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BOOK REVIEWS

Josmy Jose Ezharamattathil FMA, *Formation to Interreligious Dialogue: a theological Approach in Forming the Adolescents to Create a Culture of Dialogue*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2021. Pages: 349. ISBN 9788195411245

Reawakening: that is the tone of the current status of religious practices around the globe. Temples get modified, churches get rebuilt, and mosques have newer additions and are growing. All religions are on the expansion mode while there are attempts to curtail propagation of other religions. There are legal fists presented before those who would like to change over to other religions. ‘Conversion’ has become a taboo in many places. Fanatic attempts to annihilate other religions, to disrupt their practices and massacre people because they believed in a particular religion, etc. have become daily events in many Indian states. Globally wars are being fought in the name of religion, as it was in history.

While this being the case, there have been umpteen instances where people are brought together to discuss about religious practices and go forward amicably believing in their own credo. Global leaders have taken initiatives to bring on to the discussion table people belonging to different religious sectors and have attempted to foster a dialogue between nations, religions and practices.

It is against such a background that Dr Josmy Jose Ezharamattathil FMA, brings forth her study on Interreligious dialogue. Being a relevant theme, she has chosen a meticulously sliced segment of this process concentrating on the formation to interreligious dialogue, which is a commendable and visionary approach. Hailing from Kerala, where she lived in personal life the possibility of amicable interreligious co-living, she is the best *porta-voce* for credibly proposing ways and means to create, foster and impactfully instil a formative paradigm for adolescents who can, in their turn, become agents of social transformation in a society marked with fanatic outrage.

Foreword by Dr Anto Amarnad, CMI, from the Pontifical Athenaeum, DVK, in Bengaluru, enriches this book. This research has

become one of the latest attempts by academicians to mitigate the strife and bringing together 'heads' and 'hearts' of people who want to go beyond compartmentalization caused by religious practices. That is why Amarnad asserts, "Interreligious dialogue is not a luxury of human societies but a prerequisite for healthy developments and achievements in our world." This work of Dr Josmy is a bold and deep academic dive into the panacea of attempts to bring people together, where she has successfully identified newer frontiers of interventions and has suggested ways and means to propagate the same.

The extend of reading which Dr Josmy has ventured into and the number of sources from where she has obtained information shows that she did intend to make a thorough study about the scenario and bring about concrete changes in the lives of people.

The first chapter on the Biblical, Patristic and Ecclesial vision of Formation to Interreligious Dialogue speaks about the historical and biblical living of interreligious dialogue in the annals of Bible and biblical narratives. The first part speaks about the influences which other religions played on the life and practices of Israel bringing about a Universalism through the different epochs and especially through the Wisdom literature. The Philanthropy visible in the lives and teachings of prophets are well taken note of and the interreligious dialogue with its various nuances and mined out delicately from a history where such concepts were clarified. When it comes to the New Testament, the universalistic approach of Jesus Christ, the growth and development of early Christianity with disciples and especially the initial definite openness of St Paul to other religions, etc. have been dealt with before moving into the patristic orthopraxis. St Justin the Martyr and the concept of religions participating in the Word, St Ireneus who dealt with the Universal Presence of Logos, St Clement of Alexandria who spoke about the universality of sanctity have been dealt with in the first chapter itself. While there were concepts sounded like *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus Est* there were also significant interreligious relations present in the history of the Church which Josmy has carefully noted.

Pages 42 to 62 deals elaborately with the Vatican II documents and the magnificent impetus it has provided in recognizing the value of other religions and dogmatizing such a pedagogy. A diligent analysis of *Nostra Aetate*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, *Gaudium et Spes*, etc. have given credibility to her process of reflection. Post Vatican II documents have gone well beyond stating matters to guiding processes. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio*, Dialogue and Proclamation, Dialogue and Mission etc. are true indicators of the

Dialogue trajectory Dr Josmy has identified. Contributions of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have been steadily after this process through guidelines and practices and have made the process of interreligious dialogue grow into a credible system, necessary for a serene social co-living.

After a biblical and historical reprisal Josmy moved into creating the theoretical framework for her thesis. In chapter two she has brought about an analysis of the theological foundation and models of interreligious dialogue. Daniélou, Lubac, Chardin, Balthasar and Rahner have become part of reflection. Theological foundations have obtained special consideration and they form the basis of credentials on which she proposes dialogue. The contentious concept of the Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ and the idea of Jesus as the only Mediator between God and Man, etc. have been taken into a well-balanced consideration. Dealing with various models of interreligious dialogue she runs across the Exclusive, Inclusive and Pluralistic approaches as also the Cosmotheandric and Non-Uniqueness models. Theological effects of Interreligious Dialogue are mentioned with sufficient details. The evangelizing mission of the Church in the context interreligious dialogue requires great attention which she has prudently and adequately provided in her reflection and she states that they are interconnected yet not substitutable.

The social scenario in which interreligious dialogue is practiced globally and especially in the Church in India has been reserved to chapter three of her book. Contributions of World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, that of FABC, CBCI, etc. are well studied and this segment of the book is a real contribution to academicians and scholars as it brings under single section various movements done in this regard. The various approaches of Christian theologians to the process of Interreligious dialogue illumines the Indian theological horizon in a special way. Raimon Panikkar, Bede Griffiths, Swami Abhishiktananda, Amalolpavadass, Sebastian Kappan, M.M. Thomas, etc. have contributed enormously to the process of interreligious dialogue and Josmy has found it most apt to place them together forming the reflective scenario on the Indian side.

One of the unique ways of verifying her understanding about the practices and the need for formation to interreligious dialogue in India has been through deploying Participative Observation Method, a qualitative survey, which she conducted in the suburbs of Bengaluru. While this intervention does not bring about any solid material to catapult the reflection into a new horizon, it underscores

her understanding and the lived experience about the need for formation to interreligious dialogue. The analysis at the end of the survey has proved the same.

It is the fourth and final chapter of the book which deals elaborately with the creation of a culture of interreligious dialogue. In the title itself she has made clear that there are practical guidelines to set up a formative pattern into this process. After outlining the status quo of the formation for interreligious dialogue she brings forward vision and mission statements to achieve the objective. She has boldly brought forth various strategies and action plans to achieve this objective. The systematic presentation of the strategies and the subsequent action plans make it possible that a formation to interreligious dialogue is possible in the Indian context. The long chapter extending from pages 220 to 279 shows how the detailed presentation of various interventions by various social agents can bring about a much needed change in the practices of interreligious dialogue in India.

The entire volume produced by Dr Josmy Jose on formation to Interreligious Dialogue has taken into consideration historical and biblical aspects of the process. Forming foundations based on well-known theologians and ecclesiastical interventions she has underscored that there had been practices and pedagogy on interreligious dialogue in the past. Hence there is no claim for a totally original intervention. It is to be noted that she could take into consideration more Patristic interventions so also interventions by leaders of other religions which would have given a wider outlook into the historical developments of the matter under discussion. The novelty stands in focusing on the core of the need for formation which she has done marvellously well.

With a graceful blend of orthodoxy and innovative orthopraxis Dr Josmy has proved that this book deserves to be disseminated as a 'must-have' book for all formation houses, libraries and above all for those who intend to create a world of peace, serenity and comfortable religious living. In a world wounded by hatred, viciousness and prejudice against other religious practices, this volume challenges readers to assimilate the beauty of serene co-living and bring about synergy, harmony and tolerance. The need to inculcate systematic formation to adolescents who would create a more peaceful world is underscored and that is the challenge which Josmy puts forward through this book.

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