

WAYS OF  
MEETING



A 6-week Youth Ministry Curriculum  
Exploring How Christianity Engages Religious Difference

## CONTENTS

2	Introduction
3	Gen Z and Religious Diversity
4	How to Use this Resource
5	*Week 1: OVERVIEW
10	<i>Four Models</i>
11	Week 2: One Way
14	Week 3: One Way, That Includes Many
18	<i>Two Diagrams</i>
19	Week 4: Many Ways to One End
23	<i>Puzzle Game</i>
27	Week 5: Many Ways, Different Ends
30	<i>Two More Diagrams</i>
31	*Week 6: DEBRIEF
35	<i>Dialogue vs Debate</i>

## INTRODUCTION

This curriculum is suitable for use in youth ministry settings, primarily with High School aged students in mind. Over the course of 4-6 weeks students will be introduced to how Christianity has interpreted and addressed the reality of religious difference in the world.

As you might imagine there have been a variety of approaches. This curriculum draws much of its content from the work of Paul F. Knitter *Introducing: Theologies of Religions* (2005), and as such weeks 2-5 will focus on the four different theological positions on the relation of Christianity to other religious ways:



1. The Replacement Model
2. The Fulfillment Model
3. The Mutuality Model
4. The Acceptance Model

It is important to acknowledge that there are numerous nuances and variations inside and outside this typology. This is simply one way of understanding the vast field of scholarship in this area. Investigating how those who profess to be Christians have sought to practice their faith and live alongside people who do not share their religious convictions in a worthy project. Through this series it is my hope that the student's interest would be sparked for further exploration and that they would be equipped for self-reflection.

Each student should leave feeling better equipped to evaluate for themselves the particular theological convictions that motivate particular interreligious encounters, as well as articulate their own position vis a vis non-Christian religious faiths.

## GEN Z AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

*“As the most racially, religiously and sexually diverse generation in American history, Gen Z expects people to have different beliefs and experiences, and they seem to have a greater appreciation for social inclusiveness compared to generations before them.”<sup>1</sup>*

Barna’s Gen Z report brings to light characteristics and trends that may not be surprising for those of us who work alongside 13-18 year olds, *ie.* those born between 1999-2005. This report illustrates that although Gen Z’s generational ethos may resonate with a life of Christian faith in some ways, in other ways their collective worldview clashes with many tradition Church traditions and beliefs. To summarize the potential resonances that Barna identified may prove extremely helpful as you embark in this series:

### **DIVERSITY.**

*“Teenagers, by-in-large, assume that diversity is good. Gen Z tends to be more comfortable than older generations with practicing diversity-in-unity now.”<sup>2</sup>*

Being aware of this assumption is important at you navigate weeks 1 and 2 in particular, since the theological positions explored here may be viewed as out-dated or intolerant. Encouraging the students to see the merits of such approaches may be challenging, but crucial in order to nurture a culture, within your small group or Sunday School class, of respect and openness.

### **EMPATHY.**

*“Perhaps because diverse views and experiences are the social norm for Gen Z, their tolerance threshold tends to be high and their appetite for antagonizing low.”<sup>3</sup>*

As you begin to discuss contemporary issues/scenarios it will be essential to allow students to share openly their thoughts and reactions to the various models presented in this curriculum. This study encourages you and the teens to think about what you believe in light of scripture, religious tradition, intellectual reasoning and your personal experience. In order to do this, students must feel comfortable enough to express their thoughts without fear of being edited, silenced or sparking a negative reaction.

This view of diversity and propensity toward empathy make this current generation of teenagers an exciting group to work with and listen to as they process things of faith, and its role in their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Kinnaman, David “Introduction” in Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation (2018) Barna Group, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Morrow, Jonathan “Hope for Their (and Our) Future” in Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation (2018) Barna Group, 105.

<sup>3</sup> Morrow, Jonathan “Hope for Their (and Our) Future,” 106

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This 4-6 week series is highly adaptable so do not hesitate to adjust it, the various elements and suggested resources to suit your particular context and group. However, there is a basic structure to each lesson that has been designed with an interior logic.



CENTER

### Center

Begin your group with a centering practice. This can take any form that best suits your group. It can be as simple as a breathing exercise or reciting the prayers provided.



LEARN

### Learn

This part of the lesson is the time to introduce the various different ways Christian has understood religious diversity. In weeks 2, 3, 4, and 5 there will be one model introduced.<sup>4</sup>



REFLECT

### Reflect

After being introduced to a particular theological approach to religious diversity, students will reflect upon the possible implications of such an approach in real life. During this time certain movie clips, newspaper articles, or



INTERPRET

### Interpret

Moving from contemporary sources, students will now have the opportunity to identify how a theological position can influence how a person interprets the Bible. Each week the group will return to the same passage: John 3:1-17.



APPLY

### Apply

Before closing your time together, spend about 5-10 mins considering the ethical implications of this theology, that is, how it plays out in the world, in our country, in our schools and workplaces.

Each step should take about 10 minutes, but can be adjusted to suit your group's needs.

\*Week 1 and Week 6 are optional; however it is recommended that if you are utilizing the 4-week series that leaders weave in some of the content from these weeks to help contextualize the material and set expectations going forward.

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<sup>4</sup> These models are adapted from Paul F. Knitter's typology in his publication "Theologies of Religions" and from Dr. Christopher Elwood Christians & Others course at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

## \*WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

### BIG IDEA

Students will recognize that in a world of religious diversity, there has also been diversity in how Christians have thought about how they relate to non-Christian neighbors.

### YOU'LL NEED:

A copy of this **leader guide**; a **pencil or pen** for each participant. Enough copies of the **Four Models Handout** for everyone; an **assortment of newspaper articles**; **Art materials**: color pencils, markers, crayons, and old magazines to cut up, scissors, and tape or glue; sheets of **poster board**, one sheet per team. **Internet-capable TV** and/or **Laptop** and **Projector**.



