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Stopping sexual harassment through prayer Elise L. Moore

It was my first job after college. I was the token professional woman in the department, in the plant for that matter. A few of the men refused to work with me and told me so. Most, however, were professional, helpful, and respectful. But there was the remainder. The terms *sexual harassment* and *sexual discrimination* hadn't been popularized yet. But that's what it was, from open sexual approaches to catcalls to demeaning remarks. There were several uncomfortable, difficult, and even frightening experiences. Yet I was able to meet these challenges through prayer.

The initial incident occurred during the interview process. It was clear the interviewer wasn't accustomed to working with women. His remarks were sexist and demeaning. I dreaded the prospect of a second interview and considered withdrawing my application.

This was my first encounter with such a prejudiced attitude, and I ended up calling my mother that evening in tears. As we talked, I began to realize that the interviewer probably wasn't even aware of the impact of his words. He apparently saw men and women strictly as physical personalities, categorized by age, race, and sex characteristics. In Christian Science I had learned to see *man* as a generic term, referring to all the sons and daughters of God, made in the divine image and likeness. Recognizing God as incorporeal Spirit, rather than as a male, humanlike being, frees us to appreciate the spiritual nature and essence of ourselves and others.

Mrs. Eddy who founded The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts, discerned in both the Old and New Testaments a higher view of God, which includes mothering qualities as well as fatherly attributes. In her writings she frequently refers to God as Father-Mother. For instance, in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* she says, "Father-Mother is the name for Deity, which indicates His tender relationship to His spiritual creation."

So spiritual man, as God's image, or idea, rather than physicality, includes both male and female qualities. Intelligence is no more masculine than it is feminine. Creativity is no more feminine than it is masculine. I prayed to know that I included and expressed all the qualities of God, such as wisdom, strength, patience, accuracy, gentleness, joy.

I affirmed the true, spiritual origin and identity of myself and the interviewer, expressing Godlike qualities. Holding to this higher understanding during the second interview, I no longer felt belittled or intimidated and completed the process successfully.

With this lesson I moved on to increasing challenges. Several times a week I had to walk through part of the factory to reach the engineering section. An entire department would erupt into catcalls, whistles, and lewd comments. I began to dread the walk and became increasingly unnerved by the comments. Finally I began to pray specifically about the situation.

By praying I don't mean telling God what was happening or suggesting solutions. Prayer in Christian Science affirms God's presence, power, and all-knowing wisdom. I knew that, as His likeness, I expressed infinite intelligence, calm, and dignity. Praying to realize that I wasn't a helpless victim of thoughtless people, I began to see that because God is ever present, He was with me wherever I was-including on the factory floor-and I could trust His wisdom to govern and guide me.

At first, the remarks were as rude as ever, but now I was less disturbed. I continued praying. One day as I approached the department, I found myself walking right into the middle of the men and machinery. I surprised even myself. My heart was suddenly full of sisterly love for these men. I walked straight to the biggest heckler, smiled, and introduced myself. Everything in the department stopped. Immediately I was surrounded by a dozen men. Wondering if this had been a wise move on my part, I wordlessly turned to my Father-Mother and felt assured of His protective care.

It took a moment but finally the fellow replied. Introductions were made all around. I asked about their work. They asked about mine. We must have talked for five minutes. From that moment the heckling stopped. In fact, I began looking forward to walking to engineering, receiving smiles, waves, exchanging pleasantries. Most surprising of all, a few months later the one fellow asked what

my religion was and thoughtfully told me that he concluded I must be a religious person.

A third incident occurred when an executive began making sexual comments and innuendoes. I didn't realize the seriousness of the situation until his remarks turned into propositions mixed with intimidating threats. I now know his behavior should have been reported immediately to the appropriate supervisors. But at the time I was confused and frightened by the situation and couldn't bring myself to discuss it.

Although I was praying, declaring God's presence and protecting care, the predicament intensified. I reacted angrily to an apparently innocent comment made in front of others. That weekend I really prayed to know what to do. The example of Christ Jesus times he was silent. Yet always he was responding to divine Mind's impulsion rather than mere human reason or emotion. His comments were not self-assertive but self-expressive. He expressed the spiritual qualities of humility, dignity, and dominion. Jesus never felt dominated, nor did he seek to dominate others.

As I thought about Jesus' example, the executive's advances and how I should react to them stopped absorbing my attention. My desire became to bring my thoughts and actions more into accord with the Christly method of action. Whether I was silent or spoke up, I needed to respond to the divine Mind rather than react to another's limited, corporeal view of life.

I was feeling a lot of self-pity and self-justification (which can be forms of fear). This gave way to humility. I realized my need to exercise dominion. Spiritually seen, humility and dominion are closely related. The conventional view of meekness as a doormat that lets others wipe away our self-expression is the opposite of true humility, which brings out our complete, individual expression of God, without any sense of competition. Recognizing something of my spiritual nature as intact and untouchable, I felt freer of self-pity, self-justification, fear, and more able to express humility and God-given dominion.

On Monday a remarkable circumstance occurred. The plant manager met me in the hall for the first and only time. A brief conversation ensued. Within moments and with no embarrassment to me, the truth was uncovered. The harassment was promptly and thoroughly stopped.

The words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians have special significance for me in challenging sexual harassment: "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

We can lay the ax at the root of sexual harassment by "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit"-by realizing the spiritual nature and origin of man and woman. The Godlike nature of each of us is complete, satisfied, and whole. We may be required to resist domination and exercise dominion repeatedly. But we can do this as we take "the whole armour of God," express all the qualities of divine Spirit, which belong to us as God's spiritual offspring.