

Institute of Jainology has maintained a close relationship with the Roman Catholic faith since the the first visit it led the first delegation to Rome in 1995. Several visits have been made to Rome by individuals to represent the Institute and the Jain faith. To cement the relationship further, the Institute led another delegation to Rome on 6th December 2011. The objective for this visit was to meet the persons in charge of the Inter Religious activities in the Vatican and strengthen the relationship.

The delegation comprised of :

Institute of Jainology: Mr Nemu Chandaria, Deputy Chairman; Dr Mehool Sanghrajka, Director of Education; Mr Jaysukh Mehta, Director

Oshwal Association of the UK: Mr Tushar Jayantilal Shah, President; Mr Ashok Mulchand Shah, Vice President

Navnat Vanik Association of the UK: Mr Bhupendra Jeychand Shah, President

Jain Samaj Manchester: Mr Pius G Mehta, President

Jain Association: Mr Jiwan Jain, President

Oman Jain Samaj: Mr Bakul Mehta, President

The delegation had gone to the Vatican at the invitation of the President of the Pontifical Council, His Eminence, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran. He presided along with the Deputy Chairman of the Institute of Jainology, Mr Nemu Chandaria over the meeting held in the offices of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PCID).

In addition to the President of the Pontifical Council, PCID was represented by His Excellency the Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, Rev Monsignor Andrew Thanya Anan Vissanu, Under-Secretary PCID and Rev Father Santiago Michael. The latter being responsible for relationship with Jains and Buddhists.

The meeting was held in an atmosphere of mutual respect and friendship, members of the delegations expressed satisfaction over the cordial relations and cooperation that exist between both the Christian and Jain communities in countries where they live their day-to-day lives in proximity.

The delegations agreed that collaboration must be strengthened at the local levels to better contribute towards the common good of the entire society. In particular, they stressed the importance of educating the younger generations to be aware of their own traditions and convictions, and to learn about and respect those of others.

There was a lively discussion to find concrete areas of convergence as the basis of mutual collaboration and in particular they focussed on the Jain principle of 'non-violence' (Ahimsa) and that of Christian 'charity'.

Rev Monsignor Andrew Thanya Anan Vissanu said that whilst the Jains extend the principle of non-violence to absolute respect for all living beings, including plants and animals, Christians maintain that the man is at the centre of creation and thus is called to respect , protect but also use God's gifts.

Thus, whilst they found some common elements that can motivate and sustain Jain-Catholic collaboration, recognising the differences between the two principles was equally important.

"They also recognised that these common elements, on a practical level, call upon the followers of both the traditions to promote mutual respect, truthfulness, honesty, freedom, peace, social harmony and to commit themselves to eliminate every form of violence against human beings, in particular injustice, poverty and exploitation of natural resources".

Msgr Vissanu mentioned that the Rome meeting was a good starting point to promote understanding within the Jain community where in some cases the distinction between Catholics and other Christian denominations is still unclear.

At end of the discussions, a joint communiqué was agreed upon and issued.

The Institute hosted a Jain lunch to celebrate the meeting and created an opportunity for all to get to know each other and continue the discussions informally.

Next day PCID had arranged for the delegation to attend the Sermon given by the H H The Pope. The delegation members were provided with privileged seating in the front row of the hall with a capacity of about 8,000. Special mention was made of the visit by the delegation to Rome and that a communiqué had been issued. Nemu Chandaria was then introduced to the Holy Father who then proceeded to present H H The Pope with a set of Jain Manuscripts catalog and a special gift brought by the Oman delegate. The gifts were examined by the Holy Father and accepted gracefully.

PCID office had kindly arranged for the delegates to visit St Peter's Basilica, Vatican Library (where only invited guests are allowed), Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel.

Father Santiago Michael who is the Institute's contact with PCID had been instrumental in arranging the meeting which had taken over nine months to be fitted in to the busy schedule of the President of the Pontifical Council.

His Eminence, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran had been on a two week visit to India during which he participated in a seminar on Christian– Jain dialogue in collaboration with the Catholic Church in India and the World Fellowship of Religions at the Acharya Sushil Muni Ashram in Delhi.

The first high level Jain Catholic meeting took place in February 1995 in Rome. Contact between the Vatican and the Jain community dates back to the first inter-faith prayer meeting in Assisi, Italy in 1986. Jain delegation has since participated in other inter-faith gatherings in Assisi.

Contact details for the local Roman Catholic personnel were provided and delegates look forward to developing further contacts with them.

It was felt that the objectives of the visit to get to know the personnel in the Vatican and to strengthen our relationship with the Catholic Church were adequately met.

All the delegates appreciated the considerable efforts made by Nemu Chandaria in making this meeting possible and assured him of the continued support by their respective organisations for all of the Institute's activities.

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