

JAIN-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

24 May, 2015

'Compassion and Dialogue'

Concluding Remarks by

His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran

President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican

Respected Mr. Janak Rajani, President of the Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington (JSMW), Mr. Pravin Dand, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the said Society, Mr. Prem Jain, President of the Federation of Jain Societies in North America (JAINA), Your Excellencies Bishop Mitchell Rozanski, Chairman of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Bishop Denis Madden, learned speakers for the day Dr. Dipak Jain and Reverend Father Francis Clooney, SJ and honorable participants of this meeting from both the Jain and Catholic religious traditions, 'Namaste', 'Namaskar'!

I am very much pleased to be in your midst this day, along with Father Santiago Michael of our Pontifical Council (PCID), participating in this meeting between the Catholics and the Jains in the USA. I wish to place on record, at the very outset, my deep appreciation and thanks to Your Excellency Rozanski, Reverend Father John Crossin and Dr. Anthony Cirelli, the Executive Director and Associate Director for Interreligious Affairs of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (SEIA) of the USCCB, and to your generous collaborators especially from the Management of the Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington and the Federation of Jain Societies in North America, in particular, Mr. Arvind Vora, Dr. Gita Shah, Mr. Paresh Shah, Mr. Sushil Jain and Mr. Manoj Dharamsi for giving concrete shape to the initiatives of the Pontifical Council and for organizing this event so well, making thus a historical beginning to promote the cause of Jain-Catholic dialogue in the country. Many thanks also for the warm welcome accorded to us.

This, in fact, is my third visit to and meeting with Jain communities in the last five years. Having said this, let me add quickly that the contact between our Pontifical Council and the Jains, goes way back to 1986 when it invited Acharya Shri Tulsi to participate in the historic World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi on 26th October that year. Though the Acharya himself could not participate in it, he deputed the then Chairman of the *Anuvrat Global Organization* for the same. Starting from there and with the keen interest shown in 1985 by the Institute of Jainology, London in nurturing Jain-Catholic understanding, there have been, since then, somewhat regular contacts between the PCID and the Jains, some of them even representing their religion at programs organized by the PCID. In the year 2011, I had the joy of visiting, for the first time in my

life, a Jain Temple and participating in a Jain-Catholic seminar organized at Acharya Sushil Muni Ashram, New Delhi, India. The second one was in London in 2013 at the Oshwal Community Centre, Potters Bar, in the outskirts of London. Organized by our Pontifical Council, in collaboration with the Catholic Church in England and the Institute of Jainology, London, it was a follow-up of the aforesaid meeting in India and was also meant to be an outreach to the Jains in the Diaspora. Both, I must admit, were learning as well as enriching experiences for me. Today's meeting too is in keeping with this policy of the Pontifical Council mandated with the responsibility of promoting relations with the adherents of other religions, to reach out and to engage with you our Jain friends not only in the USA but also in other parts of the world and to encourage the local Churches and the Jain communities and organizations to promote dialogue between the people of our two communities for greater understanding and collaboration so as to contribute together for the good of humanity. It is my hope that this initiative here in the USA will sow seeds for strengthening the Jain-Catholic dialogue initiatives in different parts of the country leading to greater mutual understanding in the times to come.

You may know perhaps that our meeting today has a special significance given the fact that it is organized at a time when the Catholic Church is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (NA), the document of the Vatican Council II, popularly known among the Catholics and others engaged in dialogue, as the *Magna Carta* of interreligious Dialogue. The document categorically stated that the Catholic Church acknowledges what is true and holy in other religions and "regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings" (n.2), notwithstanding the fact that they differ in many aspects from what she holds and teaches. It exhorted the Catholics to enter into dialogue and collaboration with the people of other religious traditions for peace, harmony and happiness in the world. Thanks to this epochal document, there has been an astonishing transformation in interreligious relations among the people across the globe in the last five decades. The interreligious dialogue inspired by this document has not only underscored the need to know and to practice our own respective religions better but also has helped us to grow in the understanding and appreciation of others' beliefs, values and convictions, drawing us thus closer to work for the betterment of the society. The fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, hence, is an invitation, again, to all of us, believers and others in the present-day world to recognize the immense good that the encounter of dialogue has done to the society all these years; it is a clarion call to redouble our resolve and efforts to unitedly confront the challenges facing the world so as to find amicable solutions towards creating conducive conditions for all to live in peace, harmony and freedom.

We have listened to the scholarly presentations and reflections by our distinguished speakers on the theme of this meeting, from their own respective religious perspectives. Compassion in its different aspects and nuances can be said to lie very close to the heart of every religion. And for us, both the Catholics and the Jains, despite the differences in what it means to us in our own

respective religions, it is at the very core of our religious traditions. Compassion, it must be said, finds its natural expression in the active love, care and concern for and service to the other especially the suffering and the afflicted, irrespective of what ethnicity or religion that person belongs to or the social, economic or educational background he or she may come from. The paradigmatic example of Christian compassion is to be found in the Parable of the 'Good Samaritan' told by Jesus who, for us Christians, embodies the very essence of compassion itself. (Holy Bible, Luke 10: 25-37). Compassion means "to suffer with another". According to the Catholic belief, "Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer* with man in an utterly real way-in flesh and blood- as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus's Passion. Hence, in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with us*" (Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 39). God's love accompanies us in all our suffering so as to enable us to transform it into compassion towards every creature. Jainism too exhorts its faithful to a compassionate way of life when it says, "...friendliness towards all living beings, delight in the distinction and honor of others, compassion for the miserable, lowly creatures and equanimity towards the vainglorious" (*Tattvartha Sutra*, 7:6). Compassion therefore must be measured not by how we treat ourselves but rather how much we reach out to the sufferings and needs of others, feel one with them and make their sufferings and needs as our own and try sincerely to do all that we can, selflessly, to eliminate or at least to reduce their misery and pain or to fulfil their dire needs. By doing so, we bring about a new hope into their lives.

Unfortunately, due to the rise in the materialistic, egoistic and individualistic tendencies among the masses in general and growing disregard in some towards anything spiritual and religious in today's world, there has emerged what Pope Francis would call as "a culture of indifference", "a culture of exclusion" and "a throw-away culture" whereby people have lost the sense of belonging to and being responsible for one another leading to insensitivity and indifference to the sufferings and needs of others; tend to exclude and even to eliminate some as though they are insignificant and burdensome. The Holy Father whose words and gestures of compassion and his constant advocacy of policies and concrete actions for the betterment in the lives of the poor, the marginalized, the sick and the suffering have become quite proverbial now, invites us all to unitedly counter this 'culture of indifference' with 'a culture of solidarity' –a solidarity that binds us all together as members of one human family and a solidarity in the service of the common good. You must have heard that in order to create a greater awareness among the people especially among the Catholics and to encourage them to become, more and more, in thought, word and deed, persons of mercy, forgiveness and compassion, he has announced the Jubilee Year of Mercy starting from 8 December, 2015 to 20 November, 2016.

May I conclude by saying that in an age where violence, discrimination and exploitation, in many and varied forms, have become a major concern in many parts of the world and in the wake of a

growing culture of indifference among the people towards the suffering, the poor and the marginalized, the sick, the elderly and the migrants, a holistic understanding of compassion has a renewed relevance. May we, the Jains and the Catholics, rediscover the importance of compassion in our personal and collective lives and may we touch the lives of the people especially the needy and the suffering, with our little acts of kindness, gentleness and goodness. May our meeting today “open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect”(Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indication of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 11 April, 2015, 23) so that we become persons and communities of love, compassion and peace.

Dhanyawwad!