



People shop for lanterns at a market in Mumbai, India, Oct. 28, 2021, ahead of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, which this year begins Oct. 31 in most countries. (CNS/Niharika Kulkarni, Reuters)



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Christians and Hindus must promote harmony among all groups of people despite their differences, especially when ideologies increasingly seek to sow division, the Vatican wrote in a message for the Hindu celebration of Diwali.

"In the divine project, diversity and differences are not meant to be a threat to anyone's existence but a gift for harmonious coexistence," leaders of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue said in a letter published Oct. 24.

Increasingly, people of different "cultures, religions, ethnicities, languages and ideologies live side by side, either by choice or chance, in almost every part of the globe," said the message signed by Cardinal Miguel Ayuso Guixot, dicastery prefect, and Msgr. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku, dicastery secretary.

While such a phenomenon can be a "great source of mutual growth, learning and enrichment" for many, it is simultaneously "rejected in some parts of the world because it is seen as a potential threat to harmony, even leading to conflict," they said.

Often, God's vision of harmony "is supplanted by ideologies that favor exclusion, discrimination and conformity on both the individual and collective level," they wrote. "Religious fundamentalism, extremism, fanaticism, racism and hyper nationalism in different parts of the world are some examples of ideologies that destroy harmony and give rise to suspicion, prejudice, mistrust, hatred and fear among people, thereby impeding them from forging bonds that sustain human fraternity and social friendship."

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The message emphasized that communities, cities and countries must nurture a spirit of fraternity to "defeat all forms of moral, economic and social distress and disharmony."

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, is celebrated with the lighting of oil lamps, fireworks and gatherings to symbolize the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Though celebrations for Diwali span several days, this year many Hindus worldwide will primarily celebrate the holiday Oct. 31.

In their message, the Vatican officials said that due to the "immense potential religions have to create conducive conditions for harmony in society, all religious leaders have the sacred duty to encourage their followers to strive for harmony."

"All need to work toward breaking down stereotypes, fostering empathy, sensitivity and respect for those who are different from us," the message said, noting the need "to promote dialogue at all levels for a greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of the richness of diversity and differences."

"Sowing the seeds of harmony amidst diversity and despite differences is a practical necessity that calls for concrete action and collective effort from all individuals, families, educational institutions, media, communities and nations," the dicastery officials said.