

## ACCEPTING DIVERSITY FROM CHRISTIAN VIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*Accepting and treating diversity in a friendly manner is essential from a Christian perspective. If nowadays progress is being seen in terms of accepting, respecting and treating each other in a friendly manner, then this cannot be separated from the contribution of faith and religious ethical values adopted by believers. In the context of this paper, the author limits himself to the contribution of the Christian religion. For followers of Christ, being friendly to diversity whether due to physical differences, skin color, social status, gender, ethnicity, religion or culture has historical and intercultural theological aspects.*

### KEYWORDS

Diversity - Old Testament - New Testament - intercultural theology



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## INTRODUCTION

The world today is characterized by an increasingly multicultural society context. There are many differences between us. These differences are an undeniable fact. In this multicultural and multireligious era, all differences require recognition, acceptance and treatment with the same respect and respect from others. But where exactly is diversity? In what ways is diversity evident as *de facto*?

Our question was well answered by Carmelo Dotolo, permanent lecturer in theology of religions at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. In his book, “Christianity, Hospitality and Ethos”, the author presents diversity as having three aspects.

Firstly, there is diversity regarding the point of view of life or philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Multiple points of view allow for differences of opinion. It often happens that different points of view

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. DOTOLO, *Cristianesimo e interculturalità: dialogo, ospitalità, ethos*, Assisi, Cittadella, 2011, p. 22.

can turn into a source of conflict and an arena for division. In an intercultural perspective, namely a view that promotes an inclusive understanding of others, the difference in ways of seeing is actually an opportunity to interact, have dialogue, exchange ideas and views openly for the sake of discovering the truth. of life. Man cannot live without truth. Human life requires truths born from the exchange of opinions or in the Indonesian context, deliberation for consensus. The truth of life is actually the fruit of listening to one another. So dialogue is necessary so that people do not have an absolutely one-sided view of truth or a one-way point of view. The truth of the dialogue is accepted as a gift that comes from others, from Above, from God.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, there is cultural diversity.<sup>3</sup> According to cultural anthropology, culture is never understood singly but plurally. This means that there is no longer a single or dominant culture in the world. In the world there are many cultures and each culture is valuable, just as humans are the creators and carriers of culture itself. Such understanding enables Christians to grow in an intercultural mentality as a calling. Living it is thus revealed in the service of recognizing, accepting, welcoming and appreciating diversity regardless of socio-cultural background, social status, gender and skin color. In terms of language, humans or humanity, cultural carriers and transmitters are never defined singly but plurally. From this point of view, anthropologists in our time who are marked by the struggle for upholding human rights emphasize the need for the right to be different. Difference is actually a right and therefore requires respect, recognition and acceptance.

Thirdly, there is also religious diversity.<sup>4</sup> In terms of language, the term religion is not interpreted singly but also plurally. This means that the word religion always refers to and includes many, other than ourselves. This is important so that people do not fall into narrow fundamentalism, asserting and exaggerating their religious identity and demeaning others. Each religion is unique and irreplaceable. However, just as with culture, there is no religion that is pure, free of influence in the context of a world of rapid interplay.

It should be noted that the diversity of religions with various symbols, languages, rites and theology symbolically represents the meaning of others, as well as helping to interpret the role of identity, which is essentially open and not closed, dynamic and not static. Faith with an open identity means acknowledging the presence of others and considering their contribution whether as followers of Islam, Hinduism/Buddhism or other religions, as well as with other secular beliefs for the development of faith and universal humanity.

Just as every religion is different but does contain some things commonly held by others, so identity is always understood in a plural manner. No human being has a single identity. In a unique and irreplaceable identity, the old slogan reminds us, that humans are not an island.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing and accepting identity as plural and not singular, dynamic and not static is an absolute requirement for not asserting oneself and one's own culture, but rather starting to learn to acknowledge and accept the existence of the other, to have a dialogue with the other, and to take into account and rely on the other for the good of living together.

In the face of this reality, it is more than just a need to strive for. For Christians, brotherhood in diversity is a calling and mission. The multicultural reality of the Indonesian nation is a fertile land or mission field for Christ's disciples to be witnesses of brotherhood, unity and oneness without falling into uniformity or the danger of uniformity, but by continuing to accept and appreciate diversity. This article aims to convince Christians in the multicultural

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jose KURUVACHIRA, *Dialogo interreligioso*, Roma, LAS, 2015, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. DONNE, *No man is an island*, London, Souvenir Press, 1988. According to the author, every human being is a part of the continent, of the whole... of the universal humanity. This same statement was once quoted by Thomas Merton to mean that every person, for the sake of the love of God who lives and works through each person, is not alone but is an integral part of universal humanity. cf. T. MERTON, *Nessun uomo un'isola*, Milano, Garzanti, 1998.

era that the construction of an ever more human and inclusive world cannot be done without the promotion of the ethical and religious values offered by religions. That is why in this research will be shown the characters of the Bible as examples of interaction, dialogue and reciprocity for today's disciples of Christ to live side by side in diversity as a calling or mission.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method. The type of data used in this study is qualitative data, which is categorized into two types, namely primary data and secondary data (Lubis & Siregar, 2021). Sources of data obtained through library research techniques (library study) which refers to sources available both online and offline such as: scientific journals, books and news sourced from trusted sources. These sources are collected based on discussion and linked from one information to another. Data collection techniques used in this study were observation, interviews and research. This data is analyzed and then conclusions are drawn.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Diversity In The Old Testament

