

Interreligious Dialogue

Ecumenism & Interreligious Dialogue

THE UNIVERSALITY OF JESUS AND OTHER RELIGIONS

Basic questions

- Can people before the birth of Christ be saved?
- After the resurrection of Jesus, can non-Christians be saved?
- After having heard the Gospel, can those who do not become Christian be saved?
- Is it necessary for salvation to be in submission to the Roman Pontiff?

Historical review

- Justin Martyr
- Augustine
- Anselm
- Thomas Aquinas
- Boniface VIII
- *Sublimissimus Dei*
- Modern world

Perspectives

- Exclusivism
 - Only Christ
 - Only the Church
- Modified exclusivism
 - We can only be certain that Christ is the answer (DiNoia)
 - Christianity is best for humanity; without it, people are miserable
- Inclusivism
 - Anonymous Christianity (Karl Rahner)
 - Missions of the Son and Spirit beyond Christianity (Jacques Dupuis)
- Pluralism
 - There are different ways of salvation (John Hick)
 - For Christians to claim that all are saved in Christ is to denigrate other religious traditions (Paul Knitter)
 - Christian exclusive dogmas like the divinity and pre-existence of Jesus and the Trinity are concepts bound to a Greek, pre-modern culture and must be abandoned to remain faithful to the Gospel (Roger Haight)

Making sense of the truth of other religions and the saving work of Christ and the Church

Select bibliography

- Christian in motivation
 - Paul Knitter, *No Other Name: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (SCM Press, 1985).
 - Raimon Panikkar, *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, revised edition (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist).
 - David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990).
 - J. Augustine DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).
 - Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).
 - Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).
 - Gavin D'Costa, *Trinity and the Diversity of Religions*
- Comparative religions
 - John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).

- Robert Neville, *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay Toward Comparative Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

Especially helpful through 1995 is Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995), ed. Francesco Gioia (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), which contains all statements of the Universal Magisterium in regard to interreligious dialogue.

- Vatican II
 - *Nostra Aetate*
 - *Dignitatis Humanae*
 - *Ad Gentes*
- Paul VI
 - *Evangelii Nuntiandi*
- John Paul II
 - *Redemptor Hominis*
 - *Redemptoris Missio*
- Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
 - *Dialogue and Proclamation*
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
 - *Dominus Jesus*
 - *Doctrinal Note on Evangelization* (14 December 2007)

Nostra Aetate

- It is the Church's task to promote unity and love (1)
- All people are united in their origin (God) and in their end (God) (1)
- Religions seek to answer human longings (2)
- There is much good that is of value in other religions.
 - "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself." (2)
- Christians should enter into dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religions.
 - They should "recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men" (2)
- Unequal Partners in Dialogue: Different relation to Christianity
 - Judaism
 - Christians have a very special relationship with Judaism because we share with the people of Israel the same preparation for the coming of Christ and the same hope in his coming at the end of time. We also share with them a common Scripture and much of the structure of our prayer. (NA 4)
 - "Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle." (4)
 - "Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues. True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone." (4)
 - Islam
 - Second to Judaism is that which Christians share with the followers of the prophet

Mohammed. Muslims, too, recognize the sacredness of that which we call the Old Testament and also find in Jesus a figure of importance and honour his Virgin Mother. They also recognize the value of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. In our fundamental understanding of the relationship of humans and God, in our concern for ethical order, and in our expectation of a final resurrection and judgment, we have points in common with Islam, for we too claim that submission to the will of God (Islam) is the most noble form of human life. (NA 3)

- Other religions
 - Hinduism
 - Expresses the divine mystery “in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy”. Seeks the divine through ascetic practices, meditation, and love. (NA 2)
 - Buddhism
 - Points to the “essential inadequacy of this changing world”. Proposes a path to illumination and liberation. (NA 2)
- Discrimination and oppression is foreign to the Gospel.
 - “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man’s relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: ‘He who does not love does not know God’ (1 John 4:8). No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned. The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to ‘maintain good fellowship among the nations’ (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.” (5)

