In the Editorial of the latest issue of ACU National’s Australian E-journal of Theology, founding and current editor Reverend Associate Professor Gerard Hall SM, assistant Head of the School of Theology (National), calls on readers of the internationally popular online journal to enter into dialogue with followers of other religions.

“Through dialogue, we search for a way of living harmoniously that respects radical difference,” he writes. “We are not aiming for a ‘new world religion’ that dissolves the particularities of any tradition. We are aiming for an emergent harmony arising from the distinctiveness of all traditions.”

Moreover, he adds, “only through such dialogue, founded on the particularity of each religious tradition, will religions play their vital role in the creation of a civilization of love, peace and harmony.”

Associate Professor Hall, who has been with ACU National since 1999, completed his doctoral thesis at the Catholic University of America on “the interfaith dialogue and pluralism of one of the greatest contemporary thinkers in this field, Raimon Panikkar”.

Welcoming a blossoming of interest in the field in the past few years, Associate Professor Hall argues that universities emerged from the Catholic church’s monasteries during the Middle Ages, where the scientific search for truth began in context of the search for God.

“Monks understood that God is absolutely true, good and beautiful,” Associate Professor Hall said. “The development of the mind and skills associated with universities and academic life are at the heart of what monasteries were about, namely, the pursuit of truth and wisdom.

“There is a wonderful energy in Catholicism that searches for truth wherever it may be found. In particular, it seeks to bring together the two dimensions of the human heart, faith, and mind, reason. What the world needs today is a new wisdom that draws from the insights of all traditions. To this, I would add, we absolutely need each other, and the most enlightened people of all faith traditions understand that.”

In the face of aggressive nationalism, global warming and human greed, interfaith dialogue and shared spirituality offer hope, he believes.

“Human reality is capable of re-imagining itself precisely because of the divine reality in our world. This is the basis of our hope for humanity and the cosmos.”

He argues that people must learn from one another, and accept that other religions, far from posing a threat to our own beliefs and identity, are an opportunity for growth.

“The process of dialogue always involves an ongoing call to conversion including: revaluing the positive value of other traditions; overturning ingrained prejudices; revising preconceived ideas; and purifying one’s own religious faith.”

An accepting attitude is necessary. “If the religious traditions come to the dialogue table armed with unbending doctrines and narrow beliefs, these will lead at best to argument and debate, at worst to expressions of violence,” he writes.

“Religious dialogue must be based in another reality, a new vision, a divine call, or trust in the mystery that transcends us. Only through such dialogue, founded on the particularity of each religious tradition, will religions play their vital role in the creation of a civilization of love, peace and harmony. This, after all, is what all religions claim to be their goal. What is new today is the realisation that we are called to do this together.”