For the Israelites, welcoming and being friendly to strangers was a painful but dynamic experience at the same time. They started with a fear and mistrust of foreign nations and foreigners. Then they turned that fear into a virtue or awareness of mission in the midst of foreigners. This is certainly not something that spontaneously or automatically happened. It was a long process that was trained, developed, refined and promoted with a lot of attention, empathy, according to their traditions. Here, it is important to study the deepest roots of tradition which became the reference point for them to grow in a friendly attitude towards differences. For that purpose, let us now deepen the anthropological-theological understanding of the Exodus event, which was shared by the chosen people as a nation.

From a cultural point of view, the Exodus has one universal anthropological meaning. That is, it becomes the prototype of any liberation movement that allows people to make decisions responsibly. This is a prerequisite for recognizing the freedom of others, including freedom of religion. According to the rules of the Sabbath, foreigners, servants and even domestic animals had the right to rest. One sign of overall environmental restoration.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the experience of the same Exodus, can be interpreted as an adventure, full of uncertainty. An adventure that urges people to face new cultural realities, to plan for a new future, even though it creates fear and demands hard work. It was this experience that compelled Moses to face the reality and make a choice: when he descended into the midst of his enslaved brethren, he could study with bitterness the difficulties of the plan of deliverance among them. Or he could choose to flee to Midian,<sup>7</sup> where he found an ally, as evidenced by his marriage to Zipporah and his bond with his father-in-law Jethro.<sup>8</sup>

From this point of view, the book of Exodus, according to Marcello Milani, becomes very significant for "liberation theology" to interpret the creation story, eschatologically and historically. Referring to these two aspects, the biblical scholars say firstly, that the creation story is placed as a ministry of liberation in history, in a spirit of solidarity with all people, without exception. Secondly, the story of creation is also a proclamation of a liberation, as a mere grace that comes from without, from God, and is not the result of purely human efforts

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. MILANI, *L'incontro con l'altro nella Bibbia, una lettura in prospettiva interculturale e interreligiosa*, Padova, Edizione Messaggero, 2017, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Exodus, 2, 21-22

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

(Marxism). Thirdly, liberation does not appear as an absolute value in itself, but refers to life, to interpersonal and human relationships, to live well in the present, to remain ready to face all, towards the promise of the fulfillment of the new heaven and earth, even in the midst of suffering, and misfortune.<sup>9</sup>

Theologically, the Exodus is not just a place and a culture of slavery that needs liberation. The existence of a chosen nation in a foreign land and its aspect of pilgrimage to the promised land is a symbol of faith which is called to live always in encounter, confrontation with others, continuous self-purification with other cultures and to face difficulties to learn to face new things. Therefore, this is a reminder not only of the importance of inculturation, namely the process of incarnating faith in a particular culture, but also of intercultural interactions which are understood as absorbing and spreading between all cultures, cross-border encounters and conflict management. The message is that the nature of faith goes far beyond all formulas or formal teachings.<sup>10</sup>

Over the centuries, the maturity of the faith of the elect grows in exile, through self-purification and in suffering. This is another reason that underlies their development of hospitality and acceptance of strangers and those who are different from themselves. The proof, in the book of Deuteronomy we know that foreigners who come and stay in the land will always be accepted and well integrated.<sup>11</sup>

Accepting and loving strangers is seen as imitating God's own attitude. There appears here a parallel relationship between the Israelites' concepts of God and of foreigners.<sup>12</sup> The message is very clear, namely, if God loves the weak, orphans, widows, strangers, consequently, as His followers, we must also accept, love and side with them.

As for the fact that God's chosen people's faith is lived concretely in their relationships with strangers, there is one other thing that should not be ignored. To grow in acceptance and hospitality towards those who are strangers and different from them, the Israelites always remember that their ancestors had also been foreigners and pilgrims. They remembered and learned from the experiences of their ancestor Abraham. He himself was aware and recognized himself as a foreigner in the land of the people, who had left his land to go and settle in Canaan, the promised land. When his wife Sara died, it was not so easy for him to get a piece of land to bury his wife and because of that he had to ask for help.<sup>13</sup>

The elect's awareness of acceptance of foreigners as a virtue also continued to grow during the time of King David. In his prayers the king recognized himself as a foreigner and a pilgrim. But by using the plural form in his prayers, the king wanted to represent all his people.<sup>14</sup> Everyone is on a pilgrimage to the same God. Being a stranger in this view is everyone's situation, without exception, marked by distress and uncertainty. This common destiny must be the basis for accepting and living together with those who are different from us.