### Center

Each week we'll open our time together with a prayer to help focus and prepare ourselves for the next 45 minutes or so. We'll be drawing on prayers from a variety of different religious traditions over the next 4-6 weeks. This first week we will use a prayer from Thomas Merton, an American Christian monk, who describes contemplative prayer as a practice that is "centered entirely on the presence of God."<sup>5</sup>

Let's pray together in unison:

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know  
myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I  
am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that  
desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right  
road, though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore, will I trust you always though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "History of Centering Prayer," Contemplative Outreach Ltd.

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/history-centering-prayer> Accessed 11/20/19

<sup>6</sup> Merton, Thomas Thoughts in Solitude <<<year, city, page>>>



LEARN

## Learn

Religious toleration is preserved as an ideal in the United States Constitution, but religious diversity has had a complicated history in the United States.

American diversity could be summarized in the phrase “*E Pluribus Unum*,” Latin for “out of many, one” the concept that this nation is composed of diverse groups of people who have immigrated from various parts of the world. Although Americans have taken pride in the rich array of religious faiths that help define the nation, for two centuries the question of how we can coexist is still perhaps unanswered.

“America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity”

2005 NYT Article

<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/02/books/capters/america-and-the-challenges-of-religious-diversity.html>



**SHARE.** Instances where you interact or encounter those who are different from you.

## Have you ever wondered:

- Why are there so many different religions?
- If God is one, should there not be one religion?
- Are all religions valid in God’s eyes – all equally effective in putting people in contact with the Divine?
- Are their differences more a matter of perspective and culture than of conflicting content?
- Why do I belong to one religion rather than another?<sup>7</sup>



The term *typology* refers to the study and classification of different types.

There is a whole academic discipline called “theology of religions” that explore questions like these. Pastors and theologians for generations have wrestled with how Christianity relates to the many other religious traditions it encounters and one scholar has come up with a *typology* to map out some of the major positions Christians have taken.

<sup>7</sup> These questions are all taken directly out of Paul F. Knitter *Introducing: Theologies of Religions* (2005) Maryknoll, NY. 1.



The phrase *theological position* refers to an opinion of some sort (that's the "position" part) about something (say, existence or lack thereof) specifically about God (that's the "theological" part)."



REFLECT

**INTRODUCE.** Provide **Four Models Handout** that has space to summarize each model in a table.

Each model represents a particular *theological position*<sup>8</sup> and envisions a different way of meeting other religions.

Each model has a particular way of understanding God, Others and Christians. Each model understanding Scripture and certain *doctrines*.

**DISCUSS.** Initial Observations. Any surprises. Any Questions.

We will encounter each model in more detail over the next 4-5 weeks.

**Reflect**

- An assortment of newspaper articles addressing religion in modern life
  - RNS; <https://religionnews.com>
  - BBC; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/search?q=Religion>
  - NBC; <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/religion>
  - NPR; <https://www.npr.org/sections/religion/>
- Art materials including color pencils, markers, crayons, and old magazines to cut up, scissors, and tape or glue
- Poster board, one sheet per team

Participants identify prominent stories about religion in the world and articulate how those stories influence public perceptions and world events.

Form pairs or groups of three. Give each group an article. Ask groups to have volunteer(s) read the article aloud and then discuss:

- What story about religion and inter-religious interaction do you see in this article?
- What impression does the article give about how people of different faiths interact?

Give groups about 5 minutes to read and discuss their articles. Then, distribute art materials and ask each group to

<sup>8</sup> Fincke, Daniel On What Counts As A Theological Position, (2009) <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/camelswithhammers/2009/08/on-what-counts-as-a-theological-position/> Accesses 11/20/19

create a drawing, collage, poem, or prose piece that illustrates that story.

While they work, move around the room and ask if anyone would like help understanding particular words in their article or identifying how their story is about religion.

Ask:

- What different stories about religion and particularly Christian people are out there?

**SHARE.** After 10 minutes, bring the groups together. Invite each small group to show their work and discuss the stories they found.



### Interpret

As we begin to explore the different ways in which Christians have understood and interacted with people of other religious traditions, they have developed particular theologies and interpretative practices.

Each week we will be turning to a very well-known passage from the Gospel of John and considering how people who hold differing theological viewpoints might interpret the scripture differently.

**READ.** *John 3:1-17 (NRSV)*

**DISCUSS.** What questions does this passage raise when we begin to think about religious diversity today in North America.

**{DEFINE} Theology of Revelation:** The study of how God has *revealed* knowledge of divine things. It is often understood as happening in two ways: through nature and conscience (general revelation), through Jesus Christ (special revelation).

**{DEFINE} Theology of Salvation (Soteriology):** The study of how human beings are saved or delivered from harm, ruin, or loss. In Christian theology salvation is often understood as 'redemption' but there are many different ways Christians have explained how we are saved, what we are saved from, and for what purpose we are saved.

Some helpful web-based resources:

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3673](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3673)

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/religious-diversity-in-the-bible\\_b\\_1684798](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/religious-diversity-in-the-bible_b_1684798)



## Apply

Each week we will end our time together by wrestling with how our theology, or the theological position presented in the model, impacts how we live and interact with people who are different from ourselves, practice different religions and hold vesting different understanding of the world, of God, of humanity and our purpose.

**WATCH.** *“Stand up against religious discrimination – even if it’s not your religion” (5:10).<sup>9</sup>*

Eboo Patel, the founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a national nonprofit working to make interfaith cooperation a social norm, shares a personal story about an incident in high school and drew his attention to the importance of educating around religious difference.

## Closing Prayer

**May the grace of God uphold you,  
the peace of God surround you,  
the love of God flow from you  
and the strength of God protect  
and bring you safely through this day.**

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<sup>9</sup> Patel, Eboo “Stand up against religious discrimination – even if it’s not your religion” (2015)  
<https://bigthink.com/Charles-Koch-Foundation/eboo-patel-religious-discrimination> Accessed 12/02/2019

# WEEK 1: FOUR MODELS

	ONE WAY	ONE WAY THAT INCLUDES MANY	MANY WAYS TO ONE END	MANY WAYS, DIFFERENT ENDS
CHRISTIANITY				
OTHERS				
REVELATION				
SALVATION				

## WEEK 2: One Way

### BIG IDEA

Students will be introduced to the *One Way* model as one particular theological approach to religious diversity and biblical interpretation. They will practice identifying, analyzing and evaluating *One Way* in real world scenarios, scripture, and in their own lives.

