

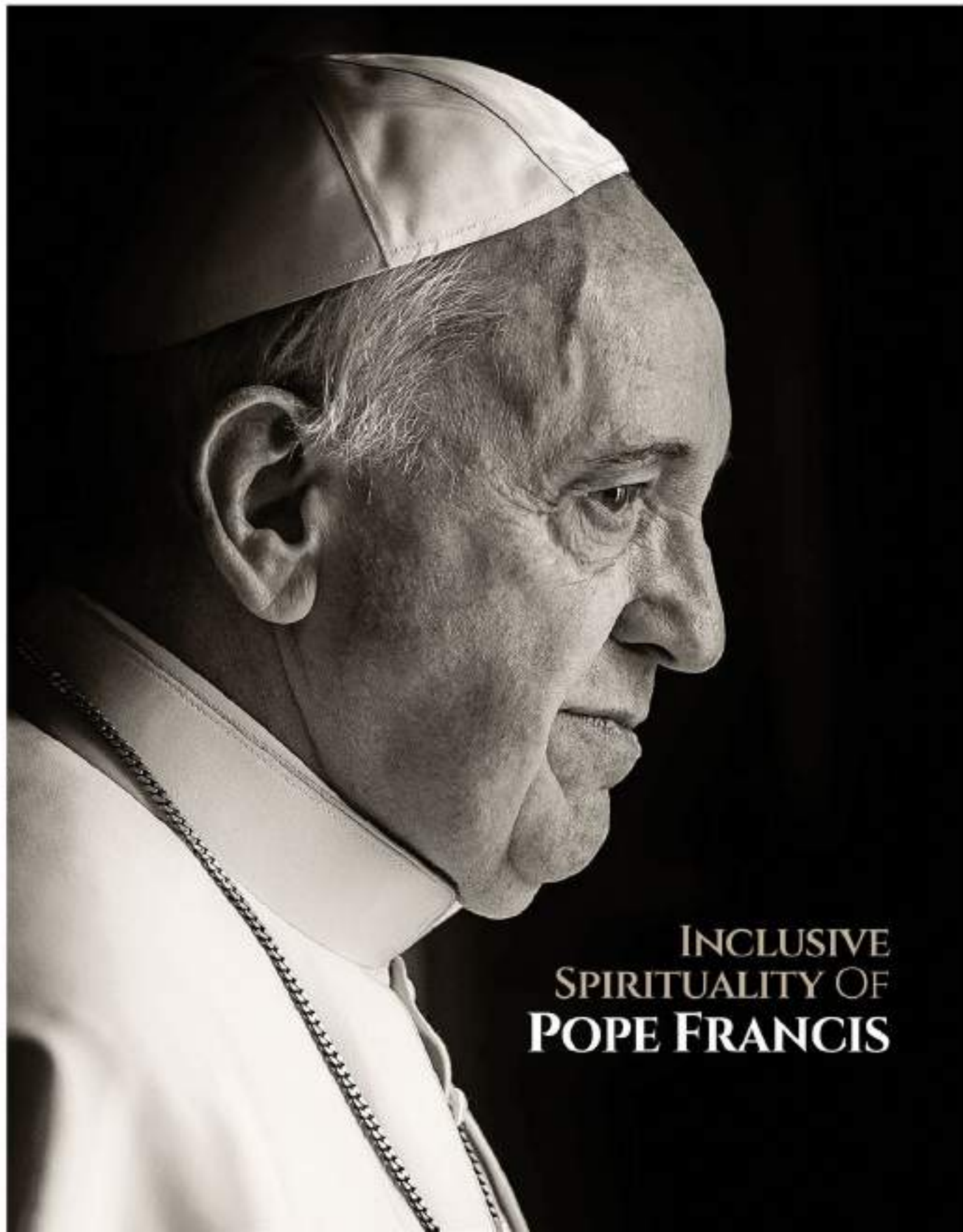
Bimonthly

# PaxLumina



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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



INCLUSIVE  
SPIRITUALITY OF  
POPE FRANCIS

# PaxLumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

**When you care for the weakest,  
you are closest to God's strength.**

– Pope Francis



# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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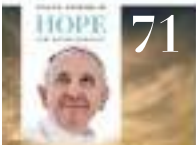
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# Depth and Authenticity:

## Inclusive Spirituality of Pope Francis in a Divided World

We find ourselves in a time marked by paradox—an era of instant communication and deep loneliness, of spiritual longing amidst growing alienation from institutional religion. In this complex landscape, Pope Francis offered a beacon of hope through what we now recognise as inclusive spirituality—a way of engaging the divine that is rooted in openness, authenticity, and compassion rather than dogma or exclusion.

Inclusive spirituality embraces all—people of all religions, those with no religion, those who doubt, and those who have been wounded by rigid systems. It makes room for complexity, for contradiction, for imperfection. And Pope Francis, even while holding the highest office of one of the world's oldest religious institutions, embodied this radical openness with humility and grace.

Despite the immense weight of the tradition of Catholic Church, the Pope nurtured an ecclesial culture grounded in transparency, simplicity, and love. He reached out to people on the margins. His was a papacy of encounter. Pope Francis believed the Church should be a field hospital, not a fortress. In a world fractured by binaries—us and them, saved and lost, believer and sceptic—he offered a third way: one of accompaniment, where every human story is treated with dignity.

This special issue of Pax Lumina brings together reflections on his inclusive vision—how it touched the lives of the voiceless, the displaced, and the forgotten. From interfaith dialogue and ecological concern to economic justice and gender inclusion, Pope Francis has shown us that true spirituality is about widening the circle, not tightening it.

As we mourn his passing away and celebrate his legacy, we are reminded that his most enduring gift is not a set of teachings, but a way of seeing the world—with compassion, humility, and radical hope. May we continue to walk the path he opened: one of inclusive spirituality, where no one is left outside.

*Jacob Thomas*

Editor



**Hope  
walks  
barefoot,  
but  
it always  
moves  
forward.**

- Pope Francis





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*Pax Lumina 3(6)/2025/08-11*

# CONFERRING AND CLAIMING HUMAN DIGNITY





**W**hen it comes to including the excluded, the pontiff carried on the Indian precedent of Mahatma Gandhi. **Gandhi felt that the very concept of outcaste or untouchable was dehumanizing, anti-divine, and repugnant. So, Gandhi renamed these beloveds of God, *Harijan* - that is, Children of God.**



**W**e treasure with gratitude the pontificate of Pope Francis for its many gifts. One such gift stands out: inclusiveness. In the spirit of liberation theology, this Holy Father sought to include those forlorn on the margins whom others had forgotten.

### **From Untouchable to Harijan**

When it comes to including the excluded, the pontiff carried on the Indian precedent of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi felt that the very concept of outcaste or untouchable was dehumanizing, anti-divine, and repugnant. So, Gandhi renamed these beloveds of God, *Harijan* - that is, *Children of God*.

What's in a name? Status? Ontology? Reality? All of these. In the book of Genesis, God names the creation "good" (Genesis 1:1-2:4a). Uttering the word, good, makes the created world good in essence.

Another way to view this shift—from the margins to the very center of value—is through the concept of dignity. In ancient Rome, dignity was a claim reserved for the rich and powerful. The rest of society—including plebeians, non-citizens, captives, and slaves—were marginalized. It was the role of these marginalized groups to confer dignity upon those at the center of Roman society.

In contrast to this selective application of dignity, the Christian tradition extends the notion of dignity to every human person, regardless of social status. Each one of us—no matter how humble our social circumstance—bears the *imago Dei*, the image of God. And bearing God's image makes us, in a sense, holy.

*Mahatma Gandhi*





believe this is the essential task of liberation theology. First, we confer dignity. **Then, second, the person or family on whom dignity is conferred rises to claim dignity, self-respect, and worth. The movement from conferral to claim to actuality constitutes liberation.**

When this Christian understanding became secularized in Western Europe during the 18th century, philosopher Immanuel Kant embedded dignity in the very definition of being human. We must treat each person as a moral end and never merely a means to some further end, he declared. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 enshrines this doctrine. Each human person is to be treated as sacred, inviolable, and lovable.

### **The Vatican as the Shepherd of Dignity**

If the United Nations dignified the world's sheep in the post-World War II period, the Vatican became their shepherd. The tacit public theology of the Roman Catholic Church in recent decades has focused on the conferral of human dignity in the secular domain. "At the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s," writes Gaymon Bennett at Arizona State University, "dignity was put forward as an answer to the problem of how the church should relate pastorally to the secular world....it also raised the question of whether human dignity, framed as intrinsic and universal, could be recognized and understood apart from the church's theological vernacular and doctrinal commitments" (Bennett, 2016, p. 4). I dub the Vatican's pastoral ministry public theology, because it's advocacy of dignity benefited the wider culture and not only the Church.

I think of public theology as "conceived in the Church, critically reasoned in the academy, and offered to the wider culture for the sake of the common good" (Peters, 2023, p. 3). Certainly, this describes the public ministry especially of John Paul II and Francis. "Humanity, in its essence and need for actualization, is a common object of responsibility for the church and the United Nation" (Bennett, 2016, p. 30).

### **Conferring Dignity in Liberation Spirituality**

The sad yet empirical fact is that individual persons and classes of persons the world over are denied dignity. They are treated by governments and businesses and races and classes as non-persons, as de facto outcasts, as expendable. Emigrants fleeing crime and persecution arrive on the shores of nations who reject them. They end up nationless, landless, homeless. Political calumny and institutional cruelty deny them the worth God sees in them.

Scapegoating and trashing immigrants have become the daily fare recently in the United States. Pope Francis has denounced this new American inhospitality toward the sojourner as unacceptable. In a recent visit to the Vatican on the part of US Vice President JD Vance, "there was an exchange of opinions on the international situation, especially regarding countries affected by war, political tensions



and difficult humanitarian situations, with particular attention to migrants, refugees and prisoners."

How should we who are disciples of Francis and Gandhi and God respond to the new barriers put up against immigrants? By conferring dignity. How do we confer dignity? The Hebrew Scriptures know the answer. We execute "justice for the fatherless and the widow, and love the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18).

When we treat each homeless person as a moral end, that person gains a sense of dignity and can then claim that dignity. As a moral end, each sojourner should be accorded hospitality at minimum, sharing and opportunity at maximum. In time, each sojourning family will become a productive contributor to the common good. Dignity is first conferred. Then it is claimed.

I believe this is the essential task of liberation theology. First, we confer dignity. Then, second, the person or family on whom dignity is conferred rises to claim dignity, self-respect, and worth. The movement from conferral to claim to actuality constitutes liberation.

Is this is not what God did for the human race when becoming incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth? In "the mystery of the Incarnation," Pope Francis observed, "God himself took on our flesh and raised it up to a sublime dignity" (Francis 2025, §16). This is what Gandhi and Francis like God sought to do in their respective ministries. This is our call from the God who treats us as worthy of divine love.

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# PEOPLE'S POPE

Pope Francis boldly ventured where few of his predecessors dared to go—addressing presidents and world councils, reminding their callous consciences and urging them to serve the poorest of poor as well as the mother earth.



**A**lthough many sensed it approaching, the death of Pope Francis surprised, shocked and saddened many because he was a Pope with a difference. He was the ‘people’s Pope’, the ‘reformist Pope’, the ‘green Pope’ and also ‘the Pope of surprises.’

The greetings ‘buona sera’ at the very start of his pontificate, and ‘buona Pasqua’ at the end, are eloquent markers of the remarkable and outstanding life-mission of Pope Francis. He began and ended his pontificate in the company of those whom he loved, his people.... a pastor “with the smell of the sheep.”

What made Pope Francis strikingly different? It was his sheer simplicity modelled upon Jesus, poor and humble. Upon assuming office, he not only rode the bus instead of the papal limo, forsook the gold pectoral cross for his plain metal one and opted to live in the simple Vatican guest house rather than the luxurious apostolic palace, but also ushered in a new way of being Pope.

Pope Francis’ unprecedented style of life and governance was not limited to externals. He imbibed the compassionate and comprehensive vision of Christ. This vision gave him a positive outlook about self and others. Hence, during his 12-year pontificate, he explored all those unheard, unseen, unnoticed and overlooked perspectives and processes of leadership.

Pope Francis boldly ventured where few of his predecessors dared to go—addressing presidents and world councils, reminding their callous consciences and urging them to serve the poorest of poor as well as the mother earth.

There were no conditions and confines in Pope Francis’ choice of ministries. In the words of St Paul, he was “all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22). His embrace clasped all without exception. Notably, he bent down to wash the feet of women, prisoners, refugees, and the marginalized, and spoke gently with the forsaken and forgotten. He comforted the sick,

hugged the aged, advised Putin on ending the war and empathized with Zelenskyy.

Francis touched friend and foe alike. The presence of leaders from 130 nations at his funeral testifies to his universal appeal.

Pope Francis did not just preach mercy; he became mercy, so to say. He did not just dream of a poor Church for the poor; he became poor. And in so doing, he bequeathed to us a legacy not of mere words, but of solid witness of what tenderness, courage, neighbourliness, mercy and love demand in action.

Like Christ, Pope Francis was relentless and tireless in “going about doing good” (Acts 10:38)—especially for the weak and the vulnerable. He not only welcomed them but also showered so much love on them that crowds flocked around him. His was a papacy of destroying walls, building bridges and creating a culture of listening and communion.

Through his words and deeds, especially through synodality, which is his unique style of communication, Pope Francis paved the way for a new communicative culture; and in an age of distrust, discord, division and destruction, he became a global icon of mercy, dialogue, peace-making and building individuals and communities. What message does Pope Francis gift us?

Pope Francis invites us to discern and become God’s voice in our own surroundings, i.e., to be hands of service, hearts of mercy, and voices of hope to those he held closest to his heart—the poor, the migrants, the sick, and the forgotten. He motivates us to be epitomes of dialogue, channels of peace, champions of justice and caretakers of creation, so that this fragmented and tormented world may be a better place for all God’s children.

In sum, the best way to remember Pope Francis is to continue his legacy by being beacons of mercy, compassion, and justice to all—especially to the last, the least and the lost of Christ’s sisters and brothers.

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*Pax Lumina 3(6)/2025/14-17*

# POPE FRANCIS AND THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES





**O**n Friday, May 2nd, 2025, St. Peter's Basilica was overflowing with tourists and pilgrims. Yet an event took place that has perhaps no precedent in the history of the Roman Church. At 5 PM, a Novendiale Mass was offered by Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, prefect for the Dicastery of the Eastern Churches. He was joined by several hierarchs of the Eastern Catholic churches in communion with Rome, as well as some representatives of the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches.

The Novendiale Masses are an ancient tradition rooted in pre-Christian practice. At the death of a Roman emperor, funeral rites would be offered for nine days, allowing the people of the city to mourn before the proclamation of his successor.

Eventually, this tradition came to be observed at the passing of the successors of Peter—especially after the eighth century, when the Bishop of Rome, supported by the Frankish kings, became the de facto ruler of large swathes of territory in central Italy.

In the present day, the Novendiale takes the form of eight liturgical celebrations offered by prominent cardinals on the eight days following the pope's funeral. These Masses also serve as an opportunity for the cardinal electors to meet and exchange opinions as the conclave approaches.

