RECONCILING HISTORIES

Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

> Reconciling the past is not easy,
> but it is necessary for building a future where
> everyone can live in peace and dignity.

— Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

PaxLumina
A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Pax Lumina
An Initiative of Peace and Reconciliation Network
Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA)

Vision
Promotion of Peace and Reconciliation

The Nodal Platform for Peace and Reconciliation Network of JCSA aims at fostering peace with a multi-pronged approach.

Contents

Vol. **06** | No. **04** |July 2025

PaxLumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

FEATURE

06

38

42

46

50

54

58

61

Reconciling Histories

G lobal peace is constantly threatened by the many conflicts that persist around the world. In such a context, one is led to ask: is there any place on this planet untouched by the memory of past violence?

The violence that persists today—and its lingering memories—haunts the waking hours of every living being. In this sense, most people are not truly living in the present, but are instead haunted by the nightmares of the past.

One significant source of this ever-present violence is identity, and its many fragments scattered across the world. These identities, it must be said, are not always real. Imagined identities can inflict as much pain and violence as real ones.

It is evident that the nature and expression of identity-related violence vary from place to place and culture to culture. Unless this violence is addressed at the very stage of identity formation, it is difficult to envision how peace can ever become a shared reality for all who inhabit this planet.

Looking at the rather dismal scenario concerning peace, the easier option—losing hope and embracing darkness—may seem like the only path available to many.

Yet, our experience with writers who contribute to various issues of Pax Lumina shows that optimism is not mere wishful thinking; it is a signpost pointing toward action—a commitment to a better state of being for all who inhabit this planet. More specifically, the positive examples and narratives shared by our writers reveal that, despite the grim picture painted by conflict and violence, people across the world continue to live in relative peace and harmony with one another and with nature. Thus, the most compelling evidence for the possibility of hope in an otherwise bleak scenario is hope itself.

We must recall the courageous efforts of the young moral philosopher Edith Stein, who faced Auschwitz with equanimity even as darkness engulfed the rest of the world.

In Quantum Mechanics, the celebrated approach of Richard Feynman involves calculating the individual histories of elementary particles and summing over various scenarios. But this approach does not hold when it comes to human memory and imagination. In the human sphere, the sum of histories is limited only by imagination—and by hope.

This is the message we wish to share with our dear friends across the globe who strive to stem violence and nurture peace: we not only have a duty, but also a right to hope for a peaceful future for all who dwell on this planet.

I hope the coming issue of Pax Lumina will reinforce this hope.

Jacob Thomas
Editor

**Reconciliation
is not about
forgetting
the past, but
about healing
the present and
building
a better future.**

- Desmond Tutu

Robert Alfons Graf
robertgraf@aol.com

RECONCILING HISTORIES
PERSONAL TO GLOBAL

R econciling my personal and family histories, including the conflicts involving the First World War, the Nazis, the Cold War, immigration issues, career changes, and adopting foreign children, has made me sensitive to conflicts among religions and between nations. **It has also fostered a deep hope for peaceful solutions to global disputes.**

F or me, the theme of reconciling histories begins with the personal. My father was born in 1899 in Germany. He was drafted to fight in World War I as a teenager. After the war, inflation made it impossible to pay for the coming week's train transportation with the previous week's salary. So, he emigrated to the United States.

My mother, who was born in 1908 in Germany, lost her father in the First World War. In the mid-1930s the Nazis harassed her because she was helping Jewish people. She escaped to America in 1937 and married my father. I was born in New York City in 1948. I spoke German before I spoke English. Children with German accents were not highly regarded in the United States in the 1950s.

Growing up in New York, my parents often took me to the United Nations building in Manhattan, sometimes twice a year. We were Americans, but we felt more at home in an international setting. As a young boy, I watched the UN's Trusteeship Council meetings, which eventually led to ending colonialism.

During the Cold War, I truly believed I wouldn't reach adulthood before a nuclear holocaust ended life on Earth as we knew it. Looking back at age 50, I was surprised to see that the United Nations had succeeded in its main goal of preventing nuclear war.

As an adult, I had several careers. I worked for 9 years for the Catholic Church, 13 years for a military defense contractor, 10 years in construction and publishing, and finally 12 years teaching in a public school. When my wife and I could not have our own children, we adopted two children from Central America. Our family is related by blood to the immigrants coming to the United States from the South, both documented and undocumented.

The challenge for political scientists, leaders, and people of global conscience is to develop and promote proposals **for necessary institutional improvements for global organizations before World War III makes global economic and political rebuilding either imperative or impossible.**

Reconciling my personal and family histories, including the conflicts involving the First World War, the Nazis, the Cold War, immigration issues, career changes, and adopting foreign children, has made me sensitive to conflicts among religions and between nations. It has also fostered a deep hope for peaceful solutions to global disputes.

Through my studies of the Vatican II Council and Catholic Church social justice teachings, I am profoundly optimistic about Christian reunification and about fostering harmony and responsible stewardship of the Earth among all religions and people of goodwill.

The current political divisions in the United States trouble me deeply, as do the wars in Ukraine, the Middle East, and other conflict zones. On a recent trip to Asia, I asked several Buddhist monks for their thoughts on global peace. They all say it begins with peace in the individual's heart. I believe this too, but the challenge is to extend that peace into family, community, and international relationships.

A wise teacher once said that a person's life is like a pine tree. Each stage of life brings new growth in a new set of branches. This growth needs both rain and sun, and for the pine, also storms and freezing snow. That same teacher was also an artist who never painted any tree without including a broken branch.

In the United States, after the Revolutionary War, the founding fathers wrote the Articles of Confederation as a basic governing document.

A few years' experience showed that it was too weak. Then they wrote the United States Constitution, which has lasted over 200 years and has so far withstood many serious tests as a governing document. It created the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branches to keep a check on the abuse of power by any of the branches. Public trust in this system is a key element of its success, even though it is imperfect. Its stated aim is "to create a more perfect union."

After World War I, the League of Nations was formed to prevent another catastrophe like WW I. Following World War II, a stronger organization, the United Nations, was established. Today, many believe the UN needs revision to address current world issues. St. Pope John XXIII, in 1963, wrote that war was no longer a fitting instrument for establishing justice and peace.

The destructive power of modern weapons far outweighs the injustices that they are attempting to correct. He and subsequent popes have spoken about the need for a global authority adequate to resolve conflicts between nations. The United Nations Security Council and the International Court of Justice have not been able to hold leaders and nations accountable for their decisions in recent conflict situations.

The challenge is significant in strengthening these international institutions to earn the trust of nations in conflict. Some argue that humans have always been at war. But today, we are in a new era. On every continent, organizations are dedicated to studying peace.

The challenge for political scientists, leaders, and people of global conscience is to develop and promote proposals for necessary institutional improvements for global organizations before World War III makes global economic and political rebuilding either imperative or impossible.

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) reports that in 2023, 78 countries were directly involved in wars beyond their borders. They report that "expenditures on peacebuilding and peacekeeping were 47.2 billion in 2024, just 0.52 percent of total military spending…" Their Global Peace Index 2025 tells "The economic impact of violence was $19.97 trillion in 2024." They provide a detailed analysis of how they derive those costs, as well as a comprehensive historical analysis of violence worldwide since the IEP initiated these studies in 2008.

If structural efforts to promote peace are even 10% more successful than they are now, it can free up $2 trillion. This can help to solve problems identified in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals process. Incremental solutions can be powerful.

Pope Leo XIV in his inaugural homily, said: "Brothers and sisters, I would like that our first great desire be for a united Church, a sign of unity and communion, which becomes a leaven for a reconciled world…We are called to offer God's love to everyone, in order to achieve that unity which does not cancel out differences but values the personal history of each person and the social and religious culture of every people."

From the personal to the global, reconciliation involves truth about the past, forgiveness and mutual recognition of our common humanity and responsibility for our common earthly home in the present, and willingness and skills to build a future together with trusted structures to support justice.

Dr. Robert Graf, had been Adjunct Professor at College of Notre Dame in Maryland for Moral Theology, Religion in America, Marriage, and Christian Religion Experience. He is the Social Justice Chairperson of the West Virginia Unit of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). He is the Chairperson of Global Ministries University, California.

Simon G.M. Koo
s.koo@thebeijingcenter.org

RECONCILING HISTORIES

HEALING MEMORY IN POST-MAO CHINA

Confucianism, once condemned, has been re-embraced by officials and citizens alike. Poetry, calligraphy, and folk arts have returned to prominence. **This revival reflects not just nostalgia, but a reclamation of identity. Reconnecting with the pre-revolutionary past has helped restore a sense of civilizational continuity.**

In a country where the past is ever-present, reconciling with history is both a personal and national journey. China, a civilization that deeply reveres ancestry and tradition, endured profound ruptures in the 20th century. In recent decades, however, it has quietly sought healing—not by erasing the past, but by learning to live with it.

This reconciliation is largely an inward process. It involves restoring cultural continuity, addressing political trauma, and fostering intergenerational dialogue. While official narratives often present a curated memory, deeper reckonings continue through literature, education, and family stories. From the revival of Confucianism to the resurgence of scar literature, post-1976 China reflects a society striving for coherence after upheaval.

A Culture Interrupted, Then Revived

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) left lasting scars on China's heritage. The campaign to "destroy the Four Olds" targeted customs, institutions, and beliefs. Temples were demolished, texts burned, and families torn apart. Yet in private, traditions endured: festivals were quietly celebrated, and rituals were passed down in hushed tones.

In the decades since, a cultural revival has taken shape. Confucianism, once condemned, has been re-embraced by officials and citizens alike. Poetry, calligraphy, and folk arts have returned to prominence. This revival reflects not just nostalgia, but a reclamation of identity. Reconnecting with the pre-revolutionary past has helped restore a sense of civilizational continuity.

Scars and Storytelling

Reconciling with recent history also means acknowledging the trauma of political campaigns like the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which left millions dead, imprisoned, or persecuted. While post-Mao leadership prioritized stability, efforts such as the Boluan Fanzheng campaign of the 1980s led to the rehabilitation of many victims.

Literature became a tool for healing. "Scar literature" emerged, giving voice to experiences that had long been silenced. These narratives helped transform grief into reflection, and reflection into understanding.

Personal storytelling has also played an essential role. In family conversations, elders began sharing memories of exile, struggle, and survival. Younger generations, often unaware of such suffering, learned to listen. These exchanges have helped bridge emotional and historical divides.

Education and the Ethics of Memory

Education has been central to China's transformation. The reinstatement of the Gaokao in 1977 reopened academic pathways and signaled a broader social renewal. Learning offered not only opportunity but also a chance to restore dignity.

Yet curriculum matters. Textbooks often sidestep sensitive chapters, but educators have found ways to reintroduce nuance. Linking national developments to personal stories has helped students connect more deeply with history. Education, when approached with empathy, fosters critical reflection and awareness.

Dialogue Across Generations

Some of the most meaningful reconciliations have taken place within families. For years, many elders remained silent—out of trauma or caution. But as younger generations come of age in a different China, their curiosity about the past has grown.

Documentaries, memoirs, and oral histories have begun to bring hidden stories to light. Around dinner tables, children now ask, "What really happened?" Elders speak, often for the first time, about lost years and buried memories. And the young, instead of turning away, are learning to listen.

These conversations affirm that memory matters. Through them, the youth inherit not only national pride but also the resilience and wisdom born from adversity.

The Weight of Historical Fractures

Modern China's history holds both trauma and triumph. Events like the Opium Wars and the foreign concessions in treaty ports are deeply embedded in the national memory. They are more than historical facts—they are formative experiences shaping views on sovereignty and justice.

Yet reconciliation must move beyond grievance. A victim narrative can harden identity. Chinese traditions, especially Confucianism, stress relational ethics and historical consciousness. Reconciliation requires remembering rightly, with humility and a willingness to accept responsibility.

Dialogues Between Civilizations

A compelling example of reconciliation lies in the early encounters between China and Western Christianity. Jesuit missionaries in the late Ming and early Qing periods—notably Matteo Ricci—engaged Chinese thought with genuine respect. Ricci's use of Confucian texts to explain Christian theology was more than a strategy; it was a sincere act of translation.

However, the Rites Controversy, and the Vatican's later rejection of ancestral rites, led to a rupture in this dialogue. This episode underscores that reconciliation requires more than goodwill—it demands humility and a willingness to embrace complexity.

The Politics of Memory

In China, history remains politically sensitive. Official narratives, silences, and commemorations reflect a carefully managed memory. Yet reconciliation does not require unanimity; it requires space for multiple perspectives.