The issues

- Free seeking of the truth: Religious liberty
 - The human person “has a right to religious freedom which is based in the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself.” (*Dignitatis Humanae* 2)
- Discernment of the good
 - In other cultures
 - The “universal plan of God for the salvation of humanity is not carried out solely in a secret manner, as it were, in the minds of people, nor by the efforts, even religious, through which they in many ways seek God in an attempt to touch him and find him, although God is not far from any of us (cf. Acts 17:27); their efforts need to be enlightened and corrected, although in the loving providence of God they may lead one to the true God and be a preparation for the Gospel.” (*Ad Gentes* 3)
 - In other religions
 - “The effect of her [the Church’s] work is that whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of people or in the rights and customs of peoples, these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil, and the happiness of humans.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 17)
 - “Besides the basic conviction that peace surpasses human efforts and must be sought in the reality which is beyond us all, an element common to all religions is ‘a profound respect for conscience and an obedience to conscience which teaches all of us to seek the truth, to love and to serve every person and all peoples,’ to respect, protect and promote human life, to overcome selfishness, greed, and the spirit of revenge. The Catholic Church recognizes the spiritual, social and moral values which are found in the various religions.” (Address of John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 7, 10 January 1987, quoting his own address “To the Representatives of Various Religions for the World Day of Prayer for Peace”, 27 October 1986)
- Goals of interreligious dialogue
 - Better mutual understanding

- “It is a noble thing to have a predisposition for understanding every person, analysing every system and recognizing what is right; this does not at all mean losing certitude about one’s faith or weakening the principles of morality, the lack of which will soon make itself felt in the life of whole societies, with deplorable consequences besides.” (John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 6)
 - Peaceful coexistence
 - Shared cooperation in achieving human justice
 - Shared action for peace, harmony, and the well-being of all peoples
 - “Since God the Father is the beginning and end of all things, we are all called to be brothers; we ought to work together without violence and without deceit to build up the world in a spirit of genuine peace” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 92)
 - “In today’s world, it is more important than ever that people of faith place at the service of humanity their religious conviction, founded on the daily practice of listening to God’s message and encountering him in prayerful worship.” (Address of John Paul II to a Group of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, 26 February 1986)
 - Renewed spiritual life among Christians
 - “Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church; they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she has received for the good of all.” (*Redemptoris Missio* 56)
 - Enriches spiritual life among peoples of other religions
 - “Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world (cf. Jn 18:36), the Church or People of God which establishes this kingdom does not take away anything from the temporal welfare of any people. Rather she fosters and takes to herself, insofar as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens and elevates them.” (*Lumen Gentium* 13)
 - That the Church may become a clearer sign of the love of God in the world
 - That all may come to know the love of God in Christ
 - “Strong in faith, unshakable in hope and moved by a love without limit, the Church goes out to meet the oldest religions as well as the most recent ideologies and the most difficult human problems to bring to them her secret and her treasure—not of those perfected organization or tested technology, but ‘a seed, a leaven, salt and light’ (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 99), and she brings them with very simple words, which everyone understands as promise and liberation.” (Address of Paul VI to the College of Cardinals, 23 June 1970)
 - The “character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit. All people are called to this catholic unity which prefigures and promotes universal peace, and in different ways to it belong, or are related: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all humanity, called by God’s grace to salvation”. (*Lumen Gentium*, 13)
 - “Missionary activity is intimately bound with human nature and its aspirations. In manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to humans their true situation and calling, since Christ is the head and exemplar of that renewed humanity, imbued with that brotherly love, sincerity and spirit of peace, to which all humans aspire.” (*Ad Gentes*, 8)
- Relationship to the Church
 - “The Church is “a sign and instrument . . . of communion with God and of unity among all people” (*Lumen Gentium* 1)
 - “There is no contradiction between openness to God’s truth wherever it is found and an acknowledgment that Christ’s gift, present in the spiritual treasures of other traditions, are meant to lead back to him, since he remains, in the words of the Council, the one

- ‘principle of salvation for the whole world’ (LG 17).” (Address of John Paul II to the Bishops of Thailand on their Ad Limina Visit, 24 May 1991)
- All non-Christians are related to the Church in various ways (Lumen Gentium 16): acknowledgement of the Creator, seeking God with a sincere heart, acting in love. “Whatever good or truth is found among them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all people that they may at length have life.” (LG 16)
 - Catholicity
 - The “character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit. All people are called to this catholic unity which prefigures and promotes universal peace, and in different ways to it belong, or are related: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all humanity, called by God’s grace to salvation.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 13)

The reality: Dialogue and Proclamation

Problems (4)

- Some think that dialogue should replace proclamation
- Others see no value any dialogue
 - Does emphasis on dialogue lessen the urgency of proclamation?
- Dialogue and proclamation are both essential elements in the mission of the Church (6, 77)
 - “Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both.”
- Dialogue
 - Part of the search for truth
 - “The search for truth, however, must be carried out in a manner that is appropriate to the dignity of the human person and his social nature, namely, by free inquiry with the help of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue.” (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 3)

Meaning (9)

- Reciprocal communication
- Attitude of respect and friendship
- “All positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment” (*Dialogue and Mission* 3) in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.

