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Agnivesh presents spirituality book to Pope Francis

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Agnivesh with Pope Francis

New Delhi: Swami Agnivesh, a Hindu social reformer and activist, has presented Pope Francis a book on spirituality that urges world religions to shift from an attitude of competition to cooperation to bring common good.

The two leaders met June 13 at the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome.

The 76-year-old Indian ascetic posted a picture on Facebook where he is shown presenting the pontiff his book, "Applied Spirituality."

Published by HarperCollins and available on amazon.com, the book deals with inter-faith dialogue for peace, human rights and social justice.

The book is dedicated for Swami Dayanand Saraswati, founder of Arya Samaj (society of Aryans), who initiated inter-faith dialogue on the basis of commonality in modern times for the progress of humanity.

Underscoring that religion is about relationships, the book notes that every religion tries to enable the human person to relate to the divine and to the rest of creation in a harmonious and mutually enriching fashion. It is from this perspective that the importance of religions and their inter-relationship need to be appreciated.

The alienation between religions, or their relationship of mutual hostility, implies a contradiction of the very idea of religion, the book says. Physicians need to heal

themselves first. Religions are meant to become the nurseries of the culture of hospitality, it adds.

Agnivesh hailed WFP as the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide, delivering food assistance in emergencies and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience. Each year, it assists some 80 million people in around 80 countries.

In his address, Pope Francis called for increased commitment to the fight for zero hunger.

It was the pontiff's first visit to WFP and he gave his full support to the goal of eradicating hunger and paid tribute to the organization's staff, including those who had lost their lives at work.

Upon his arrival, he saw brass plaques with the names of staff members who have died in service.

"I prayed before the Memorial Wall," he said. "It is a testimony to the sacrifice made by members of this organization, who gave their lives, so that, in complex and difficult situations, others would not go hungry. We remember them best by continuing to fight for the great goal of 'Zero Hunger.'"

He added that WFP is an example of how one can work throughout the world to eradicate hunger through a better allotment of human and material resources by strengthening the local community.