

# DISCOVERING INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: BIBLICAL AND PATRISTIC INSIGHTS

ALLA SCOPERTA DEL DIALOGO INTERRELIGIOSO: APPROFONDIMENTI BIBLICI E PATRISTICI

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## 1. Introduction

Formation to Interreligious dialogue is an inter and intrapersonal communication with a multidimensional structure that undertakes manifold methods. The contemporary drift could be the divergence between the prodigious interreligious archetypes of brotherhood/ sisterhood, harmony, and peace on the one hand and the actual interreligious microclimate which is becoming irregular and uneven on the other. The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* devotes the eighth chapter to deepening the role of dialogue between the followers of different religions. The chapter begins with the following words: «The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society».<sup>2</sup> Inspired and motivated by the various documents of the Church since Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), there had been resilient efforts from the

part of the Church to cross the threshold in dialogue with other religious traditions. The present-day scholars note that the widespread enthusiasm of the past decades for interreligious dialogue is declining. It seems as if the interreligious dialogue is gasping for breath.<sup>3</sup> The article deepens its insights from the Old and New Testaments and expands the vision of the Fathers of the Church in the first centuries.

A current study is also a creative approach to the words of St. John Paul II, addressing a group of leaders of various religions in Madras, India: «As followers of different religions we should join together in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood, education, culture, social welfare, and civic order. Dialogue and collaboration are possible in all these great projects».<sup>4</sup> The study is gradually established through an in-depth reading of the fundamentals of formation to interreligious dialogue

## RIASSUNTO

L'articolo approfondisce le basi bibliche e patristiche della formazione del dialogo interreligioso, accennando anche alle implicanze nella pratica pastorale.

Esamina l'origine e lo sviluppo graduale dell'universalismo negli Israeliti e nella Chiesa primitiva; l'apertura e l'accoglienza dell'insegnamento delle altre tradizioni religiose e del popolo eletto da Dio; il richiamo dei profeti dell'Antico Testamento sull'esistenza pacifica con le altre religioni in Israele; il nuovo cammino aperto dall'insegnamento di Gesù di Nazareth, che ha fortemente orientato i Padri della Chiesa a esortare i cristiani su come entrare in relazione con le altre tradizioni religiose.

**Parole chiave**

Formazione, dialogo interreligioso, Bibbia, Antico Testamento, Nuovo Testamento, patrologia.

## SUMMARY

The article describes the biblical and patristic foundations of formation towards interreligious dialogue with pastoral implication to practice interreligious dialogue. It elaborates the origin and gradual development of universalism among the Israelites and in the early Church, the openness and acceptance of the teachings of the other religious traditions and the chosen people of God, the exhortation of the prophets of the Old Testament on peaceful existence with various religions among the Israel, the new way unwrapped through the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth that reinvigorated the early Fathers of the Church to exhort the Christians on how to relate with other religious traditions.

**Keywords**

Formation, interreligious dialogue, Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, Patrology.

in the Sacred Scripture and the traditions of the early Catholic Church.

The book of Genesis describes the dialogue of the Creator God concerning the inauguration of creation. The divine creativity<sup>5</sup> of interacting with the power of the Word was initiated at the creation account.<sup>6</sup> The pinnacle of that dialogue is found in creating «humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them;

male and female He created them» (*Gen 1,27*). The salvation history described by the Hebrew people profoundly is the constant dialogue of God with humankind.<sup>7</sup> The most sublime involvement in all of the antiquity was rewarded in Jesus of Nazareth. The scriptural layout elucidated by the author of the Acts of the Apostles gives a secure advance of the Church in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and

## RESUMEN

El artículo profundiza las bases bíblicas de la formación del diálogo interreligioso, matizando también sus implicaciones en la práctica pastoral. Examina el origen y el desarrollo gradual del universalismo en los israelitas y en la Iglesia primitiva; la apertura y la acogida de la enseñanza de las otras tradiciones religiosas y del pueblo elegido de Dios; el reclamo de los profetas del Antiguo Testamento sobre la existencia pacífica con las otras religiones en Israel; el nuevo camino abierto por la enseñanza de Jesús de Nazaret, que ha orientado fuertemente a los Padres de la Iglesia a exhortar a los cristianos sobre como entrar en relación con las otras tradiciones religiosas.

### Palabras clave

Formación, diálogo interreligioso, Biblia, Antiguo Testamento, Nuevo Testamento, patrología.

till the ends of the earth (Acts 1,8). During the Patristic period in the first centuries, the Fathers of the Church helped the followers of Christianity to have reverence for other religious traditions around them.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Impacts of Other Religious Traditions in the Lives of Israel

Although guarding their cult and worship, the Israelites were convinced

of their uniqueness which helped them to receive foreigners among them.<sup>9</sup>

The God of Israelites always endorsed special care and concern for the poor, widows, orphans, and the suffering.<sup>10</sup>

In an accurate sense interreligious dialogue might not be found in the Old Testament, but one can easily discover interreligious impacts in the life of Israel. Universalism is considered one of the significant themes present in the first part of the Bible.

The universalistic-wise/benevolent approach of the Israelites finds its culmination in the incarnate Word - Jesus of Nazareth.