Grassroots projects, museums, and transnational archives are opening new paths to shared memory. Joint historical work with Japan, though challenging, has led to shared textbooks

Chinese cosmology sees the world as a web of interconnection. Daoist and Confucian traditions frame harmony not as uniformity but as balance. Reconciliation, in this view, is about restoring right relationships—among people, across generations, and with nature.

A destroyed Confucian temple during the Cultural Revolution, contrasted with a photo of a restored temple.

and some acknowledgment of past atrocities (Dudden, 2008).

Globally, the Catholic Church has engaged in its own work of reconciliation. Pope Francis' emphasis on synodality and dialogue offers a model for confronting difficult legacies. As Fratelli Tutti states, "Reconciliation is not a word but a series of attitudes, actions, and structures."

A Spiritual Ecology of History

Chinese cosmology sees the world as a web of interconnection. Daoist and Confucian traditions frame harmony not as uniformity but as balance. Reconciliation, in this view, is about restoring right relationships—among people, across generations, and with nature.

This perspective aligns with the global idea of integral ecology, as found in 'Laudato Si'. Environmental crises and historical injustices are linked. Reconciliation, therefore, also means healing the human relationship with the earth. As a Chinese idiom puts it, "By using history as a mirror, one can understand the rise and fall of nations." Reconciliation is this reflective act.

Reconciling as a Shared Vocation

Reconciliation is not uniquely Chinese or Western—it is a universal human task. In an age of fragmentation, reconciling with history is not nostalgia, but a necessary act of moral imagination.

From China's experience—rooted in ancient wisdom and shaped by modern trials—comes a quiet but powerful lesson: remembering rightly can guide us toward healing. Through storytelling, education, and shared reflection, the past becomes not a burden but a resource. It teaches not only what was, but what might yet be.

Prof. Simon Koo is a scholar and academic administrator committed to advancing East-West dialogue at the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies. He held faculty positions at the University of San Diego and Santa Clara University, teaching diverse courses in Computer Science, Mathematics, Philosophy, and Finance, to inspire critical thinking across disciplines.

Elias Omondi Opongo

elias.opongo@hekima.ac.ke

RECONCILING HISTORIES

THE DECOLONIAL AGENDA IN AFRICAN RESOURCE CONFLICTS

Reconciling Africa's histories is inseparable from addressing the structural violence rooted in colonial and post-colonial governance, especially within the extractive sector. **Analysing the present reality thus demands an understanding of the historical causes of structural injustice.**

Unpacking Africa's contradictory reality—abundant natural resources alongside poverty, poor governance, and marginalization—requires a decolonial framework that critically examines the barriers to fully benefiting from these riches. While most of the continent's 54 countries have made significant economic and political progress, nine still grapple with armed conflicts.

Reconciling Africa's histories is inseparable from addressing the structural violence rooted in colonial and post-colonial governance, especially within the extractive sector. Analysing the present reality thus demands an understanding of the historical causes of structural injustice.

Africa holds approximately 30% of the world's known mineral reserves, much of it still unexploited. This includes 40% of global gold, 90% of platinum and chromium, significant quantities of lithium and cobalt, and over 12% of the world's oil reserves (UNECA, 2011). Yet the continent remains economically marginalized. Its abundant natural wealth has paradoxically become a site of exploitation by

Western nations, as well as China and Russia, which, in recent years, have dominated mineral and oil extraction across Africa.

Natural resources have also become drivers of communal conflicts, elite capture, and regional instability. These practices reproduce colonial patterns of exploitation, where raw materials are extracted cheaply and exported without significant value addition, leaving host communities impoverished and ecosystems devastated.

Thus, reconciling histories in natural resource governance should focus on decolonizing governance structures and dismantling systems that continue to marginalize communities and disable Africa's capacity to benefit from its own wealth. This calls for a politics of socio-political and economic inclusion, centred on human progress and sustainable peace.

Post-independence African states inherited centralized and militarized governance models designed for extraction rather than for empowering citizens to take charge of their lives. In countries

such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the militarization of resource governance and foreign interference have perpetuated cycles of protracted conflict. In the DRC, over 60% of artisanal mining sites are controlled by more than 100 armed groups (IPIS, 2022), fueling violence while communities lack basic services.

Most of the DRC's minerals are located in the eastern part of the country, a region that has become a site of persistent conflict. These conflicts are often rationalized through "carrot-and-stick" diplomacy, where access to minerals becomes a bargaining tool in peace negotiations rather than a pathway to social justice. The recent peace agreement between Rwanda and the DRC, facilitated by the United States, demonstrates this approach, with the US set to benefit from the exploitation of DRC minerals in exchange for guaranteeing peace and stability in the country.

Reconciling Histories Through Economic Justice

To reconcile histories in contexts of economic disparities, such as in resource-rich African countries, requires confronting historical grievances and addressing the economic systems that sustain inequality. This means reexamining how mineral wealth is governed, how it is distributed across different sectors of society, and how it is invested for the benefit of current and future generations.

For example, Africa's top oil producers—Nigeria, Angola, and Libya—still import refined fuel due to underinvestment in domestic refining capacity. Nigeria produces over 1.2 million barrels of crude oil daily, yet imports more than 90% of its refined petroleum products (NNPC, 2023). A newly constructed oil refinery by a private investor remains underutilized because of the economic and political interests of parties that prefer importing refined oil. This dependency on foreign refineries deepens economic dependence, weakens infrastructure, and undermines economic sovereignty.

On the other hand, while the DRC holds large quantities of critical minerals like cobalt (60% of world reserves) and lithium, it still lacks the infrastructure to produce end products from these resources. For example, electrification rates in the DRC remain below 20% (World Bank, 2023), and the country has hardly any electric vehicles (EVs). China accounts for 60% of global EV sales, followed by Europe (25%) and the U.S. (10%). In contrast, Africa's market share is less than 1%: in Kenya, only about 350 of the country's 2.2 million registered cars are EVs, and South Africa has just 6,000 EVs out of 12 million vehicles (IEA, 2024). These statistics demonstrate how Africa remains locked out of maximizing its value chains while primarily benefitting foreign nations.

The African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have developed frameworks to guide resource management in a more sustainable manner. Effective governance structures are equally important. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007) reiterates the role of democratic institutions in fostering stable and inclusive development through citizen participation in governance and social inclusion at all levels.

The AU has established additional structures aimed at transforming Africa from an exporter of raw materials into an exporter of finished products, breaking away from the colonial system of extraction and exploitation. In 2009, the AU launched the African Mining Vision (AMV) to shift the continent from exporting raw materials to processing high-value goods. To oversee this strategy, the African Minerals Development Centre (AMDC) was established in 2016. Further, the African Commodities Strategy, introduced in 2019, seeks to integrate African economies into global value chains to maximize the benefits from the continent's economic

Thus, reconciling histories in natural resource governance should focus on decolonizing governance structures and dismantling systems that continue to marginalize communities and disable Africa's capacity to benefit from its own wealth. **This calls for a politics of socio-political and economic inclusion, centred on human progress and sustainable peace.**

products. To achieve these strategies, it is critical that African states demonstrate deliberate political will by ratifying and implementing the proposed actions (AU, 2020).

Breaking the Vicious Cycle to Reconcile and Decolonize Histories

To decolonize and break the cycle of extraction without benefit to host nations, it is critical to pursue three key priorities.

First, establish institutional governance structures for managing extractive industries. For example, Botswana, through its institutionalized governance structures in mineral extraction, has enabled the sustainable management of its diamond wealth.

Second, ensure robust public participation in the extractive industry by promoting transparency in contracts and licenses to secure maximum benefit for host nations. This includes parliamentary scrutiny of extractive activities, civil society monitoring, and public access to legal remedies. Institutions like Publish What You Pay and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) provide effective platforms to ensure mineral resource governance aligns with the public interest.

Third, demand that foreign corporations observe international standards of corporate conduct. They must respect local laws, protect environmental and socio-cultural values, practice transparency in managing and producing extractive products, and ensure the transfer of skills and technology to local populations.

Dr. Elias Omondi Opongo, SJ, Associate Professor of Peace Studies and International Relations; Director, Centre for Research, Training and Publications (CRTP), Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya.

References

- African Union (AU). (2007). African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-democracy elections-and-governance
- African Union (AU). (2009). African Mining Vision. https://au.int/en/documents/20090220 african-mining-vision
- African Union (AU). (2019). African Commodities Strategy. https://au.int/en/commodities-strategy
- African Union (AU). (2020). Status of Implementation of AMDC and AMV.
- International Energy Agency (IEA). (2024). Global EV Outlook. https://www.iea.org/reports/global-ev-outlook-2024
- International Peace Information Service (IPIS). (2022). Mapping of artisanal mining sites in western Mambasa, Ituri Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo https://ipisresearch.be/publication.
- Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). (2023). Monthly Financial and Operations Report. https://nnpcgroup.com
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). (2011). Minerals and Africa's Development. https://archive.uneca.org/publications/minerals-and-africas-development
- World Bank. (2023). World Development Indicators: Infrastructure and Electrification in DRC. https://data.worldbank.org

Gordon Rixon
gordon.rixon@utoronto.ca

NEW HOPE ROOTED IN
FAITH AND TRUTH

Tragically, the Christian faith and its primordial symbol of the Cross became linked to the legacy of colonization and **the genocidal Canadian Residential School system, which separated children from their parents, culture, and language. The symbol of the Cross needed to be overturned to reveal its healing power.**

Ayoung man adopted by an Indigenous community once shared a dream with me about an overturned cedar tree that sheltered him from harm, its exposed roots raking evil spirits from the stormy night sky. In his adopted Indigenous culture, the cedar tree is known as the healing tree and symbolizes the Cross for many Christian Indigenous people.

Tragically, the Christian faith and its primordial symbol of the Cross became linked to the legacy of colonization and the genocidal Canadian Residential School system, which separated children from their parents, culture, and language. The symbol of the Cross needed to be overturned to reveal its healing power.

While the Cross is the primordial symbol of Christianity, its meaning has never received a conciliar doctrinal definition. Unlike the Nicene definition of the Triune God and the Chalcedonian definition of the person of Jesus Christ, the meaning of the Cross continues to unfold in the unique drama of its encounter with every individual and community. Here and elsewhere, theological speculation must be complemented by historically grounded narration that relates stories of healing, promotes justice, and fosters peacemaking. Although abstract principles remain valuable, they always require insights into specific situations to uncover their meaning and relevance.

Two principles illustrate the value of theological reflection in the recent Canadian experience. We do not save ourselves, but God does not save us without our participation. Reconciliation is both a spiritual gift and a social task. Tormented by the shame and confusion of institutional complicity in the Residential School system, faith leaders found themselves caught in public distortions of their ministry while trying to distance themselves from revelations about the unmarked graves of children who succumbed to neglect and disease in overcrowded and under-resourced schools.

This spiritual gift liberated leaders and other Christians from the snare of self-protection, allowing them to refocus on the needs of survivors and their families, joining Christ to share the shame and confusion he experienced as he witnessed the distortion of the beauty of creation. Freed from self-preoccupation, the faith community could then take up Christ's mission to stand in solidarity, reaffirming the dignity of survivors and bearing witness as they reclaimed their agency.

Truth-telling in a supportive environment is essential for overcoming self-preoccupation and other barriers on the path to peacemaking, as well as for fostering conditions for social (re) conciliation and life-affirming collaboration.

The fourteenth-century mystic Julian of Norwich noted that there are two narratives about sin, which differ in their impact on the human spirit. Sin's narrative promotes self-preoccupation and leads to spiraling isolation and despair. The Gospel's narrative proclaims God's mercy, frees people from self-preoccupation, leads to forgiveness and healing, and invites people to embrace Christ's mission to restore the integrity of creation.

Today, many cultures unintentionally support sin's narrative, mistakenly believing that the realities of oppression and injustice are so overwhelming that despair becomes their necessary validating characteristic. This cultural assumption must be illuminated and challenged by people of faith.

By embracing truth-telling, no matter how difficult and humbling it may be, and inviting others to recognize the spiritual gift of God's mercy and healing, they can be empowered to guide the way toward fulfilling the social task of becoming artisans of a new humanity.

Liberating sorrow replaces shame and confusion as Christians embrace a more grounded and comprehensive understanding of personal and social sin. This includes the invitation to discipleship as forgiven and healed individuals who participate in Christ's redeeming mission. Sorrow is not self-focused; it recognizes and mourns the harm done to creation, including the oppression of people, the suppression of languages, and the destruction of cultures. Grieving these wounds presents a transformed agency as it validates and revalues those who have endured the offenses.