The sermons delivered by cardinals during the Novendiale are distributed to the media and closely read for any clues as to the possible trends or leanings within the College of Cardinals.

Pope Francis' popularity with many Catholics reflected his widely publicized support for migrants and refugees, as well as his concern for those discarded by Western, more economically advanced societies — something he famously condemned as *la cultura dello scarto* ("throwaway culture").

**T**he Novendiale Masses are an ancient tradition rooted in pre-Christian practice. **At the death of a Roman emperor, funeral rites would be offered for nine days, allowing the people of the city to mourn before the proclamation of his successor.**





The week before his passing, on Holy Thursday, the Pope visited the Regina Caeli prison in central Rome and met with over seventy inmates. Some of them were later allowed to leave the prison to welcome the pope's funeral procession at Santa Maria Maggiore, just a few days later.

His statements about members of sexual minorities were controversial, but his pastoral, non-judgmental outreach gained him the sympathies of many.

One aspect of Francis' pontificate that attracted little attention, however, was his special care for the Eastern Catholic churches in communion with Rome. This past Friday, these churches' gratitude toward Pope Francis was clearly visible at the celebration in Saint Peter's.

While the Latin Church is obviously the largest of all the churches making up the Roman Catholic communion, there are another 23 Eastern Catholic Churches. Among them, the Syro-Malabar Church—with over four and a half million members and more than sixty bishops—is the largest, followed closely by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

Indeed, until recently, it is quite fair to say that the reality of Eastern Catholicism was a much better-known reality in India than in most Western European countries, whose Catholicism was largely of a homogenous Latin-rite character.

It is only in recent decades, with growing immigration from the Balkans and now with the refugee waves from Ukraine, that Europeans are coming to know about these ancient churches and their tradition.

In fact, co-existence between these various communities has not always been easy. The practices and spiritualities of Eastern Churches were often considered somehow defective, or at best 'inferior' to the 'norm' represented by the Roman tradition.

The fact that many of these churches allowed the ordination of married men made their relationship with Latin-rite bishops even more difficult. In 1929, the decree *Cum Data Fuerit*—initially reflecting the American situation but then extended to other countries as well—prohibited Eastern Catholic Churches from ordaining married men in the diaspora.

This decision, in fact, led to the exodus of many of these churches' faithful to Orthodoxy or other denominations. In 2014, Pope Francis decided to lift this prohibition, which, for instance, allowed the Melkite Greek Catholics in the United States to ordain a number of married men for their communities.

At various points in his papacy, Pope Francis undertook revisions of the Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Catholic Churches. His aim was to harmonize it with Western canon law while respecting legitimate differences between the two traditions.

One significant change was the prohibition of Latin deacons receiving the wedding vows of a couple when one or both spouses belong to an Eastern Catholic Church. In Eastern tradition, a priest's blessing is essential for a sacramental marriage to be valid.

Another example came in 2015, when Pope Francis issued separate guidelines for the annulment of marriages in the Latin and Eastern Churches, following his broader reform of the annulment process.

Finally, breaking from a more recent custom, Francis restored the proper protocol in the appointment of bishops. Whereas previously the papal nuncio would directly contact newly appointed bishops, Pope Francis re-established

the practice of first informing the patriarch or major archbishop of the relevant Eastern Church.

On April 23rd, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, stated, "I am a witness to how the Holy Father did everything in his power as the Vicar of Christ on earth to stop the war. I am convinced that now in heaven he has even more opportunities, even understanding and awareness, to help Ukraine."

Over the last three years, the Vatican has provided significant humanitarian aid to Ukraine. At one point, papal almoner Cardinal Konrad Krajewski even drove to Ukraine a medical vehicle blessed by the pope.

The May 2nd liturgy was a Latin liturgy, but it featured chants from many liturgical traditions and languages, including Syriac and Malayalam. A number of Indian Syro-Malabar priests were in attendance and distributed communion to the congregation.

Recently, Pope Francis remarked that Western missionaries had often shown "insensitivity" to India's ancient Christian heritage. In addressing the ongoing liturgical disputes within the Syro-Malabar Church, the Pope commended the faithful for the "vigour of their faith and piety."

Meeting in 2024 with Syro-Malabar Major Archbishop Raphael Thattil of Ernakulam-Angamaly, Pope Francis also stated, "The Christian East allows us to draw from ancient and ever new sources of spirituality; these become fresh springs that bring vitality to the Church."

Thanks to this kind of 'internal ecumenism', we can rest assured that Eastern Catholics will never forget Pope Francis' legacy of inclusion.

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# SPIRITUALITY OF A MAVERICK POPE FRANCIS



**A** popular term in this context is “Spiritual but not Religious” (SBNR), also known as “Spiritual but not Affiliated” (SBNA), or less commonly, “More Spiritual than Religious.” **This initialism is used to describe a life stance centered on spirituality without viewing organized religion as the sole or most valuable path to spiritual growth.**



## **T**he Context

More and more people are leaving organized religions, yet they continue to seek spirituality outside established religious frameworks. A popular term in this context is “Spiritual but not Religious” (SBNR), also known as “Spiritual but not Affiliated” (SBNA), or less commonly, “More Spiritual than Religious.” This initialism is used to describe a life stance centered on spirituality without viewing organized religion as the sole or most valuable path to spiritual growth. It has gained increasing acceptance across the world. Another related term is “Nones,” referring to individuals who identify as religiously unaffiliated—those who do not belong to any particular religious denomination. This group may also include those who describe themselves as atheists or agnostics.

In a study by Dominik Balazka, (2020) it was reported, ‘Non-affiliation is progressively becoming a widespread phenomenon with Europe, East Asia, North America and Australasia being the leading geographical areas in its diffusion. 25.9% of 2017-2020 respondents do not belong to any religious denomination – with 30.2% in Europe and 21.7% in non-European territories. In several countries nones already constitute a solid majority, with others slowly approaching a similar scenario. Europe is characterized by higher numbers of non-affiliation and by a significantly lower level of religiosity of nones when compared with the remaining countries.’<sup>(1)</sup>



## **An Alternative, Inclusive Spirituality**

The argument of this piece is that Pope Francis while being the head of the most organized religion in the world has opened up to a world of spirituality which is inviting even the ‘nones’ and those of other denominations.



And the world seems to be responding, as evidenced by the remarkable popularity of Pope Francis among people of other religions and even among non-believers. This affection was most evident during his recent illness, when good wishes poured in not only from Catholics and other Christians, but from many others who hoped for his recovery and return to good health. The Guardian editorial of March 17, 2025, observed:

"Progressives both inside and outside the Church must hope that he is able to continue for a good while yet. The pope's enforced absence from the world stage has served as a reminder of his importance, as universal values are repudiated and cast aside in the name of narrow and aggressive national interest."

Trying to define spirituality may not be entirely precise. However, as a starting point for deeper reflection, one can view spirituality as "the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred" (Christina Puchalski).<sup>(2)</sup>

Connecting to something larger than oneself, fostering personal growth, contributing to the well-being of others, and promoting values like compassion, non-violence, peace, and care for

the earth and its sustainability appear to be common elements of spirituality. While specific religious practices may not be emphasized, spiritual searches often include shared practices such as meditation, silence, mindfulness, prayer, service, fasting, and self-discipline.

### **Pope Francis and His Call for a Spiritual Life**

What then are some of the elements of the inclusive spirituality that Pope Francis is promoting?

#### **Mercy**

Mercy predominates the words and deeds of Pope Francis. For him, it is a response to his own personal experience of a Merciful God. His Apostolic Letter on Mercy called upon people to return to the Mercy of God and to be merciful themselves. In fact, his emphasis on mercy—especially towards the marginalized—led some to believe that the Pope was destabilizing the Church.

In one of his exhortations, he said: "Let us be renewed by the peace, forgiveness, and wounds of the merciful Jesus. Let us ask for the grace to become witnesses of mercy. Only in this way will our faith be alive and our lives unified. Only in this way will we proclaim the Gospel of God, which is the Gospel of mercy."



**H**is words and actions on behalf of war victims, migrants, women, and children stand as powerful testimony to this call for mercy. **Even while convalescing, he visited Regina Coeli, the Rome prison, on the Maundy Thursday.**



His words and actions on behalf of war victims, migrants, women, and children stand as powerful testimony to this call for mercy. Even while convalescing, he visited Regina Coeli, the Rome prison, on the Maundy Thursday.

### **Closeness to the Periphery**

A merciful man invariably goes to the periphery. Pope said, “The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.” Doesn’t this also remind us of the poem of Tagore: ‘Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! ... Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones...’

### **Being in the Present**

Reviewing the sudden appearances of Pope Francis during the convalescent period, without the formal vests even, Javier Martínez-Brocal remarked, “He (the pope) probably feels strong and thinks it’s useless to be locked up indoors . So, he thinks these are reasonable risks to take. He wants to show that he’s still present, and to see how far he can push it.”<sup>(3)</sup> Pope Francis has always remained a man in the present, with all its beauty and charm.

### **Pushing the Limits; Taking Risks**

Part of his spirituality is to push the limits. Angela Giuffrida remarked recently, ‘Pope has pushed the limits throughout his papacy, for example going to Iraq in the 2021 despite being strongly advised against it because Covid-19

was still raging and the security risks were high. He revealed in his autobiography, *Hope*, that he escaped a double suicide bombing during the trip after the attempts on his life were foiled by British intelligence and Iraqi police.’ (Ibid)

### **Trust in Prayer**

Beginning from the moment he was elected, Pope Francis has consistently requested people for their prayers and assured them of his prayers. Whichever way you understand prayer, a genuine spirituality finds time to pray consistently.

In brief, the beauty of the spirituality promoted by Pope Francis is that while he remains the head of the most organized and hierarchical church, he is a maverick who promotes a spirituality of mercy and justice, grounded in the lives of the ordinary people, especially the suffering, and is willing to take risks and push the limits. And he trusts in constant prayer.

And that remains the appeal of Pope Francis for most, if not all.

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# ONE LIGHT, MANY PATHS

## INCLUSIVE SPIRITUALITY IN POPE FRANCIS AND GURU NANAK



**I**n an age increasingly divided by religious, cultural, and socio-political differences, two spiritual figures—separated by five centuries and different faith traditions—shine as beacons of unity and inclusiveness: Pope Francis, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, and Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism. Despite their vastly different contexts, both leaders emphasize an inclusive, compassionate spirituality rooted in humility, love, and service. Their teachings and actions invite a fresh dialogue across faiths, fostering a vision of a world based on shared humanity rather than exclusive dogmas.

### **Pope Francis: A Voice for the Marginalized**

Since his papacy began in 2013, Pope Francis has been widely recognized for shifting the Catholic Church's focus toward social justice, mercy, and inclusion. Breaking away from traditional clerical aloofness, Francis chose the path of a servant-leader. He refused lavish accommodations, washed the feet of prisoners on Holy Thursday, and constantly urged the Church to go out to the peripheries of society—geographically and spiritually.

#### **His key spiritual themes include:**

- ♦ **Mercy over Judgment:** Francis placed a strong emphasis on God's mercy, often stating that the Church should be a "field hospital" for the wounded, not a tribunal for the perfect.
- ♦ **Care for the Poor and the Earth:** Francis linked social justice with ecological concern, calling for an "integral ecology" that respects both people and the planet.
- ♦ **Interfaith Harmony:** Francis made several historic moves to reach out to other faiths. His meetings with Muslim, Jewish, Hindu,

**D**espite their vastly different contexts, both leaders emphasize an inclusive, compassionate spirituality rooted in humility, love, and service. **Their teachings and actions invite a fresh dialogue across faiths, fostering a vision of a world based on shared humanity rather than exclusive dogmas.**



and Buddhist leaders were marked not by theological superiority but by humility and a shared concern for peace and justice.

Pope Francis' spirituality was deeply inclusive—not because he diluted the Christian message, but because he interpreted it in its most universal essence: love of God and love of neighbour.

### **Guru Nanak: The Prophet of Oneness**

Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539) emerged in a time of religious strife in the Indian subcontinent, where tensions between Hindus and Muslims were at their peak. Instead of aligning with one or the other, Nanak proclaimed a revolutionary message of divine unity and human equality.

#### **His core spiritual insights include:**

- ♦ **Ik Onkar (One Universal Creator God):** Nanak's vision of God transcends religious labels. For him, there is no Hindu or Muslim; all are children of the same divine source.





♦ **Naam Simran, Kirat Karni, and Vand Chakna:** The practice of remembering God, honest labor, and sharing with others—particularly the poor—are the pillars of a Sikh’s spiritual life.

♦ **Rejection of Ritualism and Caste:** Nanak challenged ritualistic religion, caste-based discrimination, and gender inequality, advocating a direct, heartfelt connection with the Divine.

♦ **Universal Brotherhood:** Through his travels and teachings (Udasis), Nanak dialogued with people of many religions, promoting understanding and spiritual inclusiveness.

Guru Nanak’s inclusive spirituality was not about blending religions, but about awakening the same divine light in every heart. His message resonated with peasants and kings, Hindus and Muslims, men and women—transcending barriers with the simple yet profound truth of oneness.

Despite the temporal and cultural distances between them, Pope Francis and Guru Nanak share remarkable similarities in their spiritual outlook:

**1. Universal Compassion:** Both leaders preach compassion not as a sentimental ideal but as a divine imperative. Pope Francis’ outreach to the poor, refugees, and the LGBTQ+ community echoes Guru Nanak’s insistence on caring for the downtrodden.

They both define religion not by ritual, but by how one treats the marginalized.

**2. Humility as a Core Virtue:** Francis often warned against clericalism—the notion that religious leaders are above others. Guru Nanak, too, rejected priestly elitism and emphasized humility, even describing himself as the “lowest of the low.” Their leadership style dismantles hierarchy and replaces it with humility.

**3. Interfaith Engagement:** Pope Francis’ visit to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and signing of the “Document on Human Fraternity” parallels Guru Nanak’s dialogues with Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Jains. Both believe that truth is not the monopoly of any one faith, and that all sincere seekers are part of the divine journey.

**4. Service to Humanity as Worship:** For both leaders, serving others is a form of worship. Francis’ call for a “culture of encounter” matches Guru Nanak’s principle of seva (selfless service). They teach that we meet God not in isolation but in community, especially among the needy and suffering.

**5. Ecological Awareness:** While Guru Nanak did not speak in contemporary environmental terms, his poetry often described nature as a manifestation of the Divine. Francis explicitly connects spirituality with ecological responsibility. Both see the Earth as sacred and deserving of care.

## Relevance in Today's World

The teachings of Pope Francis and Guru Nanak offer an urgent antidote to the divisive ideologies of our time. Whether in the rise of religious extremism, xenophobia, or environmental neglect, both figures urge a return to the spiritual fundamentals of love, simplicity, and unity.

Moreover, their inclusive spirituality provides a template for interfaith collaboration. In a world where religion is often manipulated to sow division, these leaders offer a counter-narrative of spiritual solidarity. The idea that one can be deeply rooted in one's faith while fully open to others is a radical and necessary message.

Their teachings also challenge religious institutions to become more relevant. Churches, gurdwaras, mosques, and temples must become places of refuge and social engagement, not just ceremonial observance. As Pope Francis said, "The Church must go out into the streets," and Guru Nanak would agree—faith must be lived, not just preached.

