

It's Up to You 2026 (Week 6) - How should Christians view other religions (part 2)?

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. We started building a compass to guide us true in part one last week and finished that process yesterday, using "building blocks" from the 2014 document, "The Interreligious Stance of the PCUSA."



2. Last week, we identified several acknowledgments and attitudes that need to be part of our "interfaith compass": 1) we acknowledge that Western Christianity has often had a poor relationship with other religions; 2) we should approach other religions with humility, modesty, and openness; 3) we assume a) God's presence and work, not God's absence, b) God's limitless grace, and c) our common humanity; and 4) we know that other religions will expose the flaws in our own faith and challenge us to be better.

3. To these we now add two concrete actions. First, here's building block #3 from that 2014 PCUSA document:

Building Block #3 - "The church affirms that dialogical (mutually interactive) relationships are an authentic and appropriate form of witness in which we share ourselves and our commitments and listen intently to what others express to us." We underscore from that this one key idea - dialogue is key form of Christian witness.

4. We all know the difference between monologue and dialogue; we experience it often. Dialogue is collaboration, driven by curiosity and mutual interest, a friendly game of conversational tennis. Monologue, on the other hand, is just a self-referential broadcast, speaking and not listening even when your mouth isn't moving...It's hitting a tennis ball against a concrete wall, meaning that you're really just treating the other person like an inanimate object. Too often we've been thought to think of "evangelism" or "Christian witness" as monologue, not dialogue.

5. Building Block #3 says that we share our convictions and experiences freely, but then listen as intently to the convictions and experiences of our dialogue partner. You hear that same sentiment in this citation from Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury: "(Christian witness) is not about introducing a distant and rather shy God to people that God has never met before. God is always ahead of us in the world...God is nearer to every life than you can even imagine. Dialogue is not about diluting conviction. It's about paying attention to where God may already be at work in the life and experience of another, and then joining God in that holy work."

6. This is why real interreligious dialogue results in what one expert calls "mutual conversion": both parties aren't merely proselytizing or defending their own beliefs, but instead are mutually challenged and encouraged toward greater faith and love.

7. The 2nd necessary concrete action is drawn from what theologians for a millennia have dubbed "natural law." That idea is drawn from biblical passages like Romans 2.14-15 in which we're told that all people have God's word written on their hearts and are accountable to it, and John 1.9 which states that the very light of God that came into the world in Jesus Christ shines in every human life.

8. Building on that foundational idea, we read in that 2014 PCUSA document: "Building Block #4 - We are called by God to work with other religions for peace, justice, and the sustainability of creation...The most fruitful interfaith relationships often develop when people explore concrete ethical concerns and unite to act on them together." Thus, instead of emphasizing religious distinction, we begin by finding common ethical, social, and moral concerns about which we can partner.

9. As we wrap up these two Sundays, let's consider a couple of insights from the Brian McLaren book that we'll recommend below. First, he describes three modern approaches to religious identity: 1) strong and hostile, which is strong in the wrong kind of way ("we're right, you're wrong; we're in, you're out"), 2) weak and benign, which is an overcorrection that erases religious distinctions, and 3) strong and benevolent, which is described by McLaren as follows, "Rather than defining Christianity by who it excludes, a strong/benevolent faith defines itself by its capacity to love across differences. It views the religious 'other' not as a competitor nor as a target but as a neighbor to be cherished from whom we can learn."

10. Second, McLaren asks us to imagine this scenario - Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, and Buddha walk into a bar...what happens next? Well, what doesn't is an angry theological debate, a soapbox monologue, or cold indifference. Instead, we'd reckon that other pub patrons would observe the attitudes and actions described the last two Sundays - there would be openness, trust, and modesty; there would be apologies for how their followers treated other religions; there would much respectful dialogue; and they would have found moral common ground from which to work together on the crises and needs of the world.

Explore More this Week

1. Here's the PCUSA source material for how we view other religions:

- 9.41-9.42 in The Confession of 1967, [confess671_0](#)
- The 2014 Interreligious Stance of the PCUSA, [the_interreligious_stance_pc\(usa\)_2014](#)
- Here are two shorter pamphlets from the PCUSA that cover the same ground, [witnessandevangelism](#) and [principlesforinterfaithdialogue](#)
- Here's a short article where these principles are put into practice by a PCUSA minister, [Presbyterian Mission Agency Interfaith Relations](#)
- Three book recommendations:
 - [Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?: Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World](#)
 - [What Christians Can Learn from Other Religions](#)
 - [Christianity and World Religions Revised Edition: Questions We Ask About Other Faiths](#)