### 2.1. Formation to Universalistic Approach from Creation

The dialogue of the Creator established a deeper trust in the creation.

The very Word of the Creator brought life into existence. In the narration of *Genesis* Chapter 3, one can see the breach of this constant dialogue.<sup>11</sup>

Looking from this perspective, formation to interreligious dialogue among the Israelites becomes a reality with the coexistence of other religious traditions. The prehistoric article of faith began thus: «A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous» (*Deut* 26,5).

The goal of choosing Israel as the chosen race was to reveal Himself to all nations through the instrumentality of Israel. The choice by God

sets Israel off from the world, but the prophets foretold the recognition of Israel's God by all nations and the universality of salvation (*Isa* 45,14h; 49, 6; *Zech* 14,16). This plan of God at times was misunderstood by the people of Israel and the difference between the Hebrews and Gentiles brought violence and non-acceptance of them. The expression in Hebrew *JHWH* articulates instantaneously the universality of God and His unique manifestation among His people.<sup>12</sup> The prophets would bring universalism into the attention of the people of Israel which would be gathering of nations around Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel (*Mic* 4,1-3; *Jer* 12, 15-16; *Zeph* 3, 9-10).

### **2.2. Motivated through the Wisdom Literature from Other Religions**

The wisdom literature of Israel is reflected as a merging dynamic of significant themes connected with everything under the sun. They depict the way of life on earth, productivity and paucity, existence and expiry, accomplishment and disaster, welfare and misery, affection, gender, getting old, etc. A deeper reading of these themes reflects the influence of other religious traditions of their neighbourhood. It is fascinating to note that the writings are not contaminated by exclusivism. Hence, it could be considered as an esteemed place of spiritual encounters of various religions.<sup>13</sup> Wisdom writings have helped

in the formation of Israel's outlook towards the creation, other human beings and above all in placing their dependence and reliance upon God.<sup>14</sup> The Egyptian and Mesopotamian writings<sup>15</sup> are the two important pieces of literature, that have influenced the wisdom literature of Israelites. Wisdom sayings are a result of the constant communication of the people of Israel with other religious traditions of their neighborhood.<sup>16</sup> One can find in the wisdom literature, «a strong interest in the order of the universe and its rules of cause and effect, the nature of time, the limits to human mastery of the world, and the ability to find God revealed in creation».<sup>17</sup> In other words, the participation of the people of Israel with other religions helped them to form an open-minded conception of the world.

### **2.3. Formation to be Benevolent in Words and Deeds**

The instructions of the prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah would encourage the people of Israel to appraise their approach towards the fragile section in the society: widow, the orphan, the foreigner (*Isa* 1,17; 3,14-15; 10,2; *Ezek* 22,7; *Zech* 7,10).<sup>18</sup> The power of God over the elected people, and through them to the other religious traditions over the world, is at the center of the preaching of Jesus as it was the theocratic model of the OT. The exilic period was both a period of individuality crisis for the Israelites as well as an experience at

times of the benevolence of Babylonian power. They unwrapped a new perspective of forbearance towards Israelites.<sup>19</sup> It could also be considered as «the phenomenon of a struggle for survival, which was a historical necessity at that time».<sup>20</sup>

The compassionate God in the account of prophet Jonah helps one to comprehend in-depth the benevolence of God to accept the whole humanity as children of God. The book closes with the succeeding words, «and should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?» (*Jon* 4,11).<sup>21</sup> The magnanimity of the God of Israel is extraordinary in the book of Jonah. Prophets always pointed out the perseverance in taking care of the foreigners among them.

From the relationship of Israelites to other religious traditions, one could summon up the following observations about the rapport with other religious traditions. In the first place, God's benevolence was shown to all, regardless of cultural and religious origins. In the second place, the foreigners did exercise an oracular function (e.g., Balaam) and a clerical role (e.g., Noah, and Melchizedek). Thirdly and the most important lesson, in God's plan, Israel became instrumental in the salvation for other nations.<sup>22</sup>

Development to interreligious dialogue can be well-defined as a process through which one is learning to respect the religious practices of the other. We find the realization of the OT in «something greater than Solomon is here!» (*Mt* 12,42) Jesus Christ, the master sage, is a prophet, priest and king.<sup>23</sup> Christ strengthened to magnify the universalistic attitude of the OT through his words and deeds.

### 3. Jesus of Nazareth and Inter-religious Relationships in NT

Jesus' dream of God's Reign was not fabricated upon religions but instituted on love (*agape*) and service (*diaconia*). His vision led all humankind to become brothers, sisters and friends (*Mk* 1,15; *Mt* 12, 46-50; *Mt* 20, 28; *Jn* 13, 1-17).<sup>24</sup> It displays how the first Christian community<sup>25</sup> was vivacious and prompted by the supremacy of Jesus' resurrection (*Phil* 3,10-11). Jesus in the first person and his disciples after his resurrection fulfill the will of the heavenly Father. He encouraged all his followers to construct an art of dialogue and he explained it through his very life.

