



DICASTERIUM
PRO
DIALOGO INTER RELIGIONES

Christians and Jains Meeting

Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (DID) and Institute of Jainology (IOJ), London, UK
Venue: Conference-room of Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome

26 November 2024

'Christians and Jains: To Build a Better Future'

Opening Remarks

Msgr. Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K. Secretary, *DID*

Respected Dr. Mehool Sanghrajka, Managing Trustee of the Institute of Jainology, London and leader of the International Delegation of Jains and dear friends,
Good morning! Namaskar!

I am immensely happy to welcome you all to this meeting. It has always been a pleasure for us at the Dicastery to meet, interact and reflect with you on certain relevant themes with the singular aim of promoting interreligious appreciation, dialogue and collaboration between Christians and Jains everywhere, and in particular, in places where you presently reside.

We are grateful to the Institute of Jainology, London for being our partner in facilitating, from time to time, this kind of encounter, and for being our point of reference for Jainism. Our relationship with the Institute began in 1995 when the first delegation of Jains, headed by the Institute, visited the then Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Since then, it has grown steadily and strongly. Your presence here today under the leadership of the Institute is an eloquent testimony to that. We would like to gratefully remember at this moment Mr. Nemu Chandaria, OBE and the late Dr. Harshad Sanghrajka, MBE who have been so to say the Jain faces of Jain-Christian dialogue promoted by the Dicastery for many years.

Today's meeting will focus on how we can build a better future by embracing diversity and inclusivity, and through caring for the earth, the poor and the most vulnerable. This theme calls for a careful deliberation on what needs to be done in the present-day situation of violent conflicts, genocidal warfare, environmental crises, worsening climate change, heartless indifference and conscious neglect of people who are suffering varied forms of poverty. This theme also demands on part of all individuals, communities and governments a firm conviction and an honest implementation of decisions and policies that favour coexistence on earth, our common home, as well as respect for diversity and inclusivity for the sake of harmony and peace in the world which would benefit all people in all places and at all times. This theme, moreover, has an inherent potential to evolve a consensus that will help arrest many of the problems facing our world which is increasingly becoming diverse.

Diversity is primarily not a risk but a richness. It is a gift of God to all humans (cf. Pope Francis, Video Message for the Mediterranean Meeting (MED24) 'Pilgrims of Hope and Builders of Peace', 15-20 September 2024). Only in embracing diversity that individuals and communities can preserve their own identity and unicity. Our strength as human beings, in fact, lies in the collective embrace of diversity and differences. Only by celebrating our diversity can we celebrate our shared humanity. On the contrary, every attempt to destroy diversity in some way destroys the very beauty and harmony God has designed for humans. Moreover, as history testifies, divisive ideologies and prejudices, discrimination and marginalization of humans on the basis of colour, creed, race, descent, nationality etc., perpetuate a 'culture of exclusion in the society'. Our present global situations and ecological conditions are an urgent summons to act promptly, to look for remedies that will put an end to the present menace before it is too late and to implement them, using every means in our power. The learned Speakers, I am sure, will enlighten us more on this, from their own religious perspectives. I would only quote in this regard what Pope Francis said during his recent trip to Indonesia: "A harmony in diversity is achieved when particular perspectives take into account the needs common to all and when each ethnic group and religious denomination acts in a spirit of fraternity, pursuing the noble goal of seeking the good of all" (Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, Jakarta, Indonesia, 4 Sept. 2024).

Building a better future thus calls for a sense of inclusivity, capable of fostering fraternity, harmony and peace among people. It also requires of us a change of heart that not only desires but decides to care for everyone especially the poor, the marginalized and the vulnerable of the society and for our 'common home'. "Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God" (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, 24 May 2015, 119). Tirthankar Mahavir also said, "one who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation, disregards his own existence which is entwined with them".

Meetings and mutual exchanges such as this one bring greater awareness in us in light both of the teachings of our own respective religious traditions and of the noble things we learn from other religious traditions which enrich us and help us find a common path on which to walk together and work together with a sense of responsibility and a spirit of inclusiveness and fraternity to build a harmonious and peaceful world (Cf. Francis, Address, Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, Theatre of the Cultural Centre of the National University of Singapore, 12 Sept. 2024). I wish to conclude with the words of Pope Francis: "We will either build the future together or there will be no future" (Address, Interreligious Meeting, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019).

I wish you all a fruitful seminar!

Thank you for your kind attention.