## Conclusion

Pope Francis and Guru Nanak, though separated by time, geography, and tradition, embody a spirituality that transcends all borders. They call us to move beyond ritual, dogma, and narrow identities, urging us to rediscover the divine through love, service, and unity. Their inclusive spirituality is not a dilution of faith, but a deeper fidelity to the very essence of religion: the oneness of God and the unity of humanity.

In the face of global challenges—from climate change and inequality to religious intolerance—the wisdom of these two leaders offers a guiding light. Their legacy invites all of us, regardless of our faith tradition, to build bridges, heal divisions, and recognize the sacred in every human being.

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**T**he teachings of Pope Francis and Guru Nanak offer an urgent antidote to the divisive ideologies of our time. **Whether in the rise of religious extremism, xenophobia, or environmental neglect, both figures urge a return to the spiritual fundamentals of love, simplicity, and unity.**







Swami Dharma Chaithanya

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# **SRI NARAYANA GURU AND POPE FRANCIS**

## **A SHARED DREAM OF INCLUSIVITY**





**D**espite initial indications of a brief appearance dictated by protocol, the Holy Father's presence was marked by genuine warmth and generosity. He did not stand aloof on a distant stage. **He sat with the representatives, engaging personally. Reportedly, he spent more time than initially planned, personally interacting with many of the more than 200 delegates present, offering blessings and creating a feeling of deep connection and joy.**



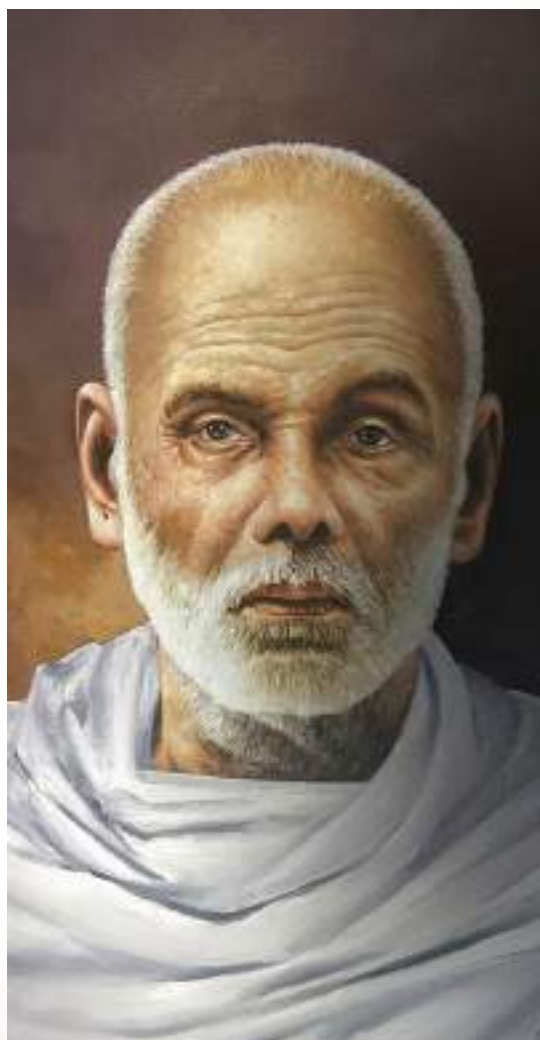
**S**ri Narayana Guru's timeless message of unity finds resonance in Pope Francis's embrace of inclusivity.

A century ago, in March 1924, the great South Indian sage and social reformer Sri Narayana Guru convened a remarkable assembly in Aluva, Kerala. It was not a debate to declare a single religion supreme, but to initiate a dialogue. His instruction to the gathered scholars from various faiths was simple yet profound: "Preach about the core principles of your religion."

After listening intently, the Guru's conclusion was delivered with gentle clarity: "What I heard here is very clear. All religions have the same core principles." From this foundational understanding, he envisioned a Mahapathasala (great institution of learning) in Sivagiri, dedicated to teaching about all religions – a testament to his vision of universal truth.

Fast forward a hundred years to 2024, the Sadabdi (centenary) year of that historic Aluva assembly. Celebrations spanned the globe, but one event stood out for its symbolic significance: a gathering held at the Vatican. To many, the presence and participation of Pope Francis in an event honouring Sri Narayana Guru, a Hindu sage, was deeply moving and noteworthy.

*Sri Narayana Guru*





Why would the head of the Catholic Church engage so directly in the gathering? It speaks volumes about Pope Francis's own profound commitment to interfaith dialogue and the inherent dignity of all human beings, principles that echo Sri Narayana Guru's philosophy of "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man." This was not about one leader teaching the other, but about the convergence of great minds recognizing universal truths that transcend religious boundaries. At the Vatican, the spirit of inclusivity championed by the Guru found a powerful contemporary affirmation.

Witnessing Pope Francis during this event was an experience in itself. Despite initial indications of a brief appearance dictated by protocol, the Holy Father's presence was marked by genuine warmth and generosity. He did not stand aloof on a distant stage. He sat with the representatives, engaging personally. Reportedly, he spent more time than initially planned, personally interacting with many of the more than 200 delegates present, offering blessings and creating a feeling of deep connection and joy.

This personal warmth and radical inclusivity are hallmarks of Pope Francis's papacy, strongly influenced by his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi. Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Argentina to Italian immigrant parents, his choice of the name Francis upon becoming Pope was a clear signal of his priorities: a return to the simplicity, humility, compassion, and connection with nature and the poor that defined St. Francis.

Like St. Francis, who embraced lepers when others turned away, Pope Francis consistently reached out to the marginalized. His pastoral care included particularly those on the fringes of society—including the transgender community—emphasizing the inherent dignity and worth of every person. He led a life of striking simplicity, choosing a modest room in a Vatican guesthouse over the traditional splendour of the papal palace, embodying the spirit of poverty and service that St. Francis lived. He often spoke of ordinary acts like cooking his own meals or doing his laundry, gestures that reflect his deep connection to everyday life—a lived expression of humility.

The Vatican event marking the centenary of Sri Narayana Guru was more than a historic commemoration—it stood as a living testament to the enduring power of his message of universal harmony. In Pope Francis, the world witnessed a leader whose actions and spirit deeply resonate with the inclusive vision Sri Narayana Guru proclaimed a century ago. It served as a powerful reminder that the call for unity, understanding, and compassion among all people is timeless—shared by enlightened souls across continents and creeds. The legacy of Aluva lives on, finding its echo in the very heart of the Vatican.

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# LIVING THE GOSPEL

## POPE FRANCIS' WITNESS TO COMPASSION





**T**o me, the most defining feature of Pope Francis is his “language” — a language not merely spoken, but lived out in acts of sacrifice. **At times, I wonder if he knows any other way to communicate. His readiness to engage with the complexities of our modern world is nothing short of striking.**



**L**ooking at Pope Francis, I behold a figure whose influence transcends religious boundaries. Though he stands as the spiritual head of the Catholic Church, his presence and ministry extend far beyond, radiating a spirit of deep sacrifice and a truly universal embrace.

To me, the most defining feature of Pope Francis is his “language” — a language not merely spoken, but lived out in acts of sacrifice. At times, I wonder if he knows any other way to communicate. His readiness to engage with the complexities of our modern world is nothing short of striking. There appears to be no subject he has shied away from, no terrain he has left unexplored — be it ethnicity, politics, global history, gender equality, the LGBTQ+ community, the cry of the Amazon, or the painful realities of alcoholism and prostitution. His prolific writings and bold public statements form, in my view, a profound commentary on how to navigate the challenges of contemporary life through the lens of faith.

He constantly calls us back to the concept of synodality, reminding me that the Church, at its most faithful, is a pilgrim community—one where all journey together. This vision transcends the clergy; it is a conviction that the Church becomes most fully itself when everyone is welcomed, heard, and equipped and empowered to participate. It is a principle that reaches far beyond ecclesial boundaries, touching the very fabric of communal life.

One of the most striking aspects of his presence is the grace with which he faces even the harshest criticisms—always with a disarming smile. There is immense virtue in this, an unspoken invitation to move forward with joy. It echoes the spirit of his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*), where joy is not a fleeting emotion but a deep spirituality rooted in the Gospel’s heart—a living testament to a faith alive and radiant.

I believe he seeks to live the Gospel as Jesus did. He is merciful—the one who feeds the hungry and gives drink to the thirsty. Yet he also mirrors the Jesus who challenged injustice, who stood firm before religious hypocrisy, and who was unafraid to name hard truths. In my mind, just as a few simple strokes can capture the essence of Mother Teresa or Mahatma Gandhi, the soul of Pope Francis can be distilled into a single, unbroken line of compassion—a line that bends toward the poor and the marginalized, where the heart of the Gospel truly beats.

I have been particularly moved by stories of his direct engagement with those on the margins of society. I recall hearing of his decision to walk through the streets in Rome known for prostitution. There, he encountered individuals trapped in that painful reality. It is said he wept with them, offering a message of deep and tender solidarity: “You are not alone. I am with you. We are with you.” This simple yet profound act of presence among the most vulnerable evokes the image of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek out the one lost sheep.



I have also read some of his major writings—his encyclicals, *Frattelli tutti*, *Laudato si'*, *Dilexit nos*, *Lumen fidei*, as they are called—and I humbly urge others, especially Catholics and other Christians, to do the same. These texts, rich in wisdom and spiritual insight, offer guidance on matters such as domestic life and the unity of the Spirit. I truly believe that engaging with his words can lead to profound personal and familial transformation. He gently reminds us of God's blessings upon the family and of the spiritual love that binds us all.

Ultimately, I believe his overriding message is both simple and profound: "He loves us." For me, reading the Gospel is nothing less than gazing into the heart of Christ—and in the ministry of Pope Francis, I see that same heart reflected with radiant clarity.

I have been blessed with a few deeply spiritual encounters with Pope Francis—moments etched into my memory with quiet reverence. The first occurred during a formation programme, where I witnessed him celebrate the Holy Mass. Watching him offer the sacred liturgy was a profoundly moving experience. There was a joy on his face, a luminous expression of the divine mystery unfolding. His words were

simple; his homily, brief—yet the encounter was deeply rewarding, a moment that felt truly touched by God.

Another occasion was during the *ad limina* visit to Rome. Accustomed to seeing public figures encased in layers of security and protocol, I was struck by Pope Francis's remarkable simplicity. He moved freely among the people, giving instructions with quiet authority—offering water, directing guests, asking us gently to pause our writing. Here stood a man of immense global significance, conducting himself with the humility and directness of a servant. It was an unforgettable witness to his character.

My third vivid memory is from a shared lunch at Santa Marta, a hostel where he resided. It was a buffet arrangement, and everyone served themselves. I watched as he moved gently among the crowd, greeting people, resting a hand on a shoulder, offering silent blessings. Then, having taken his own meal, he quietly washed and dried his plate. To see the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church perform such an ordinary, humble act was a living parable—a powerful visual lesson that continues to speak to me.

Even at the age of 88, until death separated him from us, Pope Francis continued his ministry with undiminished energy. His engagement with the world—even through platforms like Instagram, where he reaches hundreds of thousands—reveals a soul ever intent on communicating divine love and building bridges across all boundaries.

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# A SHEPHERD FOR ALL

## MOURNING POPE FRANCIS





**H**e was more than the head of the Catholic Church; he stood as a towering presence who embraced the very heart of the global human family.

**His was a transformative life, one that embodied truth and authenticity. Truly, he can be remembered as a remarkable individual whose influence spanned far and deep.**



**F**ollowing the passing of Pope Francis, the world has entered a time of profound reflection on his life and legacy. It is a moment of deep significance, marked by remembrance rituals such as the “Pappa Smruthi” procession in which I recently took part. These gatherings offer us a space to honour and express the immense goodness of a man who meant so much to so many.

To participate in such a remembrance for Pope Francis is to be moved at the core. He was more than the head of the Catholic Church; he stood as a towering presence who embraced the very heart of the global human family. His was a transformative life, one that embodied truth and authenticity. Truly, he can be remembered as a remarkable individual whose influence spanned far and deep. Even in moments of solemnity, he brought with him a divine light—offering insights and wisdom that often transcended my own understanding.

Pope Francis had much to offer the world. He was a man of great inner strength, marked by an open spirit and extraordinary depth of character. In every way, he was a powerful and luminous human being. His vision affirmed that Christ’s mission was not confined to the structures of the Church, but was Christ himself—alive and active in the world. It was a bold, principled affirmation that shaped his entire ministry.

When asked about his spiritual leadership, I would affirm it without hesitation. He navigated complex situations within the Church with remarkable clarity—especially when addressing issues of misuse and misconduct. His approach can be understood through two profound concepts drawn from spiritual language: Vaathil (Door), signifying an open invitation—come into this; and Mathil (Wall), expressing a boundary—enough is enough, close it. If one were to ask who Francis is, I would say: he is a spiritual leader profoundly engaged with the human condition.

He was a leader of uncommon depth—insightful, widely read, and attentive to both issues and individuals. Even without personal encounter, one could sense his intimate engagement with the world. He offered clear moral direction on various fronts, including in Muslim-majority nations, particularly within the GCC states.

Pope Francis consistently championed dialogue, a word he returned to often, emphasizing the sacred task of mutual understanding. I have read extensively on his reflections—especially his writings on the role of dialogue among the Abrahamic traditions and beyond. He revealed a rare capacity to encounter the other with openness, listening deeply across lines of belief and culture.

A moment that particularly resonated with me was his stance on the people of Palestine. During the Christmas season of 2024, he drew the world’s attention to their suffering. We are familiar with the traditional Christian celebration of Christmas, where Jesus is depicted lying in a manger. Yet, in 2024, Pope Francis offered a striking and deeply symbolic representation: the



cross bearing the crucified Christ also included an icon evocative of Palestine—a scene where Jesus lay wrapped in a *keffiyeh*, the traditional scarf worn by men in parts of the Middle East, resembling a modest Palestinian dwelling or a simple shelter that mirrored their lived reality. It was, without doubt, a powerful political statement.

His positions and actions often drew criticism—at times severe, even brutal. Some of the responses he received were regrettable, laced with terrible words, and in some instances, there were even attempts to associate his views with extremism. Such reactions underscore the cost of taking bold moral stands. Yet, we must remember: the responsibility to oppose violence and terrorism—regardless of where it originates or who commits it—rests on all of us. We must also reject any attempt to justify such acts. While we may not agree with every detail of his approach, it is essential to affirm that violence can never be the answer. If his message failed to reach those who perpetuate violence, that would indeed be a tragic failure. Nevertheless, despite the backlash he endured, I held him in deep esteem for the courage and clarity of his stand.

Pope Francis was a great shepherd, a remarkable figure who left a deep and lasting imprint on the world. He was a profound mediator. In Islam, the Prophet Muhammad teaches that we are all mediators—called to connect, to reconcile, and to build bridges. Pope Francis embodied this calling with grace and conviction; he was truly a bridge-builder in a divided world.