Transformational agency is not limited to those who have experienced forgiveness for their role in oppressive social structures. No less, and often more powerfully, those who undergo healing from the trauma of oppression through the Paschal Mystery emerge as leaders of renewal within their faith communities. Gifted with healing and spiritual wisdom, they may break free from the three-cornered cycle of victim, perpetrator, and rescuer, supporting others as they reclaim their dignity and agency.

For those called into discipleship and developing skills for ministry, there is a two-way challenge

in integrating insights and practices from Christian doctrine and social sciences. Finding God in all things becomes more creative and genuine as faith communities recognize their fragility and engage maturing secular societies that no longer automatically favour religion without critical reflection, yet remain open to transcendence.

Theological anthropology benefits from practical insights on how to preserve cultural identities and hold social group boundaries, the impact of misrecognizing personal identity on self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, and the strong bonds that can develop through solidarity in vulnerability.

Understanding trauma and its intergenerational effects is greatly enhanced when therapeutic techniques are viewed within the larger context of religious meaning-making and the validation of participation in the missions of Spirit and Word. Transformational change is emerging as the Spirit breathing through cultural and social diversity is shaped and affirmed by the revealed Word.

After the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholics realized that unity in faith and practice does not require uniformity. Having struggled with viewing history as a series of disconnected events and confusing pluralism with aimless moral relativism, a new generation of believers now celebrates diversity as a gift from God and understands that true unity involves graciously accepting differences. In an era of increased tolerance and acceptance, their fundamental question is how they can belong to the faith community and participate in Christ's mission to bring hope to the world.

In a world characterized by the fragmentation of nationalist populism and affected by war, social violence, and environmental decline, believers bring a new engagement with history, courage in speaking truth, and a sign of hope for a new creation.

Gordon Rixon, SJ, is a Professor at Regis St. Michael's Faculty of Theology, University of Toronto.

Understanding trauma and its intergenerational effects is greatly enhanced when therapeutic techniques are viewed within the larger context of religious meaning-making and the validation of participation in the missions of Spirit and Word. **Transformational change is emerging as the Spirit breathing through cultural and social diversity is shaped and affirmed by the revealed Word.**

Thiranjala Weerasinghe
thiniroshan@yahoo.com

COMPETING HISTORIES, EMERGING HOPE
SRI LANKA'S DIVIDED PAST

The defeat of the LTTE reinforced the possibility of merging the entire island under a dominant Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist narrative. **The consolidation of groups like Bodu Bala Sena (translated into English as Buddhist Power Force) fuelled anti-Muslim campaigns, culminating in the 2014 Aluthgama riots against Muslims.**

The clash of histories, rooted in ethnolinguistic and religious differences, is a defining feature of Sri Lanka's post-independence era. History—or rather historicisations—taught in schools, debated in political arenas, and expounded in religious discourses, often ignited tension and division instead of fostering shared understanding and valuing pluralism. These narratives soon produced bloodier aftermaths marked by hatred, suspicion, and deeper divides.

The rise of Sinhala-Buddhist populism in 1956 marks a watershed moment in Sri Lankan historical discourse. The year 1956 signifies, to a great extent, the radicalisation of ethnolinguistic and religious histories, along with the failure to reconcile and coexist peacefully.

Enormous socio-economic, political, and personal costs are attributed to this clash of histories in the country. Despite the end of Eelam War IV in Mullivaikkal in 2009, which saw up to 40,000 civilians killed in the final months (January–May 2009), according to a UN Panel of Experts Report (2011), the benefits of ending a three-decade war have yet to translate into justice, well-being, secure livelihoods, and freedom for the people.

King Dutugamunu

The Dutugamunu-Elara saga is an example worth considering. It captures the rising, fragmented historical consciousness of a nation attempting to define itself on ethnolinguistic and religious grounds. The saga remains one of the most powerful and yet contested historical and cultural narratives.

It is based on a 2nd-century BCE conflict between King Dutugamunu, a Sinhalese Buddhist prince from the South, and King Elara, a Tamil Hindu ruler from the North. King Elara had seized Anuradhapura, which later became the epicentre of Sinhala-Buddhist national discourse. The Mahāvaṃsa, the 5th-century Buddhist chronicle, provides the basis for the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist narrative by portraying Dutugamunu as a righteous warrior who liberates the sacred Buddhist capital (Anuradhapura) from Elara, a 'foreign' and Tamil usurper.

The attitude underpinning the narrative of Sri Lanka's Sinhala-Buddhist domination is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the Sinhala population through centuries of historicisation and misrepresentation. Consider the influential figure Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), popularly known as the father of the Buddhist renaissance.

A key figure who revived and reshaped Buddhism during the colonial era, he played a pivotal role in shaping the concept of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation through religious revivalism and national ideology. Dharmapala made a lasting correlation between Buddhism and Sinhalese ethnicity, presuming that Sri Lanka is the sacred land of the Sinhala Buddhists, destined to preserve and promote Buddhist teachings and values.

Drawing on the Mahāvaṃsa, and the historicised golden sagas, such as the reign of Dutugemunu, Dharmapala presented Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism as a return to national glory. This narrative portrayed Tamil kings, such as Elara, and European colonisers as foreign invaders responsible for the island's moral decay. However, modern and contemporary historians and archaeologists have questioned the accuracy of the Mahāvaṃsa, presenting the chronicles as a semi-legendary historical and religious account that attempts to legitimise monarchy and the centralisation of power.

There is a high probability that both King Dutugamunu and King Elara ruled over multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities during the 2nd century BCE, when divisions were less ethnically rigid. Politically, ethnolinguistic and religious differences have been a dynamic force.

The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism positioned itself in opposition to Tamil nationalism and vice versa. The ideologies of each of these groups have remained largely exclusive, rigid, divisive, and suspicious of the other. **Even in moments of greater national concern underpinning broader economic, political, and social dilemmas, these ideological blocks have failed to cooperate, communicate, and work together for people suffering from poverty, marginalisation, and victimisation.**

Numerous politicians and political parties, past and present, have understood how to exploit these differences for their own personal, political, and financial gain, rather than for the country or its people.

It was this orientation that propelled the political transformation of 1956, in which Sinhala was designated as the language of administration through the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, pushing Tamil and English to the peripheries. The same ideological forces brought Mahinda Rajapaksa to power in 2005 and his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2019.

The defeat of the LTTE reinforced the possibility of merging the entire island under a dominant Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist narrative. The consolidation of groups like Bodu Bala Sena (translated into English as Buddhist Power Force) fuelled anti-Muslim campaigns, culminating in the 2014 Aluthgama riots against Muslims.

Similarly, Ravana Balaya, named after the mythical King Ravana, promoted anti-minority sentiments while emphasising Sri Lanka's Sinhala-Buddhist supremacy. Since 2009, reconciliation has been used mainly as a strategic catchphrase to cover the failure to promote justice, truth, well-being,

and freedom. Moreover, the Tamil nationalist counter-narrative has continued to scratch the itch of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism by providing little space for peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism positioned itself in opposition to Tamil nationalism and vice versa. The ideologies of each of these groups have remained largely exclusive, rigid, divisive, and suspicious of the other. Even in moments of greater national concern underpinning broader economic, political, and social dilemmas, these ideological blocks have failed to cooperate, communicate, and work together for people suffering from poverty, marginalisation, and victimisation. Numerous opportunities for reconciliation and peacebuilding based on common grievances, hopes, and dreams have failed to inspire, allowing fighting, division, radicalisation, brutality, and suffering to persist instead.

The youth uprising of 1971–1972, driven by economic discontent, unemployment, political frustrations, and ideological inspirations, was particularly animated by sections of Sinhalese leadership. However, the Tamil political leadership largely remained aloof. The emergence of Tamil militancy in the 1970s supported the aspirations of both Sinhala-Buddhist and Tamil nationalist forces, each holding a minuscule imagination of a shared future.

The Sinhalese political leadership adopted the same indifference in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, amidst efforts to define Sri Lanka exclusively in ethno-nationalist terms, the hardening of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, the introduction of the 1972 Constitution, the Black July pogrom

(1983), and the anti-Tamil riots that claimed more than 1,000 innocent lives.

Despite the failures of the past, the Aragalaya (meaning 'struggle' or 'resistance' in Sinhalese), the mass protest movement in Sri Lanka in 2022 during the country's worst economic crisis since independence, points towards a shared future where diverse histories coalesce to rebuild common ground, lines of communication, shared interests, and the well-being of the people. Configured on multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious grounds, Aragalaya was not just a youth-led protest that mobilised unprecedented youth engagement in civic life but, more importantly, remained highly non-partisan, inclusive, open, and appreciative, rather than fearing differences.

It was a rare moment when Sri Lankans from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds dreamed together of a better and shared future. The demands for better governance, transparency, equitable economic management, and a transformed political culture, united people, rewriting the possibility of a new nation that recognises justice, reconciliation, and well-being as the cornerstones of national revival. These remain only the initial steps in the right direction, still far from a nation fully reconciled and peaceful.

Thiranjala Weerasinghe, a Jesuit from Sri Lanka, is currently pursuing theological studies (BTh) at Hekima University College in Nairobi, Kenya.

Oliver P. Rafferty
frraffer@bc.edu

FROM
CONFLICT TO
COEXISTENCE
THE LONG ROAD TO PEACE IN IRELAND

'Peace For All' sculpture by Derek A. Fitz Simons, Aghalane, Co. Fermanagh, erected 1999

These historical developments laid the foundation for enduring antagonism between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland—a divide that has continued in various forms to the present day. **While Protestants sought to assert dominance in a predominantly Catholic country, Catholics faced increasing discrimination, were denied a fair share in the nation's wealth, and were systematically excluded from public life.**

Derry youths throw petrol bombs at the RUC during the Battle of the Bogside in August 1969

The long history of conflict in Ireland is both intricate and deeply rooted. It began in the late 12th century, when the Anglo-Normans (the English) invaded Ireland, initiating centuries of hostility between Ireland and England (later Britain). The conflict intensified in the 16th century with the introduction of Protestantism by King Henry VIII. For many native Irish—and even the 'Old English,' families who had settled in Ireland during the 12th century—Catholicism became a marker of identity and a symbol of resistance to the growing influence of the 'New English' Protestants introduced under Henry's rule.

The situation grew more complex in the 17th century, when Protestants from England and Scotland were settled in Ireland, primarily in the northern region of Ulster. These settlers,

known as 'Planters,' were granted or sold land confiscated from native Irish Catholics. Over time, they became a loyal base of support for the British Crown in opposition to the native Irish.

These historical developments laid the foundation for enduring antagonism between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland—a divide that has continued in various forms to the present day. While Protestants sought to assert dominance in a predominantly Catholic country, Catholics faced increasing discrimination, were denied a fair share in the nation's wealth, and were systematically excluded from public life.

The issue of religion became increasingly entangled with questions of politics. While politics is the art of the possible and necessarily involves compromise, religion is not something individuals are typically willing to negotiate.

This was, at its core, the problem in Ireland: religious antagonism—hatred is not too strong a word—became deeply embedded in the political fabric of Irish life.

In an attempt to address the Irish problem—particularly in the context of the Napoleonic Wars and following the failed Irish rebellion of 1798—the British government orchestrated a union between Britain and Ireland. Thus, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland came into being on 1st January 1801. Although initially supported by Irish Catholic bishops, the Union did not, in itself, succeed in reducing religious tensions. Many leading figures in both Irish and British society remained staunchly anti-Catholic.

Over time, however, political circumstances for Catholics began to improve, largely due to continued agitation. The Emancipation Act of 1829 granted Catholics the right to sit in the British Parliament in London and to hold public office. Still, many Protestants feared that if the Catholic majority ever gained power in Ireland, they would retaliate by subjecting Protestants to the same kind of persecution Catholics had suffered in the past.

