

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIALOGUE?

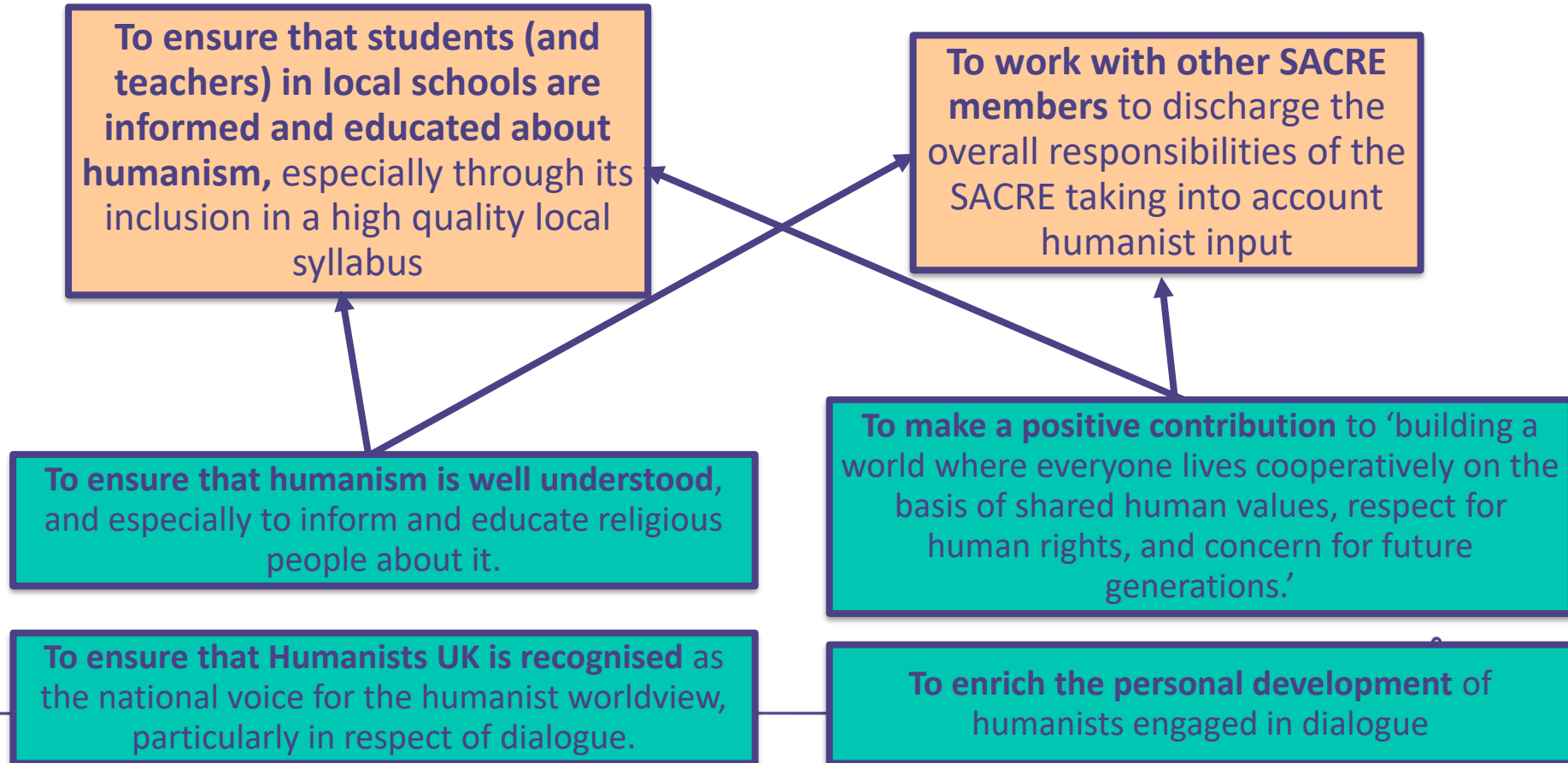
“By ‘dialogue’ we mean engagement between people with different approaches to life to build mutual understanding, identify common ground and, where it makes sense, engage in shared action.”

Covers a wide range of activities, not just formal “dialogue” events.