### YOU'LL NEED:

A copy of this **leader guide**; a **pencil or pen** for each participant; a **flipchart or big piece of paper** and a **marker**. **Internet-capable TV** and/or **Laptop** and **Projector**. **Flipchart or big piece of paper** and a **marker**. Copies of the **Four Models Handout** for everyone.



### Center

In Islam, there are two forms of prayer. One has ritual, formal requirements and manners, which are essential to its correct observance. This is called *ṣalāt*. The other form is supplicatory prayer, and in its more general sense, represents an open-ended conversation with *Allah*, which may occur at any time or place, with few restrictions or requirements. It is called *dua'a*.



*Allah* is “God” in the Arabic language. Arabic-speakers of all Abrahamic faiths, including Christians and Jews, use the word *Allah* to refer to “God”



Let's pray together in unison this *dua'a*:

“Oh Allah, honor me by the light of understanding and take me out from the darkness of doubt and open upon us the doors of your knowledge and open upon us the treasure of your recognition, oh the best of the Merciful ones. Oh Allah, and give me success in study and solving all the difficult problems through learning. By your mercy, oh the best of the merciful ones.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <http://muslimgirl.com/9100/exam-day-duaa-perfect-memory-increase-knowledge/>



## Learn

The theological position we are focusing on this week has many names:

- The Replacement Model
- One Way
- Exclusivism



**Prevenient Grace** (or enabling grace) is divine grace that precedes human decision. In other words, God can and will show love or mercy to someone before they're even aware of it.

In its simplest form it... religious exclusivism, or exclusivity, is the doctrine or belief that only one particular religion or belief system is true. For Christians who hold this view there is no way to God outside of Christianity. There is no revelation of God outside of Jesus Christ and there is no Salvation outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ. There are some variations in this way of thinking that allows for the operation of *prevenient grace*, and holds that there is the possibility of some revelation of God within other world religions, although there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ.

Refer back to the **Four Models** Handout from week 1 that summarizes each model in a chart. You may find it useful to review the definitions of revelation and salvation.

**FILL-IN.** Have the student fill-in the spaces for the *One Way* model.

## Reflect

**WATCH:** Video *State of the World/The Task Remaining*<sup>11</sup>

Form pairs or groups of three. Hand out a **flipchart or big piece of paper** and a **marker** to each group. Discuss and write or draw:

- What can you tell about the theological position of the organization that made this video?
  - Think about how the Christian views themselves, how they view others, roles, responsibilities etc.

**SHARE:** Have each group share their reflections.



You could also reflect on Brandon Heath's 2015 song *One Way to Heaven* (3:47).

<sup>11</sup> State of the World/The Task Remaining released by Global Frontier Missions in 2015. <https://youtu.be/WrHC7hXNoV8>. This clip is 4:36 long but the first 1:41 is enough for the student to reflect upon. This video uses information from Gordon Conwell Seminary's Center for the Study of Global Christianity and the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course. Accessed 12/2/19

Helpful Reminder: Encourage students to continue to hold gracious views of positions and approaches that they may not share.



### **Interpret**

Coming back to our passage, we'll read from a different translation this week.

### **READ. *John 3:1-17* (MSG)**

Ask:

- How might someone who holds a *One Way* theological position...
  - ...interpret and understand this story?
  - ...understand salvation in this story?
  - ...understand what the Christian's responsibility toward others to be?
- How is this interpretation compelling?

**SHARE.** Give some time for students to answer.



### **Apply**

*One Way* Christians remind us that of the importance of grounding a Christian response to religious diversity and dialogues with others must be founded in the witness of the New Testament.<sup>12</sup>

Ask:

- What are the strengths of this position when it comes to meeting humanity's needs?
- What might you consider the weaknesses?

### **Closing Prayer**

**May the grace of God uphold you,  
the peace of God surround you,  
the love of God flow from you  
and the strength of God protect  
and bring you safely through this day.**

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<sup>12</sup> Paul F. Knitter *Theologies of Religion*, 51.

## WEEK 3: One Way, That Includes Many

### BIG IDEA

Students will be introduced to the *One Way, That Includes Many* model as one particular theological approach to religious diversity and biblical interpretation. They will practice identifying, analyzing and evaluating *One Way, That Includes Many* in real world scenarios, scripture, and in their own lives.

### YOU'LL NEED:

A copy of this **leader guide**; a **pencil or pen** for each participant; a **flipchart or big piece of paper** and a **marker**. Enough **wooden beads** for 18 each, and enough larger **"guru" beads** for one each, **embroidery cord**; **scissors** to cut to length. **Two Diagrams** Handout and copies of the **Four Models** Handout for everyone.



### Center

Beads are used in many religious traditions in prayer practices. Buddhist prayer beads or malas (Sanskrit: mālā "garland"), strands of 108 beads plus a "guru" bead, are a traditional tool used to count the number of times a mantra is recited, breaths while meditating, counting prostrations, or the repetitions of a buddha's name.

We're going to start today making malas of 18 beads plus 1 larger bead and pray in a *mantra*-style for discernment and understanding for today's lesson.



**CREATE.** Make malas with the supplies provided.

Let's pray this *mantra* in silence using the beads, when you are finished say **"Amen"**:

**"Wisdom and understanding are yours"**



## Learn

**REVIEW.** Ask a volunteer to briefly describe the *One Way* model from last week.

Present the **Two Diagrams** Handout.

Ask:

- Where do other religions stand in relation to Christianity?

The theological position we are focusing on this week has a couple of different names or descriptions:

- The Fulfillment Model
- One Way, That Includes Many
- Many Expressions of the One Way
- Absolutist Model

This model is a theological position that believes that Christianity is the “fulfillment” of other religions. This model seeks to affirm God's *universal* love for all humanity and God's *particular* expression of that love and salvation in Jesus Christ.

