



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM  
PRO  
DIALOGO INTER RELIGIONES

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Dear Jain Friends,

As you commemorate the birth anniversary of Mahavir, the 23<sup>rd</sup> *Tirthankara* (Path- Finder) of Jainism, on 17<sup>th</sup> April this year, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue greets you most cordially and offers best wishes to you, your families and friends.

Exchanging of greetings on occasions such as this, presents an opportunity to strengthen our relationships based on mutual respect and esteem and to collaborate for the common good. Among the values shared by our communities are the legitimate freedoms of individuals, most especially the freedom of religion, a pre-eminent one and an integral part of the common human patrimony essential for peaceful coexistence and harmony in society.

Religious freedom, a fundamental right rooted in the very dignity of the human person, as is commonly understood, implies that each person is free to profess, practice and propagate his/her religion individually or in community, in public or private, with due respect for the freedom of others and public order. It also permits change from one religion to another and the choice to profess no religion at all. Above all else, it generates solidarity and goodwill in society. Denial or suppression therefore of this freedom "...is a threat to serenity and peace, and an obstacle to the achievement of authentic and integral human development." (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, no.29).

Threat to religious freedom is witnessed in various forms all across the globe today accompanied by a reduction in respect towards and acceptance of the different 'other' and the resultant polarization of 'we' versus 'they'. Convinced of religious pluralism in society as a fact to reckon with, and peaceful co-existence as our common responsibility, we, the Christians and Jains, along with men and women of all religions and people of good will, are to confront the challenges emerging from the contemporary threat to religious freedom by positively promoting together a culture of freedom and mutual respect in matters of religion.

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Incidentally, we are commemorating this year the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Assisi Day of Prayer for Peace, a bold initiative of Pope John Paul II of happy memory, for world peace in 1986. On this memorable day, the representatives of different religions pledged to make religions channels of peace and unity and not division and conflict. Encouraged by the fruits that this initiative produced in measures great and small in many parts of the world, may we together, with renewed commitment, work towards promotion of 'religious freedom' which in the words of Pope Benedict XVI is "an authentic weapon of peace" and "the path to peace." (Cfr. *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 2011).

Wishing you all A HAPPY MAHAVIR JAYANTI!



Jean-Louis Card. TAURAN  
President



Archbishop Pier Luigi CELATA  
Secretary