Departing from this awareness, the prophet Ezekiel also dared to speak about the rights of foreigners to citizenship and inheritance. This applies to everyone, just like any other Israelite.<sup>15</sup> We also find the figure of this foreigner in several women who managed to become an integral part of the chosen people, until later becoming the ancestors of Jesus, God who became human.<sup>16</sup> About this we know Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba as told by Matthew in the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. MILANI, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. GAHUNGU, *L'interculturalità. Una necessità nella formazione vocazionale oggi*, Roma, LAS, 2017, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Genesis, 23,4.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 1 Chronicles 29:15.

<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel, 47,22-23.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. GAHUNGU, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

genealogy of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> It also becomes clear from this how difficult it is to find a population that is pure, without the contact, influence and contamination of diversity.

Life on the move becomes an opportunity for foreigners, newcomers or those who are different to mingle in new human communities. Gradually, the chosen nation will understand that what is meant by foreigners or who is different can involve anyone, including themselves.<sup>18</sup>

The key to reading and interpreting Scripture interculturally will have a tremendous impact on the New Testament. In particular, with an intercultural perspective, the theme of the hidden motivations behind an open, friendly and accepting attitude in the New Testament church will be deepened.

## 2. Diversity In The New Testament

In this section, we will explore specifically the deepest motivations for accepting and welcoming diversity according to the New Testament. The central figure who will be very influential in the growth of this attitude is Jesus himself. After Jesus and His disciples, from the point of view of their Christian calling, followers of Christ are called to be more open and inclusive of diversity. Different from the past, in this multicultural era, Christians are called to be friendly, accepting and fraternal with differences wherever and whenever they are.

The basis for this attitude is the central role of Jesus Christ, the One sent by the Father to unite in Himself differences and divisions. This was accomplished through the events of His passion, death and resurrection. A church that follows the Lord who came to save everyone, can do nothing but follow the example of its Master. He is the cornerstone, the answer to why it is necessary to live in diversity, by loving all people without limits so that no one is lost but has eternal life.<sup>19</sup> Here, the author explores these important elements one by one.

### 2.1. Christ the Cornerstone

The central role of Christ, the initiator of the new humanity, is described repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments by the term “cornerstone” or «ακρογωνιαίος» in Greek according to the prophet Isaiah.<sup>20</sup> According to tradition, it is seen in the metaphor of the fundamental “cornerstone” which unites the two walls, strengthening the entire building. This term has been used in the Old Testament hyperbolically related to the Israelites.<sup>21</sup>

In the Psalms, the stone despised by the Israelites, which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. According to the Book of Isaiah, in the New Testament, this passage is applied to Christ. If the cornerstone is indeed the foundation stone, these passages prove that Christ, though rejected by man, was chosen by God as the cornerstone of the new heavenly sanctuary, of God's new people in Christ. From the discarded stone to the most important stone: the “cornerstone”, which acts as a link between two walls.<sup>22</sup>

That is why the apostle Peter expressed himself in this way before the new Israel, the Jews and the Gentiles: “You who were not God's people, but are now His people, who were not loved but now have mercy.”<sup>23</sup>

The unifying foundation is Christ who unites the two. It is the irreplaceable foundation in building the new Israel.<sup>24</sup> This is a statement deeply ingrained in the soul of the apostle Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians: “For no other foundation can be laid than that which has been laid, namely, Jesus Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Matthew 1, 3.5.6

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Isaiah 28,16.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jude. 20,2; 1 Sam 14,38; Is, 19, 13; Zc 10,4.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Psalms 118, 22-23.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Pieter 2,10.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. F. ASENSIO, *Gesù Cristo: Profezia e Vangelo*, Romae, Gregoriana, 1971, p. 159.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor 3,11.

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Compared to the ancient world, the novelty that Jesus, the cornerstone, offers us will no longer refer to the rule of Moses, not even to Jerusalem as a fixed point of orientation. On the other hand, the reference to the new humanity is the precepts, which were not engraved by Jesus on stone tablets, or written on paper with ink, but were imprinted on the souls of His disciples. So in Jesus Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled. The characteristics of the New Testament are revealed.<sup>26</sup>

At this point we can say that the Bible places before us a great message and helps us understand that Jesus' death on the cross broke all boundaries and made us new members of God's people. He is the one who unites the human family which is torn apart and separated by walls of separation in love. This new people of God, as Saint John Paul II explained, needed: "An initiative of life-giving love, beginning with the heavenly Father and culminating in Jesus Christ, extends and spreads to universal dimensions, to involve all humanity in the new creation".<sup>27</sup>

The end goal is exactly the same, namely living together in harmony, as expressed by the apostle Paul in his letter to the people in Galatia: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free man, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>28</sup> Paul recalled the many divisions that could be overcome by the power of baptism. In this new people of God, Saint Augustine especially admired aspects of communion and universality. Thanks to the blood of Christ, in such a union there is only one people of God.<sup>29</sup>

With Christ, indeed, the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, has strengthened two walls: the Jew and the Gentile, coming from the opposite direction. If in Christ two walls coming from opposite directions are brought together without excluding any contradiction, the consequence is that we no longer pay attention to the distance traveled by the two who come from afar, but to their proximity to one another.<sup>30</sup>

With regard to intercultural dialogue, it can be said that only in the light of Christ's death and resurrection can one grow in unity with diversity and have the courage to look at others, not with fear and suspicion. In an inclusive view, being different is no longer a threat. In the context of living together, diversity is a strength, resource and opportunity that enriches each other. In Christ who died and rose, the view must be placed not on what divides, but on what unites.