<https://humanists.uk/community/dialogue-with-others/>



SACRE INTERACTIONS ARE DIALOGUE, AND OVERLAP ITS OBJECTIVES



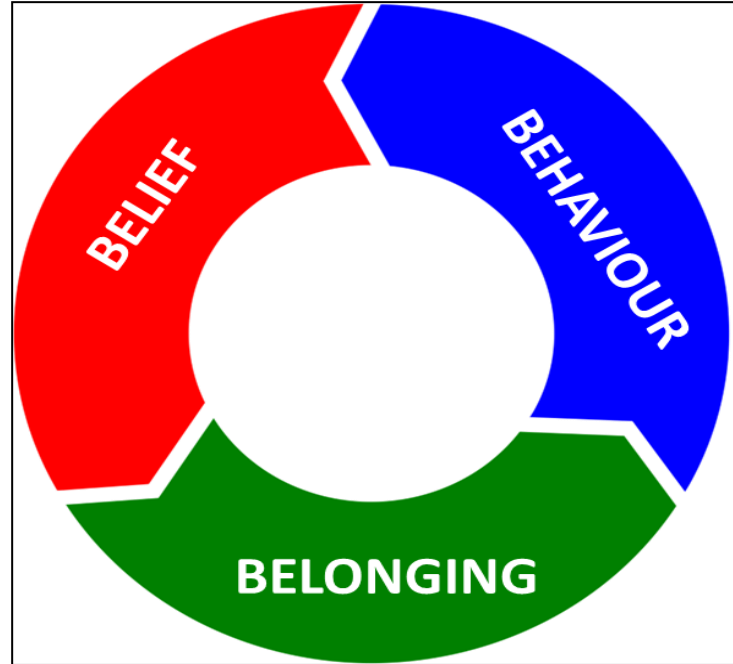
CONTEXT FOR DIALOGUE



WHAT IS “RELIGION”?



Don't assume religion is all about belief. It isn't.



ON A SACRE, “OFFICIAL” TEACHING OR COMMUNITY VIEWS MAY TRUMP PERSONAL PREFERENCE (FOR FAITH REPS)

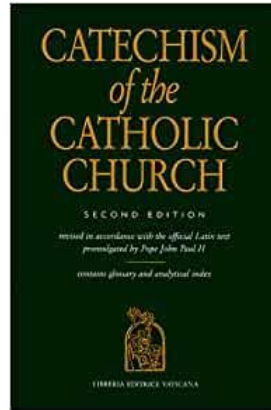
People

Catholics



Teaching

Catholicism



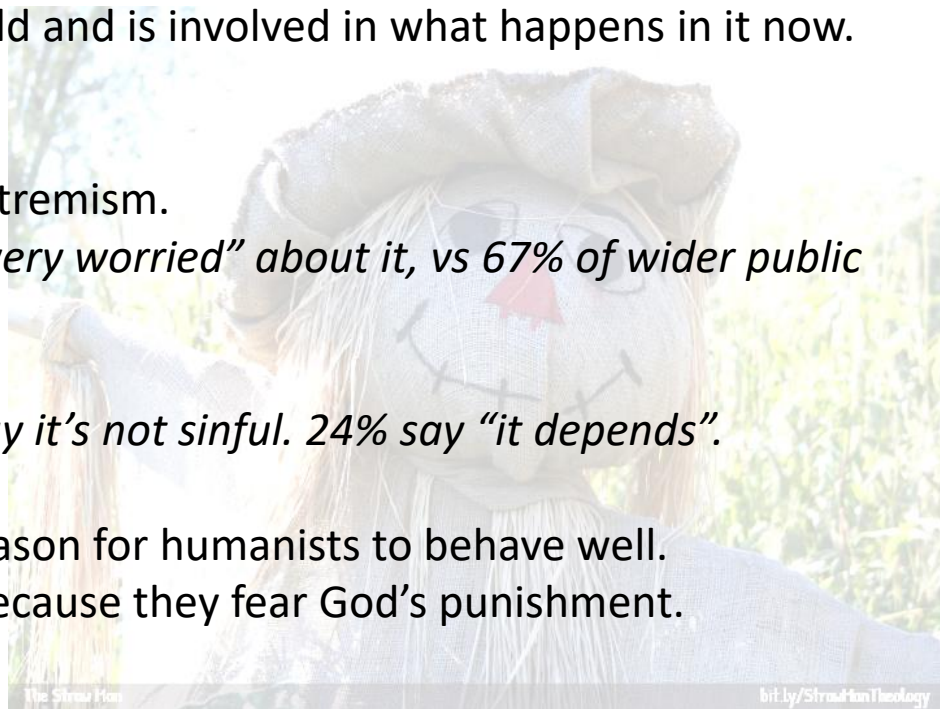
Institution

Catholic Church



...BUT REALITY IS MORE COMPLEX...