#### 3.1. Jesus and Interreligious Relationships

The scholars of NT point out the goodness and understanding of God, as delight and contentment for a total transformation of values in the life and teaching of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> The words and deeds of Jesus<sup>27</sup> opened to the human race the key to the ambiguities

met by the people from the foundation of civilization (*Mt* 5,1-12). The admiration of the Magi realizes the prophecies of the respect paid by the nations to the God of Israel (*Num* 24,17; *Ps* 72,10-15; *Isa* 49,23). The Gospel of Luke expresses through the prophecy of Simeon (*Lk* 2, 27-32) the universal salvation brought by Jesus the Messiah. The denunciation of Jews and the call of the Gentiles to salvation are clearly expressed in the subsequent words, «[...] Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves are thrown out. Then, people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God» (*Lk* 13,28-29). Associating the people of Jesus' hometown, the pagan centurion and Canaanite mother remain as models of steadfast faith. It is also a call to esteem another person notwithstanding their religious traditions.<sup>28</sup> Jesus declares that he is the center of a religious conviction, re-established 'in spirit and truth' (*Jn* 4,24). The ample mercy of God through Jesus was acknowledged by people of all walks of life: Samaritans (*Jn* 4,1-42); Gentiles (*Jn* 4,46-54). In conclusion, the Word Incarnate goes yonder all boundaries of religious or ethnic predispositions to establish God's kingdom here on earth.<sup>29</sup>

### ***3.2. Interreligious Relationships in the Initial Christian Gatherings***

The Jews who paid attention to the words of Peter were from different

nationalities and vernaculars. The story of Philip and the eunuch of Ethiopia as well as the outburst of the Holy Spirit in Cornelius' house give us the first steps of the Christian community's relationships with other religions. The singularity of Pentecost has elements common to the speaking in tongues experienced by Cornelius (*Acts* 10,44-48) and by the disciples of John at Ephesus (*Acts* 19,6). On the whole, during the first years of the growth of Christianity, there was an unwillingness in relating to the non-Jewish religions. The openness to salvation to all was insistent in the primitive Church as the first followers imitated its Master as Philip goes to the Samaritan villages to preach (*Acts* 8,5-25).<sup>30</sup> The advent of Gentiles to Christianity helped them to understand the ulterior meaning that the salvation of Jesus is for the entire humanity.<sup>31</sup> Peter elucidates it through the vision he had (*Acts* 10,9-16) and in the house of the Roman Centurion Cornelius, he experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit coming down upon the entire household. In the vision, God himself showed Peter that he must accept the hospitality of the uncircumcised. In the Council of Jerusalem, we find Peter himself testifying that the gentiles are cleansed by faith (*Acts* 15,9). St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, had been extraordinary in relating with other religions. He took it to heart as the mission assigned to him by Jesus of Nazareth to preach the

Gospel to the Gentiles. His three major journeys disclose the profundity of his commitment to relating with other religions. He daringly chose to dedicate himself to the Gentiles. Consequently initiates a new epoch of dialogue between the Gentiles and newly formed Christian communities. The famous Athenian Speech (*Acts* 17,22-31), the second of the three major missionary speeches of Paul, represents the preaching to the Gentiles.<sup>32</sup>

Envisaging from the perspective of formation to interreligious dialogue, the first approach of the Apostle is considerably optimistic: «Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way» (*Acts* 17,22). People are called pursuers of God, and their ignorance is overlooked by God (*Acts* 17,30). Paul begins his dialogue on the ignorance of the Athenians.<sup>33</sup> The very method of interreligious dialogue is «to go beyond one's narrow linguistic limits and cultural boundaries and getting into other man's [person's] hermeneutical cycle».<sup>34</sup> Paul's gradual dialogue with Athenians about their religiosity and knowledge of God symbolises a positive attitude towards the surrounding religious world.<sup>35</sup> From the beginning of Christianity, persons from other religious traditions could follow the Christian faith and enter into communion with other faithful. Primitive Christian Community under the leadership of the apostles «discovered that even the name of Jesus (*Acts* 4,12) is neither a magical formula nor a legal code of God's action in

the world [...]».<sup>36</sup> Considering Paul, his religious commitment was always deep and radical due to his firm convictions.<sup>37</sup> After having reflected on the various texts of St. Paul, Joseph Pathrapankal would conclude the urgency of an «education at all levels» to advance a new theology of interreligious relationship.<sup>38</sup>

Hence it is clear that those who promote interreligious dialogue should be integrated persons possessing clear religious identity. They need to listen to one another, to deepen their knowledge and respect the other to collaborate «in projects of common concern».<sup>39</sup> Like the OT which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ NT also gives a sure foundation in the formation to interreligious dialogue. The teaching, preaching and healing ministry of Jesus gives ample opportunities to experience the essence of interreligious dialogue. This openness to respect and accept other religious traditions was continued by the Fathers of the Church in the first centuries.

