



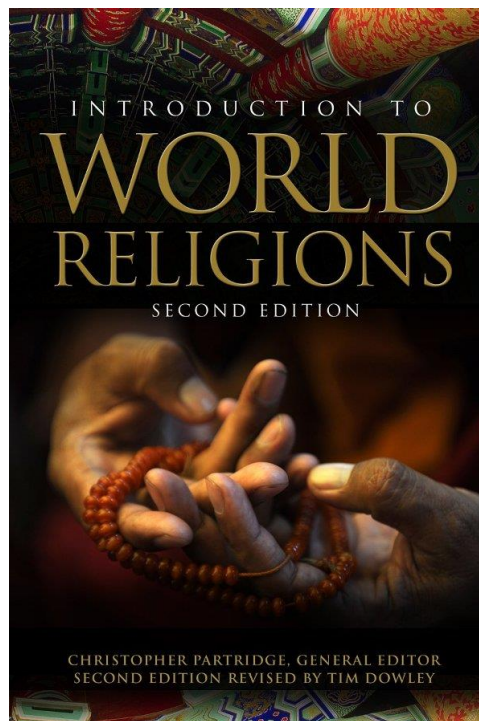
fortress press

discussion guide

Fortress Press Videos

Introduction to World Religions: Second Edition

Interfaith conversations with students from
Augsburg College's Interfaith Scholars Program



introduction

Fortress Press is pleased to present four new videos to be used with *Introduction to World Religions: Second Edition!*



Introduction to World Religions is one of the best surveys of world religions in its scope, balance, readability, and sensitivity. A new and exciting feature of the second edition is the inclusion of short articles written by “ordinary” believers about how their lives are informed and shaped by their religious beliefs. The videos that have been developed as a companion to the textbook further illuminate how individual believers understand and act upon their faith. These short conversations are between undergraduate students who have been part of Augsburg College’s Interfaith Scholars Seminar. In these videos students highlight why their religious faith is important to them and why, in an increasingly globalizing world, it is essential to engage in dialogue with others who hold different religious beliefs and/or truth claims.

The conversations in these videos reveal what religious pluralism looks like as these students give witness to their beliefs while being receptive to learning about and being changed by the beliefs of their peers. Their conversations reveal the rich mosaic of religious expression and how in this context they find common ground for action among their peers, on their campus, and in the wider community and world.

These videos are designed to spark further discussion in your classroom about how one lives one’s belief system and how one engages with others who identify differently than one’s self. While the students in these videos do not represent all the religions of the world, hopefully every student, from across religious traditions, as well as those who are spiritual seekers or nonreligious, will find these conversations helpful in facilitating reflection about their own beliefs and about ways to engage with others across difference.

Each video focuses on a few guiding questions, but the conversations are wide ranging. Below are brief introductions to the guiding questions of the videos, followed by questions for class discussion and suggestions for further action and reflection.

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Video 1: Why is interfaith discussion important?

The first video introduces the student participants and the faculty moderator. The conversation focuses on the following questions: “What role does faith play in one’s life? Why is interfaith work important?”

Use the following questions for personal reflection, essay composition, and classroom discussion.

Questions:

1. What values and beliefs, based in a religious perspective or not, underpin your worldview?
2. Have you ever felt stereotyped because of your religious belief or lack of belief? Describe your experiences or the experience of someone you know. Have you ever felt that the media portrays your religious tradition or other traditions inaccurately? Give examples.
3. Julian mentions religious diversity as a “beautiful mosaic.” What would a society look like that values religious pluralism? Give an example of a rich religiously diverse and pluralistic environment you have read about, have observed, or been a part of.
4. Aisha speaks about her experience in her first religion course. What has been your experience of taking a religion course? Did you have any hopes, expectations, or fears? What has been valuable about the course for you? What could make it better?

For Action and Further Reflection:

1. Read, watch, or listen to three different media pieces that involve a particular religious tradition. How is their portrayal similar or different? From what you know of that tradition, either from your own experience or study, how accurate is the portrayal?
2. Talk with a friend about what has shaped their values and beliefs. Has religion been a part of that process? How does currently see the role religion in his/her life?