- Christians believe God created the world and is involved in what happens in it now.
Only 38% of young British Catholics agree
- Muslims are in denial about Islamist extremism.
63% of British Muslims are “worried” or “very worried” about it, vs 67% of wider public
- Catholics believe abortion is sinful.
Just 29% of British Catholics agree. 42% say it’s not sinful. 24% say “it depends”.
- Without heaven and hell, there’s no reason for humanists to behave well.
Christians/Muslims only behave well because they fear God’s punishment.



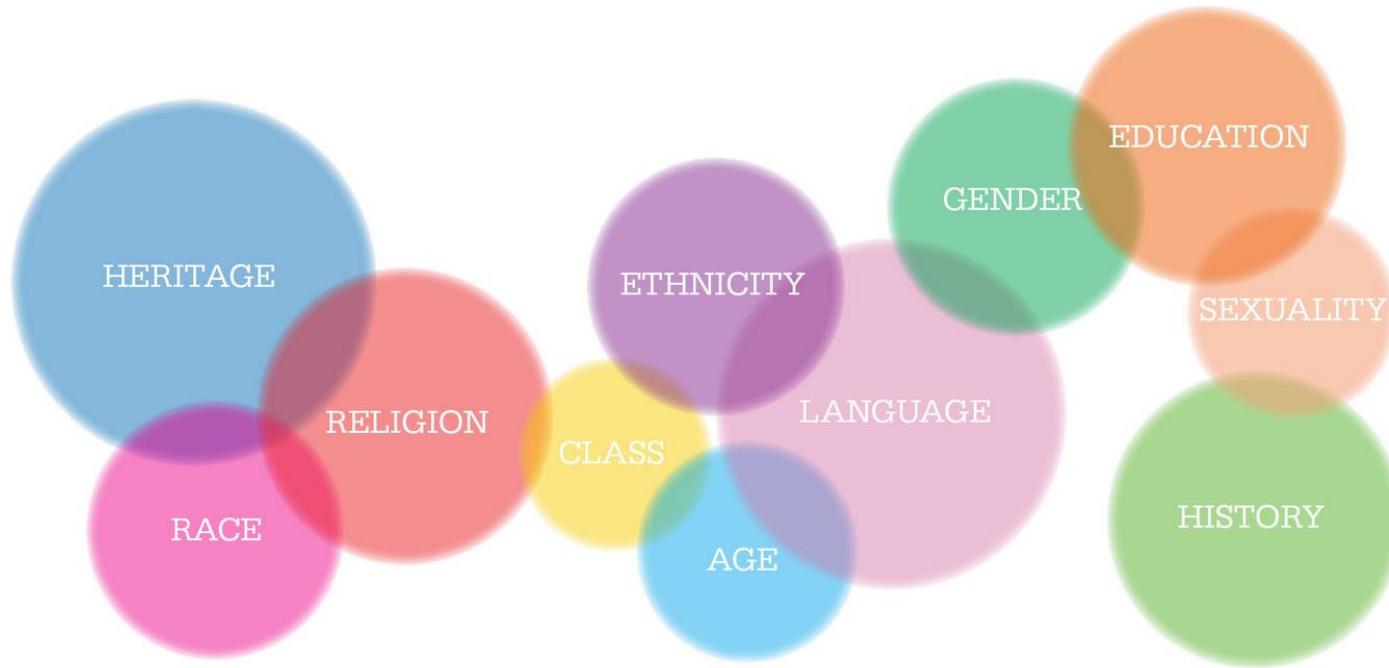
[Complex Catholicism \(2018\)](#)

[Listening to British Muslims - Crest Advisory \(2020\)](#)

[To Conscience First, and to the Pope \(Long\) Afterwards? \(2021\)](#)



...AND EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS



Pitfall alert

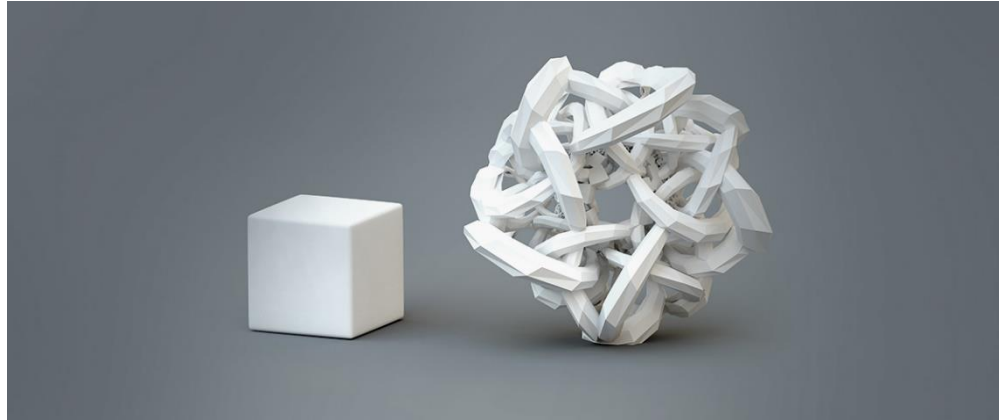
Don't confuse religious and other dimensions of difference