#### **4. Patristic Attitude to Interreligious Relationships in First Centuries**

The Roman Empire did not tolerate happily the Christians in the first three centuries. Christians were attacked because of their strong attachment to the person of Jesus Christ, unfamiliarity and suspicion of the people around them, the allegations of the pagan intellectuals and the reactions of the civil authority.<sup>40</sup> The early Chris-

tian communities lived in a multi-religious environment. There were threats from the rulers and other religious authorities. The negation of Christians to worship the gods of ancestors and non-participation in the cult of the Emperor were seen as a danger to society. Romans would speak of *pax deorum* (the peace of gods), which can be interpreted as respect to all gods.<sup>41</sup> Religious tolerance always hides many non-religious reasons. It is not caused simply by the monotheistic matrix. It deals with some ways of evolution, of interaction and manifestation of the individual and social identity of the Christians, defined for the first time in religious and non-ethnic or linguistic-cultural terms. The Code of Theodosius affirms it.<sup>42</sup> Christians needed to relate with persons of other religious backgrounds. Confronting the Greek philosophy St. Justin, St. Clement of Alexandria and St. Irenaeus developed the doctrine of 'seed of the Word' that is hidden in the philosophical thinking of their times. They also found this teaching as the evangelical preparation for witnessing one's faith. The post-Biblical tradition also comprehends conflicting information. Negative judgements on the religious world of their time can easily be gleaned from the writings of the Fathers. Yet the early tradition shows outstanding frankness. Several Church Fathers take up the sapiential tradition reflected in the New Testament. In particular, writers of the second cen-

tury and the personalities of the first part of the third century like St. Justin, St. Irenaeus and St. Clement of Alexandria, either explicitly or equivalently, speak about the «seeds» sown by the Word of God in other religions.<sup>43</sup> St. Justin was the first one to reflect on the relationship of Christ to other religious traditions. While challenging the philosophers of his time, Justin brought the connection between the Word in Christ and the different degrees of participation of the other religious traditions in the same.<sup>44</sup> St. Justin<sup>45</sup> is one of the early Fathers of the Church who spoke about the *seeds of the Word*<sup>46</sup> found in all religions.<sup>47</sup> The reflections of St. Justin are centered on the word 'Participation.' All those who have recognized the Truth and lived uprightly are Christians, for and insofar as, all have partaken of, and lived according to, the Logos who is all Truth.<sup>48</sup> St. Irenaeus advanced the theology of Logos-revelation<sup>49</sup> on that of St. Justin. The economy of divine languages through the Logos is present from the beginning of creation and it reveals Father gradually.<sup>50</sup> According to St. Irenaeus, the first divine expression is the creation itself.<sup>51</sup> In his outlook, creation makes it possible to meet the Logos. Thus, every encounter becomes an answer of humankind to the Logos. The appreciation of the master generates in the human person openness to the truth of the other.<sup>52</sup> St. Irenaeus assumed that Logos was present to humankind



from the very foundation of time. St. Clement's writings also focus on Logos. The teaching that singles out him from others are that a fundamental understanding of God can be assimilated through the use of purpose (human reason) and it is available to all individuals. «There always was a natural manifestation of the one Almighty God among all right-thinking men».<sup>53</sup> He reflected the Jewish tradition as law and for the Greeks as philosophy both imminent from God. He calls the philosophy of Greek as a contract made by God with humankind, a stepping-stone to the teachings of Christ.<sup>54</sup> According to Clement, the philosophy is to guide the person to Christ. Once the person encountered Christ, He alone is the truth.<sup>55</sup> He underlines that faithful guides of persons are ancient philosophers who truly motivated by God, acted upon by the Logos, have taught the nations divine truths. St. Clement mentions the «Indians who obey the precepts of Buddha; whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to divine honours».<sup>56</sup> He estimates, «all that was said about nature by the ancients is said also by those who philosophise beyond Greece: some things by the Brahmins among the Indians, [...]».<sup>57</sup> From his writings, we can conclude that the partial Christian truth is found in other religious traditions. St. John Chrysostom requests all the faithful spread throughout the world to be in empathy with each other in

the Holy Spirit so that «he who dwells in Rome [would] know those in most distant parts to be his members».<sup>58</sup> St. Thomas, in his *Summa Theologiae*, pens about those who have not yet received the Gospel and yet are related to the People of God in various contexts.<sup>59</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 A.D.) situates it as whatever good or truth is initiated among them is considered by the Church to be a groundwork for the Gospel<sup>60</sup> and given by Him who educates all people that they may at length have life. God has empowered humankind to share in this law of His so that, under the gentle nature of divine wisdom, many may be able to arrive at a deeper and deeper knowledge of unalterable truth.<sup>61</sup> The early Fathers of the Church expanded their empathetic attachment to Christ with other religious traditions of their epochs. They were able to discover the *seeds of the Word* existing in various methods in other religious traditions. The environment around them became a spring of the presence of the creator. The acknowledgement of this divine expression climaxed in the later works of St. Augustine.<sup>62</sup> The biblical and patristic understanding of the formation to interreligious dialogue stimulates our reflections to the praxis of the same in the present context. The latter part of the article commits to the concrete action plans for the formation to interreligious dialogue in the pastoral contexts of the present realities.