These concerns became central to the Home Rule Movement from 1870 onward. Although occasionally led by Protestants, most of its supporters were Catholic. Protestants strongly

Aftermath of the burning of Cork by British forces
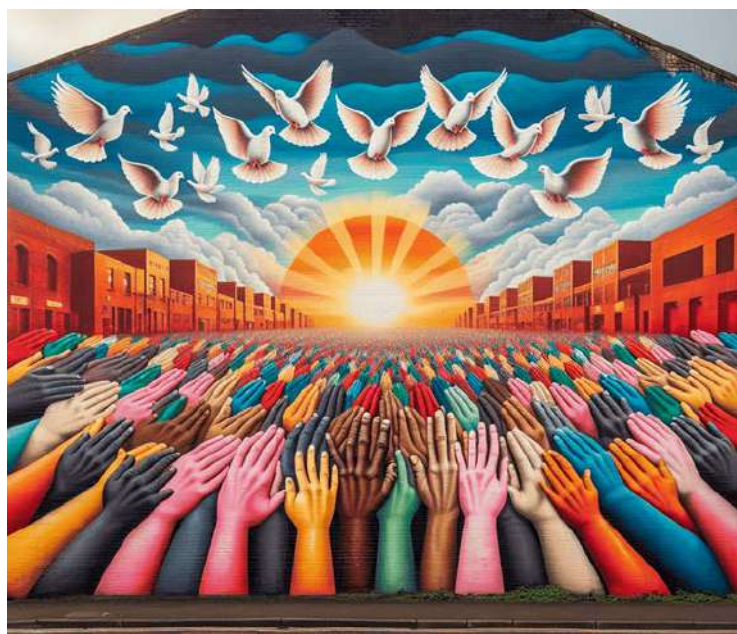
Peace Wall Belfast

opposed the idea of a separate parliament in Dublin, even if the British monarch remained head of state. They believed that Home Rule would mean "Rome Rule," subjecting them to Catholic moral teachings enforced through law.

By the end of the First World War, the forces of largely Catholic Irish nationalism had begun a struggle against British rule—a struggle that, in its violent phase, lasted from January 1919 to July 1922. The British Empire was fought to a standstill. The result was the partition of Ireland—a tactic the British used elsewhere—into the largely Catholic Irish Free State (a republic outside the Commonwealth since 1949) and Northern Ireland, with its two-thirds Protestant majority. From that time on, two main antagonisms existed in Ireland, even if they were largely peaceful: the cross-border hostility between Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland, and the continuing internal tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

By the late 1960s, partly inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Catholics in Northern Ireland began demanding civil rights and freedom from oppression and discrimination. Initially, the Catholic Church supported these demands, but as the situation deteriorated into violence, the Church hierarchy began to question whether such violence was too high a price to pay, even for legitimate political goals.

Clergy from all denominations prayed and worked for peace, questioning why Christian charity failed to prevail over violence. **Many wondered whether Ireland could truly call itself a Christian country if it could produce individuals capable of such internecine brutality.**

From 1970 onwards, a de facto war broke out between Catholic and Protestant paramilitary forces. The British Army, supposedly a neutral peacekeeping force, often appeared biased in favour of the pro-British Protestant paramilitaries. In contrast, it frequently mistreated the Catholic community, which the British claimed was the main source of the violence. The thirty-year conflict, known as The Troubles, resulted in over 3,500 deaths and tens of thousands of injuries. Entire communities were displaced, and widespread suffering occurred within what is a relatively small geographical area.

Amid the murder and chaos, voices continued to call for peace and reconciliation. Even Mother Teresa of Calcutta opened a house in Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, hoping it would be shared by Anglican nuns as a sign that Catholics and Protestants could live together. But that hope, in the end, proved impossible. Clergy from all denominations prayed and worked for peace, questioning why Christian charity failed to prevail over violence. Many wondered whether Ireland could truly call itself a Christian country if it could produce individuals capable of such internecine brutality.

Eventually, the men and women of violence joined hands with conventional politicians, as well as the British and Irish governments, in a series of talks that culminated in a peace agreement. This was signed on 10th April 1998—Good Friday. Yet, the divisions run so deep that while Catholics refer to it as the Good Friday Agreement, Protestants often call it the Belfast Agreement. The accord was further supplemented by talks held at St. Andrews, Scotland, in 2006.

Over the past 25 years, the agreement has brought a significant degree of peace to Northern Ireland. Former bitter enemies now serve together in the same government. Still, the peace is often uneasy, and tensions between communities persist. There has been considerable discussion about the need for a reconciliation of memories, but that remains a distant goal. Some individuals still harbor deep reservoirs of hatred.

One persistent challenge in Northern Irish society is the inability of individuals and communities to imaginatively step into the pain and experience of the other. The late John Hume—a Catholic politician and one of the chief architects of the Good Friday Agreement—often pointed to the example of France and Germany. Once sworn enemies, engaged in seventy years of war and destruction, they later became the driving forces behind the European Union and the idea of European integration. Conflict between them is now unimaginable. The Franco-German rapprochement offers, perhaps, a model not only for Ireland but for other troubled regions across the globe.

True peace and reconciliation in Ireland—and elsewhere—is possible. Such peace does not erase anyone's identity but rather seeks to transcend it by revealing a shared humanity.

Prof.Dr.Oliver Rafferty has specialised in Irish and Church History, and teaches currently at Boston College, USA.

Sebastian Joseph
monichenjo@gmail.com

HEALING THROUGH MEMORY

RECLAIMING INDIA'S HISTORY

I n many South Asian households, textbooks are shared among siblings, discussed by parents, and serve as cultural touchstones for those who may not have completed formal education. **When these materials are revised with political intent, the damage extends beyond the child to the broader public. Erasing names like Akbar and Tipu Sultan, or events like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, diminishes not only civic awareness but also the emotional engagement with the nation's plural legacy.**

H istory, perhaps more than any other discipline, bears a double burden: the pursuit of truth and the wielding of power. It holds a quiet, almost sacred potential to mend past wounds through remembrance, yet equally harbours the peril of becoming a weapon that divides rather than heals. Nowhere is this tension more acute than in South Asia, especially in contemporary India, where history has shifted from scholarly deliberation and archival care to a tool of political engineering.

Under the shadow of majoritarian ideologies, history has undergone a subtle yet sweeping transformation. Once a dynamic, pluralistic archive of the subcontinent's diverse inheritances, it is now narrowed into a singular tale of cultural supremacy. School curricula are cleansed of uncomfortable truths, monuments renamed to fit imagined pasts, and films turned into spectacles of grievance and glory.

These are not isolated incidents but part of a deliberate reconfiguration: the transformation of the democratic fabric of memory into the rigid architecture of identity-driven nationalism. Yet another path remains open. Practised with critical integrity, history can become a force of restoration. It can revive silenced voices, weave together fractured memories, and nurture a civic imagination grounded in empathy and justice.

This essay is rooted in such a therapeutic vision of history. It contends that the present crisis is not merely academic misrepresentation but a deeper corrosion of our shared conditions for pluralistic coexistence. Through an examination of textbooks, public monuments, and cinema, it argues that reclaiming history is no longer a scholarly luxury, but a moral and political necessity.

Childhood Memory and the Pedagogy of Erasure

In India, where education remains a powerful instrument for national integration, textbooks shape children's historical consciousness. NCERT history textbooks, once designed by eminent historians like Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, Satish Chandra, and Bipan Chandra, reflected India's plural ethos. They integrated the diverse pasts of regions, religions, and movements into a cohesive civic memory.

Since 2014, this pedagogical landscape has undergone a stark ideological shift. Citing the pandemic as justification, historical content has been "rationalised," leading to the removal of entire epochs and figures. The political narratives of the Mughals, for instance, have

been replaced with skeletal treatments of economy and agriculture. These omissions constitute a politics of erasure.

Drawing from Michel Foucault's concept of "regimes of truth," these interventions are more than curriculum updates; they are ideological projects. The textbook becomes a battleground where knowledge and power intersect. In the classroom, the teacher mediates this power, shaping how students internalise history, often unknowingly. Through repeated exposure and examinations, students are conditioned to reproduce these distortions, perpetuating a hegemonic memory that privileges one community over others. The democratic potential of history thus gives way to authoritarian mythmaking.

Textbooks do not remain confined to classrooms alone. In many South Asian households, textbooks are shared among siblings, discussed by parents, and serve as cultural touchstones for those who may not have completed formal education. When these materials are revised with political intent, the damage extends beyond the child to the broader public. Erasing names like Akbar and Tipu Sultan, or events like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, diminishes not only civic awareness but also the emotional engagement with the nation's plural legacy.

Erasing Monumental Memory: The Architecture of Forgetting

Public monuments in India, from the Taj Mahal to the Charminar, serve as anchors of memory, embodying the nation's complex cultural inheritance. Yet, renaming roads, buildings, and historic sites has become a political project aimed at reconfiguring collective memory. Examples include renaming Aurangzeb Road to Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Road and rebranding Mughal Gardens as Amrit Udyan. Such changes are presented as efforts to "decolonise" public space but often function to communalise it.

This is not merely symbolic erasure. As Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora argue, memory is inherently spatial and social. Monuments are not static structures; they are lived sites of intergenerational storytelling. Reframing Mughal architectural contributions as symbols of "foreign rule" undermines India's syncretic traditions.

The Taj Mahal, long seen as a symbol of love and cultural amalgamation, is now contested by Hindutva narratives. The emotional and civic memories attached to these spaces dissolve under the ideological heat of nationalism.

This erasure of interreligious and intercultural synthesis in favour of a homogenised narrative reflects a deeper anxiety about pluralism. By privileging a singular civilisational story, it marginalises the richly layered histories that constitute India's national fabric. Historical amnesia becomes a tool for political consolidation.

Renaming also reflects a desire to overwrite one history with another. Changes like Allahabad to Prayagraj or Faizabad to Ayodhya are not just administrative but attempts to erase the Indo-Islamic strata embedded in these geographies. Even renaming Mughal Sarai Junction to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Junction points to an intentional redrawing of the cultural map.

This erasure of interreligious and intercultural synthesis in favour of a homogenised narrative reflects a deeper anxiety about pluralism. By privileging a singular civilisational story, it marginalises the richly layered histories that constitute India's national fabric. Historical amnesia becomes a tool for political consolidation.

Cinematic Fictions: Spectacles of Historical Manipulation

Cinema, one of India's most influential mediums, has become a potent vehicle for spreading distorted historical narratives. Unlike textbooks or academic journals, films reach vast audiences and are consumed with emotional investment. Recent films such as The Kerala Story, Padmavat, and The Kashmir Files exemplify what Robert Rosenstone calls "false inventions"—narratives that fabricate history for ideological ends.

The Kerala Story grossly exaggerates figures of radicalisation, painting entire communities with suspicion. Padmavat romanticises medieval myth as historical fact, while The Kashmir Files offers a selective, emotionally manipulative portrayal of the Pandit exodus. Each film weaponises history to fit a predetermined ideological frame, turning visual culture into a theatre for historical revisionism.

The popular success of these films shows how cinema implants revisionist histories into public consciousness. This trend is not isolated. Blockbusters like Bahubali and RRR depict fictional Hindu kingdoms as idealised historical states, embedding Hindutva aspirations into mass culture. These films create a process of "Bahubalisation," stylising majoritarian history while suppressing complexity.

Such cinematic reinterpretations have real-world effects. In schools, students often reference distorted or fictionalised histories from these films as truth. This blurring of history and mythology, fact and fiction, erodes the line between cultural appreciation and ideological indoctrination.

The pedagogical dangers here are immense. In South Asia, where oral tradition and visual storytelling hold deep cultural resonance, films often override textbooks as primary sources of historical imagination. Their power to shape national memory must, therefore, be subjected to critical scrutiny.

Reclaiming History: A Therapeutic Response

If history has become a battleground, reclaiming it becomes an ethical and therapeutic imperative. Historical knowledge, when rigorously grounded in sources and committed to inclusivity, serves

a healing function. It restores fragmented memories, fosters empathy, and nurtures a civic ethos grounded in pluralism.

Reconceptualising curricula is the first step. Emerging fields such as environmental history, emotional history, gender history, and the history of science offer a more expansive understanding of India's past. These approaches move beyond binary religious identities and help students engage with India as a civilisational mosaic.

Critical historians must also venture beyond classrooms. By producing documentaries, engaging on social media, and writing accessible histories, they can counter propagandist narratives. Public history projects, oral history archives, and virtual museums become essential tools in this struggle. As Jason Stanley notes in How Fascism Works, authoritarian regimes fear the democratic potential of history precisely because it enables critical reflection.

Digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) offer democratic spaces for counter narratives. Short films on the Bhakti movement, regional resistance heroes, or Dalit intellectuals can reach audiences untouched by academic discourse. South Asian historians must embrace these tools not as compromises in rigour but as invitations to wider participation.

In this way, the therapeutic work of history intersects with the pedagogical. The goal is not merely to recover what has been lost but to create a space where memory is dialogical, open-ended, and inclusive. This historical healing aligns with Gandhian and Tagorean visions of education as practices of inward cultivation and social harmony.