### 2.2. Christological motivation

Christ himself is the core reason for Christians to behave and have different attitudes in accepting and living side by side with diversity. In Jesus, God is on the side of humanity, but he is also an outsider.<sup>31</sup> He came into the world and became «like us in every way, except in sin».<sup>32</sup> His poverty was evident from His birth to His death on the cross. His unusual birth and death reveal clearly how God himself became a stranger in the midst of his creatures.

The evangelist Luke explains from the very beginning of his Gospel the reality of God being a stranger. The evangelist writes: «He wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Jeremiah, 31,31-33.

<sup>27</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II ai Partecipanti al Convegno Internazionale del Movimento «Umanità Nuova», Domenica, 20 marzo 1983*, dalam «vatican.va» <(8.12.2017) [https://w2.vatican.va/con-tent/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1983/march/-documents/-hf\\_j-pii\\_spe\\_19830320\\_u-mani-ta-nuova.html](https://w2.vatican.va/con-tent/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1983/march/-documents/-hf_j-pii_spe_19830320_u-mani-ta-nuova.html)> , hlm.1.

<sup>28</sup> Galatians, 3,28.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. C. BORGOGNO (ed.), *Agostino d'Ipbona, Commento ai Salmi di Lode, prima parte*, Milano, Paoline, 1986, p. 18

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Cf. GAHUNGU, *op.cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>32</sup> Hebrews, 4,15.

a lowly manger, for there was no room for them in the inn».<sup>33</sup>

Matthew dramatically relates how His life ended: “Around three o'clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice: «Eli, Eli, lemà sabactàni?»», which means: «My God, O my God, why have you forsaken me?».<sup>34</sup> But for John the Evangelist, "the unknown Jesus will save all people and draw them to Him".<sup>35</sup>

One step further and radically from Jesus in his dealings with strangers was to identify himself with them. It is mentioned in Matthew 25, in the final judgment episode, where Jesus declares that whoever accepts and welcomes a foreigner will receive and welcome Himself.<sup>36</sup>

So much is said about the text of Deuteronomy (God loves strangers and you must imitate Him). In this light, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini emphasized that welcoming a stranger (anyone different from us) is not an easy and simple matter, which will be rewarded by God, but rather a graceful opportunity to establish a personal relationship with Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

The Christological reasons for the welcome were affirmed by the church itself and inspired by the Bible. The liturgy defines it seriously when it speaks of the human body of Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, through which "the invisible Word appears in our flesh."<sup>38</sup>

The fathers of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council also underlined the radical nature of the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, asserting: “The Son of God .... works with human hands, thinks with human minds, acts with human wills, He loves with human hearts. Born of the Virgin Mary, He truly became one of us, like us in every way except sin.”<sup>39</sup> Jesus Christ is the model and soul of human love. This must be mutual. No one can consider oneself and one's own culture better than another in living brotherly love. So it takes humility to wash each other's feet, through simplicity of life, unity and fellowship of life.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3. Charismatic motivation

Exploring this motivation, it should be immediately explained here that Christian hospitality is not an imitation of the human, but because of the charismatic dimension that underlies it. The urge to accept differences comes from: *ex Caritate Dei et Christi* - from the love of God the Father and from the example of the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup>

To grow and develop in this dimension, according to Saint Paul, it is important to have an awareness of God the Father and the feelings of Christ himself. Loving acceptance is present in Saint Paul's teaching on love. "Strive to obtain the most excellent gifts,"<sup>42</sup> the apostle of the nations taught. In chapter 13 of the same letter he asserts that the greatest charism is love. Receiving and welcoming strangers is one of the manifestations of love, which is the greatest law for Christians: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered those who asked Him about the first and foremost commandment.

Jesus summarized the Laws and teachings of the Prophets in what is called the golden rule: "Whatever you want people to do to you, do it to them also."<sup>44</sup> Love, a gift higher than any other, is lived for all, including strangers, as is emphasized in the parable of the good

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<sup>33</sup> Luke, 2,7.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew, 27,46.

<sup>35</sup> John, 12,32.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. ACCANFORA (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 1743.

<sup>38</sup> CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Messale romano*, Città del Vaticano, LEV, 1984<sup>2</sup>, p. 317.

<sup>39</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, The pastoral Constitution on the Church in the contemporary world *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. John, 13.

<sup>41</sup> MILANI, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians, 12,31.

<sup>43</sup> Mark 12,31

<sup>44</sup> Matthew, 7, 12.

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Samaritan. He, considered a foreigner by the Jews, did not hesitate to help an injured Jew who was on the side of the road. His attitude transcends racial and religious boundaries. "He approaches", with loving charisma. He made himself a model to follow in cultivating a friendly attitude towards foreigners.<sup>45</sup>

Through the parable of the good Samaritan,<sup>46</sup> Jesus identified himself with a stranger, whom he saw as a fellow human being who is accepted and welcomed with love, and helped in his time of need, regardless of national, ethnic, creed and cultural origin.