## 5. Pastoral Implications of Formation to Interreligious Dialogue

Pragmatic interreligious dialogue is reliable only between persons who are trustworthy to their own particular religions.<sup>63</sup> Converging on the pastoral apprehensions means, each one has to come to dialogue with one's individual beliefs.<sup>64</sup> The various undertakings of the diocese and parish should help the faithful to make deeper their faith. In order to realize the approach of educating to Intra-religious Dialogue, the following tangible action strategies would be helpful.<sup>65</sup>

### 5.1. Systematic Parish Catechesis to Anchor One's own Faith

Catechesis can be well-defined as «the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the son of God, so that by believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ».<sup>66</sup> This growing of one's faith through directives helps the believer to cultivate the Word of God communicated to them at the first instance of initiation.<sup>67</sup> Catechesis is reflected as an intermediary through which the Catholic Church highlights her internal life as a community of believers and of her peripheral activity as a missionary Church.<sup>68</sup>

The existence of the Church in a pluralist context challenges itself to enter into dialogue with various religious

traditions. Hence, the ultimate scope of the catechesis should be widened «from the transmission of Christian doctrine to adherence to Christ, maturation of a mentality of faith, deeper penetration of the Christian message, initiation into the life of the Church, interpretation of life and events, education to ecumenism, and dialogue».<sup>69</sup> It should help the faithful to bear witness to ones' religious values and an inclination to work together with others for the improvement of humanity.<sup>70</sup> The weekly catechesis in the parish according to the age group and the preparation for the sacraments of initiation could become golden opportunities to enable the children to live a *dialogue of life* with other religious traditions.

### 5.2. Inspiring the Adolescents to Value Interreligious Dialogue

Continuous meetings of animation of adolescents would be helpful to shape a full-fledged personality in them. It is also a very constructive time to make them enter into a profound personal relationship with God and their neighbour. They should have sufficient occasions to come together and debate on the spiritual, societal, and mental concerns of life. The animator should be bendable to pose questions and to enable such encounters. They should be familiarized with the various activities of the parish and should be channelled in joint ventures like visiting families who are following other religious tradi-

tions, helping the sick people without considering the religion they belong to, people who are afflicted by natural calamities or other disasters, etc. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10,25-37) interpreted in the social encyclical *FT*,<sup>71</sup> is a suitable example to be contemplated upon.

The facilitator should generate liberal instances to work for peace and harmony. Characters who had a deep impact on society could be introduced to the young. They should be smoothed to create peace and harmony in their own locality among various religious traditions. One of the important approaches that the young should inculcate is the esteem for the other faiths. The inclination to mock the one who is different from the crowd needs to be educated in order to turn it into appreciation and affection. Creating openings of mutual collaboration with members of other religions of the locality would give enough chances to build self-reliance with them as well. With a closer look at the peer groups, one can easily realize that religious changes do not matter in their friendships. Therefore, the animator should have the courage to take issues and problems of daily life existential situations to dispute for better solutions. The facilitator should try to catalyse the cognitivity of the young towards higher points through patient and constant accompaniment helping them to accept one step above their own existing one, with the natural use of it in new cir-

cumstances.<sup>72</sup> The high moral standard could be culled out from the Biblical models. «Sunday school is the appropriate place to pose moral questions based on the Bible as are more informal religious education settings. [The life story of] Moses, Noah, Daniel, Zacchaeus, Paul, Timothy and numerous [other] Biblical characters and events contain moral problems for children to discuss».<sup>73</sup> The lives of saints and of honourable personalities originate around also could be made into a detailed exploration with the young people.

### ***5.3. Pastoral Ministry from an Interreligious Perspective***

The existence of the parish particularly in the Indian context is encircled by other religious traditions. Through associations and groups among parish communities help the members to become liberal and other-focused in their approaches and undertakings. The responsibility of backing oneself to the integral development of the locality is possible through these associations. In order to teach interreligious attitudes in oneself and in the forthcoming peers, these associations could take up undertakings inclusive of other religious traditions too. It could be educating a poor student of other religious traditions by the families of the parish. It might also provide basic needs like food, water, house, clothes, etc., for deserving persons in a particular locality.

The dialogue of life could be explained in detail and could suggest discussion among the members. Many of the prejudgements could be clarified through the question-answer method and the adults in turn could educate the younger generation. The position of the Catholic Church about the relationship with other religious traditions also could be explained to these groups. Inspire to reach out to the members of other religious traditions in times of natural disasters or sickness or other emergencies. Human dignity should not be acclimatized by the religious beliefs of the individual.