In this model Jesus makes atonement for all of humanity. Salvation is still found in Jesus and God's love and grace are extended to all of humanity. This model seeks to balance between God's presence in other religions and God's special presence in Jesus. It may be surprising to notes that this model comes out of the Roman Catholic Church.

Karl Rahner was one of the greatest minds in the Roman Catholic Church. His theological tenets and work heavily influenced Vatican II, the last major reform of the Catholic Church. He believed in a concept of “Anonymous Christians” meaning that people who have never heard the Christian Gospel might be saved through Christ. In this theological position followers of other religions are understood to be worshipping *shadow* versions of Christ that lead to the Christian God if they are faithful to the shadow Christ in their religion.

Ask:

- What do you think about this concept of “Anonymous Christian”?

The balancing act between the *universal* and the *particular* characteristics and actions of God can be seen as the key to these various theological positions on religions.



“These are only a *shadow* of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”  
(Colossians 2:17)

*One Way, That Includes Many* Christians want to remind us that Jesus Christ is a non-negotiable when it comes to possible interreligious dialogue. In this theological position Jesus Christ holds central importance in defining the identity of the Christian religious person.

For *One Way, That Includes Many* Christians we can note three convictions about Jesus:

1. In Jesus, God has done something very special, something that has not been done, and will not be done elsewhere.
2. Because of this something special, Jesus may have a lot in common with other religious figures, but he remains different. the difference Jesus makes must be preserved.
3. The something special that God has done in Jesus is very important not just for Christians but for all people.<sup>13</sup>

Refer back to the **Four Models** Handout from week 1 that summarizes each model in a chart. You may find it useful to review the definitions of revelation and salvation.

**FILL-IN.** Have the student fill-in the spaces for the *One Way, That Includes Many* model.



REFLECT



The *incarnation* is the belief that Jesus took on a human body and was fully human and fully God.

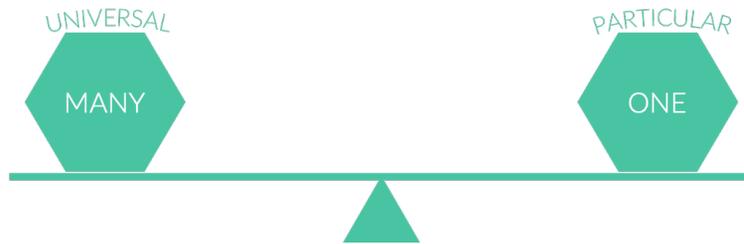
### Reflect

The complexity of religious diversity is understood in different ways by Christians. To reflect more deeply on this model we have to return to the concept of *revelation*.

Ask:

- How does someone holding this theological position...
  - ...understand how God reveals the deepest truth about Godself?
  - ...understand the *incarnation*? Jesus?
- Look at the diagram on the next page, how might this image help summarize the *One Way, That Includes Many* theological position?

<sup>13</sup> Paul F. Knitter Theologies of Religions, 103



- What is understood to be *universal* in this approach?
- What is considered *particular* in this approach?

### Interpret

READ. *John 3:1-17 (AMP)*



Ask:

- How might someone who holds a *One Way, That Includes Many* theological position...
  - ...interpret and understand this story?
  - ...understand salvation in this story?
  - ...understand what the Christian's responsibility toward others to be?
- How is this interpretation compelling?

SHARE. Give some time for students to answer.

### Apply

"Rahner understood Jesus not as the one who fixes what is broken but as the one who reveals what is already given but not yet evident. Jesus in this sense does not build the bridge that enables us to connect to God. Rather, he shows us in his message and person that we are already connected."<sup>14</sup>



Ask:

- What are the strengths of this position when it comes to meeting humanity's needs?
- What might you consider the weaknesses?

### Closing Prayer

May the grace of God uphold you,  
 the peace of God surround you,  
 the love of God flow from you  
 and the strength of God protect  
 and bring you safely through this day.