Conclusion:
Toward a Plural Memory Culture

In South Asia, where the histories of partition, colonialism, and communalism remain deeply embedded in the collective psyche, the stakes of historiography are high. Authoritarian regimes, recognising the power of historical narrative, seek to replace multiplicity with myth. Their aim is to craft a sanitised past that legitimises present inequities.

To resist this, history must reclaim its therapeutic potential. It should become a discipline that not only informs but heals, serving as a site where contested memories are not erased but brought into dialogue. Textbooks, monuments, and films must become instruments of reconciliation rather than vehicles of division.

In this endeavour, historians, educators, filmmakers, and civil society must collaborate to preserve the integrity of India's plural past. For it is in memory that a nation finds its conscience, and in history, its hope for a reconciled future.

The therapeutic role of history is more than metaphorical. In a country where caste violence, communal riots, and identity-based discrimination continue to erupt, history must be a stabilising force. This does not mean romanticising a golden past but acknowledging pain, injustice, and resilience in equal measure.

That is the work of restorative historiography. As South Asians, we are inheritors of a multiplicity that colonialism tried to compress and communal ideologies now seek to polarise. Against this backdrop, to teach, write, and remember responsibly is not just an academic obligation—it is a moral one. The future of reconciliation lies in how honestly we confront the past.

Dr. Sebastian Joseph, Head, Environmental History and Anthropocene Studies, Tropical Institute of Ecological Sciences (TIES) Kottayam, Kerala, India.

Aamir Habib
aamir.habib@iust.ac.in

MEDICINE, MISSION, AND MEMORY

DR. ARTHUR NEVE'S ART OF HEALING

F rom the outset, Neve's gaze was not on empire or adventure, but on the lived realities of the people among whom he worked. **Early in his memoir, he describes trudging through snow-laden Himalayan passes, yet his most vivid portraits are of human suffering— villagers devastated by famine, children marked by curable yet untreated illnesses, communities vulnerable to epidemic and displacement.**

Dr. Arthur Neve, a British missionary surgeon in Srinagar

H istory, especially in a landscape as wounded and wonder-filled as Kashmir, is not merely a chronicle of events. It is a lived experience, shaped as much by silence as by speech, by tenderness as much as by tragedy. It lingers in the landscape, in the pauses between pain and prayer, in the resilience of those who have endured. The narratives that last are not always those of power or proclamation; often, it is the quieter histories—rooted in acts of compassion—that remain, asking not for allegiance, but for reflection.

Here, remembering is never neutral. Memory does not merely archive; it animates. It speaks from gravesites and gardens alike, urging us to recall not only what divided, but also what healed.

One such quiet, healing presence was Dr. Arthur Neve, a British missionary surgeon who arrived in Srinagar in 1882 under the Church Missionary Society. His life and work in Kashmir from the 1880s to the early 20th century offer a compelling example of how service, when grounded in humility, can transcend the divides of culture, creed, and political boundaries. For decades, Neve served in Kashmir's hospitals, walked its mountains, and tended to its wounds—both physical and unseen.

As one reads his memoir, Thirty Years in Kashmir (1913), it is clear it is neither an apologia for empire nor a missionary tract. It is a document of ethical engagement, chronicling not only the landscapes he traversed but the lives he touched. From the outset, Neve's gaze was not on empire or adventure, but on the lived realities

At a time when history is often wielded as a tool of division, Neve's story turns our gaze elsewhere—not toward erasure or revision, but toward a remembrance that is tender and honest. **He reminds us that healing does not always come through declarations or signed agreements. Sometimes, it begins in the quiet work of tending wounds, of walking alongside, of offering care where it is needed most.**

of the people among whom he worked. Early in his memoir, he describes trudging through snow-laden Himalayan passes, yet his most vivid portraits are of human suffering—villagers devastated by famine, children marked by curable yet untreated illnesses, communities vulnerable to epidemic and displacement.

As a record of service marked by humility, he writes not of conquest, but of cholera wards and crowded clinics, of lepers and labourers, of Himalayan passes where human suffering moved him more than any summit. In an era when empire often disguised itself as charity, Neve's life stands out as an earnest attempt to reconcile through care. "There was an immense satisfaction in aiming at an ideal," he noted—an ideal that sought not conversion, but compassion.

By the time he established the Kashmir Mission Hospital in Srinagar, Neve saw that physical healing alone was insufficient. The hospital, at the foot of the Takht-i-Sulayman, became a meeting point—of cultures, faiths, and fractured identities seeking care. In an era marked by social, religious, and political segregation, his operating theatre became an unspoken gesture of inclusion. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians came not as representatives of groups but as patients in need, seeking dignity.

In Neve's practice, reconciliation was not an abstraction, but a daily, deliberate act. At a time when medical language often echoed imperial

hierarchies, he chose another register. He learned local languages, trained Kashmiri staff, and admired the valley's mystical traditions. His ethic was rare: engaging difference not as a problem to fix, but as a reality to embrace.

Today, it is easy to read such a life through hindsight—either as an exception to colonial rule or as a figure caught in its structures. But Neve's enduring relevance lies elsewhere: in his choices to remain when others left, to treat without prejudice, to listen without judgment.

Dr. Arthur Neve

His was not a politics of resistance but a practice of presence. This resonates in our time, as Kashmir continues to live in the shadow of unresolved histories and contested narratives. Neve offers no political or diplomatic solutions. Instead, he offers something quieter and perhaps more lasting: a reminder that healing, even in divided landscapes, is possible when one sees the human before the headline, the patient before the position.

Some of the most poignant moments in Thirty Years in Kashmir are not about Neve's surgical skill or alpine expeditions, but his reflections on collective suffering. He writes of the devastating famine of the late 1870s that "hollowed the cheeks of the valley," the fragility of public health, and the quiet dignity with which ordinary people bore extraordinary hardship.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not see suffering as cultural fate, but as the result of neglect—economic, administrative, and systemic—and he responded with care. The hospital's early years were marked by scarcity: limited resources, scarce antiseptics, rudimentary facilities. Yet Neve pressed on. "Even in the absence of miracles," he wrote, "care can be

an act of faith." In that quiet sentence lies a philosophy of reconciliation—not dramatic or rhetorical, but steadfast and lived. For Neve, reconciliation was not about resolving every tension but about refusing to let division dictate one's response to suffering.

In remembering Arthur Neve, we do not romanticize the past or seek ready-made models for today. Instead, we recover a sensibility—a way to inhabit a fractured world without becoming indifferent to its wounds.

In an age of eroding empathy, Neve's story gestures toward another possibility. He died in 1919, before the redrawing of South Asia's borders, before Kashmir became a crucible of geopolitical anxiety. He did not witness the upheavals that followed, yet his life anticipated the questions we still ask: How do we live with difference? What does ethical memory look like? Can small acts of care help mend the rift between contested pasts and fragile presents?

In revisiting Dr. Arthur Neve's life, we are not seeking a hero to lionize, but a witness—someone who shows what reconciliation looks like when lived quietly and consistently. Thirty Years in Kashmir is more than a medical memoir; it is a testimony to presence, to humility that listens, attends, and heals.

At a time when history is often wielded as a tool of division, Neve's story turns our gaze elsewhere—not toward erasure or revision, but toward a remembrance that is tender and honest. He reminds us that healing does not always come through declarations or signed agreements. Sometimes, it begins in the quiet work of tending wounds, of walking alongside, of offering care where it is needed most. Perhaps even now, the bridges we long for will not be built in conference halls, but by those who carry both a scalpel and a willingness to serve.

Dr. Aamir Habib is an Assistant Professor at the International Centre for Spiritual Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology, Kashmir.

■

Ram Puniyani
ram.puniyani@gmail.com

CIVILIZATIONS AS ALLIANCE OF DIVERSE HISTORIES

The difference between Brahminical values and the values of other religions was striking. While Brahmanism focused on caste and gender hierarchy, the other religious traditions were more egalitarian and were loosely called Shamanic traditions. **Barring Buddhism and Jainism, all the prevalent traditions came to be called Hinduism, though Brahmanism remained the dominant stream.**

During the growth of human society, there has been a multifaceted forward march of different aspects of human life across various parts of the globe. As kings and rulers expanded their territories, the processes and norms of kingdoms began to emerge. In due course, this led to the formation of 'nation-states' in most parts of the world. This development also brought with it a vast diversity, which, in turn led to political struggles.

At parallel level, many religions also developed in the world. These religions began by structuring themselves around moral and ethical ethos, and institutions grew around many of them. These religions, in turn, gave rise to many sub-sects. Mostly, these sub-sects also retained the moral code in some way. Many kings used the cover of religious terms like Jihad, Dharamyudh, and Crusade for the expansion of their power. Religions spread across continents and countries through the efforts of saints, clergy, and social interactions. These interactions contributed to the progress of different facets of life.

In India, Vedic Brahmanism emerged as an early religion. However, many other tendencies also prevailed here. As early as the period of Emperor Ashoka, Vedic Brahmanism (currently referred to as Sanatan Dharma), Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikas were the main religious tendencies.

The difference between Brahminical values and the values of other religions was striking. While Brahmanism focused on caste and gender hierarchy, the other religious traditions were more egalitarian and were loosely called Shamanic traditions. Barring Buddhism and Jainism, all the prevalent traditions came to be called Hinduism, though Brahmanism remained the dominant stream.

Christianity arrived in India in the first century AD with the coming of St. Thomas, who set up many churches and began the spread of the faith here. Islam came to the Malabar Coast in the seventh century through Arab traders. Sikhism developed in the 15th and 16th centuries. Around this time, many traditions like Bhakti and Sufi also emerged in society.

The struggles of the people were mainly against the oppressive feudal system. Some subsects, such as Shaiva and Vaishnav, and Shia and Sunni, also experienced strife among themselves.

During the British period, as Indian nationalism began to rise, it provided an inclusive platform and identity to people of all religions. This movement was directed against British colonialism. In opposition to the inclusive tendency of Indian nationalism, some political groups seeking to retain feudal values and hierarchies presented themselves in the garb of religious nationalism. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League were the main ones among others. They spread hatred against the 'other' community, which led to communal violence. These are purely political phenomena, cloaked in the name of religion.

At the global level, the major struggle centred around resources and markets. After the emergence of Soviet Russia as a major pole in global politics, the 'Free World'—that is, the imperialist powers, America, the UK, and others—was based purely on capitalism, while Soviet Russia pursued its own version of socialism. Many colonial countries, long enslaved by imperial powers, freed themselves under the banner of socialism.

With the decline of Soviet Russia, America began to promote groups with fundamentalist leanings, particularly in the name of Islam. Terrorists were trained in Pakistani madrassas, with America providing $8 billion and supplying 7,000 tons of armaments. The world, particularly West and Central Asia, came under the impact of this terrorism, which wore the mask of Islam. American media labelled this as 'Islamic terrorism,' and a large section of the global media quickly adopted the phrase.

Parallel to this process, Samuel Huntington floated the thesis of the 'Clash of Civilizations,' which gained popularity in some circles. This was a disturbing trend. The United Nations took up the issue for serious deliberation, and Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, appointed a high-level committee to review this thesis. The committee produced a significant report titled Alliance of Civilizations, arguing that human society has progressed mainly through interaction and alliance among civilizations.

World culture is not an isolated, stand-alone civilization. Our present civilization is a thorough intermix of diverse religions, regions, languages, ethnicities, and more.

A great misconception today is the notion that conflicts between religions are drastically pulling apart the process of peace. Too often, religions are abused to preserve the out-dated values of inequality from times gone by.

World culture is not an isolated, stand-alone civilization. Our present civilization is a thorough intermix of diverse religions, regions, languages, ethnicities, and more. A great misconception today is the notion that conflicts between religions are drastically pulling apart the process of peace. Too often, religions are abused to preserve the out-dated values of inequality from times gone by.

In reality, the moral values of different religions have significant overlap, even if their rituals differ. Many saints from diverse faiths have contributed to this syncretism in various parts of the world. The notion that a "Clash of Civilizations" rules the world has now been largely negated, and the idea of an "Alliance of Civilizations" is gaining theoretical acceptance in our time.

The journey of human society has always been thoroughly intermixed, with one part of the world affecting the whole. The present turmoils of the world often stem from selfish motives. These motives can be overcome by a global effort rooted in the values that have emerged from our long and interactive journey over the past many centuries.

The diversity of cultures and religions adds richness to our lives. We need to view this diversity positively and work to inculcate these values through various means of dissemination. Human society has progressed enough that all people in the world can be well-fed, clothed, and provided with proper education and healthcare. The achievements of science have equipped us with the means to overcome global challenges.

