to other Asian countries with the goal to establish an "Interreligious Studies in East-Asia Program."

6. Systematic conclusions for a theory of interreligious dialogue

The brief historical survey of disputations shows that a rich tradition of interreligious communication already exists in Buddhism and Christianity. This means that modern interreligious dialogue is not so complete novel or heterogeneous for both religions as it first may seem. Thus, an investigation into the long tradition of religious disputations enables us to elaborate more clearly the specific profile of interreligious dialogue today. A comparison between disputations and dialogue provides a clearer picture of the particular character of both forms of interreligious communication. In other words, these old traditions of disputations can provide a basis on which interreligious dialogue can be further developed by taking up certain elements (such as the dialogical form) and modifying or rejecting others (such as the "victory-defeat" pattern). The following conclusions are an attempt to formulate some basic elements for a "theory of interreligious dialogue" on the basis of the investigation above. In the first part, communalities and distinctions between disputations and dialogue will be clarified. In the second part, the character of interreligious dialogue will be elaborated in more concrete terms.

1. The participants or *agents* of religious disputations in Buddhist and Christian traditions comprised not only members of different schools within one religion, but also members of other religions. Interreligious dialogue essentially consists of communication between members of different religions, even though it implies also intra-religious communication as precondition and as consequence.
2. The *presupposition* of religious disputations shared by both traditions is that inquiry in religious truth(s) can and must be pursued in form of rational discourse as the only common ground for such kind of communication. Interreligious dialogue shares this presupposition.
3. The *form* of religious disputations consists of questions and answers. Disputations and dialogue essentially share this form of communication in distinction to that of monologues. The dialogical form of questions and answers is also characteristic for *mondo* and catechisms as a means for learning religious matters.

4. The *subjects* of religious disputations are contradictions, differences, communalities, similarities and conveniences (conformities) between two traditions. These are characteristic for interreligious dialogue as well.
5. The *first goal* of religious disputations is to discern religious truth(s). This is also the aim of interreligious dialogue today.
6. Whereas in most historical cases the *way of determining religious truth(s)* was conceived according to the pattern of “victory” of one’s own conviction and “defeat” of the other’s position, developments in medieval Christian discourse began to transcend such a model by not providing a final conclusion. Interreligious dialogue conforms with the latter development by not aiming at a decision according to the pattern of “victory or defeat,” but by keeping the ultimate conclusion in principle open.
7. Medieval European approaches avoided the “victory or defeat” pattern, because they *aimed at avoiding religious wars and achieving peace* among religions on religious grounds. Both, form and aim of interreligious communication correspond with each other. Accordingly, fostering tolerance, preventing religiously motivated violence and creating religiously inspired peace is a main goal for interreligious dialogue.
8. Religious disputations have been frequently *abused* for the purpose of gaining personal benefits (individually or as group) or by way of praising oneself and slandering the other. Such abuses only deepened gaps and controversies between different parties. They resulted also in prohibitions of such disputations, and in disinterest in religious differences. It is obvious that interreligious dialogue must not be abused for ulterior motives, otherwise it risks the fatal loss of mutual trust.
9. Whereas disputations that follow the principle of “victory or defeat” aim at transforming the other subject (the interlocutor) into an object of one’s own design and expectation, interreligious dialogue in principle acknowledges the existence and *legitimacy of two or more subjects* at one time (as Martin Buber suggested) while relating to each other in a meaningful way (cf. # 16 ff).
11. The relation between two or more subjects implies competing claims for (absolute) religious truth. Seen from the perspective of certain forms of *Western formal logic*, such claims pose an irreconcilable contradiction. The Aristotelian *principium contradictionis* (excluding a statement being true and false at the same time) and the principle of *tertium non datur* (a proposition is either wrong or true, there is no alternative) exclude the possibility of competing truths. This form of logic is the most common reason and (mostly unconscious) presupposition for the rejection of interreligious dialogue. Such a way of thinking seems to necessarily result in *exclusivism*. However, since such underlying thought patterns cannot grasp interreligious relationships adequately, theories of interreligious dialogue, first of all, have to develop philosophically sound alternatives (cf. # 15).
12. On the other hand, Asian religions tend to reduce competing claims to one transcendental “truth” (such as: “there are many different ways to the one top of the mountain,” or “all religions derive from one common root”). Thereby they define interreligious relationships in *inclusive* ways. Also some Christian approaches, such as Karl Rahner’s theory of the “anonymous Christian,” tend towards religious inclusivism. Similarly, attempts to reach a unity of differences dialectically by discerning a synthesis on a “higher” or “deeper level” end in inclusivism. Because such approaches disregard concrete differences between religions, in the end they lead to monistic models.
13. The basic patterns dominating interreligious relationships in history up to now were either inclusivism (monism) or exclusivism (dualism). Interreligious *dialogue attempts to provide an alternative* model to both by acknowledging basic differences among religions while maintaining not only the possibility, but also the importance of meaningful communication among them.
14. Recent attempts at re-defining relations among different religions acknowledge the fact of *religious pluralism*. Some of them treat the term “religious pluralism” as a normative concept, thereby ending in religious relativism. Since this contradicts the self-understanding of religions which in one way or another claim an “ultimate concern” (Paul Tillich), interreligious dialogue – by respecting the legitimacy of one or more subjects and subsequently, different claims for truth – can acknowledge religious pluralism on the empirical level, but not as a normative concept.
15. As a theory of interreligious dialogue cannot ignore competing claims for truth among different religions, it also cannot disregard their essential character as being “mission religions” (as in the cases of Buddhism and Christianity), which poses a contradiction to “dialogue.” Also for this reason, the first task of theories of interreligious dialogue is to develop a *more complex logic*, for example, according to the “principle of bi- or multi-valence.” Philosophical approaches such as Cusanus’ *coincidentia oppositorum* may help to develop this kind of logic.