#### **5.4. Interreligious Method in Parish Endeavours**

A parish predominantly takes care of the Catholic inhabitants of a specific vicinity. But in a pluralistic society, all the families and individuals geographically further down a particular parish need to fall under the care of the parish. South India has had the practice of religious harmony for more than two thousand years.<sup>74</sup> The families in the parish should be educated to take good care of their neighbours of other religious traditions. The dialogue of life and actions could be put into practice in the parish territory. The parish community could be motivated to practice the Gospel values through visiting the sick and elderly of other religious traditions too. Economically poor families could

be supported by the various organizations of the parish. The education of the children from the particular area of the parish could be taken care of by the families in the parish. The members of the Parish could be invigorated to respect and to be compassionate during the celebrations of other religious traditions. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue* acknowledges that «sacred places put us in the presence of the Sacred Reality»,<sup>75</sup> and it gives a person an awareness of the existence of the Divine Reality in human form.<sup>76</sup> The parishioners should become aware of the *Guidelines* through various activities of the parish. The *Guidelines* also give the responsibility of working out the norms about the participation of the rituals of other religions on the local Ordinaries.<sup>77</sup> The faithful should become aware of those norms through adult catechesis and other pastoral circulars from respective authorities. The timidity of including the persons who deeply desire but find difficulty to receive the sacrament of Baptism could be clarified through the right understanding of harmony. Agreeing to John Chethimattam, the unity that Christ wants his Church to have «is a dynamic one, as that between Father and the Son, oneness in distinction».<sup>78</sup> The documents of the Second Vatican Council affirmed that all human beings are interrelated to the Lord and the Paschal Mystery in varying results.<sup>79</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The history of dialogue opens with the creation narrative of the universe. The salvation history reveals the account of the chosen people and their dialogue with numerous religious traditions around them.

The God-experience of Israel was exceptional and they shared various degrees of this experience with the people of other faiths. When it came to the time of the prophets, they introduced universal replications to bring all nations to respect the God of Israel. The Wisdom literature, the books of Job and Proverbs, etc., give emphasis to this saga of expressions and experiences. Israel was retold often by the leaders to respect the people of other faith. God's divine care for all people is more clearly explained in the book of Jonah. God is interested in all.

In the NT, we see that the Word of God that shaped the universe appropriated the human form in Jesus of Nazareth. The Word incarnate revealed through his living examples how to esteem and appreciate the people of other faith. The first Christian community shadowed the example of Jesus and lived in coherence with other religious traditions. The daring outreach of St. Paul, the Apostle of Gentiles, gave new implications on how to relate with people of other faith. He ventured beyond his own constricted linguistic and cultural borders to get into the background

of the other civilization so that he could discourse with them.

The first centuries also added to the deeper understanding of the reason for valuing the other religious traditions. The openness of St. Justin, in the words articulated as the *seeds of the Word* present in the other religions and St. Irenaeus, who initiated it as the universal presence of Logos was sustained by St. Clement of Alexandria.

Interreligious dialogue is pondered as «an attitude and an activity of committed followers of various religions who agree to meet and accept one another and work together for common ideals in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust».<sup>80</sup> Action guidelines are fashioned with planning and analysing the reality of the context. In the present situation of the world, among so many different people, cultures and religions, the life of the Church as a spiritual union assumes greater significance. The union of minds and hearts needs to foster greater closeness in collaboration with other religious traditions.<sup>81</sup>

The enthusiasm that motivates the formation to interreligious dialogue is the pursuit for the ultimate veracity. The outlines and the action policies support to realize this objective.

From the above pastoral implications, it is clear that Practical Theology is disposed to join its hands with other disciplines to make theological education more significant and farsighted, applicable and appropriate and above

all, authentic to the vocation received. Formation towards interreligious dialogue pervades and disseminates the cultural equilibrium of every society but it should also renovate it and help it to move forward with a civilisation of network, fairness and integrity. The research titled *Formation to interreligious dialogue* is an example of Practical Theology of collaboration and of confrontation with other religions and disciplines. It does not promulgate the exclusive claim for completeness of truth but to advance our search for the truth in a significant and effective way. It is a protracted ride we have initiated it with one step at a time.

## NOTE

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<sup>2</sup> FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter on the Fraternity and Social Friendship: *Fratelli Tutti (FT)*, 3 ottobre 2020 n. 271, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Cf EVERS George, *Trends and Developments in the Field of Interreligious Dialogue. Dialogue Gasping for Breath? Interreligious Dialogue at the Beginning of the New Millennium*, in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 11(2001)2, 235-249.

<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address of John Paul II on the Occasion of the Meeting with the Exponents of Non-Christian Religions*, Madras, 5 February 1986, 4, in <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/february/docu->

[ments/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19860205\\_religioni-non-cristiane.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/february/docu-ments/hf_jp-ii_spe_19860205_religioni-non-cristiane.html) (25-11-2021).

<sup>5</sup> Cf WITHERUP Ronald D., *The Word of God at Vatican II. Exploring DV*, Minnesota, Liturgical Press 2014, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Cf FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter: *Laudato si (LS)*, 24 May 2015, in *AAS* 107 (2015), 65 (872-873); 66 (873).

<sup>7</sup> Cf SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Dei Verbum (DV)*, 7 December 1965, in *AAS* 58(1966), 3(818).

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed reading of the reflections JOSE Josmy, *Formation to Interreligious Dialogue. A Theological Approach in Forming the Adolescents to Create a Culture of Dialogue*, Bengaluru, Dharmaram Publications 2021, 21-40.

<sup>9</sup> Cf KAKKANATTU Joy P., *Identity and Alterity in the Book of Jonah*, in *Journal of Dharma* 43(2018)4, 415.

<sup>10</sup> The book of *Deuteronomy* 10, 17-19 says: «For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt».