The major lesson of our shared journey is that, as a world community, we should be united by the humanism we have developed so far. Yet, we still have a long way to go to ensure the well-being of all living beings on our planet. Our parallel and joint journeys send us a strong message about the direction in which we need to move forward.

Ram Puniyani is an Indian author and former professor of biomedical engineering, affiliated with the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay as a senior medical officer.

Jose Kalapura
jkalapura@gmail.com

HISTORIES OF RECONCILIATION
LESSONS FOR BUILDING
PEACEFUL
SOCIETIES

Amid these conflicts, Indian history also reveals many reconciling movements. India, the birthplace of **Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and a welcoming ground for Christianity and Islam, has witnessed the world's largest number of religious reconciliation efforts over the past two millennia.**

Sages have long affirmed in various ways that all religions are paths to the One God and that all humans belong to one family. Yet, history shows that religion has not always fostered human unity, peace, or harmony. Instead, religious differences have often led to conflict and violence.

Violence can be internal or external. Internal violence arises when followers of the same religion differ in beliefs and interpretations. Thousands have suffered due to sectarian conflicts, such as those between Catholics and Protestants in Europe. Similar persecutions have occurred between Vaishnavites and Saivites within Hinduism, and among sects within Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam.

External violence occurs when a religion is rejected by others or forcibly imposed. Over two millennia, major religions have seen intense conflict. In its early centuries, Christianity faced violence from adherents of Judaism and Roman religions and later from aggressive Islamic expansion in North Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Europe.

In India, Buddhism and Jainism arose as protests within Vedic Hinduism but were nearly stamped out by revivalist Hinduism after the 7th century. Later, Hindus themselves faced oppression under certain Islamic rulers in the subcontinent.

Amid these conflicts, Indian history also reveals many reconciling movements. India, the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and a welcoming ground for Christianity and Islam, has witnessed the world's largest number of religious reconciliation efforts over the past two millennia.

As a country with a long history, religion in India developed through interactions with various traditions. The Vedic religion, which arrived with the Aryan-speaking peoples, absorbed many elements from the Indus civilization. Similarly, in the mid-first millennium of the Common Era, a great religious tradition flourished in southern India in the form of the devotional Bhakti movement.

Historians argue that the Bhakti movement emerged in opposition to the ethical, fatalistic, and atheistic traditions of Jainism and Buddhism. Yet the orthodox and heterodox traditions interacted and left their mark. The idea of renunciation, central to Buddhism and Jainism, was adopted by Saivites and Vaishnavites.
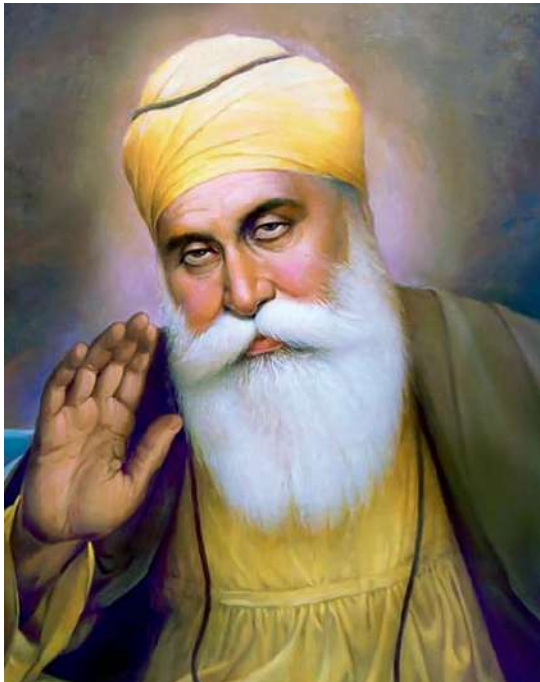
Guru Nanak (1469–1539)

In response to the simplicity and life-negation of heterodox sects, the Bhakti movement celebrated life through festivals and rituals. Bhakti exponents asserted that, unlike the fatalism of Buddhism and Jainism, devotion to Vishnu and Siva could overcome fate. Thus, Vedic Hinduism was transformed by its conflict with Buddhism and Jainism.

Supported by ruling kings, the Bhakti movement left a deep impact on social, political, religious, cultural, and linguistic spheres. South India became a centre of religious renaissance from the 7th to the 10th century. Inspired by poet-saints, the Bhakti cult spread across India from the 14th century onwards.

Scholars note that the Bhakti movement's rapid spread in the 2nd millennium was partly a response to the arrival of Islam and subsequent Muslim rule in India, along with Hindu-Muslim conflicts.

The Hindu response to Muslim political power was complex. While there was hostility toward the new religion, there was also an internal reform to strengthen Hinduism against the challenge. An important outcome was the rise of syncretic sects and saints like Kabir, Ravidas, Tulsidas, and Mirabai.

Kabir's monotheistic and egalitarian vision, rooted in non-conformity, stood apart from earlier South Indian traditions. He denounced polytheism, idolatry, caste, and Muslim formalism with equal rigour.

The saint with the greatest institutional influence was Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who founded Sikhism, reflecting the syncretic influences of Hinduism and Islam.

Sufism arrived in north India alongside Islam, sharing striking parallels with Bhakti traditions. The Chishti, Suhrawardi, and Naqshbandi orders emphasized love, compassion, and humility as paths to divine union. Sufi saints like Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Baba Farid, and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya drew followers across religious lines, fostering interfaith harmony.

Their messages of universal brotherhood and equality still resonate, offering lessons in an era of religious divides. Sufi saints transcended communal boundaries, promoting the interests of humanity at large. Their most important contribution was blunting Hindu-Muslim conflicts and prejudices by forging solidarity and brotherhood between the communities.

Bhakti poets and Sufi saints such as Kabir, Namadeva, Chishti, and Farid brought reconciliation amid religious tensions. If revived, in education and public discourse, their teachings can inspire a more harmonious, inclusive society true to India's legacy of unity in diversity.

The Bhakti and Sufi movements remain pillars of India's syncretic heritage, underscoring the power of love, devotion, and inclusivity. In a world divided by identity politics, they remind us of the shared spiritual values that bind humanity. These movements teach that spirituality transcends religious boundaries, a vital lesson for fostering interfaith dialogue.

Syncretism in India has emerged through a confluence of historical events, religious movements, political policies, cultural exchanges, and social practices. This blending of traditions has created a rich, diverse cultural tapestry that continues to define the Indian subcontinent.

T he Bhakti and Sufi movements remain pillars of India's syncretic heritage, underscoring the power of love, devotion, and inclusivity. **In a world divided by identity politics, they remind us of the shared spiritual values that bind humanity. These movements teach that spirituality transcends religious boundaries, a vital lesson for fostering interfaith dialogue.**

Swamy Vivekanandan

In the 19th century, several Hindu and Muslim reform and revivalist movements arose in India. They brought radical changes in people's thinking and led to various social service initiatives. These included the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophical Society, Ramakrishna Mission, Wahabi Movement, and Faraizi Movement, among others. These socio-religious movements helped remove societal and religious evils and encouraged scientific thinking among Hindus and Muslims.

The interaction between Christianity and Hinduism during the first millennium was marked by shared culture, worship practices, and Hinduised rituals. From the 19th century, with the intervention of Protestant missionaries during British rule, Hindu-Christian churches (sects), Hindu-Christian ashrams, and the Sadhu Movement emerged. The recent Christu Bhakta (Christ devotees) movement is another example of Hindu-Christian reconciliation.

A re-reading of India's socio-religious history shows that the emergence of new religious traditions and sects alongside mainline traditions, which themselves evolve, can be seen as reconciling historical movements. These movements helped avert the bloody religious conflicts seen in early modern Europe between Catholics and Protestants. Today, Christian communities in Europe and elsewhere have largely come to terms with internal differences in belief, worship, and culture.

Globally, Christians, aside from their core belief in Christ, are divided into around 40,000 churches and sects. This shows that diverse faith expressions can coexist, and peace can be maintained through acceptance and reconciliation. While memories of religious conflicts remain, they must be accepted, forgiven, and reconciled to build a peaceful society for a better future.

Dr. Jose Kalapura is a renowned historian and formerly Director of Xavier Institute of Social Research, Patna.

Walter Fernandes
walter.nesrc@gmail.com

HISTORY TO JUSTIFY CONFLICTS AND FOR PEACEBUILDING

M uch of India perceives the Northeast as a region of conflicts alone because of its nationalist struggles and ethnic conflicts, without mentioning **its history of colonial policies like the introduction of new administrative divisions, and disruption of the traditional governance structures that sowed seeds of discord among its ethnic groups.**

T he saying that history is written by the victor and has been true all through the ages, from the Ramayana and the Book of Exodus to colonialism, the World Wars, and post-colonial ethnic conflicts. Common to them is the role of history in justifying conflicts. Both sides in a conflict rewrite history for this purpose by taking individual instances out of context and using them to present the other side as the aggressor and themselves as the victim.

The Role of History in Conflicts

To give a few examples, only some recent histories mention, usually indirectly, that World War II began on the day the Treaty of Versailles was signed. It imposed on Germany heavy fines which it could not pay. The economic crisis it caused and the invasion of Ruhr by France to collect it, were attacks on the very identity of Germany. It was crucial in strengthening Adolf Hitler and Nazism. Similarly, today hardly any report on terrorism mentions the link between the bombing of the developed country of Iraq back to the stone-age by the US-led allies, the humiliation that its ruling class suffered and the birth of ISL.

To come back home, much of India perceives the Northeast as a region of conflicts alone because of its nationalist struggles and ethnic conflicts, without mentioning its history of colonial policies like the introduction of new administrative divisions, and disruption of the traditional governance structures that sowed seeds of discord among its ethnic groups.

Similarly, post-independence policies such as imposition of a centralised administration, and a single national identity ignored the region's history of dealing with ethnic diversity by combining tension with mutual cooperation.

The demands for autonomy and identity that followed are then presented as terrorist and secessionist. For example, the Naga movement is rooted in historical demands for the recognition of Naga identity, and the anti-foreigner Assam Movement in the 1980s on historical anxieties over land and identity. The trend to ignore this context and to focus on the immediate causes can exacerbate the conflict and justify atrocities.

These events show that historical narratives play a major role in shaping exclusive identities and justifying division, and often become tools for mobilisation and resistance. Competing historical narratives on both sides of a conflict, exacerbate tension, reinforce divisions and perpetuate mistrust. For example, the narratives of the origins of ethnic communities, and their claim to the indigenous status in a given area based on it, are basic to prolonged disputes, as in the ongoing Meitei-Kuki in Manipur. As the anthropologist Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox points out, "The result is that, by conflating specific unjust events, policies, and laws with 'history,' what is unjust becomes temporally separate from the present, unchangeable." It narrows down options for restitution: "we cannot change the past."

Such a convenient framing of issues is basic to unjust peace imposed through the force of arms as the attitude of Israel towards the Palestinians

and of the Americas and Australasia towards their indigenous populations shows. Based on it, political leaders and settler populations deal with residual guilt on their own terms through the script of "forgive and forget," "move on from the past," and "unify as a country," and brush aside discussion on restitution or justice and make reconciliation difficult. It turns history not into something of the past, but into a force that keeps shaping the present and the future.

Rewriting to Justify Conflict

Most conflicts in the Northeast as in much of India are rooted in anxieties over land and identity, traced back to the colonial era imposition of economic, political, and demographic transformation. In order to protect its land, identity, privileges or sustenance, each community frequently rewrites and distorts 'history' to justify its own stand. For example, in Manipur, after the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19, the colonial regime punished the Kuki by dispersing them to different districts, thus turning them into a threat to their local communities, but created a new history that the Kuki have always been nomads who encroached on the land of others.

The demands for autonomy and homeland by the Kuki and the Naga are built on the 'historical narratives' of these events that present the Kuki as non-indigenous, recent-illegal immigrants. That narrative is used to legitimise also the present Meitei-Kuki conflict.

A mid such conflicts, history and acknowledging multiple perspectives can be powerful tools for peace-building, dialogue and reconciliation.
Efforts to create inclusive historical narratives that recognise the contribution of all sides are essential for healing and unity.

Such 'historical narratives' nurture and maintain tension between communities. In that situation, an unfortunate incident, can lead to a violent conflict erupting. For instance, the trigger for the Kuki-Naga conflict of 1992-97 in Manipur was an incident in the trading town of Moreh on the Myanmar border, of armed groups from both communities seeking control over its trade. In such cases, false rumours spread like wildfire. Persons with vested interests create or fuel such rumours for personal gain, and often rewrite history to justify the conflict.