His connection to Saint Francis of Assisi is part of well-known history. We remember how Francis of Assisi, in the midst of the Crusades, dared to seek peace—venturing alone into the camp of the Muslim army to speak of understanding. His solitary pursuit of peace and dialogue stands as a luminous example. And yet, why does the world still reel under the weight of so many wars? We must rise above conflict, letting dialogue—not violence—shape the story of our times.

Throughout my own journey—speaking for peace, standing with those who struggle for justice—I have encountered many who embody quiet resilience. Their pain is real, their courage enduring. They remind us that the path to peace is walked together, step by step, with hearts open to one another.

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In reflecting on Pope Francis, I am reminded of the prayer offered during the Janazah Namaskaram (Islamic funeral prayer), which includes heartfelt supplications for the deceased and for those left behind. One such prayer that echoes in my mind is: "La taharimna ajarahu, wa la taftinna ba'dahu" – O God, do not deprive us of his reward, and do not let us fall into confusion or trial after him; do not leave us orphaned in his absence. How deeply

meaningful this prayer becomes when offered for someone whose influence reached far and wide—within his Church, among his family and community, and across the public sphere.

This prayer, taught by the Prophet, transcends religious boundaries. It is not meant for the Catholic faithful alone—it is a universal human plea. It speaks to the hearts of all: the poor, the orphaned, women, and those whose rights have been denied. It speaks of the loss of one who stood in defence of the vulnerable, who gave voice to the voiceless.

Pope Francis was a revolutionary figure on the world stage—a man of rare substance and profound humanity. He did not seek a life of quiet seclusion, but rather chose to engage actively with the complexities of the world. He used his position not for passive leadership but for transformative action. The depth of his spiritual presence can be praised in countless ways.

Long before his passing, I had read, studied, and learned much about Pope Francis. His departure is a loss not just for the Church, but for all of humanity. As the tradition teaches us, we remember the good deeds of those who have gone before us. Pope Francis was such a person—one whose life and legacy have left the world richer, kinder, and more just.

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# BRIDGES NOT WALLS

**A JOURNEY INTO  
INCLUSIVE  
SPIRITUALITY**



Religion provides communal belonging through doctrines and rituals. **Spirituality, on the other hand, is a solitary yet expansive inward journey—a personal dialogue with transcendence, often expressed through meditation, contemplation, or engagement with nature. Recognising this difference is key to fostering inclusive spirituality.**



### **Tale of Two Encounters**

**A**In 2024, I was privileged to be granted audiences with two of the world's most influential spiritual leaders—Pope Francis in the Vatican, and His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India. Though they represent different religious traditions, their message resonated with the same spiritual urgency: the call to embrace inclusive spirituality.

This essay, anchored on their teachings and conversations, explores the evolving meaning of spirituality that moves beyond dogma, embracing a humanity bound by compassion, mutual respect, and shared transcendence.

Inclusive spirituality, as defined by the *Triveni Journal*, a journal of Indian renaissance, “promotes the acceptance of diverse beliefs and practices as equally valid paths to understanding the ultimate truth, fostering an environment of respect and open-mindedness among various spiritual traditions in the world.” This sentiment finds echo in both the gentle wisdom of the Dalai Lama and the moral courage of Pope Francis.

### **The Evolving Nature of Spirituality**

Spirituality, like language, has evolved over time. While early Christian thought understood it through the lens of the Holy Spirit, by the late Middle Ages, it came to incorporate the mental, contemplative aspects of life. Today, spirituality is increasingly associated with personal growth, subjective experiences of sacredness, and values that guide life, sometimes within religion, sometimes apart from it.

The word “spirit” traces back to the Latin *spiritus*, meaning breath, soul, or courage, linked in translation to *pneuma* in Greek and *ruach* in Hebrew. Modern spirituality involves more than faith; it is a search for ultimate meaning, sometimes expressed through yoga, mindfulness, or meditation. The works of scholars such as Georg Feuerstein, who wrote extensively on Eastern traditions and mysticism, and Kalus Klostermaier, who analysed Hindu scriptures and the *Bhagavad Gita*, remind us of the vast diversity of spiritual wisdom humanity has cultivated.

Georg Feuerstein was a pioneering scholar of yoga and Indian philosophy whose writings span Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and comparative mysticism. In his extensive works, such as *The Yoga Tradition* and *The Essence of Yoga*, Feuerstein traced the spiritual quest for liberation (*moksha*) across diverse traditions. He explored Hindu yoga's paths—*karma*, *bhakti*,



*Pope Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship in  
Fratelli Tutti | Catholic Truth Society*

*jnana*, and *raja*—emphasising the unity of body, mind, and spirit. He showed how Jainism’s radical nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and Buddhism’s Four Noble Truths offer ethical frameworks for spiritual realisation. Feuerstein also respected the inner transformation found in Christian mysticism, the ecstatic union in Muslim Sufism, and the mystical symbolism of Jewish Kabbalah. He argued that beneath doctrinal differences lies a shared aspiration: to transcend ego and realise the divine or the ultimate reality. His scholarship promotes a profound interspiritual understanding that celebrates the sacred in all traditions, aligning perfectly with the vision of inclusive spirituality.

### **Religion and Spirituality: The Vital Distinction**

Religion provides communal belonging through doctrines and rituals. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a solitary yet expansive inward journey—a personal dialogue with transcendence, often expressed through meditation, contemplation, or engagement with nature. Recognising this difference is key to fostering inclusive spirituality.

Where religion may draw lines of orthodoxy, inclusive spirituality builds bridges. It understands that many individuals today are spiritual but not religious, or belong to minority traditions. True inclusivity respects not only interfaith dialogue but also intrafaith diversity and those outside formal religion altogether.

### **Pope Francis and the Catholic Vision of Openness**

During my audience with Pope Francis, what struck me was not his authority, but his humility. His theology is pastoral, rooted in love over law. In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), he articulates a radical vision of global fraternity that invites all believers and non-believers alike into dialogue and mutual care. “*The Church must not be a customs house,*” he told me. “*It must be the home of all.*”

He challenges the Church to rethink exclusionary attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals, the divorced, people with disabilities, or those economically or racially marginalised. As he once famously asked, “*Who am I to judge?*” Francis’s emphasis is on mercy, not gatekeeping; on embracing the marginalised, not codifying condemnation.

His inclusive vision extends to ecological care, indigenous rights, and interreligious dialogue, reminding us that the Christian mission is not purity but presence. Under his guidance, the Church’s Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity seeks to heal historical schisms and envisions a universal embrace of people of all races, genders, sexual orientations, and theological backgrounds—particularly poignant in the 1700th anniversary year of the Nicene Creed.



**T**he Dalai Lama promotes “secular ethics”—universal values that transcend doctrinal boundaries. **He is not interested in converting others to Buddhism, but in cultivating compassion, mindfulness, and moral clarity across traditions. His teachings are appealing precisely because they do not require belief in a particular deity or dogma.**



### **The Dalai Lama’s Call to Compassion Beyond Creed**

In Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama welcomed me with the serenity of a man who has seen both profound suffering and radiant hope. He told me, *“My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.”* This distilled essence of Buddhist thought forms the core of his inclusive spirituality.

The Dalai Lama promotes “secular ethics”—universal values that transcend doctrinal boundaries. He is not interested in converting others to Buddhism, but in cultivating compassion, mindfulness, and moral clarity across traditions. His teachings are appealing precisely because they do not require belief in a particular deity or dogma.

He envisions a world where interfaith harmony and individual transformation go hand in hand. His message, like that of Pope Francis, centres on human dignity and ethical responsibility. Both view spirituality not as an escape from the world but a deeper engagement with its needs.

### **Can the Church Truly Be Inclusive?**

*“Can any church be truly inclusive if it discriminates against people on the grounds of disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, sexuality, or even neurodiversity?”*

This vital question forces us to confront internal contradictions within religious communities. While some traditions have embraced inclusivity



in theory, they still struggle in practice with issues like sexual diversity, mental illness, or neurodivergence.

Inclusivity is not tokenism. It requires that all individuals, not just the palatable or conforming, are welcomed, valued, and included in leadership, sacraments, and community life. Jesus Himself reached out to the marginalised and scandalised the religious authorities by doing so.



To be truly inclusive, faith communities must move beyond moral rigidity and embrace a “generous-hearted” theology that prioritises love and justice over judgement and exclusion.

### **Inclusivity Without Incoherence: The Tension of Opposing Convictions**

*“What does it take for people of every theological conviction to be fully included? Can someone in a faithful same-sex relationship be included, if their deepest beliefs clash with others?”*

Here lies the core dilemma of inclusivity: it invites tension. It requires us to learn to live with disagreement, to allow differences without disintegration. Shared community does not mean identical belief—it means mutual respect. As Pope Francis suggests, it means recognising the primacy of love over doctrine in building unity.

George Orwell’s satirical insight, “*some are more equal than others*”, may apply when communities selectively include. For inclusivity to be credible, it must apply even when it is difficult.

There may well be non-negotiable tenets in every tradition. But true spiritual inclusion does not demand uniformity; it invites dialogue, correction, growth, and, above all, humility.

### **Inclusive Spirituality in Everyday Life and Work**

Beyond faith institutions, inclusive spirituality has relevance in the modern workplace. Integrating spiritual values into the work-life balance promotes personal growth, ethical integrity, and stress reduction. Mindfulness and holistic well-being are increasingly recognised as essential components of employee health.

Case studies reveal that organisations embracing religious and spiritual diversity foster more respectful, resilient, and productive environments. In this context, inclusive spirituality becomes more than a private belief—it becomes a catalyst for collective flourishing.

Encouraging respectful conversations about faith at work reduces alienation and encourages mutual empathy. In a pluralistic world, spiritual inclusivity is not a luxury—it is a necessity for cohesion and cooperation.

### **Toward a Shared Horizon of Compassion**

Both Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama point to a common spiritual horizon. It is not defined by doctrine but by love. They share a vision where spirituality is lived, not legislated; where its fruits are seen in service, humility, and the alleviation of suffering.

**B**oth Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama point to a common spiritual horizon. It is not defined by doctrine but by love. **They share a vision where spirituality is lived, not legislated; where its fruits are seen in service, humility, and the alleviation of suffering**



Their teachings suggest that inclusive spirituality is not a compromise—it is a deeper faithfulness. It asks not “Who is right?” but “Who is suffering, and how can we help?”

It is this shared moral vision—embodied in the Catholic “field hospital” church and the Buddhist path of universal compassion—that offers the most hopeful path forward in our fractured world.

### **Conclusion: The Inclusive Spirit**

My meetings with these two towering figures of our time—Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama—have left an indelible mark on my understanding of what it means to be spiritual. They revealed that inclusive spirituality is not a vague ideal but a lived imperative. It is a daily commitment to compassion over condemnation, dialogue over division, and hope over fear.



Inclusive spirituality builds not walls of purity but bridges of understanding. It does not ask us to abandon our beliefs but to hold them with humility, recognising the divine in every other.

In a time when the world is divided by ideology, identity, and inequality, we must rediscover what unites us at the deepest level. And in that rediscovery lies the promise of a more compassionate and inclusive future—one breath, one prayer, one conversation at a time.

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# IN THE **PRESENCE OF GRACE**

## **MY MEETING WITH POPE FRANCIS**



**A**s we walked through halls adorned with ornate ceilings, grand chandeliers, and masterpieces painted over the centuries, the awe-inspiring splendour was unmistakable. **Yet, in contrast, the Pope's office stood out for its simplicity—elegant, understated, and purposefully businesslike.**



**S**o much has appeared in the print and electronic media since the 21st of April when Pope Francis breathed his last. He has been hailed as a compassionate intellectual with a heart that felt deeply for the poor and the marginalised, and lauded as a moral guidepost not only for his 1.4 billion fellow Catholics but equally so for the rest of the world. A Pope for all, his views on human suffering, inequalities, wars and conflicts, widespread displacements, problems of migrants, and ecological issues were heard with respect and attention. He was also a Pope of surprises, continuously breaking away from expectations and precedents.

His simple yet elegant words, whether in a homily or in conversation with people, resonated with his innate sense of concern, moral correctness, and deep empathy. He drew attention to humanitarian plights that were off the global radar. His meetings with the warring leaders of South Sudan to plead for peace, with the Rohingya migrants, and with the poor migrants in the camps in Italy are just a few examples.

The New York Times has come out with a list of their publications and news items on Pope Francis right from 2013. Some of them which I have read, depicted him as a man who learnt from mistakes and showed a capacity to change, the most surprising of human traits, especially when seen in a person of authority.

“He was family,” mourned the faithful, who descended on St. Peter’s Square, sleeping there overnight for the funeral. The people cared for him as someone who occupied a deeply personal space in their lives. More than a pope, he was a father figure to many, especially the disadvantaged and the poor. Of the many banners that were held by the crowds that day, the one that could be called the best was the banner that read: “The world you loved is here today to say Thank You.” Truly, Pope Francis gave the world an image of what a Catholic is.

There are a few rare and unforgettable moments in life that remain etched in both heart and mind. One such moment for me occurred on the morning of May 6, 2024, when I, along with three others, was granted an audience with the Holy Father in his office at the Vatican. As we walked through halls adorned with ornate ceilings, grand chandeliers, and masterpieces painted over the centuries, the awe-inspiring splendour was unmistakable. Yet, in contrast, the Pope’s office stood out for its simplicity—elegant, understated, and purposefully businesslike.

The four of us, Justice Kurian Joseph, formerly of the Supreme Court of India, Mr. K.P. Fabian, formerly of the Indian Foreign Service and Ambassador to the Vatican, Prof. Monamma Kokkad, Member of the Kerala Women’s Commission, and myself, a former civil servant were ushered in with all the due formalities.



His Holiness stood up to receive us with a smile of welcome, holding our hands and looking into our eyes. I could see warmth, care and authority all together in that benevolent gaze. We were introduced by Justice Kurian Joseph, and the Pope acknowledged us, seated across from him at his table. There was a priest from the UK who acted as the interpreter, as the Pope spoke in Spanish. His words were calm and clear, and to my surprise, I could understand most of them, having learnt French a long while ago.

Since the Pope was briefed about the subject of our visit, which was the prevailing situation of unrest, disunity, and disruption in the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese of the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala, and the deep anguish and anxiety of the lay people over such disagreements and hostilities, he spoke out his views on the matter calmly and with precision. He reiterated the need for preserving

unity among the faithful as well as the need for obedience. I can say in all truthfulness that His Holiness laid greater emphasis on unity throughout his talk.

We then individually gave our observations, stressing the pain and disquiet among the faithful. I stressed the fear and risk of increasing civil litigations, consequent government interventions and their aftermath, along with the impact that such unfortunate incidents have had on the youth, women, and children and the general faithful alike. The scandal that has erupted has thereby deeply shaken an archdiocese once cherished for its unity, faith, and vibrant community life.

What struck me as most significant was the openness and willingness to listen despite any prior views, assumptions, or stand that His Holiness had on this subject. He accepted our written representation gracefully and spoke about the importance of the church in India, especially in Kerala, and the service it is rendering. His demeanour was calm and serious and absolutely non-judgemental. There was an intrinsic humanism in his endearing presence.