<sup>11</sup> Cf PATHRAPANKAL Joseph, *Text and Context. In Biblical Interpretation*, Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi 2009, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Cf BEAUCHAMP P., *L'uno e l'altro testamento. Saggio di lettura*, Brescia, Paideia 1985, 272.

<sup>13</sup> Cf LEGRAND Lucien, *The Bible on Culture. Belonging or Dissenting?* Bangalore, TPI 2008, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Cf MURPHY Roland E., *The Tree of Life. An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, Grand Rapids Michigan/Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing 1990, 125; cf MURPHY Roland E., *Wisdom Themes and Hypotheses in Israelite Wisdom. Theological and Literary Essays in Honour of Samuel Terrien*, edited by GAMMIE J. G. New York, Scholars Press for Union Theological Seminary 1978, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Cf MURPHY Roland E., *Wisdom*, in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by FREEDMAN

David Noel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2000, 1381.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Gammie, *Israelite Wisdom* 67-81.

<sup>17</sup> Murphy, *Wisdom*, EDB 1381.

<sup>18</sup> Cf Kakkannattu, *Identity and Alterity in the Book of Jonah*, 415.

<sup>19</sup> Cf *ivi* 418.

<sup>20</sup> Kalluveettil Paul, *Sojourner and Foreigner. Biblical Perspectives*, in *Asian Horizons* 8(2014)4, 689.

<sup>21</sup> Legrand Lucien, *Unity and Plurality. Mission in the Bible*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books 1990, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Cf O'Collins Gerald, *Salvation for All. God's Other Peoples*, Oxford, OUP 2008, 1-64.

<sup>23</sup> Cf O'Connor Kathleen M., *The Wisdom Literature*, Minnesota, Liturgical Press 1988, 187-189.

<sup>24</sup> Cf Kundukulam Vincent and Raj Irudaya, (eds.), *Indian Theological Association Statement 2018: Challenges of Religious Nationalism in India Today. A Theological Response*, in *Asian Horizons* 12 (2018)3, 520; FT 31.

<sup>25</sup> Cf *ivi* 521-522.

<sup>26</sup> Cf Jeremias Joachim, *New Testament Theology. The Proclamation of Jesus*, vol. 1. Translated by Bowden John, United Kingdom, Scribner 1971, 248.

<sup>27</sup> Cf *ivi* 31.

<sup>28</sup> Cf Patrumadathil Henry, *Two Great Models of Faith in Matthew: The Centurion and Canaanite Woman*, in *Bible Bhashyam* 39 (2013)1, 86.

<sup>29</sup> Cf Chennattu Rekha, *Mercy Revealed. Biblical Foundations*, in *Bible Bhashyam* 43(2016)3, 148-49.

<sup>30</sup> Cf Anderson Robert T., *Samaritan*, in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* 1159.

<sup>31</sup> Cf Chethimattam John, *Meaning and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue*, in *Jeevadhara* 65(1981)2, 320;

<sup>32</sup> Cf Legrand Lucien, *The Unknown God of Athens*, in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 5(1981)2, 222-223.

<sup>33</sup> Cf *ivi* 229.

<sup>34</sup> Chethimattam, *Meaning and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue* 330.

<sup>35</sup> Cf Legrand, *The Unknown God of Athens* 230.

<sup>36</sup> Cf Chethimattam, *Meaning and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue* 331.

<sup>37</sup> Cf Pathrapankal, *Text and Context. In Biblical Interpretation* 176.

<sup>38</sup> Cf *ivi* 197.

<sup>39</sup> Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission (DM)* 4 September 1984, in AAS 76(1984), 13(819).

<sup>40</sup> Cf Favaro Gaetano, *Il dialogo interreligioso*, Brescia, Editrice Queriniana 2002, 70-71.

<sup>41</sup> Cf *l. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Stroumsa Guy G., *La formazione dell'identità cristiana*. Brescia, Morcelliana 1999, 134-138.

«In A.D. 438 the Roman emperor Theodosius II (408-450) published, in a single volume (codex in Latin), the general laws of his Christian predecessors beginning with Constantine I (306-337). Roman law had always regulated the transfer of wealth from one generation to the next. The Theodosian Code reveals that, during the era when the empire was becoming Christian, emperors sought a greater share of that wealth for themselves and for the imperial Church through the control of wills and testaments». Harries Jill, *The Theodosian Code*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press 1993, in <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/law/law-divisions-and-codes/theodosian-code>, (22-03-2019).

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed reading: cf Jose, *Formation to Interreligious Dialogue* 35-44.

<sup>44</sup> Cf Justin Martyr. *The second apology*. Pages 294-304, in vol. 1 of ANF, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. Edited by Schaff Philip. Grand Rapids, MI, Christian Classics Ethereal Library 2001, 190-191. Henceforth referred as Justin, *The second apology*.

<sup>45</sup> Cf Justin, *The Second Apology* 8.1(ANF 1,191); cf Daniélou Jean, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press 1973, 41-42.

