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The ministry of reconciliation

By Elise L. Moore

On paper it looked simple. An interfaith organization in Nashville, Tennessee, decided to plan a "Women in World Religions" conference. The purpose was to provide women with an opportunity to explain their deeply felt spiritual convictions. But, as the planning got underway, suspicion, deeply rooted hurt feelings, and anger at the community's treatment of religious minorities bubbled to the surface. Getting women to come to the first planning session turned out to be an exercise in grace.

Prayer, love, and respect, though, were what eventually brought the group together. At the planning sessions, the deeper spiritual truths upon which we all agreed began to surface. And the conference ended up reflecting this unity. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Bahd'fs, Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative Jews, and Christians from numerous denominations attended with a motive to inform, not convert. The diversity of dress and religious practice was amazing. And it didn't divide the participants. It seemed that God brought people together on a divine, rather than a human, basis. The atmosphere resonated with love and joyous expectation.

Being able to express our deepest religious convictions, share how God was visible in our lives, explain the scriptures that brought us all inspiration, comfort, and guidance was like breathing out after holding one's breath for a lifetime. Friendships were forged that continue more than ten years later.

For me, what happened at the conference was about the ministry of reconciliation. To reconcile is to establish a close relationship, to bring oneself to accept another. And the ministry of reconciliation begins with establishing a close relationship with God.

This relationship is the basis for harmonious relations with one another.

The three main monotheistic religions share some of the same prophets, the same belief in God, and reverence toward Jerusalem. The Hebrew Bible provides the Ten Commandments, which include "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." ¹ And the Koran makes the same point when it declares, "Your God is One God: There is no god But He." ²

Unfortunately, the downside of interfaith relations is the history of competition for political supremacy, territory, and the hearts of men and women. The underlying spiritual foundation of various faiths may be the same, but their interpretation of worship and service to God in daily life is often very different.

So how does one transcend those differences? Well, God reveals Himself as Spirit, Life, Truth, Love. He is beneficent and merciful. He is I AM, the Supreme Being who was and is and always will be. These facts, and others like them, can awaken humanity to understand something of the divine. Yielding to inspiration about God and from God requires a degree of humility, as well as faith in the unseen. But this humility and faith are the first step toward reconciliation.

Loving God is the next step in reconciliation. Not with a half-hearted love that comes and goes depending on how one's personal life is going. Love for God needs to transcend human circumstances. And in fact it does. Often people who have the least material wealth and who face desperate deprivation have great faith and a deep love for God.

Jesus, summarizing the Ten Commandments, said that the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." ³ This might seem like a lot to demand until one perceives that God is the source of this love. God is Love and loves His creation with all (His) Love and Soul and Mind. God is loving us, and our neighbors, and our enemies.

The third aspect of reconciliation is to establish a trustworthy relationship with others. Reflecting God's love means loving one's neighbor as oneself. It's not being naive about another's motives or intentions. It's knowing that love is more powerful than hate, honesty than dishonesty, good than evil. And proving it.

A prayer I pray daily, one written by Mary Baker Eddy, has become my

prayer for global reconciliation of all kinds. "'Thy kingdom come;' let the reign of divine Truth, Life, and Love be established in me, and rule out of me all sin; and may Thy Word enrich the affections of all mankind, and govern them!"⁴

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¹Ex. 20:3. ²Abdullah Yusut Ali, *The Holy Qur-on: Text, Translation and commentary*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., [1938]). 2:163. ³Matt. 22:37. ⁴Manual of The Mother Church, p. 41.