Forms (42)

- Dialogue of life
 - “In order to bear witness to Christ, Christians should establish relationships of respect and live with those [who have never, or barely, heard the Gospel message], they should acknowledge themselves as members of the group in which they live, and through the various undertakings and affairs of human life they should share in their social and cultural life. . . . that through sincere and patient dialogue they themselves might learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations. They must at the same time endeavour to illuminate these riches with the light of the Gospel, set them free, and bring them once more under the domination of God the saviour.” (*Ad Gentes*, 11)
 - “Editions of sacred Scripture, provided with suitable notes, should be prepared for the use of even non-Christians, and adapted to their circumstances. These should be

prudently circulated, either by pastors of souls, or by Christians of any rank.” (*Dei Verbum*, 25)

- Dialogue of action
 - “Not seldom do human values common to all humans require of Christians working for apostolic ends that they collaborate with those who do not profess Christianity, but acknowledge these values. Through this dynamic, yet prudent cooperation (cf. UR 12, LG 15), which is of great importance in temporal activities, the laity bears witness to Christ the Saviour of the world, and to the unity of the human family.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 27)
 - Promotion of religious liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae* 2-4): “This right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.” (DH 2)
- Dialogue of theological exchange
- Dialogue of religious experience

Dispositions

- Balanced attitude (47)
- Religious conviction (48)
- Openness to truth (49)

Fruits

- New dimensions of faith (50)
- Deeper knowledge of truth

Obstacles (52)

- Insufficient grounding in one’s faith
- Insufficient knowledge of other religions
- Socio-political factors
- Misunderstanding of conversion, baptism, dialogue, etc.
- Lack of openness
- Lack of commitment to interreligious dialogue
- Suspicion of the other’s motives
- Polemical spirit
- Intolerance
- Current cultural influences

The Initiative of God (53)

“It must be remembered that the Church’s commitment to dialogue is not dependent on success in achieving mutual understanding and enrichment; rather it flows from God’s initiative in entering into dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression.”

Prayer (89)

- The problem of praying together
- Basic principles

Misunderstandings that impede Interreligious Dialogue

- God remains mystery, therefore the more ways to him, the better for humanity
- Interreligious dialogue involves learning more about God
- The more religions one encounters, the better one’s knowledge of God
- Christ’s revelation is incomplete because he came from a particular culture and historical situation therefore, other religions can help to fill out what is missing in Christianity (see DI 6)
- Christ is the Word of God, but the Word is incompletely present in the historical Jesus and can be better understood by discovering the manifestation of the Word in the other religions (see DI 9-10)

- Christ is the Son of God, but the Spirit fills all creation and reveals different things of equal salvific value in the other religions of the world (see DI 12)
- Christ's death and resurrection are important for Christians but have no relationship to other religions (DI 13)
- Each religion is the way to God best for a given culture
- Jesus was a son of God, but there may also be other revealers of God
- Each culture embraces its own values, including religious ones
- Religion is a private matter and therefore makes little difference in public life
- It is good for people to be spiritual
- Religion should not attempt to influence society
- We are all children of God, therefore the differences in religion do not matter
- All other religions are basically different forms of Christianity with different trappings
- Religions are true to the extent of their social expression
- If the religion promotes a just society, then it is a true religion
- All religions are equalized by their ethics
- Public organization of religion (Church, synagogue, temple) are only the inessentials, what matters is that people believe in God
- Speaking about Christ in dialogue with people of other religions should be avoided because it gives offence.
- Speaking of the Trinity or Christ's divinity to Muslims must be avoided because it gives offence.
- We should only speak about what we have in common and avoid that which is different.

What do we learn from interreligious dialogue?

THE CURRENT STATE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Islam

Recommended: Maurice Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990).

- Common beliefs with Islam
 - "mankind owes its existence to the one, compassionate God who created heaven and earth." (Address of John Paul II to Followers of Various Religions in the United States, 4, 16 September 1987)
 - God is transcendent, almighty, and mysterious to humans
 - God reveals himself to humans in his Word
 - God uses prophets to bring his message to humans
 - God reveals the right way of human action
 - Humans should respond to God in love and obedience to his revealed law
 - Humans are called above all to pray
 - God desires justice in society and calls all people to justice
 - Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are the cornerstones of the spiritual life
 - Peace is a manifestation of spiritual well-being
- Common Muslim views of Christians
 - Christian belief in the Trinity is tritheism
 - Christian belief that Jesus is equal to God gives offence to God's unity
 - The Christian and Jewish scriptures once resembled the Koran but in the current versions reflect a corruption of the original
 - Christians have been unfaithful to the message of Jesus
 - Western world is equated with Christian society and with the Church
- Christians prejudices often overlook that
 - there is a wide diversity in Islam today, both theological and geographical
 - there is a difference between devout Muslims and those who advocate violence
 - Islam teaches both reverence for God and love for God
 - Islam allows for a diversity of interpretations of the Koran
 - Islam is not opposed to social progress
 - Islam is not fatalistic
- Practices on the part of Christians that help dialogue