This love for neighbor is not lived exclusively, that is, it is limited to brothers and sisters according to blood relations: "Love one another as I have loved you".<sup>47</sup> The love of Christ is the measure as well as the motivation for mutual love within, among the disciples of Christ. The inward experience of love grows openly outward as a witness to others beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, religion and color. Jesus radically said: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you",<sup>48</sup> which is a model of unlimited and inclusive love for God who, says the Bible: "raises the sun for evil and good, and sends rain for those who are evil." right and unjust".<sup>49</sup> Christ made it concrete on the cross. He gave Himself not for the few who followed Him but for all. He prayed for those who mocked and crucified Him: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing".<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, for Jesus, what is most important is humanity and their salvation and it does not depend on their origin and culture. The radicality of God's love for humans of all races and ethnicities, is not something from the past, or something abstract, but relates to the present of believers who proclaim and witness the same love in a concrete way.

One of the many warriors of faith and love for adversaries and foes was Martin Luther King. He wrote:

To our most formidable foes we say: we will meet your ability to inflict suffering with our ability to endure suffering; we will face your physical strength with our fortitude. Do whatever you want, and we will continue to love you. With heart and soul, we will not obey your unjust laws, for not cooperating with evil is a moral obligation no less than cooperating with good. Throw us in jail, then we will still love you. Drop bombs on our homes and threaten our children and grandchildren, and we will still love you. Send hooded assassins to our homes in the middle of the night, beat us and leave us half to death, then we will love you again. But let you know that we will win you over with our patience to suffer. One day, we will win freedom, but not only for ourselves: we will captivate your hearts and consciences so much that sooner or later we will conquer you, and our victory will be a double victory.<sup>51</sup>

Like this American pastor, every Christian in every time and place is called to follow the example of Jesus the Lord, in a radical way of love, which transcends the boundaries of race, religion, culture, gender and color. Jesus said: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. If you love those who love you, what is your reward? Didn't the tax collector do the same? Don't people who don't know God do the same? And if you only greet your brothers, what is more than what other people do? Therefore you must be perfect, just as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."<sup>52</sup> The divisions between people make life in diversity difficult. The disciples of Jesus are called to penetrate the walls of separation, in order to arrive at the practice of love for enemies.

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. GAHUNGU, *op.cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Luke 10, 25-37.

<sup>47</sup> John 15, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew 5, 44// Luke 6,12.

<sup>49</sup> Mt. 5, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Luke, 23, 34

<sup>51</sup> M. LUTHER KING, *La forza di amare*, Torino, Sei, 1963.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 5, 44.46-48.



#### 2.4. Eschatological motivation

Christian anthropology shows that the end of the human pilgrimage in this mortal world is directed to the immortal, namely eternal life. The pilgrimage on earth does not end here on this earth but will continue after death. In this view, believers in Christ are pilgrims and strangers in this world, i.e. those who are on their way to the eternal dwelling or city: "For here we do not have a fixed city, but we seek the city that is to come",<sup>53</sup> heavenly Jerusalem.

Departing from this Christian view of eternal life, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini explained the eschatological understanding of being friendly to strangers, guests or those who are different according to the Old Testament Scriptures. The important thing that Martini does is draw our attention to the Old Testament. What he describes here has historical basis. Among other things, Martini emphasized that just as Israel's own experience was once migrants and foreigners in Egypt, so that experience was a good teacher to always be friendly, accepting, compassionate and in solidarity with foreigners.<sup>54</sup>

The experience experienced by the chosen people in exile should therefore not be covered up, as if it were a disgrace to the nation. On the contrary, according to biblical experts Cardinal Martini, it has turned into a positive value and even has become a mission and a call to acknowledge, accept, welcome and coexist with diversity. Drawing on the experience of the chosen people in the Old Testament, the same author calls Christians pilgrims, travelers and strangers on earth.<sup>55</sup> He urges us to have, maintain and cultivate the same attitude towards strangers and those who are different from us.

Knowing and acknowledging the pilgrim in the mortal world towards an immortal destination is an important condition for acknowledging, accepting, welcoming others and living together in an atmosphere of brotherhood. Regarding this attitude, Cardinal Martini wrote: "Like Israel in the past, (...) so are Christians in every place and time, recognizing themselves as pilgrims in this transient world. Christians are called to understand suffering and need, foreigners, pilgrims and travelers in regard to the earthly homeland".<sup>56</sup>

Having an eschatological view to see the history of mankind is oriented and focused on fulfillment, according to the Cardinal from Milan, is an absolute requirement for Christians to grow in a spirit of solidarity with one another and accept each other's differences. The Cardinal himself underlined this aspect, quoting the words of a Christian in the early centuries of Christianity who described the fate of Christians as "pilgrims" in these beautiful words: "Christians inhabit their land, partake in all things as citizens, but they bear all things as foreigners. Every foreign land is their homeland and every homeland is their foreign land".<sup>57</sup> This does not necessarily mean that the other outside is unimportant. On the other hand, it is a connecting bridge to reach heaven together, without excluding anyone. And this is only possible if Christians know and realize that they are on a pilgrimage to the eternal city which God Himself prepared not only for them but for all people. For Christians, the universality of salvation from God is the ultimate goal as well as a motivator and animator of a solid and involved life to realize the work of salvation from this world.