16. Returning to the concrete level, the first *purpose of interreligious dialogue* is to mutually correct misunderstandings and prejudices in religious matters. The second aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the other religious tradition and thereby to foster mutual respect.

17. Interreligious dialogue *begins* with attentively listening to what the dialogue partner has and wants to say.

18. The *attitude* accompanying the dialogue should be that of utmost sincerity which does not avoid to admit historical mistakes or shortcomings of one's own religious tradition.

19. The *form* in which conversations have to be carried out has to be rational. One also has to adhere to the common sense so that dialogue partners are enabled to understand each other's argument and reasoning.

20. On the basis of sincerity and after some time of dialogue experiences, mutual understanding deepens. On this basis, also *mutual trust* between the dialogue partners develops. On the firm ground of trust critical and controversial questions can and should be raised in adequate form, that is, by not hurting each other. This characterizes a significant difference between dialogue and polemics or religious disputes.

21. As a result of deepening mutual understanding, respect, and trust, interreligious dialogue can and should proceed to *practical interreligious cooperation* in social concerns, especially by promoting justice and peace among people(s). Interreligious cooperation is the third goal of interreligious communication. (Cf. # 16)

22. On the basis of fruitful interreligious encounter, the dialogue partners also begin to deepen *understanding of their own faith* and religious tradition. This is not an intended goal, but an empirically discovered consequence of interreligious dialogue. Thus, dialogue with others promotes the process of finding and deepening the own religious identity while at the same time fostering openness and respect for other religious traditions. Here, the same principle of a more complex logic rules, as pointed out above.

23. Interreligious dialogue is, and has to be, carried out on *all levels of human encounter* or social fabric. It comprises daily conversations among neighbours and co-workers of different faiths, spiritual dialogue between clerics or/and celibates of different religions, encounter between communities (congregations) of different religions, and academic dialogue on a theoretical level. It further should be pursued and promoted on a practical level by politicians and business people (in cooperation with representatives of different religions) as well. In the age of "globalization" interreligious understanding is of deep social, cultural, economic, and political significance. Also, the distinguished representatives of high level dialogue or interreligious peace prayer meetings should make all effort to arrange for fruitful interreligious encounters on all levels of society, otherwise their declarations fail to become concrete.