History for Peacebuilding

Amid such conflicts, history and acknowledging multiple perspectives can be powerful tools for peace-building, dialogue and reconciliation. Efforts to create inclusive historical narratives that recognise the contribution of all sides are essential for healing and unity.

In the Northeast, there have been some such efforts. For example, the Naga peace process through dialogue between the Indian government and various Naga groups, has been attempting to address historical grievances. Many accords signed between the Government of India and the militants in the Northeast aimed to resolve historical issues around identity, though their implementation has been defective. Efforts to better understand the role of every community in the Partition of India can be a step in healing the communal divide.

Some local initiatives have shown the potential for using history for peace. For example, Amrita Saikia shows how oral narratives of history have been instrumental to some extent, in enabling the Bodos of Assam to reclaim their identity, and work for social justice.

An effort to understand the causes of Hindu East Pakistani migration, and the Bengalis recognising their settler status can be the first step towards Bengali-tribal reconciliation in Tripura. Its second step is for the indigenous tribes to recognise that the Bengali settlers cannot be expelled without massive bloodshed. These initiatives highlight the importance of involving local communities in the peacebuilding process and recognising their historical experiences.

Dr. Walter Fernandes is the Director, North Eastern Social Research Centre Guwahati, Assam, India.

Marta Helena Freitas
mhelenadefreitas@gmail.com

EMBODIED HISTORIES
BRAZILIAN WOMEN, RELIGIOSITY, AND THE HEALING ARTS

I f, on one hand, religious leaders—shamans, priests, Pais-de-Santo (African-Brazilian spiritual leaders), pastors, rabbis, monks—are mostly men, on the other, it is often women who are deeply and consistently engaged. **They live out the principles, dogmas, practices, and daily experiences that sustain religiosity in Brazil.**

R eligiosity in Brazil has emerged as both blended and singular, shaped by the confluence of diverse religions since the colonial era. To the **pajelança** (shamanism) of the native Indians and country folk were added, through "evangelization" and "catechesis," Christian theology via Portuguese colonizers, along with traditional African religions and their **orixás,** brought during slavery. Over time, as Darcy Ribeiro (2006, p. 17) describes, waves of immigrants—mainly European, Arab, and Japanese—joined this new people, introducing differences and social impacts through interactions influenced by Eastern and Protestant beliefs.

If, on the one hand, religious leaders—shamans, priests, **Pais-de-Santo** (African-Brazilian spiritual leaders), pastors, rabbis, monks—are mostly men, on the other, it is often women who are deeply and consistently engaged. They live out the principles, dogmas, practices, and daily experiences that sustain religiosity in Brazil.

Although still a vast majority, Roman Catholicism in Brazil has declined over the past 40 years from 91.8% to 56.7%, while other religions have grown: Evangelicals (26.9%), Spiritualists (1.8%), Umbanda and Candomblé (1.0%), other religions (4.0%), no religion (9.3%), and not declared (0.2%). Among the "no religion" group, most still believe in a transcendental dimension despite lacking formal affiliation (Brazil, 2025).

Gender differences are notable. Men form a larger share of the "no religion" group (56.2%) and a smaller share among Evangelicals (39.4%). For women, the latest census reports: Catholics (51%), Protestants (55.4%), Spiritualists (60.6%), Umbanda and Candomblé (56.7%), no religion (43.8%), and other religions (53.9%). The lower female percentage within Catholicism highlights women's role in advancing religious pluralism in Brazil.

Citing João do Rio's early twentieth-century study, Andrade (2009) notes how women, by joining African-derived creeds, helped establish them as recognized religions in Brazil. Similarly, women have driven the growth of Spiritism and various Evangelical branches, forming the majority in initiating and sustaining their commandments, services, and rites.

The relations between religiosity and women's heath in the country are well known since old times (Freitas, 2006). In fact, there has been, from the beginning of the Brazilian history, an interchange between medical system and religious beliefs. As a result, it develops a subtle way of conjunction of religiosity, spirituality, health and coping with diseases. In fact, by the arrival of the Portuguese, their European medicine was merged to the native health system of the young colony. A bit later, the system was associated to other typical systems from Africa and other cultures.

Some iconic protagonists in the integration of healthcare and religious systems in Brazil are the traditional **rezadeiras** (prayers), **benzedeiras** (blessers), **curandeiras** (healers), and **parteiras** (midwives). They continue to practice across Brazil due to its cultural particularities. The rezadeira is defined by Câmara Cascudo (2001, p. 587) as "a woman, usually elderly, who has 'healing powers' through blessing." Though present in many Brazilian states, her main anthropological locus today is the Northeast, where she "undertakes a specific and extremely recurring cultural dynamic" (Santos, 2009, p. 7).

Employing strategies typical of popular Catholicism—pleas, prayers, crucifixes—their aim is to restore physical and spiritual balance in those seeking help. They also use evergreen branches, tree bark, fruits, threads, fabrics, and gestures like the sign of the cross during healing rituals. Many of these elements are central to native traditional healing and Yorubá culture and have been incorporated into Candomblé practices (Cunha & Goes, 2007).

Rezadeiras (prayers), benzedeiras (blessers), and parteiras (midwives) – roles that often merge – carry a repertoire of prayers and therapeutic rituals passed down through generations. These women share traits of simplicity and renunciation, and they do not charge for their healing practices. Always available to help, they primarily care for children and women, performing specific rituals for various physical, mental, and spiritual needs, from natural deliveries to healing wounds and infections. They do not work by appointment and have no interest in competing with science. Since the earliest days of the country, these women have "crossed rivers and walked long distances to help other women – humble, simple, and confident to give birth" (Chamilco, 2004).

The emblematic Mães-de-Santo (a kind of sorceress), African-influenced women, often perform blessings (benzeção), healing (curandeirismo), and childbirth rituals within a Brazilian context. Typically Black women dressed in white dresses and wide skirts, they hold symbolic power from their religions and spiritual environments such as Candomblé, Umbanda, casas-de-santo, and terreiros. Through supportive and generous service, they go beyond religious rituals to ease suffering. Blessings, "tomar chás e banhos" (taking teas and baths), and seeking help from Mães-de-Santo in terreiros offer physical, mental, and spiritual alternative health care. Beyond Bahia, where they originated, these practices are found throughout Brazil, including in the South, where European religions have long been prominent.

Female action has also been remarkable in the latest Pentecostal movement in the country. Seeking to identify the reasons behind women's support for Pentecostalism, Santos Jr. (2011) specifies:

a) Pentecostal churches provide alternative spaces to discuss feminine and family issues, building social networks that aid women's self-esteem, differentiation from family roles, and access to the labor market;

b) These churches address human afflictions often linked to the domestic sphere, where women play a central role;

These women share traits of simplicity and renunciation, and they do not charge for their healing practices. **Always available to help, they primarily care for children and women, performing specific rituals for various physical, mental, and spiritual needs, from natural deliveries to healing wounds and infections. They do not work by appointment and have no interest in competing with science.**

c) A dynamic within these churches enables women to effectively mediate the relationship of faith within the family;

d) The possibility for women to form new evangelical churches, rebuilding their identities and freeing themselves from male submission.

These factors reveal connections between religiosity and the mental health of these women and those around them—family, friends, and community members. In the case of women pastors, Santos Jr. (2011, p. 16) notes that their work "is not restricted only to the preaching of the gospel," but includes "social hosting and active participation in the demands of the community," helping people with marital issues, drug use, and other challenges.

The feminine presence is also outstanding within spiritualist movements. This is depicted, for example, in the Brazilian film *As mães de Chico Xavier* ("Mothers of Chico Xavier"), directed by Glauber Filho and Halder Gomes. The film illustrates a form of religious coping characteristic of Spiritism (Freitas, 2022), seen in mothers who receive letters through psychography after losing their children or loved ones. These experiences help them organize their emotional, subjective, and intersubjective lives—and in some cases, fathers also participate, often encouraged by their wives.

Moreover, Spiritualist Centres are often founded by women who, even when not the main leaders, play essential roles in the initiatives and activities promoted by these institutions. These include daycare centres, nursing homes, and campaigns to collect food, clothing, and hygiene supplies, as well as fraternal assistance, healing sessions, and "spiritual medium treatments" or "disobsession" sessions. All these efforts aim to improve quality of life and support physical and mental health for individuals, families, and the broader community.

Curiously, the same element of female subjectivity often seen as drawing women to religiosity (Machado & Maris, 1997; Rocha-Coutinho, 1994) also helps explain their strong presence in care professions. Among the reasons are: a) they often define themselves as "a being for others," evident in their devotion to their children; b) they readily accept a secondary place in groups regarding resources and benefits, along with their own invisibility; c) the so-called "female qualities" of docility, tenderness, sensitivity, and renunciation. These tendencies, while not universal and often criticized by feminists, undeniably hold a strong place in the feminine subjectivity shaped by Brazilian culture.

Dr. Marta Helena Freitas is professor and researcher in the Psychology Program at the Catholic University of Brasília, Brazil, where she coordinates the lab "Religion, Mental Health and Culture".
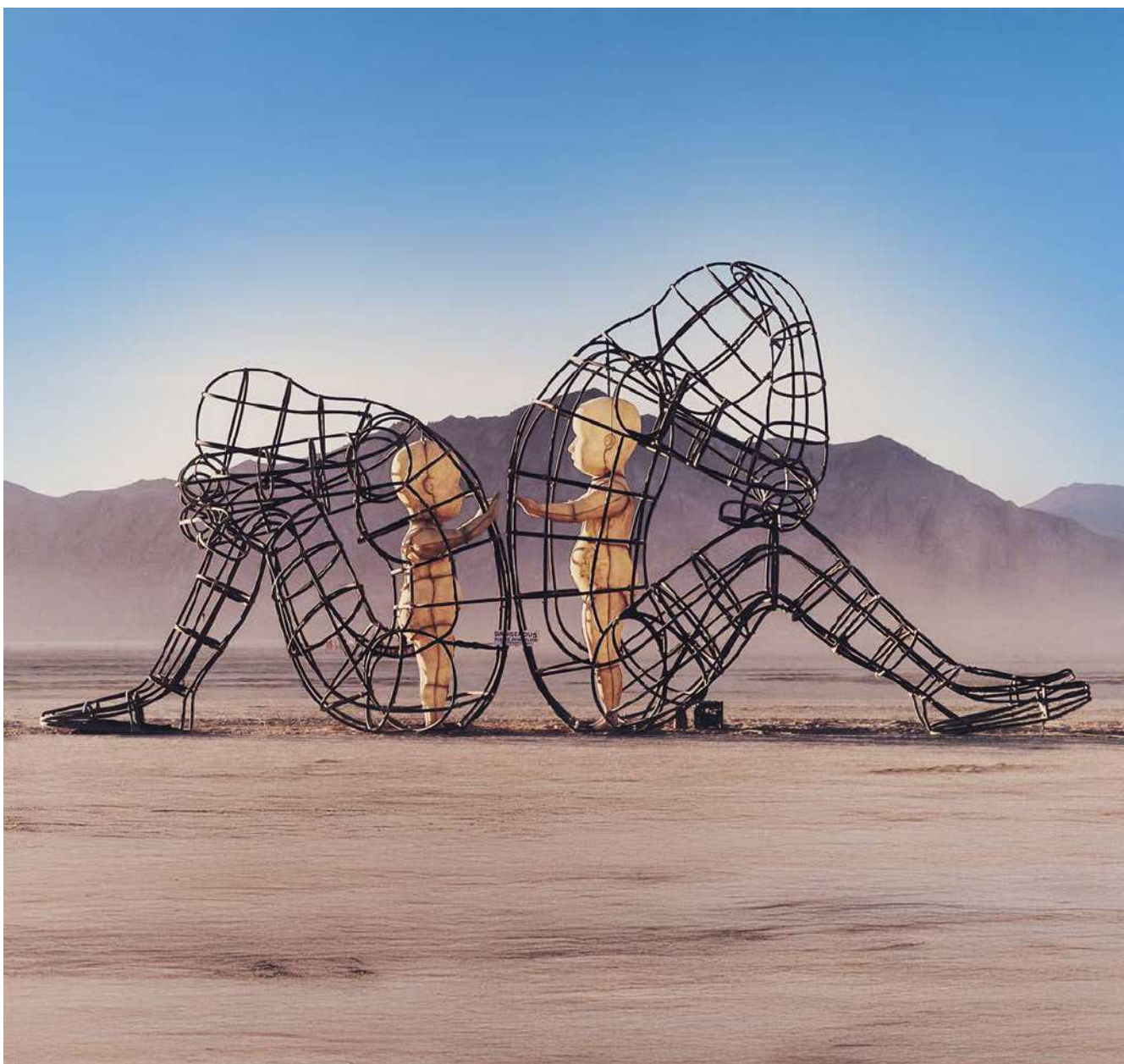
Karen Tresa Philip
H25151@astra.xlri.ac.in

THE ANATOMY OF PEACE
A **Quiet Revolution** in the **Human Heart**

O ur globalised and wounded world yearns for peace—not merely as the absence of conflict, but as a courageous presence that transforms hearts and systems. In this context, *The Anatomy of Peace* by the Arbinger Institute is not just timely; it is urgently necessary. Now in its revised and expanded fourth edition, the book offers more than theory; it is a practicum in healing relationships, from families and organisations to fractured nations. Its greatest strength lies in shifting the locus of transformation from strategies to the human heart.