He graciously accepted the Constitution of India presented by Justice Kurian Joseph, blessed each of us individually along with the rosaries we had brought, and gifted us a special rosary. For the four of us—advanced in age and long bereft of our dear parents—Pope Francis offered a profound sense of paternal affection. The warmth of this unforgettable meeting will remain with me always, for Pope Francis exemplified what it means to be a global leader: deeply concerned and genuinely committed to the many issues facing the Catholic Church.

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*Lida Jacob has served in several senior positions in the Government of Kerala as a member of the Indian Administrative Service. She was closely associated in the formulation and implementation of State-level policies for the empowerment of women, protection of children and the maintenance and support of the elderly, to mention a few.*







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# SPIRITUALITY OF POPE FRANCIS AND INCLUSIVITY OF WOMEN



Spirituality is a broad term referring to a sense of connection to something larger than oneself, often something immortal or what can bring meaning and a sense of purpose to life. Spirituality encompasses various beliefs and practices, which include but not limited to religious affiliation, transcendental meditation, or a deep appreciation for art or nature.

The late Pope Francis' papacy was marked by a profoundly inclusive spirituality that sought to reach the margins of the Church and society. Rooted in the Ignatian tradition and the theological framework of Vatican II, his spirituality was pastoral, merciful, and dialogical. It emphasized accompaniment, discernment, and the radical embrace of all people regardless of their background, beliefs, or status. Indeed, one of the most compelling aspects of Pope Francis' spiritual leadership was his explicit concern for inclusivity in terms of the poor and marginalized and his growing attention to the role of women in the Church and the broader faith community.

At the heart of Pope Francis' spirituality was the concept of encounter. His emphasis on God's mercy over judgment created a space where those who have felt alienated by the institutional Church, divorced individuals, especially women, can find a home. While he did not enact sweeping reforms on gender roles within the Church's governance structures, his language and tone signaled a significant shift toward a more inclusive ecclesiology.

Women occupy a distinctive and complex space in Pope Francis' spiritual vision. He repeatedly recognized the historical and ongoing marginalization of women within both ecclesial and social structures. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Francis notes, "The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess."

Moreover, Francis emphasized the Marian dimension of the Church, not merely as a devotional symbol, but as a theological affirmation of the Church's identity as feminine. The image

of Mary as a disciple, mother, and prophet serves as a model for understanding women's roles in faith communities. In doing so, Francis challenged the Church to mirror Mary's courage, fidelity, and openness to God's mission. His spirituality encourages a reevaluation of how women's gifts are received and integrated at every level of ecclesial life.

In practical terms, Pope Francis took incremental yet meaningful steps toward enhancing women's roles. For instance, He appointed women to leadership positions within the Vatican, gave women and non-ordained members voting rights at synods, and expressed support for increased female participation in the Church. He also strongly condemned female genital mutilation and other forms of violence against women.

He insisted that the Church must listen to the "feminine genius" and be transformed by it. While critics argue these efforts fall short of structural change, they nonetheless signal a spiritual inclusivity that values women's voices in discernment and decision-making. Importantly, Pope Francis' inclusive spirituality is not only institutional but deeply pastoral. He consistently affirms the presence of God in the everyday lives of women, especially those who suffer: single mothers, women in poverty, victims of violence, and those labouring in domestic and informal economies. His speeches and homilies frequently uplift their hidden sacrifices and silent heroism, recognizing them as central to the mission of the Gospel.

In sum, Pope Francis articulates and embodies an inclusive spirituality that seeks to reflect the wideness of God's mercy and love. For women, this spirituality affirms both their dignity and their vital role in shaping the Church's mission in the world. Although structural change remains gradual, Francis' vision is reorienting Catholic spirituality toward a more just and participatory future, where women are not merely recipients of pastoral care but active agents of theological and ecclesial transformation.

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# INCLUSIVE SPIRITUALITY

POPE FRANCIS' PROPHETIC PATH  
FOR A JUST AND COMPASSIONATE WORLD





**A**t the heart of his vision lies a concept I have explored in many of my writings: **inclusive spirituality—a spirituality that does not exclude, does not condemn, and does not close doors, but builds bridges, nurtures dialogue, and affirms the sacred in every human being and in all creation.**



**I**n a fractured and polarised world—torn by ecological degradation, spiritual indifference, rising inequalities, and cynical politics—**Pope Francis has emerged as an unlikely yet transformative voice.** His message is not merely Catholic, nor confined to Vatican corridors. It is radically human, ethically urgent, and spiritually inclusive. At the heart of his vision lies a concept I have explored in many of my writings: **inclusive spirituality**—a spirituality that does not exclude, does not condemn, and does not close doors, but builds bridges, nurtures dialogue, and affirms the sacred in every human being and in all creation.

In my two edited books—*Pope Francis: His Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society* (2019) and *The Francis Effect* (2018)—I sought to understand and communicate the fresh winds that Pope Francis has brought into global ecclesial, ethical, and ecological consciousness. More recently, in my book “**Ethics, Sustainability and Fratelli Tutti: Towards a Just and Viable World Order Inspired by Pope Francis**” (2023), I argued that Pope Francis offers not just a theological correction, but a civilisational alternative—one rooted in love, solidarity, dialogue, and responsibility. All of this, I believe, is anchored in the emerging global ethic of inclusive spirituality.





### What is Inclusive Spirituality?

Inclusive spirituality, as I understand it, is **the capacity to find meaning, sacredness, and ethical direction beyond religious labels and theological rigidity.** It transcends dogma without abandoning depth. It includes the secular without relativising the sacred. It enables people—whether Hindu or atheist, Muslim or agnostic, Christian or spiritual-but-not-religious—to collaborate in the shared search for truth, justice, beauty, and healing. It builds on the conviction that every human being is *imago Dei*, made in the image of God, and that the divine is found not only in temples or cathedrals, but also in slums, forests, and the silent suffering of migrants.

Pope Francis has not used the phrase “inclusive spirituality” in those exact words, but his actions and encyclicals breathe its spirit. From his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si’* (2015) to

the deeply fraternal *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), and from his encounters with imams, rabbis, and Buddhist monks to his tender outreach to atheists, LGBTQ+ persons, and the marginalised, he has demonstrated a **spirituality of encounter, openness, and humility.**

### Pope Francis and the Heart of Inclusive Spirituality

Francis’ inclusive vision is most clearly articulated in *Fratelli Tutti*, his social encyclical on fraternity and social friendship. There, he writes:

*“The Church esteems the ways in which God works in other religions, and rejects nothing of what is true and holy in them”* (*Fratelli Tutti*, §277).

But more than his words, it is his symbolic actions that give flesh to this ethic. Consider the 2019 Document on Human Fraternity signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi, affirming interreligious cooperation as the basis for world peace. Or his groundbreaking visit to Iraq in 2021, where he prayed at the ruins of Mosul, extending hope to war-torn communities of Christians and Muslims alike.

Inclusive spirituality here becomes a political and ethical imperative: to include the invisible, the voiceless, and the forgotten. **The “new world order” Pope Francis calls for is not a totalitarian blueprint, but a global communion of conscience rooted in shared spiritual and moral values.**

Or his consistent cry for the poor, the earth, and the excluded—seen as the wounded Christ of our time.

His inclusive spirituality, therefore, is not passive or vague. It is prophetic, dialogical, and embodied. It calls for:

- Universal dignity beyond religion, caste, or nationality;
- Ethical action rooted in solidarity with the suffering;
- A preferential option for the earth and the poor;
- And a rejection of any narrow moralism or triumphalism.

### **The Francis Effect in India and Beyond**

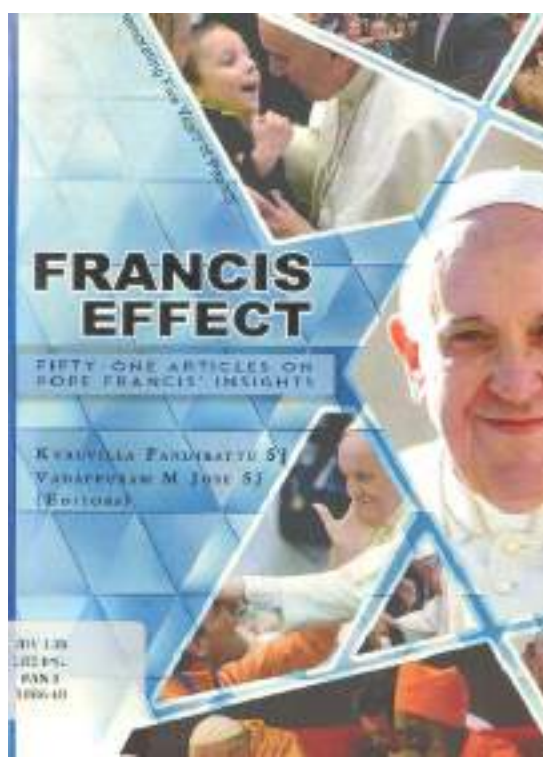
In the edited volume *The Francis Effect*, published to mark the Pope’s five-year anniversary

in 2018, Fr. V.M. Jose and myself, the co-editor, gathered essays from theologians, activists, and educators across South Asia. What emerged was a portrait of a pope whose appeal transcended ecclesial boundaries. From tribal communities in Jharkhand to Jesuit parishes in Tamil Nadu, people experienced his witness as **deeply liberating and humanising**. The book echoed what many already felt: Francis has not changed dogma, but he has **reoriented the moral compass of the global Church**—from control to compassion, from doctrine to discernment, from judgement to journeying with the wounded.

In *Pope Francis: His Impact on and Relevance for the Church and Society*, I explored this transformation more systematically. I analysed his ecclesiology of mercy, his ethical calls for socio-economic reform, and his promotion of synodality. But above all, I highlighted how Francis invites us to be **pilgrims of hope**, walking not in fear of contamination, but in the joy of encounter. His very motto, *Miserando atque eligendo*—“he looked at him with mercy and chose him”—invites us to look at the world with the same gaze.

### **Ethics and Sustainability: Toward a Just World Order**

In my 2023 book on ethics and sustainability inspired by *Fratelli Tutti*, I argued that Francis’ vision challenges the prevailing economic, ecological, and cultural paradigms. He critiques not only injustice but **the spiritual apathy that enables it**. The throwaway culture, he notes, is not just about plastics or carbon emissions—it is about how we treat people, ideologies, and truth itself.







Inclusive spirituality here becomes a political and ethical imperative: **to include the invisible, the voiceless, and the forgotten.** The “new world order” Pope Francis calls for is not a totalitarian blueprint, but a global communion of conscience rooted in shared spiritual and moral values.

### Why Pope Francis Matters Now

At a time when religion is often weaponized to divide, and spirituality is commodified into self-help slogans, Pope Francis represents a rare moral leader who grounds spirituality in suffering, simplicity, and service. He offers an antidote to both religious rigidity and secular cynicism.

### His Inclusive Spirituality:

- Resists both relativism and fundamentalism;
- Seeks dialogue without diluting conviction;
- Embraces ecology, economy, and ethics as interwoven;
- And speaks to all—from sceptics to saints—as fellow travellers.

For educators, business leaders, policymakers, and spiritual seekers, his message is urgent: we are **one human family**, entrusted with one fragile planet, called to one shared vocation—to **love inclusively, act justly, and live humbly.**

### Conclusion

Pope Francis’ spiritual leadership has catalysed what I call a **Franciscan turn in global ethics**—a turn toward inclusive spirituality. This is not about diluting differences but transcending divisions. It is about discovering that at the heart of every faith, and even of honest doubt, lies a longing for truth, justice, and connection.

In this age of ecological breakdown and ethical breakdown, Pope Francis reminds us that **spirituality must be inclusive, or it is not spirituality at all.** It must embrace the whole human being—mind, heart, and body—and the whole of humanity—rich and poor, believer and non-believer, nature and cosmos.

As I wrote in *The Francis Effect*, we are all invited to be **builders of bridges, not fortresses.** That, perhaps, is the most enduring legacy of Francis—and the most urgent task of our times.

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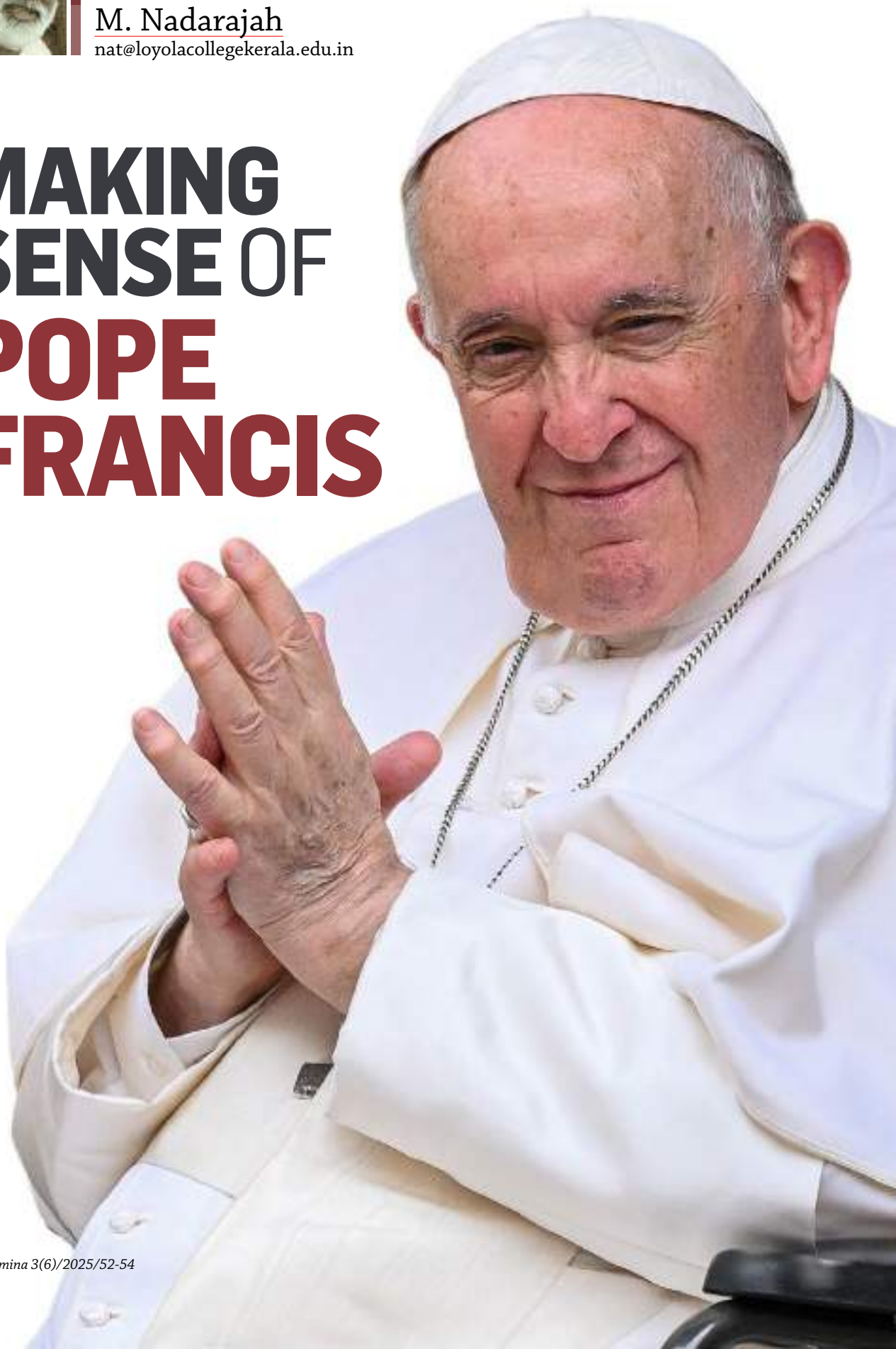
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# MAKING SENSE OF POPE FRANCIS



I have been travelling with Pope Francis for the last eight years. My association with his ideas, speeches, and actions has been a staple influence on my work since 2019, when I developed a programme called “Certificate in Compassion and Social Communication: Caring for Our Common Home.” It was offered as “Laudato Si Global Fellowship Programme for Young Media Professionals” to spread the key messages of the encyclical.