### 3. From Intercultural Theological Perspective

The friendly attitude towards diversity in Christianity can be traced and understood from the point of view of intercultural theology. The universal aspect of the Christian faith is revealed through local-based theological reflections, in its contexts and cultures. Missiology studies with this new perspective began with the German Academy of Missiology. According to Henning

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<sup>53</sup> Hebrews, 13,14; 11,10-16

<sup>54</sup> Cf. ACCANFORA (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 1744.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 1744-1745.

Wrogemann, theology with an intercultural perspective complements missiological studies with a special emphasis on intercultural dialogue.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, according to Walter J. Hollenweger, a pioneer of intercultural theology, as quoted by Francis-Vincent Anthony, intercultural theology emphasizes the use of cultural instruments for theology. Creative and relevant theology is nothing but the harmonious integration of local culture into the universal Church with all its broader perspectives. Through two-way integration, people move away from a view that tends to absolute only one way of living and expressing personal faith. Instead they will come to the realization that there are various ways to live the faith so that respect, respect and reckoning for each other in diversity can be developed.<sup>59</sup>

The pioneers of theology in this multicultural era argue that intercultural dialogue between Christians inside (*ad intra*) and with non-Christians, outwards (*ad extra*) has two benefits. On the one hand, a similar dialogue will strengthen the unity within the Church of Christ while maintaining respect for differences. On the other hand, the same thing encourages interaction and socio-cultural integration reciprocally and contributes to the development of Christian faith as well as cultural wealth and social welfare.<sup>60</sup>

In the context of dialogue with diversity, UNESCO emphasizes that no culture in the world is pure. This means that it has never been touched and is not influenced by other cultures. On the other hand, just like humans, creators, carriers and disseminators of cultural values themselves, all cultures are always contaminated, transmitting values and mingling with one another.<sup>61</sup> In this context, the theme of inculturation of faith in an intercultural perspective becomes very relevant. That is, when evangelical values blend with local cultural values and purify them, a critical and creative process of inculturation is realized.<sup>62</sup> Such a process cannot be equated with the process of cultural adaptation or syncretism efforts. The word of God itself, according to Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, has a deep intercultural character. "The word is able to encounter various cultures and in turn allows them to meet one another."<sup>63</sup>

**a. Diversity: space for theology**

In the light of intercultural theology, diversity is actually a space for intercultural theology. An approach that defines differences as *kairos*, a graceful opportunity for believers to grow in respect, in reckoning with and respecting differences, having compassion for one another. In this perspective, personal, cultural and religious identity is not actually a dividing wall but a connecting bridge to reach others, who are different from us, whether because of religion, culture, skin color, gender and social status.

All of the above diversity reminds us of two things. On the one hand, our awareness of recognition, acceptance and appreciation of others, who are different from us continues to grow rapidly. Historically, collective awareness of a recognition of others, whether because of

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<sup>58</sup> Henning WROGEMANN, *Intercultural theology*, vol. 1 - *Intercultural Hermeneutics (Missiological Engagement Series)*, Downers Grove, Illinois, IVP Academic, Intervarsity Press, 2018, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Walter J. HOLLENWEGER, *Intercultural theology*, dalam *Theological Renewal* 10 (1978) 2-14, or F-V. ANTHONY, "Interculturalità: prospettiva teologico-pratica", p. 174.

<sup>60</sup> In this point of view, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious dialogue set out 12 principles and six recommendations for an attitude to live together in diversity, namely: studying, building, encouraging Christians to deepen their religious identity and faith and their knowledge of other religions, work at the same time, urged the government to guarantee freedom of religion and prayer. cf. DOCUMENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL CONCERNING INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, took place in Bangkok, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. UNESCO World Report (2009), *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. ANTHONY, *op.cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>63</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 Februari 2007) 78: AAS 99 (2007), 165.

religion, culture, race and color, was revealed first through the Jerusalem Council, then the Council in the modern era known as Vatican II. In both historical moments, but more prominently in the Council which is also known as ecumenical because of that universality the Church not only recognizes the identity of others, but also encourages and promotes dialogue with diversity through its official documents to this day.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, more than ever before, born in our time the desire to meet, interact, live side by side, need each other, give and receive in diversity. The need for the latter is growing rapidly today thanks to advances in the field of communication and information technology. It is undeniable that in this era marked by digitalization or digital technology, diversity will meet each other, mingle with each other, infect each other, influence and enrich each other reciprocally.