<sup>14</sup> Paul F. Knitter *Theologies of Religions*, 105

WEEK 3: TWO DIAGRAMS

DIAGRAM 1

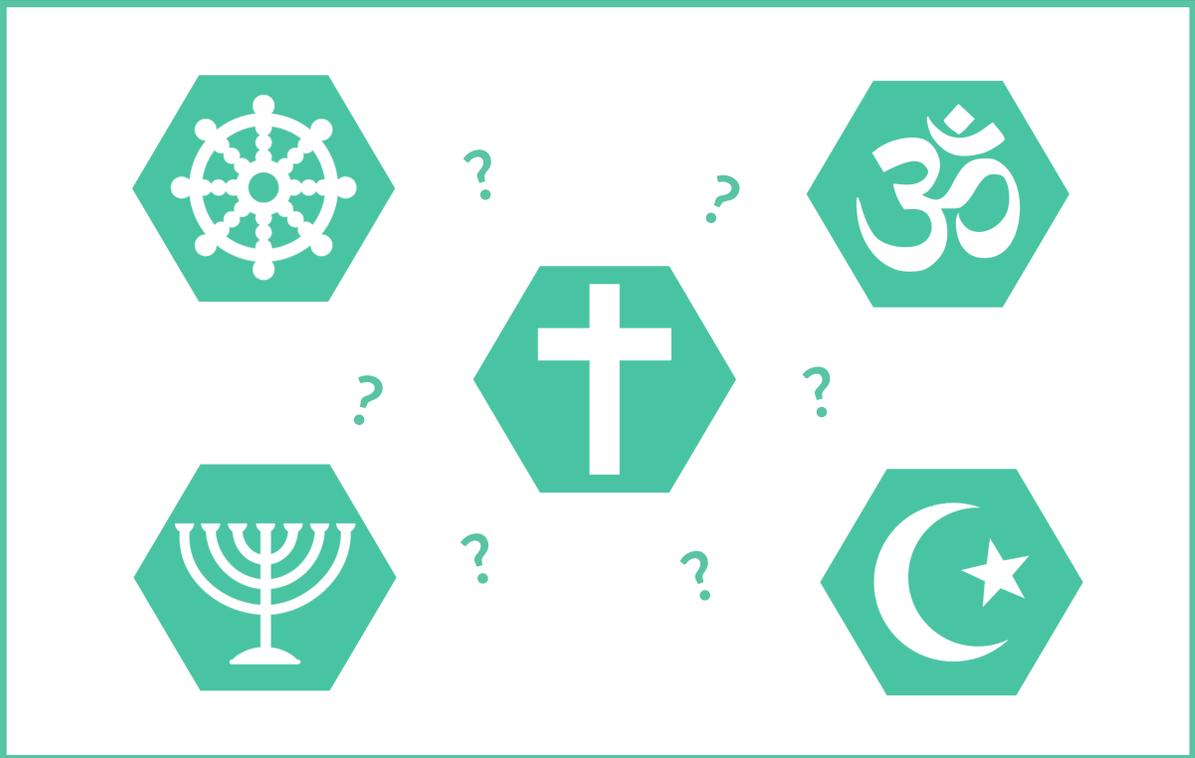
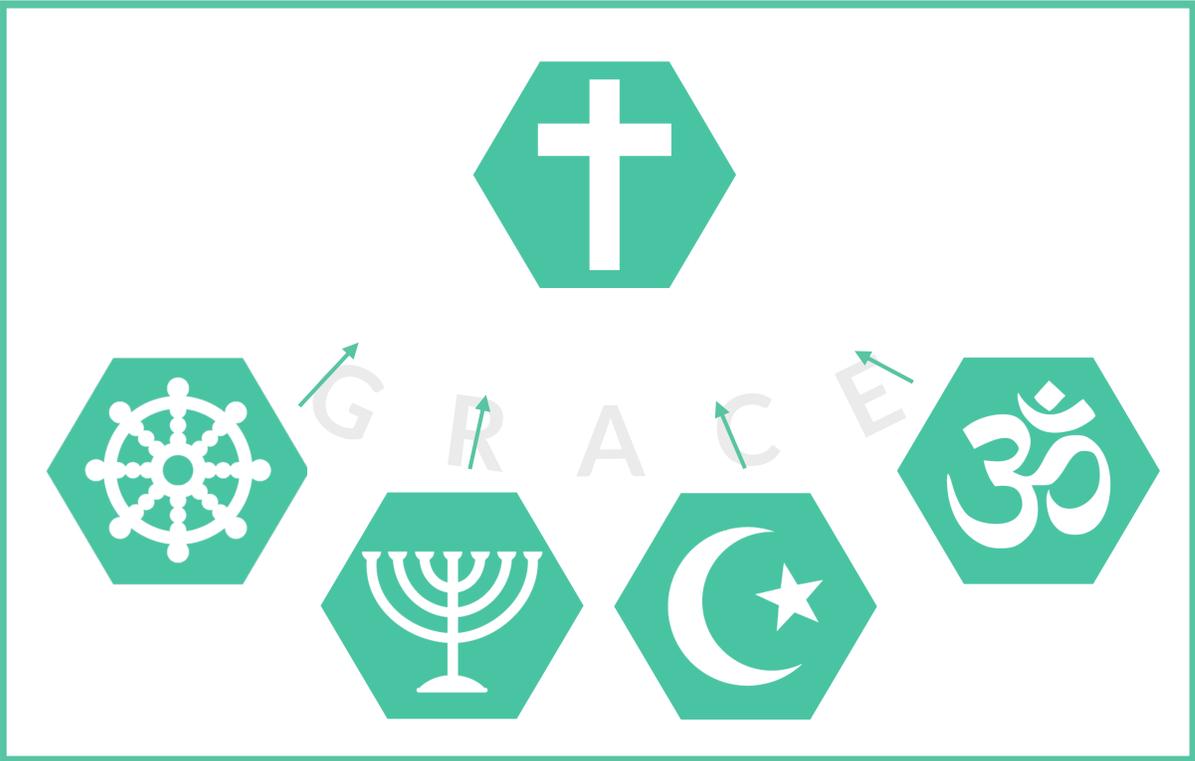


DIAGRAM 2



## WEEK 4: Many Ways to One End

### BIG IDEA

Students will be introduced to the *Many Ways to One End* model as one particular theological approach to religious diversity and biblical interpretation. They will practice identifying, analyzing and evaluating this theological position in relation to the religious diversity in society.

### YOU'LL NEED:

A copy of this **leader guide**; a **pencil or pen** for each participant; **Internet-capable TV** and/or **Laptop** and **Projector**; **The Life of Pi** movie or movie clip; copies of the **Four Models Handout** for everyone. A **flipchart or big piece of paper** and a **marker**. Golden Rule **Puzzle Game** cards cut out and pre-shuffled (Optional Activity).



CENTER

### Center

The *Amidah*, the "standing [prayer]", is divided into 3 sections, blessings of praise for God, requests for our needs and finally blessings of thanksgiving and recited while standing, as the name indicates.<sup>15</sup>

The Amidah formally concludes with the recitation of the following line while taking three steps backward, bowing to both sides, and taking three steps forward again, formally retreating from God's symbolic presence. Let's begin our time together with this whole-body standing prayer.

**"May God who brings peace to the universe,  
bring peace to us and all of the people, Israel.  
Amen."**



<sup>15</sup> My Jewish Learning The Amida Prayer <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-amidah/> This short 1:16 video explain the Amidah is accompanied by gentle low-key music and may provide a good centering practice for the beginning of your group time. Accessed 12/6/2019



## Learn

The theological position we are focusing on this week has many names:

- The Mutuality Model
- Many Ways to One End
- Many True Religions
- Pluralism

The Mutuality Model is a position being taken up by some mainline Christians in North America but is still a stretch for many. It cites God's universal love and a sense of God's presence in other religions, people in this camp do not believe that Jesus is the only Savior or the final word.<sup>16</sup>

In this framework, Jesus doesn't "save" the Buddhist. Individuals experience both revelation and salvation within the context of their own religions.

In order to get Christians to reach this position, the theologian Paul Knitter offers three possible "bridges" to help individuals to "cross over" into this stream of thought.

