



ISKCON Communications

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Founder-*Acharya* His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

To His Holiness Pope Francis
Members of the Roman Catholic Church

January 1, 2023

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) extends our heartfelt condolences to all of our friends and colleagues in the Roman Catholic Church, who are feeling great loss due to the passing of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

Pope Benedict was a great theologian and scholar of the modern Church. Among his many contributions, we are moved by his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, in 2005, where he spoke about God's limitless love for humanity. This same spirit of love inspires our Gaudiya Vaishnava faith. Pope Benedict was also a trailblazer. After serving the Church selflessly for many decades, he demonstrated his humility and detachment by stepping down from this highest post, to usher in a younger pontiff, Pope Francis. His example of service and renunciation is an important lesson for the world today.

The Catholic Church underwent a historic change in 1965, when it adopted *Nostra Aetate*, an important document of Vatican II. Then known as Cardinal Ratzinger, Benedict was a progressive voice of that Council. For ISKCON, 1965 is also exceptional, as it is the same year that Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada came to the United States to carry the message of Lord Krishna and spread love of God as understood by the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition.

In 1968, Prabhupada wrote to Pope Paul VI:

His Holiness The Pope, Paul VI
Vicar of Jesus Christ

Your Holiness:

Please accept my respectful humble obeisances at Your lotus feet....the special significance of human life is to achieve Love of God as the prime perfection of life....The human society is gradually degrading in the matter of religiosity, and justice; and "might is right" is gradually taking the place of morality and justice...because Your Holiness is the Head of a great religious sect, I think we should meet together and chalk out a program for cooperation...I shall be very much pleased if Your Holiness will grant me an interview. Thanking you in anticipation for an early reply.

Yours in the service of the Lord,

AC Bhaktivedanta Swami

While Pope Paul VI and Srila Prabhupada were unable to meet, since that time, and during the time of Pope Benedict, ISKCON members have interacted with many leaders of the Catholic Church around the world, and in various interfaith formats, both formally and informally, including with cardinals, bishops, priests, academics, and lay-leaders.

In 2008, ISKCON members, including Professor Ravi Gupta, were kindly invited to meet Pope Benedict in Washington, D.C. during his visit to the United States. During a brief exchange, Dr. Gupta informed the Holy Father about the continuing dialogue and friendly interactions between our two faiths and institutions.

As stated in *Nostra Aetate*, "...in Hinduism people explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love..."

Nostra Aetate further declared, "The Church, therefore, urges its sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture."

During the time of Pope Benedict, we saw the relationships between followers of ISKCON and the Church grow and blossom. We are grateful for Pope Benedict's support of those endeavors, and appreciative that the Church continues to welcome and encourage dialogue and cooperation in many forums around the world.

We are grateful to Pope Benedict XVI for his devotion and his many decades of service. We pray there will be a continued effort to "meet together and chalk out a program for cooperation" in promoting peace, and love of God, throughout the world.

On behalf of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)



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