**b. Need intercultural hermeneutics**

The process of inculturation in the perspective of intercultural dialogue requires a hermeneutics or science of interpretation of sacred texts that allows the growth of understanding of diversity and dialogue with differences. The basis is that the Bible itself was born in an intercultural context, in a plural and different reality. It is the product of a live and continuous dialogue between the sacred writers and the differences around them. Therefore, the Bible expert in Rome, professor and Salesian priest Mario Cimosà has spoken of the need for a science of interpretation that allows Christians to open up and have a dialogue with diversity. Strictly speaking, if we want to go in depth to understand the messages of the Bible, it is inevitable that a hermeneutic is needed starting from an understanding of the cultural environment of the holy writers with the various thoughts and views that influenced them. The Old Testament for example displays various cultures such as the culture of the nomads, the culture of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Persia and many others.<sup>65</sup>

It is almost undeniable that the open and friendly attitude of the Israelites, the Old Testament people to diversity, depended on their efforts to read and positively interpret their past experiences under Egyptian occupation and in Babylonian exile. Through the same intercultural hermeneutics we have discovered in the bitter experience of the nation its missionary vocation to accept, help and accommodate others.<sup>66</sup> We will also see that the key to reading and interpreting Scripture interculturally will have a profound effect on the New Testament. So there can be no doubt that promoting an intercultural theology that accommodates differences in today's multicultural situation is absolutely necessary.

**c. Inculturation with an Intercultural perspective**

The term inculturation in the field of theology is closely related to the English term «enculturation»<sup>67</sup> which denotes the dynamic mixing of faith, as an individual's attempt to enter into his own culture. As a movement into (ad intra) the process of inculturation needs to be carried out critically. The goal is to help the individual to appreciate his own culture as fertile ground, through which he learns to appreciate and recognize others.

More than that, the same process will help the same person to look critically and humbly at his own identity, culture and religion. In this way he does not easily fall into the danger of asserting himself and his own culture as the best and most righteous and demeaning others. A critical attitude will enable the person concerned to slowly grow in respect, open up,

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<sup>64</sup> Following his predecessors, Pope Francis continues to encourage dialogue that is open, respectful and reciprocal towards diversity. Dialogue with such respect is sharing with others and at the same time the goal of interreligious dialogue: respecting the right to life and physical integrity of others, human rights, namely freedom of conscience and thought, expression of faith. cf. FRANCIS, *sulla Dignitatis Humanae*, on the occasion of the General Audience at the Vatican, Wednesday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. CIMOSA, *op.cit.*, pp. 108-138.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Cf. F.-V. ANTHONY, «*Missio inter gentes*» e «*teologia interculturale*», *cambio di paradigma per una nuova evangelizzazione*, in «Salesianum» 75 (2013), p. 87.

acknowledge and accept others and live side by side with them. In this sense, although it still tends to be one-way, inculturation as long as it is applied with an intercultural perspective, contains efforts to promote dynamic encounters, lively and reciprocal interactions between faith and culture of a society.<sup>68</sup>

What is an example of a new, inculturative lifestyle, the fruit of interaction and reciprocity with the spirit of the risen Lord in the early community? Asking similar questions feels important. The faith inherited by the Church to this day is based on the testimony of the faith of the apostles which permeated the way of life of the early Church. The way of life of the first community after the resurrection was marked by distinctive experiences: they lived in brotherly love, faithfully listening to the Word of God, celebrating the Eucharist together and praying together, being of one heart and all things belonging to them together. Their unity and brotherhood are very real and are lived regularly thanks to the power of the Word of God and the Eucharist.<sup>69</sup> The risen Lord wants the diversity of languages to be united firmly in only one language, namely the language of love which is sealed with the event of Pentecost.<sup>70</sup> The fire of love from the Holy Spirit will awaken the apostles that the Good News is addressed to all people on earth.

It can be said that in the New Testament, the Spirit of the risen Lord continues to guide and strengthen unity in diversity, by animate in the hearts of the early congregation the charism of acceptance and acceptance of those who are different. But keep in mind that it is not as easy as turning the palm of the hand but very complex. History proves that by pointing out some undeniable internal conflicts, which then allowed the birth of the Jerusalem Council<sup>71</sup> with a firm decision not to impose on foreign people a demand that they be circumcised and become Jewish.<sup>72</sup> This council can be an example of how unity in the Church continues to be fostered and maintained without sacrificing diversity within the Church.

**d. *A Need for intercultural mediators and theologians***

Such a process requires mainly Christians with a strong intercultural base and insight to seek a dialogue between a conscious faith and the local culture. This is not meant only about the content of the teachings, but also about praxis inspired by reason or knowledge, both about one's own culture and others.<sup>73</sup>

In addition, we also need mediators who are able to facilitate the transition of those who want to unite themselves with the new World view that Jesus himself offers and proclaims. It takes missionaries, catechists, pastoral agents and living witnesses who take the gospel of Christ to others not as their own but as a grace received from Above, from divine revelation, wishing everyone to be saved. And not only that, we also need Church servants who are in solidarity with the people (anyone), from different religions and cultures so that, like the apostle Paul, they are able to manifest faith in diversity. In an intercultural perspective, we need people who are able to turn to a conscious effort to promote encounters, dialogue, interactions and mutual relations in diversity. We need those with the ability and skill to build bridges or more, to be respectful bridges between the different. The main aim of this endeavor is to reproduce regularly and sustainably both within the Church and in society the main actors, bridge builders and new mediators between differences.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Acts, 2, 42-48; 4, 32-35.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Acts, 2, 7-12.

