

CATHOLIC-JAIN MEETING
OSHWAL COMMUNITY DERASAR, LONDON, 14 June 2013

**‘Catholics and Jains: The Practice of Non-Violence as a
Contribution to Peace’**

Inaugural Address by
His Eminence Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran
President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Respected President Raaxeet Harakhchand Shah, Your Excellencies Archbp. Kevin McDonald, Chair, Episcopal Office for Relations with Other Religions, Archbp. Patrick Kelly, Bp. Paul Hendricks, Msgr. Peter Fleetwood, distinguished scholars from both the Catholic and Jain communities, learned speakers and honourable participants of this seminar, I greet you all most warmly. *Namaste!*

I am very much pleased to be here this day in your midst along with Father Santiago Michael of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. A while ago, we paid a visit to your *Derasar* (Temple) in this campus which brought forth the vivid memories of my visit to a couple of Jain Shrines in Delhi, India in November 2011 followed by a Catholic-Jain Seminar organized at the Acharya Sushil Muni Ashram. Dear Jain friends, we are grateful to you for the warm welcome extended to us. In a special way, I wish to express our heartfelt thanks to His Excellency Archbp. Kevin, his close collaborators and the entire Jain community here in London, particularly the Oshwal community, for jointly organizing this event.

Mandated with the responsibility of promoting relations with the adherents of other religions in the spirit of Vatican Council II, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), as you may know, has been ardently engaged in this task for the past many decades. Its direct contact with the Jains, for the first time, was in 1986 when it invited Acharya Shri Tulsi, the 9th Supreme Head of Terapanth Jain tradition 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. While this paved the way for a series of periodical contacts between the PCID and the said organization, the visit to the PCID and the meeting in 1995 of a 15-member Jain delegation coordinated by the Institute of Jainology, London ushered in regular interactions between the Jains and the PCID with the Jain representatives participating in interreligious programmes organized by the Vatican since then. The

Institute of Jainology coordinated yet another visit of the Jains to the PCID in December 2011. I am happy to see some of the members of that delegation present here. The PCID is appreciative of the role played by this Institute in helping foster greater understanding with the Jains and is happy about this initiative that seeks to promote, through the local Church, cordial relationship with the followers of Jainism in the Diaspora as well.

In an age where violence, in many and varied forms, has become a major concern in many parts of the world disturbing peace in the families, communities and in the society as a whole, a serious reflection on the theme of our meeting this day, *“Catholics and Jains: The Practice of Non-violence as a contribution to Peace”* is not only relevant but also imperative for both the Jains and Catholics so as to contribute together for the cause of peace in the world. Both Christianity and Jainism, as is known, give primacy to a life of love and non-violence. We see it immortalized in the life and teachings of Jesus who despite being reviled, humiliated and persecuted, remained serene, fearless, non-aggressive and suffered everything because of his unconditional love and compassion for the humanity particularly the needy and the suffering. He said, *“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”* (Mt 22: 39). He also said, *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you”* (Lk 6: 27-28). He gave his own example in this regard saying, *“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another”* (Jn 13: 34). *Ahimsa* or Non-Violence, on the other hand, is the sheet-anchor of Jainism. For you the Jains, *Ahimsa* is *paramo dharma* that is non-violence is the supreme virtue or religion (*dharma*). You believe in the proactive non-violent way of life. Tirthankar Mahavir said, *“If you kill someone, it is yourself you kill. If you overpower someone, it is yourself you overpower. If you torment someone, it is yourself you torment. If you harm someone, it is yourself you harm”*. The concept of non-violence, as we know, is not specific to Christianity and Jainism alone, it finds a prime place in all the religions of the world. However, Jainism has it as its main principle.

Non-violence etymologically though sounds negative, in positive terms it means compassion (*karuna*) and friendship (*maitri*) towards all beings in thought, word and deed. It is nothing but the application, in letter and spirit, of the golden rule of life: *“Do to others as you would like others do unto you”*. It implies that we, believers as well as all the people of good will, honour the inherent dignity of every human being; that we, despite our differences owing to religious beliefs and other factors recognize our interconnectedness and responsibility as people belonging to one larger human family to contribute individually and collectively towards the integral development of all in love, justice, freedom and harmony for peace and prosperity in the world. All the religions unequivocally propagate these values. But unfortunately, the widening gap between faith, preaching and practice among believers and the

religious leaders and the unbridled greed, selfishness, anger and quest for supremacy of some have resulted in the kind of crisis, conflicts, tensions and violence that we witness today. The rise of religious fundamentalism and the increase in the instances of inter-religious tensions in different parts of the contemporary world seem to make the sceptics of religions to blame religions for all the ills affecting the society. Let there be no doubt that religions are cause of love, unity and peace and if any religion teaches the contrary, is no religion at all.

The power of non-violence has been demonstrated time and again in human history. We have the fine examples of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and others in the recent times who have shown to the world that non-violence is a potent weapon of peace. As believers in our own respective religions that hold compassion as an essential value in the practice of our religions and as persons convinced of the necessity of the practical application of nonviolence in today's troubled times, may we Jains and Catholics, joining hands with the people of other religious traditions do all that we can to say as Pope Paul VI exhorted, "No to violence: to all violence - to everything that wounds, weakens and violates life: to everything that dishonours human dignity. At the same time we reiterate: Yes to peace: to the peace that brings happiness to all, for it is based on fearlessness and truth; it is the work of justice and fraternal love" (*Address to the Indian people in honour of Gandhi on his 30th death anniversary*, Broadcast on All India Radio on 31 January 1978) and may we counter violence as Pope Benedict XVI said, "with more love, with more goodness" (*Angelus*, 18 February 2008). This "more" according to the Pope comes from God Himself. Our hopes and dreams for peaceable world free of tensions, conflicts and violence can be achieved only through the path of dialogue and solidarity. May we therefore make nonviolence, in thoughts, words and deeds, a way of life, radiating individually and collectively more love, compassion and goodness, for peace within us, peace around us with others and peace with the entire creation!