His death is, indeed, a significant loss at a time when a powerful section of humanity is mindlessly pushing all of us toward a civilizational crisis and collapse. Pope Francis stood there defending all of us.

Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Francis made history in 2013 by becoming the Catholic Church’s first pontiff from Latin America. During his 12-year papacy, Pope Francis, as a Jesuit and a Latin American, championed historically progressive causes and became known for his advocacy for deep dialogue, immigrants, the poor, indigenous peoples, environmental activism, and care for Creation, while compassionately and courageously challenging clericalism and building the synodal church. Throughout his papacy, he published numerous key Vatican documents and inspired many important writings and videos. (There are, of course, some writings critical of him and his papacy.)

From his writings, one can discern the “Francis Method” (“Pope Francis as Method”). Exploring his key writings reveals his deep concerns, reach, scope, depth, and praxis. It is, indeed, a rich oeuvre.





Pope Francis’s universal messages of love and mercy, care for the poor and for Creation, fraternity and inclusive community, **and active synodality offer a comprehensive framework for addressing today’s global challenges and building a more compassionate future.**

This is a valuable contribution to nurturing global well-being and a grounded Catholic Church—one that belongs to the streets, serving those in need and at risk. Pope Francis’s universal messages of love and mercy, care for the poor and for Creation, fraternity and inclusive community, and active synodality offer a comprehensive framework for addressing today’s global challenges and

building a more compassionate future. His ability to speak to our shared humanity—evident in his encyclicals, exhortations, constitutions, letters, bulls, homilies, and speeches—makes his teachings both inspiring and practically actionable, socially and spiritually, for people across cultures and beliefs.

Messages	Key Themes
Love and Mercy	Unconditional love, compassion, forgiveness, tenderness
Care for the Poor, Marginalized and the Indigenous	Social justice, dignity, focus on the youth, support for migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, and the vulnerable
Care for Creation/ Environmental Stewardship	Integral ecology, sustainability, critique of consumerism, climate action
Fraternity, Social Friendship and Inclusivity	Dialogical unity, solidarity, inter-faith dialogue, addressing inequality, global brotherhood/sisterhood
Synodality	Checking power and clericalism, communion, participation and mission, reclaiming the synodal church of Christ



As we navigate the complexities of 2025 and beyond, Pope Francis’ voice will remain a beacon of hope, encouraging collective responsibility and a renewed commitment to building a just and inclusive world that regenerates compassion and mercy.

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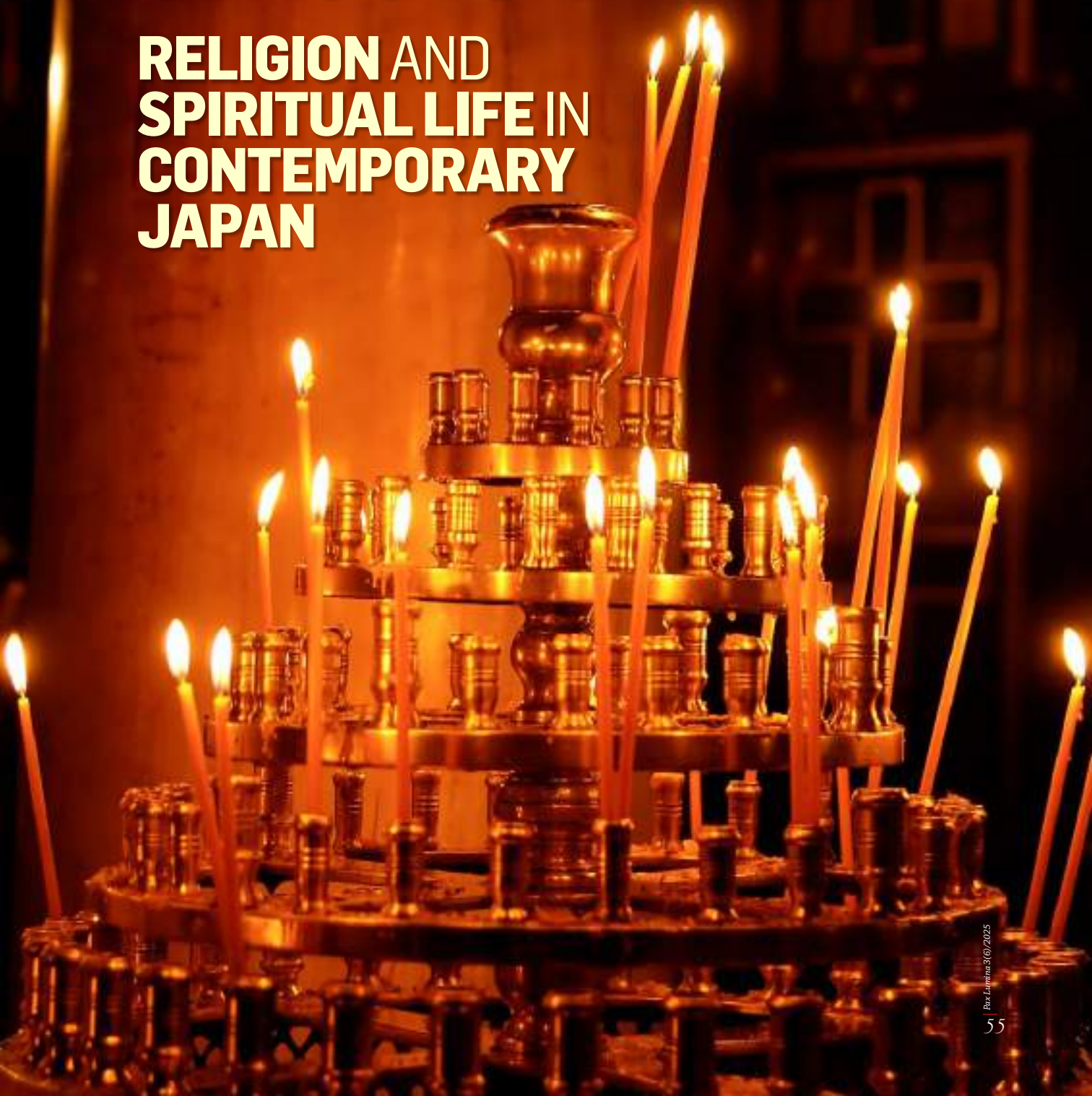


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# SACRED WITHOUT STRUCTURE

## RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN



According to a survey of Japanese by the Niwano Peace Foundation in 2019, most respondents said they haven't participated in any religious activities in recent years, and more than 70% said they don't have any faith.

**However, positive feelings about shrines and temples increased over the past 20 years in the form of visits to healing hot-spots, spiritual tours, pilgrimages, mindfulness and yoga practices and stamp collections, without belonging to any particular religion.**



Most people in contemporary Japan—or students in my university classrooms—tend to identify themselves as non-religious. Yet, religious experience in Japan reflects a unique situation: while many people actively engage with religious practices and institutions (such as shrines, temples, and churches), they do not necessarily identify themselves with a specific religion or hold strong religious beliefs. This stands in contrast to deeply religious societies, where faith is a central element of personal identity and daily life.

This reality is, in fact, surprisingly at odds with the statistics provided by both the government and religious institutions. According to population estimates for 2025, Japan's population stands at approximately 123.8 million.

However, an annual statistical study on religion conducted by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2018 reported 84.7 million Shintō followers and 87.7 million Buddhists. When Christians and followers of other religions are included, the total reaches 182.2 million—about 40% more than Japan's total population of 126 million at the time.

One reason the number of adherents exceeds the population is that, due to the freedom of religious belief in Japan and the separation of church and state, there is minimal government intervention in religious affairs. Religious groups provide statistics on a voluntary basis, and are free to define “adherent” however they wish. According to a survey of Japanese by the Niwano Peace Foundation in 2019, most respondents said they haven't participated in any religious activities in recent years, and more than 70% said they don't have any faith. However, positive feelings about shrines and temples increased over the past 20 years in the form of visits to healing hot-spots, spiritual tours, pilgrimages, mindfulness and yoga practices and stamp collections, without belonging to any particular religion.

This claim of being non-religious in fact resonates the PEW research results that place Japan among one of the most “religiously unaffiliated” cultures in the world. A study by the PEW research in 2012 showed 57% of the people in Japan as the unaffiliated. The religiously unaffiliated include atheists, agnostics and people who do not identify with any particular religion (“nothing in particular”). This group is sometimes referred to as religious ‘nones.’ However, many of the religiously unaffiliated have some religious beliefs.



However, a further study on the so called religiously unaffiliated shows that Japan has an increased number of ‘religious switching’ that leads to the higher associations with the ‘nones’. In this study they noted that Japan has experienced the largest losses from Buddhism due to religious switching: 26% of all Japanese adults say they were brought up Buddhist in childhood but don’t identify as Buddhist today but identified as unaffiliated.

If we look at the lives of ordinary Japanese, we find an intermingling between the indigenous Shintō faith and the Buddhism which come to Japan in the 6th century, lasted for over a thousand years until the Meiji government ordered the separation of the two faiths in the late nineteenth century. There was no real awareness of being an adherent, but one realize that there are clear and obvious associations with their Shinto and Buddhist spiritual history with practices in the form of daily rituals and seasonal events. Most of the families will have what are called Butsudan, small altars for honouring the dead. It is interesting to note that the Japanese Calendar is littered with ancient holidays and festivals that invite citizens to gather at shrines or in the streets for participating in traditions that have specific spiritual origins. There are equinox and harvest festivals, festivals related to mythical characters, New Years, Eve festivities, and days that are considered best for “warding off evil”. These traditions are commonly participated in and are thoroughly enjoyed by the people without their religious affiliations.

There are also widely celebrated rite-of-passage holidays for children and teenagers rooted in Eastern numerology. Shichi-Go-San is a special holiday for children aged three, five, and seven, during which they visit shrines to celebrate these “lucky” ages as milestones on their path to middle adulthood. Parents dress their children in traditional clothing and take them to the shrine to ward off evil spirits and pray for good health.



Japan’s unique relationship with faith is especially evident during the final week of the year: people exchange gifts for Christmas, ring Buddhist temple bells on New Year’s Eve, and just hours later, visit Shinto shrines to welcome the New Year. Throughout the year, Japanese people also participate in Buddhist Bon dances and Shinto festivals featuring mikoshi, or portable shrines.

Japanese people will commonly hold a wedding ceremony in a church but have a Buddhist funeral. It is also not unusual for a house to have both Buddhist and Shintō altars, and for the family members to be parishioners of both faiths. For such reasons, quite a few people are counted as “adherents” of more than one religion, particularly Buddhism and Shintō. “In Japan, faith is not considered an important element of religion, unlike Christianity or Islam, in which understanding of the Bible or the Quran is necessary and the theology serves as a guidepost for daily life,” says Ryosuke Okamoto, a religion professor at Hokkaido University.

A survey conducted by Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, on contemporary values, yielded interesting results regarding the meanings assigned to religion in Japan. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents to this survey acknowledged that they belong to some religious group, consistent with the results of surveys conducted throughout much of the post-war period. Despite this rather low level of religious affiliation, however, one-half

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the respondents said that they believe in the existence of gods or buddhas, and nearly two-thirds professed that they believe in an “unseen higher power.” Perhaps the most startling result was that one-quarter of those who described themselves as atheists also professed some belief in the transcendental. It would appear that “atheist” has different connotations in Japan, identified more with a rejection of “religion” than a lack of belief in the divine.

The Nanzan study also confirmed, in the clearest possible terms, the low regard in which religion is held in Japan. One survey question asked respondents to rate their level of trust in various social institutions. The police scored high (69%), followed by the legal system (63%) and the military (52%). Religion, however, ranked last—only 13% of respondents considered it trustworthy, a figure even lower than the 20% who expressed trust in politicians in the national parliament.

What these survey results clearly show is that, in contemporary Japan, the term “religion” is primarily associated with religious institutions—and the vast majority of people hold a low opinion of these institutions. What we might typically think of as religious beliefs, practices, and feelings has become separated from the concept of religion in the Japanese context. As Dr. Lee Roser, a professor of religion at Temple University Japan, explains: “Before the strong influence of China, Japan didn’t have an organized religious system, they didn’t have priests, and so they didn’t have creeds.

Nevertheless, they had a strong spiritual sense. Their ideas were so deeply embedded in everyday life that they didn’t need to distinguish them as part of a separate institution. It was simply part of reality.”

I believe contemporary Japanese spirituality stems from a healthy distrust of organized religion, particularly following the emperor's *Ningen-sengen* (human declaration), which marked a turning point by renouncing his divine status as *Kami* (God). This act effectively secularized religion and contributed to the widespread lack of formal religious self-identification. In Japan, spirituality is deeply woven into cultural heritage and the everyday rhythm of life. Identifying as religiously unaffiliated while still engaging in centuries-old spiritual traditions and newly emerging practices is not seen as a contradiction—it is simply a different way of living out one’s spirituality.

Those considered “unaffiliated” often live in harmony with nature, remain open to other religions, and are generally unconcerned with formal religious rituals. To those who equate spiritual life with institutional structures and overt religious expression, this might appear puzzling. While organized religion certainly has its place, the spirituality expressed by the unaffiliated reveals another possible and valid path.

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# **SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND RETHINKING RELIGION**





**M**y friend came seeking a spiritual experience but he was given a 'religious show'! **What happened on the Brigade grounds was a compromise between the two worlds of the sacred and the secular. It implied using the secular power to advocate the sacred.**



**I**t was on Feb 4, 1986. 'The Brigade Grounds' in Kolkata city was all set to receive Pope John Paul II along with thousands of Catholics, for an open-air celebrations of Eucharist. Nothing unusual for a city like Kolkata. This venue has witnessed many such events with larger crowds of people for political meetings.

Despite the usual security hazards on such occasions, I decided to join the crowds to attend the Eucharistic celebrations. A colleague of Hindu traditions, from Calcutta University expressed his desire to join me for the celebrations. With much effort, I managed to get a ticket for him.

As per rules, we were expected to be seated one hour before. About half-hour before the celebrations, 'Black Cats' (the high security personnel), appeared on the huge make-shift stage. About five or six 'black cats', well-armed, took positions on the stage, facing the people, and a similar number facing the altar at the centre of the stage. Seeing 'Black Cars' and the massive security around, my friend turned to me to say: "I thought I came to have a darshan of a saintly person; but this is a political/military type of show meant for a politician". Saying this, he excused himself and left the pandal.