<sup>71</sup> The Council of Jerusalem (Acts, 15,6-29) took place in Jerusalem in AD 49. A kind of governing council of the Church consisting of the apostles with Peter as the spokesman and the elders with James as the spokesman. In addition there were also delegates from Jerusalem, from Paul and Barnabas from the Church in Antioch and the Jews. (cf. S. BARLETTA (ed.), *Sola fede: la lettera ai Romani*, Firenze, ADV, 2017, p. 12).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Rafael VICENT, *La vocazione nella Bibbia*, Roma, LAS, 2015, pp. 196, 235.

Through the proclamation and witness of the life of the early community, the early Church helps us to see and understand more deeply the participation and involvement of the faithful in the mystery of God's incarnation into man and the paschal mystery of the Son of God. This is a radical rapture of human history through Christ the Son of God.<sup>74</sup> Through His suffering, death and resurrection, He has elevated our human nature to a divine level. This belief has consequences for our preaching today. In the light of the mystery of the incarnation, diversity is not only the goal and object of proclamation. They are the subject and partner of a living intercultural dialogue. Equality as partners must be recognized and accepted together with the differences that exist in them. Such interactions can be special opportunities for religious growth and cultural development thanks to the integration of new ideas, symbols, practices and principles. The main goal is to multiply the space or coexistence between people where intercultural and interreligious dialogue continues to be promoted.<sup>75</sup>

We must therefore return to deep roots and authentic evangelical motivations. God the Creator of the universe, born, died and rose gloriously came not only for Christians but for all people. The proclamation of the Word of God needs to be lived in an intercultural perspective, namely with the awareness and belief that other people also have the right to hear the message of salvation that comes from God. This basic belief has a consequence that proclaimers of the Word of God need to know how to read and interpret sacred texts and biblical events in a real context and in the midst of diversity as it is today.

What's more, they (the preachers, whether clerical, religious or lay) are called upon to find appropriate and creative ways to spread the Good News in today's multicultural context. It is time to start that conversion from within, from ourselves by boldly correcting the old ways that put forward the truth in one direction, or trying to lead others into our beliefs through cheap proselytism. In the same spirit, the habit of badmouthing fellow believers of other religions in the pulpits of sermons must be abandoned. In the intercultural spirit, which emphasizes interaction and reciprocity among human beings, it can be said that this is the time for us to live and pastorally live the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. The humble church is the church that listens. A good listening church will continue to grow in its respect for differences and in its noble intention to always have dialogue with one another.

## CONCLUSION

A way of life that emphasizes hospitality and reciprocal acceptance is not automatic but a long process. From the chosen nation we have learned how difficult and complicated it is to make hospitality a value worth fighting for and preserving. A mission from God to be realized. According to the Bible, hospitality to the different turns into mission to acknowledge, accept and live together with one another.

Theology in today's intercultural perspective therefore should promote reflection that helps the faithful to arrive at a double a double scientific conviction. Firstly, the collective belief in hospitality to others, is rooted in the Word of God. The Word of God is not a voice in the past that was static, but a transformative force that continues to transform, create, liberate and empower living and mutual relationships among differences. The Word who is the person of Christ himself continues to be present and communicates himself throughout the ages through various events, ways of life and words that bind each other. In the midst of diversity which is still marked by difficulties in living together, theological reflection needs to help the faithful to read, ponder and confront in the light of the Word of God the concrete problems every day that arise due to different ways of seeing.

Secondly, the belief in a critical attitude towards the view that building a world that is peaceful, just, solidarity and inclusive does not require ethical and religious views and beliefs, rooted in the promises of true happiness, as reflected in the way of life of Jesus himself. This long pilgrimage process is full of meanings and encounters that occur not in one direction only (mono-

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<sup>74</sup> Roger SCHROEDER, *Interculturality as a paradigm of mission*, in Lazar T. STANISLAUS – Martin ÜFFING, *Intercultural mission*, vol. 2, Sankt Augustin, Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, 2015, p. 159.

<sup>75</sup> Carmelo DOTOLO, *Cristianesimo e interculturalità, dialogo, ospitalità, ethos*, Assisi, Cittadella, 2011, p. 135.

multicultural) but in an interactive, dialogical, reciprocal and intercultural climate with diversity.

Theology in the latter perspective means encouraging and continuing to promote an intercultural hermeneutic that allows Christians to be critical of themselves, their own religion, culture and their point of view. In this sense we recognize the process of inculturation into (*ad intra*) in a critical way. Its aim is to help believers to enter into themselves and their own culture with a critical and humble view that they are not alone and their culture is not the only one on earth. This confrontation is necessary so that they are able to come out of themselves (*ad extra*) to grow in respect, appreciate others, interact with them for the common good. At this stage, when the local cultural values embedded in oneself interact with evangelical values and are purified by them, what is known as intercultural exchange is realized.

In order to arrive at acceptance, dialogue and friendly coexistence, reflection on humanity as *imago Dei* is not secondary but primary to theology. The treatment of God is the same practiced for humanity, the image of God himself. The same thing is to accept and love the history of life, culture and diversity around humans as if loving and treating humans kindly themselves. The creative and critical process of inculturation as well as a conscious, integrative and transformative intercultural dialogue gives birth to new creativity for faith and the development of local cultures.

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