1. The philosophical-historical bridge focuses on the philosophical possibility that God is behind all religions and the historical limitations of all religions.
2. The religious-mystical bridge says that God is more than "anything experienced by any one religion and yet present in the mystical experience of them all."<sup>17</sup>
3. The ethical-practical bridge focuses on the common suffering of all humanity and calls people to a common dialogue.

Refer back to the **Four Models** Handout from week 1 (page 10) that summarizes each model in a chart.

**FILL-IN.** Have the student fill-in the spaces for the *Many Ways to One End* model.

Refer back to the teeter-totter image (page 17), if the *One Way, the Includes Many* usually landed more heavily on the side of Jesus' particularity, in this *Many Ways to One End* model the greater weight will fall on the side of God's universal love.

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<sup>16</sup> Paul F. Knitter Theologies of Religions, 109

<sup>17</sup> Paul F. Knitter Theologies of Religions, 112-113



## Reflect

**WATCH:** Video *Life of Pi – Religion Scene*<sup>18</sup> (2:03)

To begin with, Pi struggles with the concept of following just one religion. He is an accepting, loving child, and sees no reason why he cannot embrace Hinduism, Christianity and Islam equally.

Ask:

- What challenges and conflicts do you think Pi's father sees?
- Where does Pi's mother stand in relation to Pi's embrace of Christianity?
- What does this clip reveal about Pi's view of world religions?
  - How does this clip relate (and not relate) to this model?

NB. There are some differences between this clip and *One Way to One End/The Mutuality Model* and the model we'll be introducing next lesson *Many Ways, Different Ends/The Acceptance Model*.



## Interpret

**READ.** *John 3:1-17 (NKJV)*

Ask:

- How might someone who holds a *Many Ways to One End* theological position...
  - ...interpret and understand this story?
  - ...understand salvation in this story?
  - ...understand what the Christian's responsibility toward others to be?
- How is this interpretation compelling?

**SHARE.** Give some time for students to answer.

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<sup>18</sup> Life of Pi The religion scene (2:03) <https://youtu.be/58t8lAw5lEY> This clip is the conversation the young Pi has with his family around the dinner table. From a young age, Pi develops a strong faith in Hinduism and credits his curiosity and openness to other religions to his Hindu roots. He is later introduced to Catholicism by Father Martin, a Catholic priest who shows Pi that the foundation of Christianity and faith in God are based on love. Within the same year, Pi also starts following Islam. Accessed 12/6/2019



## Apply

This theological position is a God-centered (theocentric) approach.

Ask:

- What are the strengths of this position when it comes to meeting humanity's needs?
- What might you consider the weaknesses?

The *Golden Rule* is the principle of treating others as you want to be treated. It is a maxim that is found in many religions and cultures. It can be considered an ethic of reciprocity in some religions, although other religions treat it differently.

## OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Golden Rule Puzzle Game<sup>19</sup>

The sentiments of the *Golden Rule*, in one form or another, show up in almost all cultures and religions. The Golden Rule is sometimes described as an ethic of reciprocity. We are going to play a **Puzzle Game** that will show us how different faith traditions state their version of the golden rule.

Say:

- Find the puzzle card halves with the quotes that match the faith name printed on your card half, but without talking.
- The person who is the first to find the quotes for all of their faith name cards wins. There are no other rules. Go!

## PLAY. No more than 5 mins

Ask:

- Reading these statements, how might a *Many Ways to One End* Christian understand about each faith tradition?

**SHARE.** Give some time for students to answer.

## Closing Prayer

May the grace of God uphold you,  
the peace of God surround you,  
the love of God flow from you  
and the strength of God protect  
and bring you safely through this day.

<sup>19</sup> This activity was taken from The Chorus of Faith Youth curriculum by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Workshop 2: "We Need Not Think Alike To Love Alike," Activity Two: "Ethic of Reciprocity." <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/chorus/workshop2/173590.shtml> Accessed 12/7/2019

## WEEK 4: PUZZLE GAME

None of you [truly] believes  
until he wishes for his brother  
what he wishes for himself

**ISLAM**

This is the sum of Dharma  
[duty]: Do naught unto others  
which would cause you pain if  
done to you.

**BRAHMANISM**

We affirm and promote respect  
for the interdependent web  
of all existence of which  
we are apart.

**UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALISM**

...a state that is not  
pleasing or delightful to  
me, how could I inflict  
that upon another?

**BUDDHISM**

The sage has no interest of his  
own, but takes the interests of  
the people as his own.

**TAOISM**

And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou neighbor that which thou choosest for thyself.

**BAHÁ'Í**

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

**CHRISTIANITY**

Do for one who may do for you, that you may cause him thus to do.

**ANCIENT EGYPTIAN**

The hear is the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form.

**SHINTO**

All things are our relatives; what we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really One.

**NATIVE AMERICAN**

Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.

## CONFUCIANISM

...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

## JUDAISM

The basis of \_\_\_\_\_ is consideration of the hearts and feelings of others.

## SUFISM

Whatever is disagreeable to yourself so not so unto others.

## ZOROASTRIANISM

And it harm no one, do what thou wilt.

## WICCA

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

**TAOISM**

No one is my enemy, none a stranger and everyone is my friend.

**SIKHISM**

One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.

**YORUBA**

A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated.

**JAINISM**

Reason should be balanced with compassion and empathy and the whole person fulfilled.

**HUMANISM**

## WEEK 5: Many Ways, Different Ends

### BIG IDEA

Students will be introduced to the *Many Ways, Different Ends* model as one particular theological approach to religious diversity and biblical interpretation. They will practice identifying, analyzing and evaluating this theological position in relation to the religious diversity in society.

### YOU'LL NEED:

A copy of this **leader guide**; a **pencil or pen** for each participant; a **large canvas drop-cloth** (at least 8x8), or a **big piece of paper**, **paint brushes**, **sponges** and **paints**. A **laptop** or **CD Player**, and a **5-10 minute Meditative Playlist**, copies of the **Four Models Handout** for everyone and the **Two More Diagrams Handout**.



