



# Foreword

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In our previous 39 issues, we have had an average of 5,2 articles per issue. In this 40<sup>th</sup> issue, we happen to have six. There is something more to this number of six, however, than just that it is one more than the usual five. It is six in the sense of two times three. Common to all six of the articles in this issue, there is a relevant and urgent message of togetherness, but three start from a perspective of divergence and the other three focus on a view of convergence.

Two of the first three articles tackle problems related to the phenomenon of ethnicity, and the third takes into account both ethnicity and religiosity. In our field of dealing with conflict, these two phenomena, either singly or as a pair, very often play important roles. The crucial point is, however, that they do not play these roles as the phenomena they are, but due to the ways in which they are perceived, and/or interpreted, and/or utilised. After all, phenomena are apparent realities as *observed* by our senses. It is in our brains that our sensory impressions are processed – usually (fairly) reasonably, but also emotionally. The part of the brain where this takes place has been given the Late Latin name of ‘*sensorium*, from *sens-*, past participle stem of *sentire* “to feel”’.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, when we read these articles, we may just as well check our own and our own group’s observations, thoughts and feelings with regard to ethnicity and religiosity. (I am using

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1 Harper, Douglas 2001–2017. *Sensorium: Origin and meaning*. Available from: <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/sensorium>> [Accessed 5 November 2017].

‘religiosity’ instead of ‘religiousness’ because it rhymes with ‘ethnicity’ and because religious conflicts are apparently usually based on features of a more external nature.)

What we find in the three articles are accounts of how ‘leaders’ play ethnic cards, or play other types of cards in ethnic ways, and thereby turn games that should have been friendly into divisive plots. By so doing, they not only usurp unfair advantage for their own power and wealth, but also inculcate a superior-us/inferior-them mindset in the people they are supposed to govern and guide. Such dominant politicians and their submissive polities are apparently *observing the fascinating diversities* on the human scene, but *interpreting* them as *unfavourable differences*. With perhaps good intentions, but more probably with own-interest motivations, they move away from be-friending feelings to be-foeing dispositions. Pages can be written here about the tragedy of such digressions into divergence, but in the articles that follow various deplorable realities and events are discussed and recommendations are given for rectification and remedy.

In the other three articles, various aspects of convergence are discussed: educating for reconciliation, realising the need for contentment, and even risking to rescue fellow-humans of other nationalities. These are just a few examples, but apart from sharing particular ideas, they may help to shift thinking from aversion to affinity.

With regard to attraction, the metaphor of gravity may be of interest. All around the globe – whether in Sudan or in Japan – we have the impression of being on top of the world. Our feet are kept on the ground by gravity, but this invisible power does not only attract us to the centre of gravity of the planet. It is an all-directional mutual attraction between objects with mass, which we also are. This metaphor may prompt us to imagine our human interrelatedness as an invisible but ever-present dynamic which can be stronger than the repulsive forces of prejudice, stereotyping and disliking, and can contribute to reconciliatory feelings, moves and results.

I do trust that the realities and the challenges we read about in these articles will prompt us to think more penetratingly and creatively about reconciling,

rescuing and rejoicing. When taken seriously and not superficially, each of these possibilities can produce astounding results – not just pretence, appearance or show, but frank engagement with root causes. In this regard, the combining of reconciliation with *truth* may be most relevant and urgent. For instance, where the divide between the desperate destitute and the comfortable affluent is still an undeniable reality, real reconciliation will be unattainable. With sadness, yet with hope as well, I have to add that for all the newness we enjoy in the new South Africa, we still have to overcome the economic separatedness of the old South Africa. Effectively narrowing (and eliminating?) this conflict-causing gap is a top priority task in South Africa, but probably elsewhere as well.

Another truth that has to be acknowledged and confronted, is that there are cases where divergence may be valid and mutually satisfactory. But such cases can be open-mindedly understood and accommodated – and may be quite compatible with an atmosphere of convergence.

So, with the relevant crucial truths in our critical minds, we may explore our very human ethno-culturalities and own-groupish tendencies, and creatively promote as much as realisable of inter-human togetherness. Informative and stimulating reading! And sustained research!