*Don't **assume** you already know what this particular Catholic, Muslim, Jew...
thinks or does.*





- **Good disagreement** – complexity, curiosity, understanding



- **Bad disagreement** – simplistic thinking, polarisation, conflict

PUNCTURING PRE-CONCEPTIONS



Points it's useful to emphasise early on:

- Humanism is a **positive worldview**, in which atheism is just one element.
- Humanists UK **not 'anti-religious'**, but **'anti-harm' and 'anti-privilege'**
- acknowledge the spectrum of views
- **Freedom of religion and belief** key element of **'secularism'**



BASIC DIALOGUE SKILLS



Maximise trust & confidence, minimise anxiety & threat

Feeling safe – ground rules

Respect fellow humans, and importance of people's faith to them

Be empathetic

Take risks with your own feelings and personal stories

Avoid **trying to convince** (or score 'cheap' points) - '**dialogue, not (adversarial) debate**'

Be **curious**; actively **listen**; ask **questions**

Be prepared to **acknowledge** the good stuff (e.g. Muslim requirement for charity)



Be mindful . Try not to get emotionally hooked (& help others do the same)



Use “I” statements

“I think...”, or “As a humanist I think...”, or “most humanists I know think...” ,
or “the Humanists UK view on that is...”

You can't claim to speak for all humanists.



Don't:

- Assume you know what “*true (name of religion)*” is
- Hold them personally accountable for actions of their co-religionists



BASIC DIALOGUE SKILLS (3) – LANGUAGE AWARENESS

Listen to the other's language

'Rational' - Naturalism, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, Deontology

'Emotional' - Love, compassion, empathy, caring, transcendence , spirituality, 'grace'...

Beware jargon, ambiguity, abbreviations



Don't get too hung up on language



BASIC DIALOGUE SKILLS (4) – DEALING WITH FUNDAMENTALISM

Advice from Prof Linda Woodhead:

- Do not engage head on
- Search for shared values; reframe

“I believe in traditional family values, and gender roles. It’s what the Bible tells us.”

Don’t say: “Show me where the Bible says that”.

Try: “That’s interesting. Can you tell me a bit about your own family background?”



Dealing with hostile questions or comments

Assume good intent (unless good reason to think otherwise)

Reframe to defuse potential conflict

Don't be afraid (politely) to express your views, or defend our campaigns

It's ok to agree to disagree "I can understand that. As you might guess, I think..."

If you want, be willing to say something like : "Ouch! That feels a bit harsh.*"

Be willing to accept the questioner saying "Oops! That didn't come out the way I intended."*

If hostility is directed towards someone else

Be prepared to support others against unfair attack

** The Faith & Belief Forum refer to these as "Oops/Ouch" questions*



BASIC DIALOGUE SKILLS (6) – ASKING QUESTIONS

“Open” questions - what, why, when, how...

‘Why’ can feel confrontational

Don’t start with a heavy challenge

“Has morality evolved since the stories of the Israelites in the Torah?”

Be conscious of sensitivities

“Is it ok if I ask you about...?”



- **Language**
 - Check for misunderstandings on language/definitions
 - Sometimes precision is essential (*"Is a Jaffa Cake a biscuit or a cake?"*), sometimes agreeing a "family resemblance" is enough (*"Is Islam 'just' a religion?"*)
- **What premises are being assumed?**
 - Take time to explore what premises are & of what type
 - "Is"/facts or "Ought"/judgements/opinions
 - Rather than shoot down flawed or disputed premises:
 - Either: help find premises you can agree on
 - Or: agree to disagree in order to move forward

Aim to agree, or at least agree on where the core disagreement lies.



SUMMARY



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- You're engaged in dialogue once you walk through the SACRE door
- Be aware of complexity - faith reps may have personal views at variance with official or community line
- Have dialogue skills in mind

SACRE relationships may provide opportunities for dialogue outside SACRE itself

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