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Video 2: What is your vision for your community?

The discussion in the second video is sparked by the question “What is your vision for your community?” The conversation focuses significantly on what conditions are necessary for meaningful discussion of interfaith issues.

Use the following questions for personal reflection, essay composition, and classroom discussion.

Questions:

1. What would make your campus a more inclusive place for all students? What specifically could be done to make your campus more welcoming and affirming for students who come from religious minorities?
2. Aisha speaks about experiencing “kumbaya” or “magical” moments in her interfaith work. Have you had experiences like these where religious diversity is valued and highlighted?
3. Where, beyond the university classroom, do you think people can be educated about the religions of the world?
4. Joe discusses how religion can either create barriers or bridges between one another. Have you experienced religions creating either barriers or bridges? Can you think of examples of each?

For Action and Further Reflection:

1. Research organizations in your community or nationally that draw together diverse religious groups to engage in human service or public policy work.
2. Explore the videos for the organization of the Charter for Compassion (<https://www.youtube.com/user/CharterforCompassion>). Research how religious leaders have signed on to the organization's mission to make compassion a “luminous and dynamic” force in the world.

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Video 3: What do you think makes a vibrant interfaith classroom?

The third video picks up on the theme of the second video of creating space for interfaith dialogue. It specifically addresses the question “What makes for a vibrant interfaith classroom?”

Use the following questions for personal reflection, essay composition, and classroom discussion.

Questions:

1. What experiences have you had with teachers who are able to create an open and inclusive classroom, where students feel empowered to share their opinions, beliefs, and experiences? What strategies did the teacher employ to create this kind of environment?
2. Julian speaks about the need to “lean in” when engaging in interfaith dialogue. What do you think it means to “lean in?” How specifically can one maintain this form of engagement when facing difficult or controversial issues involving religion? Do you know people who are adept at “leaning in?” What makes them skillful in this area?
3. Aisha discusses how one can feel tokenized if one is the only person of a particular faith in a classroom. Have you ever felt that you have had to answer for the entire religion to which you belong? What is the most effective way to respond when one feels one is being tokenized?
4. What commonalities have you discovered with people who hold religious beliefs different from your own? Have these commonalities led to any shared action on your campus or in your community?

For Action and Further Reflection:

1. Explore the website for the pluralism project at Harvard University (<http://pluralism.org/>). Specifically examine the case studies initiative about how pluralism is becoming a part of the changing religious landscape in the United States.
2. Research historical figures that have been interfaith leaders in social change movements. How did these individuals create interfaith coalitions in order to further the common good?

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Video 4: What do you wish people knew about your faith?

In the final video, the students speak more specifically about their particular belief systems, as informed by their faith. The guiding question of the video is “What do you wish people knew about your faith?”

Use the following questions for personal reflection, essay composition, and classroom discussion.

Questions:

1. Julian describes Judaism as “all about wrestling with God.” He interprets this as not accepting doctrine as it is, but questioning it. What is the value of questioning or even skepticism within religious belief? Are there any beliefs you were raised with that you have questioned and either set aside or re-embraced in a new way?
2. How does Amineh see Islam as a religion about human rights in general and women’s rights in particular? In learning about the religions of the world, have you found anything that surprised you about a particular tradition?
3. Joe sees differing views within Christianity on public policy issues. How can one create intrareligious dialogue—meaningful discussion of differences within a religious tradition?
4. Aisha describes how she has found compatibility between her faith and science. In your opinion, can one be a person of faith and scientist? What do these disciplines share in common?

For Action and Further Reflection:

1. Visit a house of worship of a religious tradition other than your own. What commonalities do you see with your tradition? What is particular about their style of worship or theology that you find most interesting, inspiring, or thought provoking?
2. Research scientists who see or saw themselves as religious believers. How do or did these individuals find resonance between these seemingly dissonant worldviews?