

THE DIALOGUE DECALOGUE

GROUND RULES FOR INTERRELIGIOUS, INTERIDEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

Dialogue in the interreligious, interideological sense is a conversation on a common subject between people with differing views undertaken so that they can learn from one another and grow. The Dialogue Decalogue formulated by Prof. Leonard Swidler sets forth the ground rules for dialogue.

FIRST COMMANDMENT

The essential purpose of dialogue is to learn, which entails change. At the very least, to learn that one's dialogue partner views the world differently is to effect a change in oneself. Reciprocally, change happens for one's partner as s/he learns about oneself.

SECOND COMMANDMENT

Dialogue must be a two-sided project: both between religious/ideological groups, and within religious/ideological groups (Inter- and Intra-). Intra-religious/ideological dialogue is vital for moving one's community toward an increasingly perceptive insight into reality.

THIRD COMMANDMENT

It is imperative that each participant comes to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. This means not only describing the major and minor thrusts as well as potential future shifts of one's tradition, but also possible difficulties that s/he has with it.

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

One must compare only her/his ideals with their partner's ideals, and her/his practice with their partner's practice. Not their ideals with their partner's practice.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Each participant needs to describe her/himself. For example, only a Muslim can describe what it really means to be an authentic member of the Muslim community. At the same time, when one's partner in dialogue attempts to describe back to them what they have understood of their partner's self-description, then such a description must be recognizable to the described party.

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Participants must not come to the dialogue with any preconceptions as to where the points of disagreement lie. A process of agreeing with their partner as much as possible, without violating the integrity of their own tradition, will reveal where the real boundaries between the traditions lie: the point where s/he cannot agree without going against the principles of their own tradition.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Dialogue can only take place between equals, which means that partners learn from each other—*par cum pari* according to the Second Vatican Council—and do not merely seek to teach one another.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust. Because it is persons, and not entire communities, that enter into dialogue, it is essential for personal trust to be established. To encourage this it is important that less controversial matters are discussed before dealing with the more controversial ones.

NINTH COMMANDMENT

Participants in dialogue should have a healthy level of criticism toward their own traditions. A lack of such criticism implies that one's tradition has all the answers, thus making dialogue not only unnecessary, but unfeasible. The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, which is impossible if one's tradition is seen as having all the answers.

TENTH COMMANDMENT

To truly understand another religion or ideology one must try to experience it from within, which requires a "passing over," even if only momentarily, into another's religious or ideological experience.

Leonard Swidler

SEVEN STAGES OF DEEP-DIALOGUE

Deep-Dialogue requires that we undergo a profound change in the way that we think. It requires a change in our very being. The Seven Stages of Deep Dialogue have been delineated by Prof. Leonard Swidler, one of the world's foremost thinkers in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

- Encountering an Other, one who has an entirely different way of viewing and experiencing the world, unsettles my sense of security with regard to my own worldview. I must change.
- Change entails that I distance myself from my former worldview. Taking my cue from the worldview of the Other, I realize that I must learn a different worldview.
- I feel a great affinity for the new world that I inhabit. I delight in making discovery through its worldview and my understanding of the Other is enriched. But in the end I realize this is not my home.
- I return to my own world carrying with me new knowledge, understanding reality differently – how I see myself, others, and the world. My very identity is challenged; it is deepened.
- My transformed sense of self now takes into account the many different worlds and viewpoints that surround me, all the while experiencing a greater connection to my communal environment, a network of relations with Others.
- As my identity continues to deepen I become aware of the profound unity underlying the diversity of perspectives. This knowledge I bring to my peers, which can at first be a disorienting experience, for many among them cannot comprehend a diverse world. But I must persevere.
- The most profound change that I undergo in the overall process of Dialogical Awakening is the realization that I have a responsibility to my world, comprised as it is of Others, of bringing to it a sense of understanding and communion, not *in spite* of, but *because* of the differences.

Leonard Swidler