## Religious pluralism and Society



#### Census results

	<u>Christian</u>	No Religion
2001	71.7%	14.8%
2011	59.3%	25.1%
2021	46.3%	37.2%

Prince Charles had stated that when he becomes King he wants his title to be changed...

His Majesty [name], by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and His other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.



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Defender of Faith.

However, this didn't actually happen when he became King.



## Why are people more aware of other/ different faiths?

- √ Foreign travel& holidays
- ✓ Increased variety and access to methods of communicationsbooks, newspapers internet.
- ✓ Increase in multi faith communities, diversity in schools and the workplace.
- ✓ RE lessons
- ✓ Supermarkets stocking food for non Christian festivals.

#### **Encountering other faiths**

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<ul> <li>Can share common values</li> <li>Adopt new ways of thinking</li> <li>Develop relationships</li> <li>Set examples of cooperation, dispel prejudice and promote peace.</li> <li>Encountering different beliefs will encourage them to think more deeply about their own.</li> <li>Learn about the faith and practice of others.</li> </ul>	Might undermine the uniqueness of the Christina message.     Children may become interested in faiths beyond Christianity.

<u>Interfaith dialogue:</u> the relationship/ communication between **different** religions. Can be known as inter-religious dialogue.

#### <u>Aims</u>

- . Promote peace and understanding.
- Build relationships
- Create mutual respect, understanding and cooperation.
- Identify areas of tension.
- . Break down stereotypes and prejudices.
- NOT trying to convert

<u>Church of England- "Sharing the gospel of salvation."</u> Four strands of Interfaith <u>Dialogue:</u>

- 1. Dialogue of daily Life: informal conversations about personal belief.
- 2. Dialogue of common good. Adherents of different faiths work together for common good of the community.
- 3. Dialogue of mutual understanding. People getting together for formal debates
- 4. Dialogue of spiritual life. When people of different religions meet together for prayer and worship.

<u>David Ford:</u> there are two strands of history which led to new directions in interfaith dialogue. <u>The Holocaust:</u>

- Germany has traditionally been Christian, yet many of the population had enthusiastically supported the Nazi regime which persecuted the Jews.
- It cant be denied that the Church played some role in the presentations of the Jewish faith as a "failed" religion. Its followers had gone in the wrong direction by not accepting Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament.
- · Christianity had superseded Judaism.
- After the war the Christian/ Jewish tensions led Rabbis to initiate interfaith discussion. The produced a document called "Dabru Emey" (Speak the truth).
- Key points:
- Christianity and Judaism share the same God and seek authority from the same scripture.
- · Christianity and Judaism should work together for peace.
- Jews have made significant contributions to culture and economies.
- Conclusions:
- Christianity and Judaism need to communicate.
- Cooperation should become a normal part of Jewish and Christian life.

Tensions between Islam and the west at the start of the 20th Century.

- In 2007 leading Muslim scholars sent a letter to Churches called "A Common World between Us and You."
- It highlighted the passion both Muslims and Christians have for worshipping one God and for loving you neighbour.
- But it did not claim that the religions were the same.
- Emphasised that both religions have responsibility to work for everyone's good. Both faiths need to live up to their own teachings.
- Called for on going dialogue between the two faiths.

Dialogue doesn't just have to be between Christianity and other faiths. It can be between two separate faiths.

Catholic Church and interfaith dialogue

A Papal Encyclical is a letter sent from the Pop to the Church to address a significant issue.

Redemptoris Missio focused on Christian missionary work in a multi faith world and makes it clear from the outset that Christian mission to non-Christians remains essential. Jesus Christ is the one saviour and Christ is the only way in which God is revealed to the world. Christians have always been, and should continue to be, empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring others to the Christian faith.

For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16)

Interfaith dialogue should be seen within the context of a Christin mission, rather than in opposition to it. Whilst the Pope takes an exclusivist approach there is need for respect in interfaith dialogue, it should be based on "hope and love" and it should be used to uncover universal truths. When dialogue is conducted with honesty and humility it can overcome "prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings."

"then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup> Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.' [a]

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

 The Church of England and interfaith dialogue: "Sharing the gospel of salvation".