- <sup>46</sup> Cf JUSTIN, *The Second Apology* 13.2-3 (ANF 1,192-193).
- <sup>47</sup> Cf JUSTIN, *The Second Apology* 13.1 (ANF 1,193).
- <sup>48</sup> Cf SALDANHA C., *Divine Pedagogy. A Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions*, Roma, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano 1984, 179.
- <sup>49</sup> Cf IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies*. Pages 508-953 in vol. 1 of ANF, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Grand Rapids, MI, Christian Classics Ethereal Library 2001, 4. 20.6-7 (ANF 1,489-90). Henceforth referred as IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies*,
- <sup>50</sup> Cf IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* 3. 6.2 (ANF 1,419).
- <sup>51</sup> Cf IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* 4. 20.6-7 (ANF 1,489-490).
- <sup>52</sup> Cf IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* 2.6.1 (ANF 1,365-366).
- <sup>53</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA. *Stromata*, in vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885-1887. 10 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers 1994, 5.13 (ANF 2, 465). Henceforth referred as CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata*. DUPUIS Jacques, *The Cosmic Christ in the Early Fathers*, in *Indian Journal of Theology* 15(1966)2, 117.
- <sup>54</sup> «If, as a general rule, all things necessary and profitable to life come to us from God, philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks as a covenant peculiar to them, being, as it is, a stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ». CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* 6.8 (ANF 2, 495).
- <sup>55</sup> Cf CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* 5.5 (ANF 2, 451).
- <sup>56</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* 1.15 (ANF 2, 316).
- <sup>57</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* 1.15 (ANF 2, 317).
- <sup>58</sup> CHRYSOSTOM John, *Commentary on the Gospel of st. John*, in *Patrologia Graeca*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 59 vol. Paris 1862, 65 (PG 59, 361).
- <sup>59</sup> Cf AQUINAS Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 1-3. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York, Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1946-1948, III, q. 8, a. 3. Henceforth referred as AQUINAS, *Summa Theol.*
- <sup>60</sup> Cf EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Preparatio evangelica*, in *Patrologia Graeca*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 21 vol. Paris 1857, 1 (PG 21, 28ab).
- <sup>61</sup> Cf AQUINAS, *Summa Theol.* I-III, q. 91, a. 1; q. 93, a. 1-3.
- <sup>62</sup> Cf BURROWS William R., *Redemption and Dialogue. Reading RM and DP*, Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers 2009, 100.
- <sup>63</sup> Cf ABHISHIKTANANADA, *The Way of Dialogue*, in *Interreligious Dialogue*. Edited by HERBERT Jai Singh. Bangalore, CISRS 1967, 83-85.
- <sup>64</sup> Cf PANIKKAR Raimon, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, Bangalore, ATC 1984, 74.
- <sup>65</sup> For a detailed reading of the pastoral strategies and action plans are found: cf JOSE, *Formation to Interreligious Dialogue* 260-265.
- <sup>66</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Catechesis in Our Time (CT)*, 16 October 1979, in AAS 71(1979), 1(1277-1278).
- <sup>67</sup> Cf VAN Caster M., *The Structure of Catechesis*, New York, Herder & Herder 1965, 12.
- <sup>68</sup> Cf CT 15 (AAS 71, 1289).
- <sup>69</sup> CAVALLOTTO G., *Contemporary Catechesis from Pius X to Our Own Times*, in BONIVENTO Cesare, *going, teach...: Commentary on the Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae of John Paul II*. Boston, St. Paul Editions 1980, 185.
- <sup>70</sup> KURUVACHIRA Jose, *Pope John Paul II's Theology of Interreligious Dialogue*, in *Mission Today* 19 (2017)1, 11.
- <sup>71</sup> Cf FT 56-86.
- <sup>72</sup> KOHLBERG L. - TURIEL E., *Moral Development and Moral Education*, in *Psychology and Educational Practice*. Edited by BECK C.- Sullivan E., Glenview III, Scott Foresman 1971, 450-452.
- <sup>73</sup> LEE Michael James, *How to Teach. Foundations, Processes, Procedures*, in *Handbook of Children's Religious Education*. Edited by RATCLIFF D. E. Birmingham, Religious Education Press 1992, 152-223.



<sup>74</sup> NEHRU Jawaharlal, *The Unity of India*, in *Foreign Affairs* 16(1938)2, 235-236.

<sup>75</sup> CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF INDIA COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE AND ECUMENISM, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, Delhi, CBCI Centre 1989, 98. Henceforth referred as CBCI, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*.

<sup>76</sup> Cf CBCI, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue* 102.

<sup>77</sup> Cf *ivi* 100.

<sup>78</sup> Cf CHETHIMATTAM John, *The Universal Sacrificial Ethos and Communicatio in Sacris*, in *Sharing Worship*. Edited by PUTHANANGADY Paul, Bangalore, NBCLC 1988, 187.

<sup>79</sup> Cf SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Light of the Nations (LG)*, 21 November 1964, in *AAS* 57 (1965), 16 (20); *Id.*, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Joy and Hope (GS)*, 7 December 1965, in *AAS* 58(1966), 22(1042-44).

<sup>80</sup> CBCI, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue* 34.

<sup>81</sup> Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. The Church in Asia (EA)*, 6 November 1999, in *AAS* 92 (1999), 24 (489).