### Center

Unitarian Universalists understand prayer as one word for the alignment of our full attention with our desire to connect with That-Which-Is-Larger-Than-Us. It can take many forms, from the quiet cultivation of stillness to the deliberate naming of all that we're grateful for.<sup>20</sup> This week our centering practice is going to flex your creative muscles. We'll start with 1 minute of silence. Then while the **5-10 minute Meditative** music is playing in the background,

I'll invite you all to **use to the paint on the canvas to create an image that represents for you That-Which-Is-Larger-Than-Us.**

We'll do this creative prayer practice in silence. Let's begin.



<sup>20</sup> <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-do/spirituality/prayer> Accessed 12/7/2019



LEARN



A *truth claim* is a proposition or statement that a particular person or belief system holds to be true.



Holding a position of *suspicion* means to be aware of the biases and interests at play in a certain truth claim.



REFLECT

## Learn

The theological position we are focusing on this week may be called:

- The Acceptance Model
- Many Ways, Different Ends
- This model is very much grounded in postmodern thought and the rejection of universal *truth claims* and is *suspicious* of authority. It believed that the religious traditions of the world are really different and we have to accept those differences.

The acceptance model believes that because our realities and perceptions are relative to our own unique place and culture, the differences in our culture-religious filters are so great that, “for the most part, they are “incommensurable.”<sup>21</sup> There is no comparison between the religions in this model.

Refer back to the **Four Models** Handout from week 1 (page 10) that summarizes each model in a chart.

**FILL-IN.** Have the student fill-in the spaces for the *Many Ways, Different Ends* model.

## Reflect

**REVIEW.** Ask a volunteer to briefly describe the *One Way* model from last week.

Present the **Two More Diagrams** Handout. Review *The Many Ways to One End* Model.

Ask:

- Where do other religions stand in relation to Christianity in “Diagram 3”?
- How might you visually represent today’s *Many Ways, Different Ends* model?

**CREATE.** Have the student create a diagram for the *Many Ways, Different Ends* model.

<sup>21</sup> Paul F Knitter Theologies of Religions, 176-177



## Interpret

READ. *John 3:1-17 (CEB)*

Ask:

- How might someone who holds a *Many Ways, Different Ends* theological position...
  - ...interpret and understand this story?
  - ...understand salvation in this story?
  - ...understand what the Christian's responsibility toward others to be?
- How is this interpretation compelling?

SHARE. Give some time for students to answer.



## Apply

This theological position respects the truly differing goals and purposes stated by other religious and faith traditions. Remember the teeter-totter from week 3.



Ask:

- What, if anything, is understood to be *universal* in this approach?
- What is considered *particular* in this approach?
- What are the strengths of this position when it comes to meeting humanity's needs?
- What might you consider the weaknesses?

## Closing Prayer

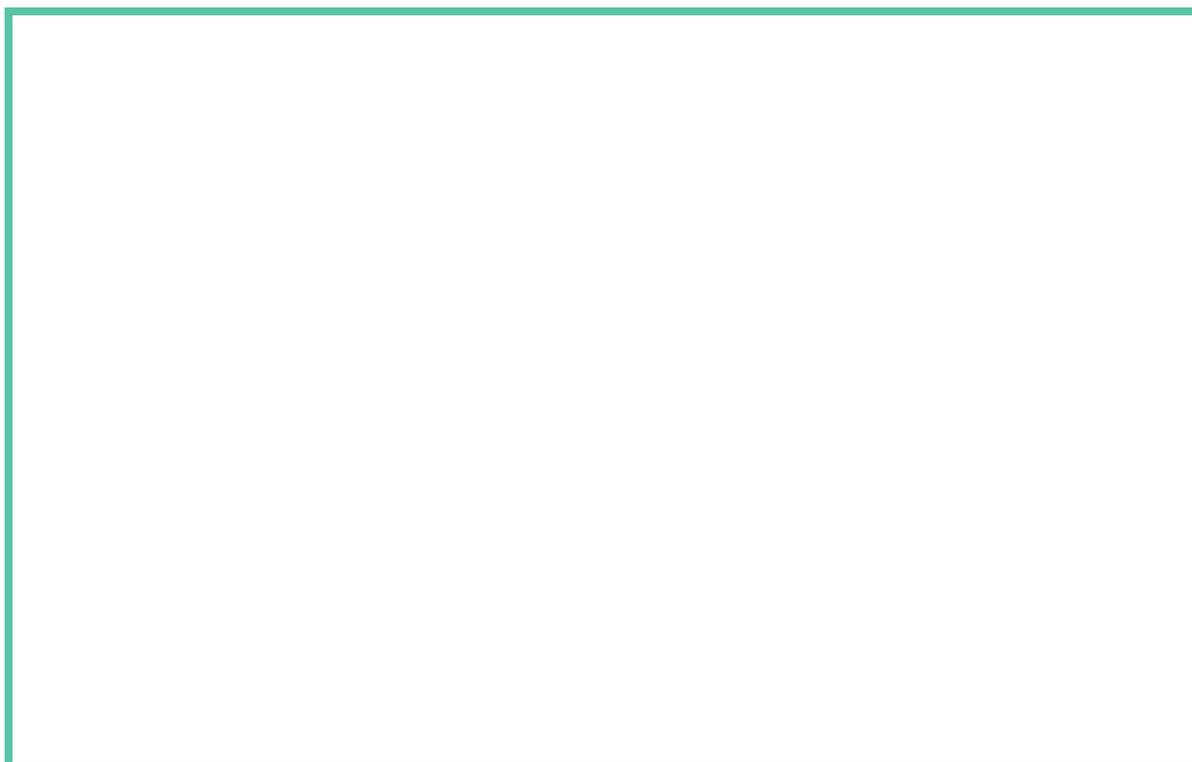
May the grace of God uphold you,  
the peace of God surround you,  
the love of God flow from you  
and the strength of God protect  
and bring you safely through this day.

## WEEK 5: TWO MORE DIAGRAMS

DIAGRAM 3



DIAGRAM 4



## \*WEEK 6: DEBRIEF

### BIG IDEA

Students will reflect on the past 5 weeks of this study and the four models of Christian theological positions when relating to other religious traditions. Student will discuss what steps can be taken to build interfaith relationships and dialogue.

