

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Dialogue is a conversation on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views. Interreligious dialogue is a specific kind of dialogue in which people who are significantly identified with their own particular religious community and tradition come together to share their religious insights to grow in understanding and appreciation of each other, and, where possible, to collaborate on projects of common interest. .

First Commandment:

The primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly.

We enter into dialogue so that we can learn, change, and grow, not so we can force change on the other, as one hopes to do in a debate. ... Because in dialogue partners come with the intention of learning and changing themselves, the outcome will be mutual learning and change for all.

Second Commandment:

Interreligious dialogue must be a two-sided project – within each religious community and between religious communities.

Partners enter into dialogue not only across faith traditions, but also within their own faith tradition with their co-religionists.

Third Commandment:

Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.

Each needs to be able to express the major and minor thrusts of their tradition, how it may change in the future, and where the participant finds difficulty in their own tradition.

Fourth Commandment:

Each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partner.

In brief: no trust *equals* no dialogue.

Fifth Commandment:

Participants must define themselves.

Only the members of a particular faith tradition can know and express what it is to be a member of that faith community. Through the dynamic of the dialogue, each will continually deepen, expand and modify their self-definition. It is essential for each partner to define for themselves what it means to be an authentic member of their own tradition.

Conversely – the one interpreted must be able to recognize him/herself in the interpretation.

For the sake of understanding, each dialogue participant will naturally attempt to express what they think is the meaning of the partner's statement. The one interpreted must be able to recognise themselves in that expression.

Sixth Commandment:

Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are.

Each partner should not only listen to the other with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible, while still maintaining integrity with their own tradition. Where they can agree no further without violating their own integrity, precisely there is the real point of disagreement – which most often turns out to be different from the point of disagreement that was falsely assumed ahead of time.

Seventh Commandment:

Dialogue can take place only between equals.

The partners will only be equals if both come to learn.

Eighth Commandment:

Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust.

It is wise to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground on which trust can be established and fostered. In dialogue we proceed from commonly held matters -- which will take us some time to discover fully -- to discussing matters on which the partners will disagree.

Ninth Commandment:

Persons entering into interreligious dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious traditions.

To be sure, in interreligious dialogue one must stand within a religious tradition with integrity and conviction, but such integrity and conviction must include, not exclude, a healthy self-criticism. Without it there can be no dialogue – and, indeed, no integrity.

Tenth Commandment:

Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the other's religion "from within".

A religion is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and "whole being", individual and communal. John Dunne here speaks of "passing over" into another's religious experience and then coming back enlightened, broadened, and deepened.

Interreligious dialogue operates in four areas: *the dialogue of life* where we interact with members of other faith traditions spontaneously; *the dialogue of action*, where we collaborate to help humanity; *the dialogue of doctrinal discourse*, where we seek understanding and truth, and finally *spiritual dialogue* where we exchange religious experience. It is here that we attempt to experience the partner's religion "from within". Interreligious dialogue also has three phases. In the *first phase* we unlearn misinformation about each other and begin to know each other as we truly are. In *phase two* we begin to discern values in the partner's tradition and wish to appropriate them into our own tradition. If we are serious, persistent, and sensitive enough in the dialogue, we may at times enter into *phase three*. Here we together begin to explore new areas of reality, of meaning, and of truth, of which neither of us had ever been aware before. We are brought face to face with this new, as-yet-unknown-to-us dimension of reality only because of questions, insights, probings produced in the dialogue. We may thus dare to say that patiently pursued dialogue can become an instrument of new "revelation", a further "un-veiling" of reality -- on which we must then act.

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Adapted from following sources:
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Cardinal Arinze: *Columban Mission Institute Speech* 1997