My friend came seeking a spiritual experience but he was given a 'religious show'! What happened on the Brigade grounds was a compromise between the two worlds of the sacred and the secular. It implied using the secular power to advocate the sacred. Are spirituality and religion two opposing entities or two sides of the same coin, complementing one another?

### **Religion as a Sociological Entity**

Emile Durkheim, spoke of 'totem' - an image or object or a concept that enabled people to be united, and strong, (Emile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of religious life*, 1912). People's strength was imaged onto an object, randomly chosen from the immediate surroundings (tree, bird, animal) and that functioned as a unifying entity, of people who otherwise remained dispersed. The totem, gradually acquired a 'divine status' of uniting and maintaining social cohesion among peoples. This could well be one of the ways of the historical development of religion as a social entity.

Rudolf Otto in the 'Idea of the Holy' (1925) describes the holy as 'Numinous' entity, containing both attractive and repulsive elements (*tremendum et fascinans*). The sacred being attractive, and repulsive at the same time, had to be handled carefully and accordingly various rituals originated to keep both entities in good humour.

Max Weber, (*Theory of the Modern State*, 1927) spoke of rationalization of 'the charisma' of an original experience by institutionalizing it into Sacred Text, Rituals, and Community. Any form of rationalization runs the risk of losing or at least weakening of the original charisma. However, without institutionalization, the charisma runs the risk of eventual death. Spirituality similarly, might die a death of thousand qualifications without some form of a structure.



*Feb 4, 1986, Pope John Paul II in Kolkata*

Overviewing the history of religions, one recognizes that the theorization of religious experience was developed mostly within the Western Christian milieu, especially since the Enlightenment. This development also marked a dualistic trend in its approach: the sacred was set in opposition to the secular, body versus spirit, and so on. The discussion around ‘Religion versus Spirituality’ can also be located within this mode of thinking. Moreover, the entire discourse remained anthropocentric.

In contrast, within traditional tribal societies and much of Asiatic thought, the ‘sacred’ is located within the secular, and vice versa. The secular and sacred form a continuum—one manifesting and completing the other. What happened on the Brigade Grounds, therefore, was more a juxtaposition of the sacred alongside the secular.

Following the unholy alliance during the Middle Ages between feudal lords and local religious authorities, the secular began to support the sacred for mutual benefit. The Pope emerged as both spiritual leader and secular authority, thereby embodying a dichotomous perception.

Religion needs ‘institutionalized’ format to survive; spirituality on the other hand tends to be more personalized, rather than institutionalized. While the historical and cultural developments enabled a scientific understanding of religion and its scriptures, it never eliminated the sacred dimensions of the scripture nor did a scientific and critical knowledge of a sacred text, completely negated a religious reading of the same.

The western Christian theories of religion and spirituality mostly implied a dichotomous approach, the sacred as different from the secular. They spoke of a secular history, different from sacred history.

### **Spirituality of an Integral Ecology**

A ‘universe perspective’ - an integral ecological path – is emerging at the epistemological level. The evolutionary journey of the Earth and its development for the last 13.5 billion years, is advancing with the humans, journeying the same path; we the humans are ‘part and whole’ at the same time in this journey. I am part of this journey; in and through me, the universe

**The perspective of Laudato si (Pope Francis) puts forth this integral way more vividly as it speaks of ‘the inter-related, inter-dependent and inter-connected way of all and everything in this universe’. Everything is interconnected.**



is progressing. I am not in charge. Yet, I am ‘whole’ in myself; am an independent entity capable of growing and progressing through my decisions and choices.

In and through that journey, the humans experience birth-death dynamics, alienation and reconciliation tasks as part of this evolutionary dynamics. The perspective of Laudato si (Pope Francis) puts forth this integral way more vividly as it speaks of ‘the inter-related, inter-dependent and inter-connected way of all and everything in this universe’. Everything is interconnected.

The sense of the universe, the perspective of Earth, and integral approach point out to the future of humankind as part of this universe. The journey toward a total transformation of the secular and the cosmic into the envisaged integral way is advanced by those who share this common vision. The journey towards an integrated common perspective of transformation is being advanced as a common vision and task.

### **Spiritual Intelligence**

The human condition, as it is evolving, aspires for a future that is transformative into a new reality, reconciling the ‘feeling of alienation’. The secular and the sacred could move in the same direction. There is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look. (Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 1960). The original ‘explosion’ of the One, the Big Bang Universe of energy of Love, points out the magnified multiplicity, and immense diversity - that is both sacred and secular. The evolutionary journey seems to open itself to AI in our time; however the evolution could lead to greater ‘Spiritual Intelligence’ enabling all to

find mutual recognition, and to preserve, unify and contain the many into a unified entity like social groups, religious sects, nation state etc.

What happened on the Brigade grounds is the continuation of misguided journey, especially from the Middle Ages, in the church and in the world. It was a dichotomous approach to reality, bringing a cleavage between the sacred and the secular. The development paradigm that dominated the world, especially in the western Christian world, saw science and religion as exclusive of each other. This is where Laudato si (Pope Francis) shows a refreshing, evolutionary and revolutionary new path. It speaks of earth and the environment as ‘common home’, though mutilated and devastated by a development model. The integral ecology advocates a unitive way, combining the human, the social and ecological issues and promoting the well-being of the poor, and conserving the fragile environment.

Religion often contains a totalizing narrative; spirituality on the other hand promotes a diffused and varied perception of reality that is both evolving, and transforming.

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*George Pattery is former Reader at Visva-Bharati Central University, Calcutta and the former Jesuit Provincial of South Asia.*





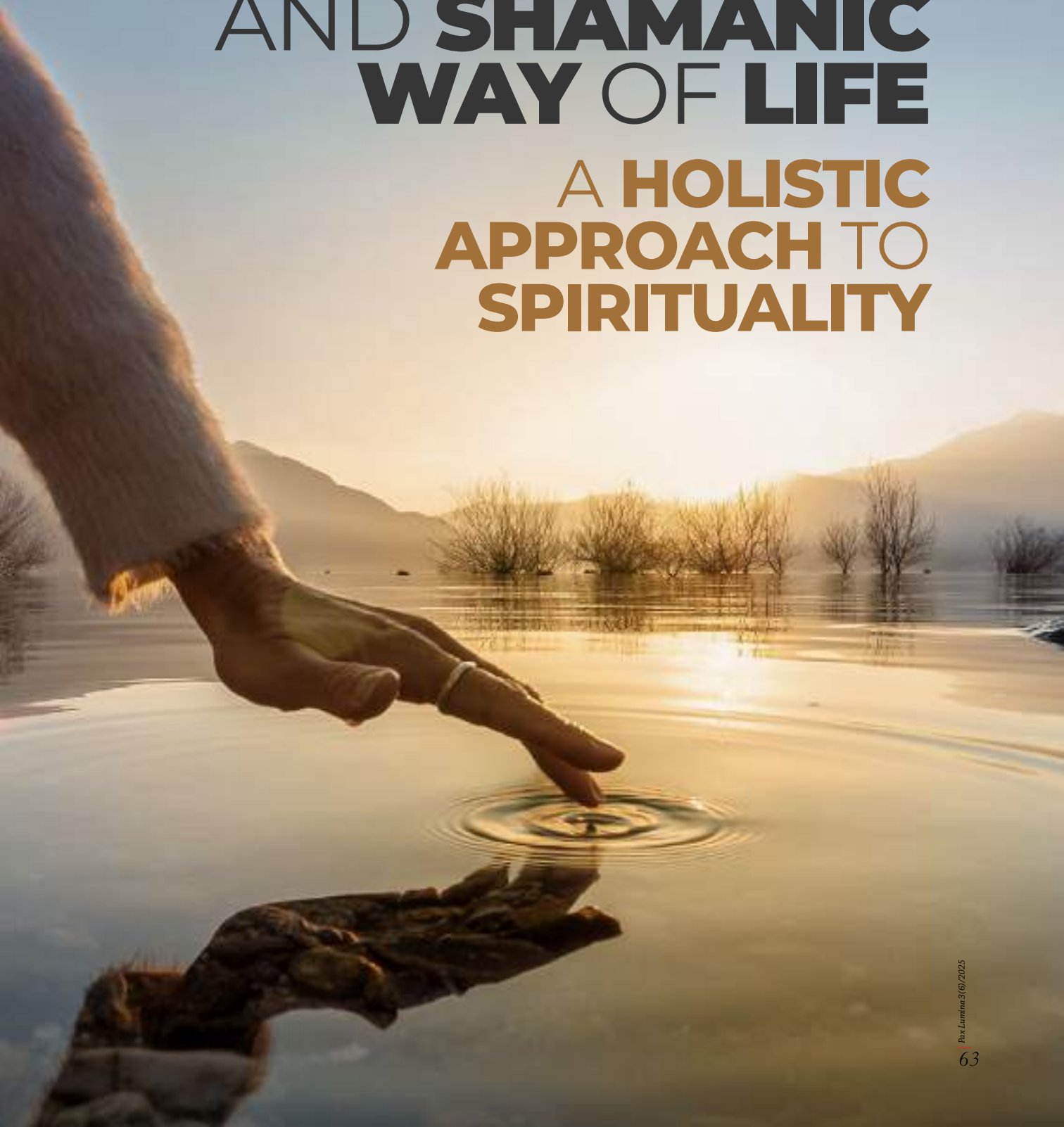


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*Pax Lumina 3(6)/2025/63-66*

# TANTRIC AND SHAMANIC WAY OF LIFE

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY



**W**hen lived with awareness, every moment becomes a spiritual experience. **I gaze at nature in awe of its splendour, feeling a sense of unity with everything in the universe, without any separation. I feel one with all.**



**“Y**ou are not a human being in search of a spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being immersed in a human experience.” - *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*.

### Introduction

Knowing oneself and finding stillness within are themes that emerge across all religions and spiritual traditions. "Know thyself" in Greece, Tatvam Asi and Aham Brahmasmi in Hinduism, the inclusivity and unity of consciousness in Tantra, the Way in Taoism, "the Kingdom of God is within you" in Christianity, and "knowing oneself is knowing the divine" in Sufism—all point toward the inner journey and the pursuit of stillness.



However, most organized religions and spiritual systems have created doctrines, dogmas, rigid structures, and rituals, often institutionalizing punitive sanctions in the name of God. These are reinforced through well-established conditioning processes.

As a result, many remain stuck on the surface, leading to the rise of Pavlovian humans everywhere—conditioned, reactive, and unaware. Organized religion has become a powerful tool in the hands of a few, used to manipulate, control, and enslave.

In such a framework, there is little space left for a deep inner quest or true liberation. The leaders of these systems, often intoxicated by power, fear the presence of truly liberated and enlightened individuals.

### Who am I?

Born into a catholic family 74 years ago I was conditioned into the Catholic way of life. As a teenager I joined the Jesuits. During my years with the Jesuits, I began to question everything and was looking for connection within, searching for meaning and purpose. I moved out of the Jesuit order and started life in the world still looking for connection, purpose and meaning.

## What is Spirituality for Me?

Spirituality is about me, my inner journey and some greater force beyond me. In the beginning, I am all centred around myself and I revolve around myself. I want to be loved, accepted and appreciated. I want to be important.

Initially, I was unaware of the disconnect within me though the feeling of disconnect automated my life. Despite recognising the disconnect within, I avoided looking deep within to find the source of the disconnect. I went around looking for connections outside in making friends, social activities, sexual relations, making money, seeking achievements, acquiring possessions – material and non-material (knowledge and skills).

A crisis of some sort happened, and I was shaken and even shattered. I picked up the shattered pieces and looked at them and realized that the brokenness was inside me. The crisis that happened was a mirror reflection of my inner state of being.

I began a new search for the causes and solutions to the disconnect. I turned to books, absorbed new concepts, and thrived on them. I sought out therapists and spiritual masters, hoping they could offer answers.

In the beginning, I asked them to solve the mysteries of my life. But sooner or later, I realized—no one can give me the answers. I had to find them within myself. Only I could uncover the purpose of my life.

I also came to see that all the knowledge and concepts I had gathered over a lifetime had to be let go. Everything needed to die—the stories from the past, the ideas I clung to—before I could approach the door to the innermost. It was hard to give up what I had held so dearly. I resisted, I hesitated. But at last, I gave in. I surrendered to the Great Force.

As I drew closer to the entrance of the innermost, I was tested—again and again—for my readiness to enter the sanctum within. At last, I found the door. I stepped through and discovered how simple everything truly is.

At first, there was an illusion that I had arrived. But soon, I realized—there is no final point of arrival. Living from the innermost is an ongoing journey, constantly unfolding, moment by moment.

Along the path of the inner journey, I was asked to renounce all that was dear and important to me. I asked why, but no answers came. So I reframed the question: “What stops me from giving up these things—both material and non-material?”

Then the answers began to flow. I had to examine my need for security, power, self-esteem, and relationships—and let them all go. It felt like death. But that was only the beginning of a deeper quest.

I had to confront many raw feelings: being abandoned, unloved, homeless, and deeply lonely. Facing these emotions opened up







## How Does Spirituality Manifest in Everyday Life?

When lived with awareness, every moment becomes a spiritual experience. I gaze at nature in awe of its splendour, feeling a sense of unity with everything in the universe, without any separation. I feel one with all. I reflect on my thoughts, feelings, words, and actions, asking myself: What kind of vibrations am I generating? What energy am I emitting?

In daily life, I experience spirituality through my awakened senses. My eyes serve as a conduit to countless sights—colours, shapes, landscapes, oceans, mountains, skies, and galaxies. My ears and body respond to sounds and melodies, offering spiritual experiences. My nose immerses me in exotic fragrances or harsh odours, each bringing transformative qualities that deepen my spiritual journey. My taste buds, together with my sense of smell, allow me to appreciate food and drink in ways that transport me to otherworldly realms. My skin connects me to my surroundings, providing sensual experiences.

When I have mastered the art of being still in every moment, I am ready for a spiritual experience in everything—every activity, event, and entity, at each moment. Spirituality is about meeting myself deep within, in the innermost part of me, in the Great Void, and finding my life's purpose and meaning.

Living from the innermost part of myself is a constant communion within and without, with no separation. In this state, I have experienced a boundless expanse of pure energy. The entire cosmos is limitless vibrational energy. To be in this state requires unconditional surrender.

My spirituality is beyond religions, isms, concepts, theories, doctrines and dogmas. My relationship with the Ultimate truth I have found within me and I experience this truth all around me.

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*George Kunnath, based in Kozhikkode in Kerala, was formerly engaged in human Resources career in the corporate world. Currently he facilitates inner exploration retreats for seekers.*

deeper layers of trauma within me, allowing them to begin healing. I had experienced an existential crisis at birth—a struggle between life and death. I had fought this trauma all my life, until a few years ago, when I came face to face with a wounded, half-dead baby.

I recognized that baby as myself. I embraced it fully. That was the beginning of the end of my inner war—a major battle among many. Then, peace began to grow within me. I connected with a painful memory I had long avoided. Recognizing and embracing the wounded child, with all its pain and trauma, brought me closer to wholeness.

There were other battles I needed to face—the fear of being abandoned, the fear of my own power, the fear of uncertainty, and the taboos surrounding sexuality.