- Attentiveness to particularities of the Muslim guests: dietary restrictions, images, personal contact, etc.
- Care to always speak of Mohammed with respect
- Particular points at issue
 - The meaning of a pluralistic society
 - The application of faith to new situations: the problem of interpretation/inculturation
 - Religious freedom, the problem of religious minorities
 - The nature of globalization
 - Relationship between religion and the state, especially between religious law and civil law
 - Interfaith marriages, the relationship of the spouses, what happens when things go wrong
 - Place of women in society
- Statements & documents
 - WCC
 - *Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations, Ecumenical Considerations* (WCC, 1992)
 - *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths*. Fourth printing, revised 1990, WCC Publications, Geneva.
 - *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches*, compiled by Stuart E. Brown, WCC Publications, Geneva 1989.
 - *The San Antonio Report. Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ's Way, Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*, San Antonio, Texas, USA, May 1989. WCC Publications, Geneva 1990.
 - Five regional Christian-Muslim meetings:
 - *Religion et Responsabilité*, Porto Novo, Benin, March 1986.
 - *Advancing Together into the Next Century*, Kuta, Bali, Indonesia, December 1986.
 - *Religion and Society*, Kolymbari, Crete, September 1987.
 - *The Challenge of Pluralism*, New Windsor, Maryland, USA, March 1988.
 - *Religion and Life*, Usa River, Tanzania, June 1989.
- Official Contact
 - Greeting to Muslims at the end of Ramadan
 - The credibility of Christianity and Islam depends upon their responding to the crises of the present, such as terrorism
 - Religions must promote love and peace
 - World Islamic Call Society dialogue (11th meeting concluded on 17 Dec 2008—the next in Tripoli)
 - World Islamic Call Society was founded in 1972 to promote Islamic civilization and culture, based in Tripoli
 - Meeting in 1976, then from 1989 regularly
 - 2008 conclusions
 - Religious leaders have primarily a religious responsibility
 - They also have a cultural and social role promoting values and the common good
 - They have a special responsibility towards youth
 - Religious leaders should learn to be able to sooth conflict in the broader community, especially religious conflict, through developing mutual respect and knowledge
 - Catholic-Muslim Forum
 - Formed by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and 138 Muslim representatives through the document “A Common Word”
 - First seminar in 2008 (Nov 4-6) on the theme “Love of God, Love of Neighbour”
- Current Developments
 - Papal address at Regensburg

Buddhism

Recommended: Whalen Lei & Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multicultural History of Their Dialogue*, tr. Phyllis Jestice (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

- Theological Dialogue
 - The problem of Christian colonialism for the credibility of Christianity
 - The discovery of one’s own tradition in the process of dialogue
- Human improvement
 - The goal of dialogue is not conversion but the making of better exemplaries of each given faith.

(Anthony Fernando, *Buddhism and Christianity*, Sri Lanka, 1983)

- Political
 - Theological differences are argued on the basis of their impact on society.
 - Dialogue most concern itself above all with the fashioning of a just society where religion does not contribute to oppression (Aloysius Pieris, Sri Lanka, 1975)
 - The role of religion in the face of the modern mistrust of authorities.
- Mutual Comprehension
 - The problem of a proper model of interpretation or hermeneutics.
 - The search for a metaphysics which can encompass both religions.
- Compassion & loving kindness
 - “I wish respectfully to acknowledge your way of life, based upon compassion and loving kindness and upon a yearning for peace, prosperity and harmony for all beings.” (Address of John Paul II to Followers of Various Religions in the United States, 4, 16 September 1987)
- Statements & Documents
 - *Christians and Buddhists: Communities of Forgiveness and Compassion*, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1997.

Hinduism

Michael von Bruck, *The Unity of Reality: God, God-Experience and Meditation in the Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, trans. James V. Zeitz (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991).

Confucianism

John Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

Traditional Religions

The Current Understanding of Interreligious Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church

- Religion and culture
- Dialogue and proclamation
- Friendliness and honesty
- The issues at stake