### YOU'LL NEED:

A copy of this **leader guide**; a **pencil or pen** for each participant; a **flipchart or big piece of paper** and a **marker**. **Internet-capable TV** and/or **Laptop** and **Projector**.



### Center

This final week we are going to look back on what we have learned over the past 5 weeks. Today will be reflective but also constructive. You will be challenged to think about your own theological position. It may match one of the models that we have studied in this course, it may not. It most likely will be a combination. As we begin, let's reflect first on our experiences with prayer.

#### Ask:

- Do you pray? If not, is there something you do regularly that someone else might call prayer?
- Does the form of prayer matter to you? Why or why not? How might praying in a certain form or style affect your experience of prayer?
- How does your personal history with prayer influence your current feelings about prayer?

This week we're going to have an open time of prayer, where you can speak out loud your concern. Then after each person, we'll join together and say in response:

**"Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer."**

*O Lord, your mercy  
is before my eyes.*



## Learn

Review Models from the **Four Models** table (page 10), and both **Two Diagrams** (page 18) and **Two More Diagrams** (page 30).

**SHARE.** Invite students to share their initial observations as they look at their table and diagrams.

Break off into pairs or groups of three to discuss the next set of questions.

Ask:

- Where do other religions stand in relation to Christianity in each diagram?
- How is God's revelation understood in each model?
- How is salvation understood in each model?
- What similarities do you notice?
- What differences?

**DISCUSS.** Have 5 minutes for discussion in pairs.

**SHARE.** Invite students to share what they discussed with their partner.

Ask:

- Did your partner have any insights that you didn't have? If so, what were they?
- What benefits might there be for Christians to take openly about the differences they have in approaching other religions?
- What challenges might you face if you shared what you've learned in this series with other Christians?

**SHARE.** Invite students to share their answers.

## Reflect

**WATCH.** *Misunderstanding About Religion (2:19)*<sup>22</sup>



As you have seen over the course of this series is that there have been and will continue to be a wide range of diverse theological positions within our own faith tradition, as well as all other religions.

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<sup>22</sup> Misunderstandings About Religion, HarvardX, <https://youtu.be/U-YQXRrNo7Q> Accessed 12/9/2019



INTERPRET



*Reading the Bible at the Margins* by Dr. Cheryl Anderson  
<https://youtu.be/aLa9vaWnTZA>

*Biblical Interpretation in a World of Religious Diversity* by Dr Amy Cottrill and IYC (Interfaith Youth Core)

## Interpret

Today, one of the most important and compelling social and theological realities is religious diversity and the frequent conflicts that involve religious difference. Though religious difference itself is clearly not a new phenomenon, awareness of and interaction with people of diverse religious traditions is a feature of life today in a different way than it was even twenty years ago. We live in a world that is interconnected by economic structures, technology, media, and migration. What difference does this reality make in the practice of biblical interpretation?

Questions that might be helpful in shaping an interpretive approach to the bible that honors religious differences are:

- How was religious diversity experienced and interpreted in the ancient Near East?
- How was “otherness” perceived and encountered?
- How do particular biblical narratives reflect and interpret the religious diversity of their historical contexts?
- What difference does it make to read biblical texts through the lens of a desire to build interfaith relations?
- What are our obligations to our religiously diverse context in the practice of biblical interpretation?
- What might biblical literature offer the conversation today about interfaith encounter?

## Apply

Integral to building interfaith understanding is both the learning and unlearning of our stories of religious differences, our ‘histories’ and the histories of our faith communities.

Ask:

- What are you going to commit yourself to learning going forward?
- What are you going to commit to unlearning?

You may want to encourage the teenagers to think about what the historical record has to say about the relationships between our own Christian religious tradition and other religious groups.



APPLY

## SOME MORE OPTIONS GOING FORWARD

- Depending on the denomination(s) of the church, congregation, or youth group that you are conducting this study in, it may be helpful to research together some of the resources within your wider organization that are already working for justice, peace, interfaith dialogue and advocacy.
- One of the first steps in building greater awareness and meaningful relationships across differing religious backgrounds is the telling of stories. Stories unmask the various levels of history within families and faith communities and show how religious experiences differ when told from varying perspectives.
- Rather than beginning interfaith dialogue with doctrinal debates, storytelling enables people to first appreciate the human experience of another.
  - To highlight the differences between dialogue and debate in the following activity.
  - Draw a line down a sheet of newsprint or on a board. Label one column 'Dialogue' and the other 'Debate.'
  - Ask participants to name the contrasts between the two forms of discourse.
  - When the group has exhausted its ideas, share the list including at the end of this lesson (page 35) and compare it to the list generated by the participants.
  - Are there further additions to the list?<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For One Great Peace Study Guide, 11-12

## WEEK 6: DIALOGUE VS DEBATE

 DIALOGUE	 DEBATE
Dialogue is the understand of myself and others	Debate is the successful argument of my position over that of an other
I listen openly and compassionately with the view that I want to understand.	I listen in order to counter what I hear, and am closed to new ideas.
I listen for strengths, so I can affirm and learn, and to hear other viewpoints.	I listen for weakness, so I can discount and devalue what I hear.
I speak for myself using own experiences and understanding, and example my own assumptions.	I speak based on my own assumptions about others experiences and motives, in an effort to prove that I am right.
I ask questions to increase understanding, and am willing to temporarily suspend my beliefs.	I ask questions in order to control the conversation, or to confuse; I look for ways to affirm my own beliefs, or 'win.'
I allow others to complete their communications.	I interrupt or change the subject.
I concentrate on others' words, feelings, body language, and other modes of communication.	I focus on the point I want to make next.
I respect others' experiences as true and valid for them, and want to work with others to come to new understandings.	I critique others' experiences as distorted or invalid or wrong.
I respect the expression of feelings in myself and others.	I distrust the expression of feelings as manipulative or less than legitimate.
I honor silence.	I use it to gain advantage.
I look for ways to keep the conversation going, even in conflict.	I look for ways to end the conversation, when I am comfortable.



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*Christian & Others*  
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Dr. Christopher Elwood