One by one, I made peace with them all. Then came an invitation to go inward—to the innermost. As I followed that call, I discovered the secret of life: the Great Emptiness—a magnificent state of being.

I lacked nothing anymore. I received the greatest gift of my life. I am no longer the dismembered, disconnected self of the past. I am whole. Now, I experience a deep sense of detachment, equanimity, peace, and freedom. The baggage of the past has fallen away, and I am at peace with the uncertainty of the future.

I live in the now. I stand alone in my full power—without needing anyone's permission or approval. I am ready to reveal my deep vulnerability. My heart is filled with love, gratitude, and compassion. At last, I have come home within myself.



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# BEYOND THE ALTAR

Unveiling  
Pope  
Francis's  
**Quiet  
Revolution  
of Inclusion**

**F**rancis deliberately set aside centuries-old titles and ornate vestments to show that a Christian leader is, above all, a shepherd among the flock. **These gestures of humility underscored his central message: the Church must be a “field hospital” of mercy, open to all who are wounded.**



**P**ope Francis has shaped his papacy not through trappings or titles, but through a spirit of humble service and radical welcome. From the very first day of his pontificate, he insisted on being known simply as the “Bishop of Rome.” This choice signalled a renewed vision of Church leadership—one that emphasizes the bishop’s role as local, pastoral, and collegial rather than monarchical. Francis deliberately set aside centuries-old titles and ornate vestments to show that a Christian leader is, above all, a shepherd among the flock. These gestures of humility underscored his central message: the Church must be a “field hospital” of mercy, open to all who are wounded.

### **Choosing the Name Francis: Ecology, Poverty, and Simplicity**

The name ‘Francis’ became a living symbol of the papacy, inspired by Francis of Assisi—renowned for his legendary love for the poor, the sick, and all of God’s creation. In *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis describes his namesake as “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.” In his view, poverty and climate change are two sides of the same moral coin: to neglect either is to endanger life itself. The Pope grounded his mission in the spirit of this saint—calling on the world to protect the earth as our common home, to live the Gospel in radical poverty, and to accompany the least among us.

### **Quiet Outreach to Marginalised People**

In spring 2024, Francis made headlines by privately writing to a group of Maltese parents of LGBTQ children. These parents had publicly questioned a Vatican document, and he responded that he had received their concerns with an “open heart,” commending their ministry as “very beautiful and good.”

On the 2023 World Day of the Poor, he welcomed several transgender women—some formerly involved in sex work—to a meal at the Vatican. One of them said, “We transgenders in Italy feel a bit more human because the fact that Pope Francis brings us closer to the Church... we need some love.” Another noted, “Before, the Church was closed to us... Then Pope Francis arrived and the doors of the Church opened for us.”

Early in his pontificate, he surprised many by choosing to share a simple lunch with about 90 inmates in a Naples jail—many of them gay or HIV-positive. On Maundy Thursday, he routinely visits prisons to wash the feet of inmates. In 2025, when he was unable to perform the foot-washing at Regina Coeli prison, Francis said tearfully, “I have always liked coming to prison on Holy Thursday to do the washing of the feet like Jesus. This year, I cannot do it, but I want to be close to you. I pray for you and your families.”

In one unplanned encounter, a grateful inmate pressed a note into Francis’s hand. It read: “May the light of the Lord illuminate my life and that of my family. Thank you, Pope, for your presence.”





Year after year, Francis made solidarity with incarcerated people a hallmark of his ministry—even going so far as to open an extraordinary Holy Door at Rome’s Rebibbia prison during the Jubilee Year.

### **Inclusive Theology in Action**

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis affirms that “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord” and that “the joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.” In *Fratelli Tutti*, he similarly teaches that God “loves every man and woman with infinite love” and “confers infinite dignity upon all,” regardless of birthplace.

A groundbreaking move came in 2023, when he allowed women religious to vote at a bishops’ synod for the first time. He also expanded voting rights to 70 lay experts, half of them women. Francis regularly appoints cardinals and bishops from poor or peripheral dioceses, breaking with tradition. Nations like Mongolia, Myanmar, Rwanda, Papua New Guinea, Haiti, and Iran—previously without cardinals—now have representation in the College of Cardinals. Each appointment carries powerful symbolism, affirming that the universal Church includes everyone.

### **Embracing the Margins: Migrants, Indigenous, and the Excluded**

Francis has consistently urged nations to view migrants not as statistics but as human faces of Christ. He famously declared, “The migrant must be welcomed, accompanied, encouraged and integrated. This generosity...is in harmony with the Gospel, which invites us to do good to everyone...especially the last, the poorest, the most abandoned.”

In 2019, he convened the Amazon Synod to spotlight the struggles of indigenous tribes—an unprecedented papal focus on Amazonian cultures. In a more dramatic gesture, Francis travelled to Canada in July 2022 to express remorse for the Church’s role in forced assimilation.

### **Bridges of Faith: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue**

Francis’s inclusivity reaches beyond Catholicism, embracing the idea of “human fraternity,” a phrase he repeatedly emphasizes in *Fratelli Tutti*. He asserts that no one — not even non-believers — is beyond dignity or redemption, and he has met with atheists and pagans as friends. His symbolic gestures include praying at a Bosnian mosque, Jerusalem’s Western Wall, and Rome’s Great Synagogue. He maintains warm ties with Eastern, Oriental Orthodox, and Protestant leaders, promoting unity without insisting on uniformity. Theologically, he affirms that Christ was crucified for “all of us,” making any exclusion — religious or otherwise — an offence against God.

### **Continuing the Vision: Pope Leo XIV**

In May 2025, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost of the United States was elected Pope Leo XIV. Vatican News quickly noted that the “first Augustinian Pope” is also the “second... from the Americas” and that he “spent many years as a missionary in Peru” before rising to leadership. Peruvians now claim him as one of their own: as bishop of the remote Chiclayo diocese, he delivered food and blankets to flood victims and mountain villagers, often sleeping on a thin mattress to stay close to their struggles. He even repaired trucks himself to bring aid and, during the COVID pandemic, personally funded two oxygen plants to save lives.

In many ways, Leo XIV's life — an American who lived in a shantytown, trained as an Augustinian missionary, and taught canon law in Peru — feels like a continuation of Francis's story. **Even before his election, he had pleaded to remain longer in Peru, affirming his commitment to service.**



Pope Leo XIV



Local priests say this reflects Pope Leo's "special affection" for the poor of Chiclayo and that the experience deeply shaped him. They believe he will continue Francis's mission: "He will carry on Pope Francis's legacy of working with the poor and advocating for 'a Church with open doors'," said Chiclayo's auxiliary bishop. In many ways, Leo XIV's life — an American who lived in a shantytown, trained as an Augustinian missionary, and taught canon law in Peru — feels like a continuation of Francis's story. Even before his election, he had pleaded to remain longer in Peru, affirming his commitment to service.

With Francis as his guide and the marginalised at the heart of his ministry, Pope Leo is expected to champion the same core themes: care for the poor, ecological concern, and a humble papacy. In short, he is seen as the one to carry Francis's inclusive vision forward.

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*Midhun J Francis, SJ, is a Missiology Research Scholar in the Faculty of Theology at Gregorian University in Rome and a member of 'Jesuits among Muslims' (JAM).*





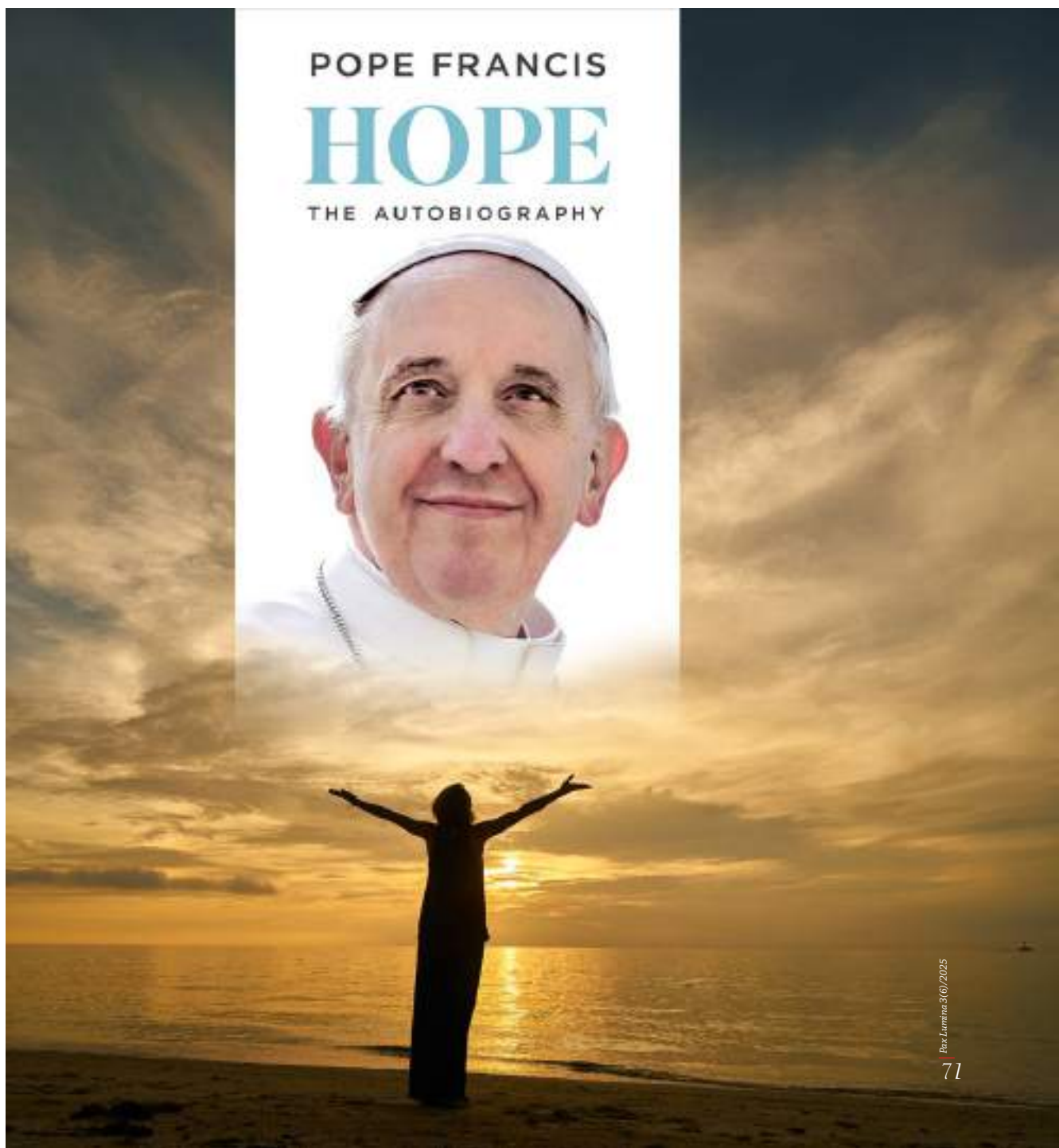
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BOOK  
REVIEW

*Pax Lumina 3(6)/2025/71-72*

# A PILGRIMAGE OF HOPE

**Pope Francis Reflects** on **Life, Faith,** and the **Future.**





In a landmark literary event timed with the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, **Pope Francis offers readers a rare and intimate glimpse into his life and reflections through the publication of his autobiography, Hope.**



and his vision for the Catholic Church. Known widely as a Pope of change and simplicity, he addresses some of the most pressing global issues of our time with sincerity and what he terms “prophetic courage.”

In a landmark literary event timed with the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis offers readers a rare and intimate glimpse into his life and reflections through the publication of his autobiography, *Hope*. Written in collaboration with Italian journalist Carlo Musso over six years of in-depth interviews, this volume marks the first autobiography ever released by a reigning Pontiff—an unprecedented move that departs from previous expectations. More than a simple record of events, the book is, in Pope Francis’ own words, “a pilgrimage of hope,” deeply rooted in his family, his people, and the broader community of faith.

Tracing the journey of Jorge Mario Bergoglio from his childhood in Buenos Aires, the narrative explores his Italian heritage and the extraordinary story of his parents’ miraculous escape from the Mafalda shipwreck—often referred to as the “Italian Titanic.” These early memories, especially the profound influence of his grandmother Rosa, are recounted with striking honesty, forming the foundation of the man who would become the 266th successor of Peter. The book unfolds in a narrative style reminiscent of a “stream of consciousness,” offering readers an intimate and uninterrupted flow of personal recollections.

Beyond personal anecdotes, *Hope* provides a candid exploration of Pope Francis’s divine calling, the pivotal conclave that elected him,

His thoughts on war in Ukraine and the Middle East, migration, the environmental crisis, social justice, the role of women in the Church, sexuality, and the future of interreligious dialogue are shared with profound seriousness. The book also touches upon significant historical figures and events, reflecting the breadth of his engagement with the world.

Comprising 25 chapters—including the intriguingly titled “*Let My Tongue Stick to My Palate*”—*Hope* is a rich tapestry woven with personal memories, theological reflections, and insights into the complexities of the modern world. Enriched with photographs and infused with moments of gentle humour and poignant vulnerability—such as reflections on past guilt or his love for classical music and literature—the autobiography offers a deeply human and honest portrait of Pope Francis.

It stands as a touching moral and spiritual testimony, a compelling legacy offered during the Jubilee Year. Through this work, readers are invited to accompany Pope Francis on his ongoing pilgrimage of hope and to reflect on the lessons he shares—on love, humility, and the vital need for connection in a fractured world.

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*Dr. Mathew K.M. is Former Professor,  
School of Management Studies, KUFOS.*

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 3(6)/2025/73



Dear Editor,

Thank you for Pax Lumina on Corporate Ethics. It is really excellent. I will be sharing the file with the corporate people in my contact.

**Lia Beltrami,**  
Italy.

Dear Editor,

Pax Lumina March 2025 is truly an amazing volume. Very timely and relevant. The interview with the maker of the documentary "Guardian of the Rainforest" is truly inspiring and insightful. Congratulations.

**Dr. Rajeev,**  
Trivandrum.

Dear Editor,

Hearty congratulations for the March 202 issue of Pax Lumina on corporate ethics. The articles are comprehensive, and they include all the aspects of business ethics. It is a domain which is not dealt sufficiently by the media.

**Dr. Joseph Mathew,**  
Muvattupuzha.

Dear Editor,

Congratulations for the very important issue on "Corporate Ethics and Peace" with a wide range of articles from business leaders across the globe as well as faculty and students of business schools in India. The articles on Ratan Tata have highlighted that profit motive should not be the only driving motivation for business, but corporate social responsibility, ethical business practices, decent work principles, environmental sustainability and philanthropy should guide businesses in the modern world.

**Denzil Fernandes,**  
Bangalore.

Dear Editor,

Congratulations and thanks for sharing the latest issue of Pax Lumina. We truly appreciate the opportunity to contribute. Best regards.

**Juan A. Vallejo and Ana M. Aponte,**  
Colombia.

Dear Editor,

Hearty congratulations to team Pax Lumina for a commendable issue on Corporate Ethics.

**José M. Guibert,**  
Spain.





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**In every tear,  
God plants  
a seed of renewal.**

-Pope Francis