Studies of Religion Conference

Interfaith Dialogue

A Christian perspective
• Interfaith dialogue is about life
The Dialogue of Life

“where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations”

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: 
Dialogue and Proclamation (1991), #42
“Dialogue is not so much an idea to be studied as a way of living in positive relationships with others.”

Pope John Paul II, 1990
Address to the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue
The Dialogue of Life
The Dialogue of Action
The Dialogue of Specialists
The Dialogue Religious Experience

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue:
Dialogue and Proclamation (1991), #42
• Interfaith dialogue is about relationship
“...human beings are, in their most intimate nature, relational beings”

Congregation for Catholic Education: 
*Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*  
(2013), #39
Our Christian Scriptures (including both Testaments) tell a love story – a relational God who dialogues with human beings, who engages with human history, and desires to draw ever closer to us.

“For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16)
• Interfaith dialogue is about meeting God in the ‘other’
You shall also love the stranger (Deut 10:19)
Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers (Heb 13:1)

[NRSV]

God is close, intimate with us, yet also ‘Other’ – different to us, unfamiliar, a mystery beyond us.
In the biblical narrative God often speaks and acts through the presence of the ‘other’, the outsider, the foreigner, the stranger...
God acts through the ‘other’. E.g.: Jethro (Moses’ father-in-law), a pagan priest from Midian who influences Moses’ leadership style. [Exodus 18]

Ruth, the Moabite, who becomes the great grandmother of King David. [Book of Ruth; Matthew 1:5]

The Roman centurian who approaches Jesus. [Matthew 8:5-13]

The Syrophoenician woman who, in her bold persistence, engages Jesus. [Mark 7:24-30]
Jules Isaac (1877-1963)

French Jewish historian. Traumatic experience led him to the study of antisemitism in Christian writings. His work had a significant impact on discussions leading up to Vatican II.

A striking example of interfaith dialogue.
Jules Isaac  (1877-1963)

Available from:
Nostra Aetate ('In our time')

Declaration on
The Relation of
the Church to
Non-Christian
Religions

Vatican II, 1965

Find it at the Vatican website: vatican.va
Hard copy (pictured) from Columban Mission Institute (Columban.org.au)
The Church therefore urges her sons and daughters to enter ... into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions.

Vatican II: *Nostra Aetate* (1965), #2
The Church acknowledges that in the religious traditions of non-Christians there are:

“precious things, both religious and human” (GS, 92);
“elements which are true and good” (OT, 16);
“....truth and grace” (AG, 9);
“seeds of the Word” (AG, 11.15),
“rays of the truth which illumines all humankind” (NA, 2)
• *Nostra Aetate* represents a turning point. A positive approach to interfaith relations now becomes explicit in the teachings and activities of the Catholic Church, including a series of dramatic gestures by Pope John Paul II.
Pope John Paul II becomes the first Pope to:

- Enter a synagogue (Rome, 1986)
- Enter a mosque (Damascus, 2001)
- Pray at the Western Wall (Jerusalem, 2000)
- Offer a comprehensive apology for Christian wrongdoing in centuries past (2000)

In 1986, 1993, 2002 he was joined at Assisi by leaders of the world religions to pray for peace
ROME, March 12, 2000

Pope Asks Forgiveness for Errors Of the Church Over 2,000 Years
Nostra Aetate (‘In our time’)  
Declaration on The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions  
Vatican II (1965)
There were many individuals and groups whose work paved the way for “Nostra Aetate”. Among these, Jules Isaac’s was a significant voice. In honouring his memory, we should also honour that of his wife, Laure, a collaborator in his work, whose last note to her husband before being sent to the death camps read:

“Save yourself for your work, the world is waiting for it.”

Laure Isaac
(1878-1943)
• Interfaith dialogue is complex, delicate, nuanced
All nations are one community and have one origin, because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the whole face of the earth. They also have one final end, God, whose... plans for salvation are extended to all...

Vatican II: *Nostra Aetate* (1965), #1
The dignity of difference
In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means ‘all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment’ (DM,3), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.

Clarity in dialogue means especially faithfulness to one’s own Christian identity.

Congregation for Catholic Education:

*Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*

(2013) #16
True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one’s own identity, while at the same time being “open to understanding those of the other party” and “knowing that dialogue can enrich each side”.

Pope Francis: *The Joy of the Gospel*, #251
(quoting previous popes)
What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says “yes” to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others.

Pope Francis: *The Joy of the Gospel*, #251
• Interfaith dialogue is essential for peace.

• It’s not easy!

• The danger of importing overseas conflicts into our interfaith conversation spaces.

• The importance of leading people into “respectful conversation” about difficult topics.
Interfaith Friendship in Turbulent Times: A Respectful Conversation

In a “respectful conversation”:

• Acknowledge the complexity of issues, don’t reduce them to slogans.

• Address injustice, yes. But don’t demonise a whole people or religion.

• Become informed. Look beyond the media headlines.

• Listen, seek to understand. Hear multiple narratives.

• Hold all peoples in your heart and prayer.
Deeper reading:

On the subject of the Israel-Palestine conflict and its complicating effects on interfaith dialogue, the following document by the International Council of Christians and Jews offers balanced comment and guidance. It is a 16-page document, including an executive summary.

“As long as you believe in a living God you must have hope”

Find it at: ICCJ.org

Interfaith activities

Examples:
Torah study for Christians (lightoftorah.net)
Interfaith sharing at Iftar dinners, Shabbat meals.
Public lectures. Online resources.
Solidarity on social justice issues.
Pilgrimages to holy places - an interfaith perspective.
“Get to Know the Neighbours”: a grassroots interfaith strategy.
Interfaith eBulletin

News of interfaith events, opportunities, resources. Emailed monthly, sometimes twice a month. To subscribe (free) – send an email to...

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Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay
2015 eConference

Religion: Catalyst for Violence or Peace?
Probing the Abrahamic Traditions for Answers

Tuesday 23 June, 10am - 2.30pm

Sponsored by The Broken Bay Institute & Australian Catholic Bishops
www.bbi.catholic.edu.au/econferences
• Interfaith dialogue must not be taken for granted; it is everyone’s responsibility
Summary of points

• Interfaith dialogue is about life
• Interfaith dialogue is about relationship
• Interfaith dialogue is about meeting God in the ‘other’
• Interfaith dialogue is complex, delicate, nuanced
• Interfaith dialogue is essential for peace
• Interfaith dialogue must not be taken for granted; it is everyone’s responsibility