



# Short Introductions to the World Religions - Interfaith Dialogue

| Newman, Paul W.

## Short Introductions to the World Religions - Interfaith Dialogue

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  
understandi  
ng 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

[Back to content](#)  
[World Religions](#)