- In 2006 Paul Eddy asked the Synod (legislative body) of the Church of England for some guidance as to whether its members should be trying to convert others. He was concerned that Christians had become too fearful of giving offence, to the extent that they no longer proclaimed that Jesus was the way to salvation. The documents "Sharing the gospel of salvation" was the Synod's response.
- The document reaffirms the Christian message that God's plan for the salvation of the world is uniquely achieved in Jesus Christ. The C of E therefore has a mission to be a witness of this, with each individual Christian being encouraged to live as a Christian disciple, which involves sharing faith with others.
- It reminds Christians of the history of the faith in Britain and that without missionary efforts of others the faith and traditions practiced now would not exist.
- It also reminds them that a mission should not be marketing exercise, they should not seek political dominance and they should be mindful of cultural insensitivities. However, they should not be intimidated by the fear of getting it wrong and should be open about their faith and talk honestly. They should remain aware that when people convert to Christianity it is through the work of God and not their own achievement of "making a sale".
- Christians should share their faith by living for the good of others. They should be afraid of recognizing and speaking about the teachings of Jesus that encourage these positive actions towards others and they can use scripture of support this.
- In very diverse areas Christians should "go beyond tolerance into positive engagement and dialogue and change". They should make the effort to find reasons to talk to others. Always treat others how you would want to be treated, be sensitive of differences and recognise people do not like being pressurized to change their beliefs. Let people take their time.

• Interfaith dialogue: The Scriptural Reasoning Movement



- Originally started by Jewish academics who wanted to study the Jewish texts together.
- They were then approached by Christians who asked to observe and listen to the conversations, in order to gain a greater insight and understanding. However, they soon got involved and it engaged in debate and developed understanding of different interpretations of scripture.
- Muslims were then invited as the three religions share roots and are all known as "religions of the book", due to the importance placed on the authority of their holy books.
- The goal of this movement is not to convert. It wants to present an opportunity to engage in interfaith dialogue without undermining or threatening anyone's particular beliefs.
- They aim to move beyond superficial generalisations of belief and look at individuals interpretation of scripture. They explore deep and significant issues in which the religions have similar teachings, but often different interpretations.
- They will explore themes such as education, creation and clothing/ modesty.

# **Discussion points**

Has interfaith dialogue actually helped social cohesion?

Social cohesion is used to describe when a society in which people have a strong sense of belonging, in which there is easy communication, shared moral values and justice.

Without social cohesion people can feel marginalised, leading to hostility and violence. Examples of riots: Oldham, Bradford and Brixton.

It is hard to measure social cohesion. Generally it is measure against crime rates: prevalence of riots, criminal damage and hate crimes. *But can you ever accurately measure how people <u>feel</u> in their communities?* 

You could argue interfaith dialogue is ineffective because... Exclusivist thinking can make open minded and tolerant/ accepting dialogue difficult as they see mission / evangelism as their duty.

However, you could argue interfaith dialogue is not the main factor behind social cohesion and material equality/ inequality is a more decisive factor. If material inequality leads someone to feel like a powerless victim of injustice then why would they be loyal to their community?

You could argue interfaith dialogue is effective because...There is a significant increase in interfaith groups.

Should Christians try to convert people from other faiths?

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28:19



Christians believe they should try and bring others to Christ as they want to share their life changing faith and open the doors to eternal salvation. Everyone has the right to hear the Christian message.

Of course those ideas come from an exclusivist point of view. Inclusivists may not feel the need for evangelism if others are genuinely seeking God through a different path. Pluralism- no need for evangelism but would be big supporters of interfaith dialogue. (Sin an essay on conversion, when exploring alternative practice you can use interfaith dialogue and its advantages).

#### Should Christians convert those of no faith?

This will not simply be an act of converting one group of people with one attitude. People are non religious due to many factors.

Christians are likely to face criticisms and questions on issues such as science and suffering.

Some inclusivists may say that non religious people could be "anonymous Christians", so will not need to be converted urgently.

However, many Christians will feel its their duty to those who are non religious and explicitly not Christian to bring them the message of Christ. (Eg. RC and C of E) Exclusivists.

This can be non confrontational. For example "alphas courses" introduce Christianity to those are interested in exploring the faith, often run in local cafes.

However, when some Christians chose to use more confrontational methods non religious people can become irritated and take offence.

So if your evaluating the exclusivist approach you could analyse their views on conversion and if it will be successful. And then explore the benefits of other actions such as interfaith dialogue and charity work.

