



Short Introductions to the World Religions - Interfaith Dialogue

| Newman, Paul W.

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1. The time is here to dialogue and cooperate with people of other religions. For many Christians, attitudes of indifference, hostility or competition have prevented dialogue and cooperation.

- Indifference leads to isolation from other faith communities. It assumes that other people's religious beliefs are none of our business. It says, in effect, "As long as the other religions do not threaten us in any way, why should we bother with

them?"

Indifference implies that there is nothing of value to be gained from dialogue or cooperation with people of other faiths.

- Hostility, on the other hand, sees other religions as a real threat to the existence and the expansion of Christianity. It assumes that other religions are not simply ignorant of the truth but are perverse and deliberate in threatening Christianity in various ways. Hostility is very suspicious and resentful of any growth and well-being in other religious communities.
- Competition is an attitude based on the sense of one's own superiority over other

religions. It expresses certainty that other religions are inferior or deficient and that they need to be told what is the better religion. It sees competition as divinely ordained in religion just as it is in business, war and sport. It assumes that if Christians are not competitive then Christianity will lose out to other religions.

2. There is a great need now to overcome such unchristian attitudes. We are living in a time when many cultures and religions meet in our local neighbourhoods and at our places of work. We can and do travel to the ends of the earth, and we learn from the media what is happening in other parts of the world. It is no longer possible to avoid being deeply involved with people

of a great diversity
of religions and
beliefs.

3. Does our
Christian faith not
require us to have
dialogue and
cooperate with
those of other
faiths? We believe
God is creator and
lover of all human
beings. Our God is
too small if we think
God is God of
Christians alone.
God's Spirit goes
out to the ends of
the earth (Psalm
139). We dare not
say that the Holy
Spirit is confined to
the Christian
church. When we
see the fruit of the
Spirit - love, joy
peace, patience,
gentleness,
temperance, self-
control, etc. in
people of other
faiths, should we
not praise God for
them? How could
we keep the first
Great
Commandment to
love God with all our
heart and mind and
not give God glory
for the presence of
the Spirit in all the
earth? Dialogue is
the way we see the
glory of God in the
face of other
religious people. It
can be very
encouraging and
inspiring.

4. The second
Great

Commandment also requires us to dialogue and cooperate with our neighbours of different faith. "To love is to step into the presence of the other and listen." (Martin Buber) This is as true for our neighbours or our enemies as it is for our children. Love requires listening and talking. We have a moral obligation to understand the deep religious convictions of those we would treat as neighbours.

5. Of course, we believe that we must "test the spirits" to see if they are truly of God. (1 John 4:3) And we believe that the Spirit of Jesus is the criterion by which we accept what we accept as being of God. In dialogue we try to remain faithful to Christ as we respect the other people and as we disagree with them when necessary.

6. The world is crying out for people of good will to join together to make right all that is harming the earth. Some of the worst problems of prejudice and conflict cannot be resolved without

people of different religions working together to overcome the problems.

7. If we truly want to dialogue and cooperate, what should we do about it? Here are 10 suggestions for interfaith dialogue.

1. Actually meet some people of other faiths. (Dialogue doesn't happen in your mind alone.)
2. Listen to the conviction of your neighbours of different faith. (Remember: "To love is to step into the presence of the other and listen".)
3. Be prepared to grow and change your mind about some things. (In other words, "Walk humbly with God" who may have spoken to your neighbour of a different faith).
4. Be fair and practice the "Golden

- Rule." (This means not using hurtful words, not hanging on to false ideas about the other people when they are shown to be false, and not insisting on using your own terms to define the other"s beliefs. Let them use their own terms to define their own faith).
5. Witness to what you believe most deeply. (In fact, as you listen to other"s deepest beliefs you are given permission to witness to your own).
 6. Agree to disagree, if necessary. (That assumes you will question the others about aspects of their religion that you do not like, and they will do the same with you).
 7. Work together with

your
neighbours
of another
faith to make
the world a
better place.
(Try inviting
them to join
in common
efforts with
you).

8. Where possible, share each other's celebrations, rituals, worship and meditation. (As mutual respect and understanding grow, it becomes possible to participate in common religious activities).
9. Do your "homework" to learn about each other's history and scriptures, if there are any.
10. Have hope that dialogue will make for peace and justice and fullness of life. (Without such vision the dialogue will perish).

8. In summary, if we love God and love our neighbours, as Jesus commanded, we will overcome

the attitudes of
indifference, hostility
or competition that
prevent dialogue
and cooperation
with people of good
will from many
different religions.

Paul W. Newman

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