The premise is radical in its simplicity: most conflict endures not because of what others do, but because of how we see them. When we view others as objects—obstacles, vehicles, or irrelevancies—we adopt a "heart at war." Conversely, when we see them as people—complex, worthy, and equal—we cultivate a "heart at peace." This internal posture shapes all our outward actions. With quiet but firm conviction, the book proposes that resolving conflict requires a transformation of being, not merely doing.
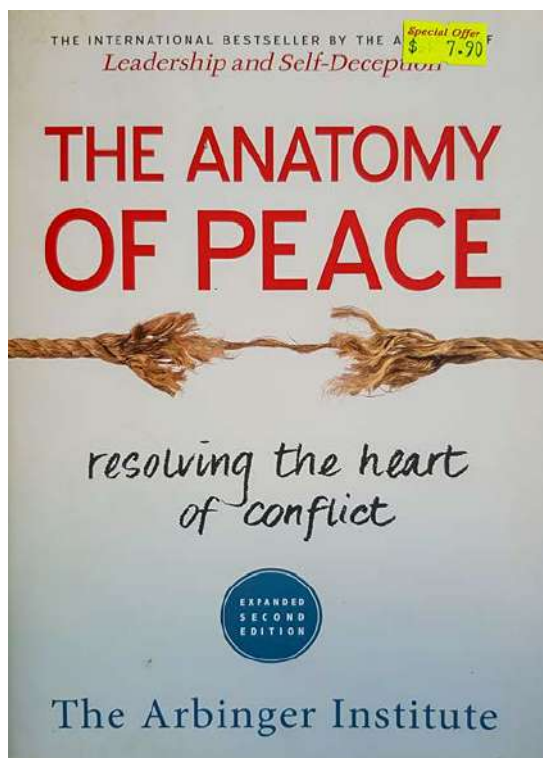
The narrative unfolds through a fictional workshop held at "Camp Moriah" in the Arizona desert, where a diverse group of parents has brought their troubled teens. The co-leaders—Yusuf al-Falah, a Palestinian Muslim, and Avi Rozen, an Israeli Jew—are themselves former enemies whose reconciliation becomes both the parable and practice of peace. Through dialogue and reflection, they invite the participants—and by extension the reader—into a journey of self-discovery. What begins as an external critique of children, colleagues, or communities gradually turns inward: "If you want to help things go right, you must begin by helping yourself see right."

In doing so, the book brilliantly dismantles the illusion that conflict is simply about external differences or bad behaviour. Instead, it introduces a layered model showing how our actions arise from deeper motivations—what it calls "ways of being." A particularly powerful tool is the "box," a metaphor for the self-justifying narratives that sustain our own sense of righteousness while perpetuating the blame on others. We betray our sense of rightness, develop a need to justify ourselves, and then project that distortion onto others. The result is a recursive loop of accusation and defensiveness.

This phenomenological depth sets *The Anatomy of Peace* apart from conventional self-help or conflict resolution manuals. Rather than offering techniques for behavioural change, it focuses on the ontology of peace: who we are in relation to others. Here, we find echoes of Martin Buber's *I and Thou,* Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of the Other, and even the Christian tradition's call to "love your enemy." Peace, the book insists, is not a tactical truce but an existential decision.

What makes the book especially relevant today is its expanded engagement with systemic issues such as racism, sexism, and dehumanisation in all forms. The 2022 edition responds to the urgent social need for equity and inclusion, offering practical resources for organisations to assess and transform their cultures. These additions elevate the book from a personal manual to an ethical framework for institutional transformation. In a time when corporate diversity efforts often fall into tokenism, *The Anatomy of Peace* offers a refreshing moral

The spiritual undertone of the book is unmistakable. Without explicitly espousing any religious tradition, it channels the wisdom of all—particularly the prophetic call to transformation from within. **Saladin's story, invoked early in the book, becomes emblematic of a leader whose strength lay not in vengeance but in magnanimity.**

architecture: change must be rooted in how we view and value others—not merely in how we perform inclusion.

The style of the book is deceptively simple. Its narrative device—fictional dialogue and anecdotal exchanges—may strike some academic readers as overly didactic or sentimental. Yet this simplicity is strategic. Like all parables, it bypasses defences and draws the reader into a relational world where philosophical truths emerge through lived encounter. For instance, the contrast between "dealing with things that go wrong" and "helping things go right," illustrated through the visual metaphor of the 'Influence Pyramid,' offers a conceptual clarity that remains etched long after the book is read.

That said, the book's accessible narrative may not appeal to readers seeking rigorous theoretical argument or empirical data. It is not designed as a research monograph or an academic treatise. Rather, it is a handbook for the human condition—applicable in boardrooms and bedrooms alike. The book's universality is one of its strengths: whether you are a CEO navigating organisational dysfunction, a parent managing adolescent rebellion, or a peacebuilder working in interfaith dialogue, the insights here are transferable.

The spiritual undertone of the book is unmistakable. Without explicitly espousing any religious tradition, it channels the wisdom of all—particularly the prophetic call to transformation from within. Saladin's story, invoked early in the book, becomes emblematic of a leader

whose strength lay not in vengeance but in magnanimity. His "heart at peace" allowed him to win not just battles, but the deeper war for humanity. Such examples elevate the book into a sacred text of sorts—an invitation to live more humanely in an inhumane world.

For *Pax Lumina,* a journal committed to peace, justice, and reconciliation, this book is a natural companion. It affirms that peacemaking is not just about treaties or ceasefires, but about personal conversion. It is not the loudest slogans or the most powerful weapons that change history, but the silent decision of hearts to remain open in the face of offence. *The Anatomy of Peace* reminds us that peace begins not in parliaments or pacts, but in persons.

In a world fractured by ideological polarisation, economic inequity, and spiritual exhaustion, *The Anatomy of Peace* is both balm and provocation. It invites us not to conquer others, but to confront ourselves, to risk the vulnerability of seeing others as fully human, and to remember that while we cannot always change the other, we can always change the way we see.

And in that seeing lies the first step to peace.

Citation:

The Arbinger Institute. (2022). *The Anatomy of Peace*: Resolving the Heart of Conflict (4th ed.). Berrett–Koehler Publishers.

Karen Tresa Philip pursues Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management from XLRI Jamshedpur.

UNIVERSITIES TO BE AGENTS OF HOPE, JUSTICE, DIALOGUE, AND RECONCILIATION

Extracts on 'Reconciliation' from the address of Rev. Fr. Arturo Sosa Abascal, SJ, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, to the Assembly of the International Association of Jesuit Universities, held at Bogotá, Colombia, June 29 to July 3, 2025.

Rev. Fr. Arturo Sosa Abascal, SJ, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, receiving a copy of Pax Lumina on "The Inclusive Spirituality of Pope Francis" during the IAJU Assembly in Colombia.

The university apostolate makes sense when it contributes to opening up and following the path of justice and reconciliation that leads to fraternity… The Society of Jesus understands its apostolate as collaboration in the mission of reconciliation, contributing to the struggle for social justice.

…Reconciliation is a complex task. It requires achieving peace among peoples. It seeks fraternity as a defining feature of social life. It requires halting the deterioration of the environment and restoring relationships with nature to care well for the earth as a common home. It also aspires to reconciliation with God, realizing the dream of the fullness of life that springs from limitless love.

…We know well that a university under the responsibility of the Society of Jesus is part of a humanistic tradition. Therefore, it seeks a deeper understanding of human truth in order to contribute as effectively as possible to reconciliation and universal fraternity. A rereading of Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli tutti* can shed light on the path to be followed by a university that lives its faith in the promotion of justice and reconciliation.

… Dialogue is a tool of reconciliation and negotiation to arrive at shared social decisions. If dialogue fails to find a path toward a shared life in which decisions can be taken for the common good, if it is nothing more than a series of unrelated monologues, then it is like a wheel that spins in the air without ever touching ground and moving forward…Our identity calls us to be agents of hope, justice, dialogue, and reconciliation.

■

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I just enjoyed an energizing meditation reading through the articles about Pope Francis in the latest issue of Pax Lumina. Truly inspiring. Many thanks and congratulations for the work for peace and reconciliation that you do through this ongoing publication.

Ellen B. Ryan
Professor Emeritus,
Psychiatry & Behavioural Neurosciences,
McMaster University, Ontario, Canada.

Dear Editor,

Congratulations, I am very pleased to have the special issue on Pope Francis,

This commemorative special is an in-depth tribute to Pope Francis. This explores his impact on the Catholic Church and the world at large. Ofcourse, this issue very carefully celebrates his life, legacy, and impact on humanity at large.

Prof.(Dr) Sabu Thomas
Former Vice Chancellor,
Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala.

Dear Editor,

Thanks for sharing a copy of Pax Limina, May 2025. It has come out very well, and am sure this issue on Pope Fransis will inspire many.

PV Rajagopal
Former Vice Chairman
Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi.

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for pax Lumina on Pope Francis. It is worth reading and inspiring.

Sr. Ashmitha,
Principal, Providence Women's College
Calicut.

Dear Editor,

Read the articles on Pope Francis in Pax Lumina (May -2025). It is very informative and inspirational. Thank you for your sharing.

Joby Baby
Kuwait.

Dear Editor,

It is a fitting and thoughtful edition of Pax Lumina on Pope Francis. Congratulations.

Ramlat Thomas,
Trivandrum.

Dear Editor,

Pax Lumina on Pope Francis is a good issue to be archived!
Thanks and congrats.

Dr. Patrick Gnanapragasam
Professor and Head of the Department of Christian Studies University of Madras.

*D*ear Editor,

Thank you for the excellent edition of PAX LUMINA on the legacy and inclusive spirituality of Pope Francis. Many have expressed much appreciation for this edition. Keep up the good work. God bless.

Vernon D'Cunha,
Rome.

---

*D*ear Editor,

Thank you very much for these issue of Pax Lumina! You deserve praise and appreciation! A prayer for you and your apostolate.

Thomas Kuriacose,
Delhi.

---

*D*ear Editor,

This issue on Pope Francis is a collector's volume. Thank you for sharing.

Best wishes,

Dr Roy A Kallivayalil
Former Secretary General,
World Psychiatric Association, Geneva.

---

*D*ear Editor,

What a treasure!!!

Pax Lumina May 2025 is a collector's piece.

Thanks for sharing. I would like a hard copy of this May 2025 Issue on Pope Francis.

Roy da Silva,
St. Stephen's School, Chandigarh.

THE BLOG OF **TED PETERS** ON **PAX LUMINA**

Pax Lumina on Human Dignity: The Inclusive Legacy of Pope Francis

"Pax Lumina, in my opinion, is the best. This online magazine provides a panoptic outlook within which the public theologian can enjoy both ecumenic (multi-religious) and ecumenical (multi-denominational) alliances working in concert for the planetary common good. This free online organ is the brainchild of Indian Jesuits at the Loyola Institute of Peace and International Relations (LIPI), Kochi, in Kerala, and published by the Peace and Reconciliation Network of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (PRN-JCSA). I urge everyone in public theology to subscribe. The May 2025 issue of Pax Lumina takes up inclusive spirituality in fond remembrance of the ministry of His Holiness, Pope Francis."

Ted Peters,
CTNS, Berkeley, California.

**If there is to be reconciliation,
first there must be truth.**

- Timothy B. Tyson

**LOYOLA INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (LIPI**
Ponoth Road, Kaloor, Kochi - 682 017, Kerala, India

INDIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTE (ISI)
24 Benson Road, Benson Town, Bengaluru - 560 046

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION NETWORK
Jesuit Conference of South Asia
225, Jor Bagh, New Delhi - 110 003, India