24. Since interreligious dialogue is an endeavour one has to learn, various religions should cooperate and establish formal *study and training programs* for young people. These require financial investments such as funding programs and providing scholarships for students. The costs of such measures preventing violence, war and terror are rather low compared with those of the consequences of religious violence.

Zusammenfassung von "From Disputations to Dialogue" (M. Repp)

Diese Untersuchung analysiert Disputationen im Christentum und Buddhismus unter dem Aspekt religiöser Kommunikationsformen. In beiden Religionen besteht eine lange Tradition von Ausbildung und Praxis in religiösen Disputationen. Disputationen sowohl innerhalb einer Religion wie auch zwischen unterschiedlichen Religionen dienten dazu, eine religiöse Wahrheit in dialogischer Form zu eruieren. Da die Disputation sowohl im Buddhismus wie im Christentum lange gepflegt worden war, konnten buddhistische Priester und katholische Missionare im 16. Jh., als sie sich zum ersten Mal in Japan begegneten, ganz selbstverständlich miteinander kommunizieren. In der Neuzeit scheint die Disputation als religiöse Kommunikationsform in Europa wie auch in Japan jedoch nicht mehr gepflegt worden zu sein. Dies ist ein Grund dafür, dass "Religionsdialog" im 20. Jh. als ein *novum* betrachtet wird.

Disputation und Dialog teilen die Form dialogischen Eruierens von Wahrheit, unterscheiden sich aber dadurch, dass die Disputation in der Regel auf eine Entscheidung von "Sieg oder Niederlage" drängt, während das Ende vom Dialog prinzipiell offen ist. Bereits Cusanus betrachtete den Religionsdialog als einzige Alternative zum Religionskrieg. Die These dieser Untersuchung besteht darin, dass eine Theorie des interreligiösen Dialogs aufgrund der langen Tradition von Disputationen kritisch entwickelt werden kann. Aus der Tatsache, dass die Disputationspraxis sowohl im Buddhismus wie im Christentum systematisch trainiert wurde, wird die Schlussfolgerung gezogen, dass auch der moderne Religionsdialog einer systematischen Ausbildung bedarf.

Résumé: De la dispute au dialogue

Dans cette recherche l' auteur analyse les disputes dans le christianisme et dans le bouddhisme sous l' aspect des formes religieuses de la communication. Dans les deux religions il existe une longue tradition de formation et de pratique dans les disputes religieuses. Les disputes dans une seule religion ou entre des religions diverses servent à découvrir une vérité religieuse en forme de dialogue. Puisque la dispute avait été exercée par des prêtres bouddhistes et des missionnaires catholiques, ceux-là pouvaient communiquer évidemment entre eux quand ils se rencontrèrent la première fois au Japon. Aux temps modernes il semble qu' on n' exerçait plus la dispute comme forme de communication religieuse en Europe et au Japon. C' est la raison pour laquelle on considère le „dialogue des religions“ comme un novum au 20ème siècle.

La dispute et le dialogue ont en commun la façon de découvrir la vérité à travers le dialogue, mais ils se distinguent en cela que la dispute insiste sur une décision entre victoire et défaite, tandis que la fin du dialogue est principalement ouverte. Déjà Nicholas de Kues considérait le dialogue des religions comme alternative unique à la guerre des religions. La thèse de cette recherche consiste en cela que la théorie du dialogue interreligieux puisse être développée d' une manière critique à cause de la longue tradition des disputes. De ce fait on peut conclure que la pratique des disputes non seulement dans le bouddhisme mais encore dans le christianisme fut entraînée systématiquement, et que, par conséquent, le dialogue interreligieux moderne ait aussi besoin d' une formation systématique.

