

THE DIALOGUE DECALOGUE

- FIRST COMMANDMENT: *The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that 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*.)
- SECOND COMMANDMENT: *Interreligious, interideological dialogue must be a two-sided project—within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities.*
- THIRD COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.*
(In brief: no trust, no dialogue.)
- FOURTH COMMANDMENT: *In interreligious, interideological dialogue, we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice.*
- FIFTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must define himself. Conversely—the one interpreted must be able to recognize herself in the interpretation.*
(Only the Jew, for example, can define from the inside what it means to be a Jew. Others can only describe what it looks like from the outside. Also, for the sake of understanding, each dialogue participant will naturally attempt to express for herself what she thinks is the meaning of the partner's statement; the partner must be able to recognize herself 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.*
(Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with his own tradition; where he absolutely can agree no further without violating his 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.*
Not only can there be no dialogue between a skilled scholar and a “person in the pew,” but also there can be no such thing as one-way dialogue: both sides must come to learn, not one side to learn and the other only to teach.
- EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: *Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust.*
It is...fundamentally true that it is only *persons* who can enter into dialogue. But a dialogue among persons can be built only on personal trust. Hence it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but rather to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, thereby establishing the basis of human trust. Then, gradually, as this personal trust deepens and expands, the more thorny matters can be undertaken. Thus, as in learning we move from the known to the unknown, so in dialogue we proceed from commonly held matters—which, given our mutual ignorance resulting from centuries of hostility, will take us quite some time to discover fully—to discuss matters of disagreement.
- NINTH COMMANDMENT: *Persons entering into interreligious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions.*
A lack of such self-criticism implies that one's own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary, but even impossible, since we enter into dialogue primarily so *we* can learn—which obviously is impossible if our tradition has never made a misstep, if it has all the right answers. 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 partner's religion or ideology “from within.”*
“...for 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 three areas: the practical, where we collaborate to help humanity; the cognitive, where we seek understanding and truth; and the “spiritual,” where 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. For example, in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue, Catholics have learned to stress the Bible, and Protestants have learned to appreciate the sacramental approach to Christian life—both values traditionally associated with the other's religious community. 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 even 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 “re-velation,” a further “un-veiling” of reality—on which we must then act.

from “Applications of the ‘Dialogue Decalogue’ for Latin American Interreligious Dialogue” (*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 25:4, Fall 1986)