Traduction: Edeltraud Reindl-Beckel

Resumen: De la disputa al diálogo

Esta investigación analiza las disputas en el cristianismo y en el budismo bajo el aspecto de las formas de comunicación religiosa. En ambas religiones existe una larga tradición de formación y práctica en disputas religiosas. Las disputas tanto dentro de una religión como entre religiones diferentes sirvieron para descubrir una verdad religiosa en forma de diálogo. Ya que la disputa, tanto en el budismo como en el cristianismo, fue ejercida por largo tiempo, los sacerdotes budistas y los misioneros católicos se pudieron comunicar en forma completamente natural entre ellos cuando se encontraron por primera vez en el siglo XVI en el Japón. Al parecer en los tiempos modernos la disputa como forma de comunicación religiosa, tanto en Europa como en Japón ya no se practica. Esta es la razón por la cual el “diálogo religioso” es considerado como un *novum* en el siglo XX.

La disputa y el diálogo tienen en común la forma de descubrir la verdad a través del diálogo, pero se diferencian en que normalmente la disputa insta a una decisión de “victoria o derrota”, mientras que el fin del diálogo por principio es abierto. Ya Nicolaus Cusanus consideró el diálogo de las religiones como alternativa única a la guerra de religiones. La tesis de esta investigación consiste en que una teoría del diálogo interreligioso se puede desarrollar de una manera crítica basándose en la larga tradición de las disputas. Partiendo del hecho, que la práctica de las disputas tanto en el budismo como en el cristianismo fue entrenada sistemáticamente, se concluye, que el diálogo religioso moderno también necesita una formación sistemática.

Traducción: Yenny Buholzer Sepúlveda

Footnotes / Anmerkungen / notes / notas

1. *Mochizuki bukkyo daijiten*, ed. by Tsukamoto Zenryu, Sekai Seiten Kanko Kyokai Tokyo 9. ed. 1974, Vol. 3, p. 2422.
2. *Mochizuki bukkyo daijiten*, Vol. 3, p. 2423.
3. The following section is inspired by the last lecture which Prof. Carl Heinz Ratschow (Marburg University) delivered on the topic of medieval Christian - Jewish - Muslim disputations resp. dialogues.
4. Peter Abailard, *Gespräch eines Philosophen, eines Juden und eines Christen*, (Latin and German version), ed. and transl. by Hans-Wolfgang Krautz, Insel Verlag Frankfurt a.M. and Leipzig 1995.
5. Ramon Lull, *Das Buch vom Heiden und den drei Weisen*, ed. and translated by Theodor Pindl. Stuttgart: Reclam 1998.
6. Nikolaus von Kues, *Vom Frieden zwischen den Religionen*, (Latin and German version), ed. and translated by Klaus Berger and Christiane Nord, Insel Verlag Frankfurt a.M. and Leipzig 2002.
7. Pater Luiz Frois (S.J.), *Die Geschichte Japans (1549-1578)*, transl. and comm. by G. Schurhammer and E.A. Voretzsch. Verlag der Asia Major Dr. Bruno Schindler. Leipzig 1926, passim.
8. Ebizawa Arimichi (Ed.), *Nanban-ji kohai-ki, Jakyo taii, Myotei mondo, Ha-daiusu*. Toyo bunko 14. Heibonsha. Tokyo 1964
9. Cf. Martin Repp, *Die Begegnung zwischen Europa und Ostasien anhand der Auseinandersetzung um die christliche Gottesvorstellung*, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* Vol. 45, p. 98.
10. Repp, pp. 88-91.

Zuerst erschienen in: Reinhard Kirste / Paul Schwarzenau / Udo Tworuschka (Hg.): *Europa im Orient – Der Orient in Europa. Religionen im Gespräch*, Band 9 (RIG 9). Balve: Zimmermann 2006, S. 44–59

RIG 9/RIG9-Repp-Japan-Dialogue, 01.06.06