

DISCOVER THE REAL NATURE

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HOW IRONIC that the very purpose of religion—to instill in humanity a bond with God and a way to practice in life this godliness—should so often be distorted, becoming a source for strife and warfare instead. History is replete with examples of conflict in the name of religion, for example, the Crusades, Wars of Religion in the late Middle Ages, or the more recent conflict in Northern Ireland. And the world's climate today is no exception. Whether it's conflict in the Middle East, cultural wars between sects, such as we see in the Balkans or Rwanda, or doctrinal struggles within denominations, religious warfare is all too often the cause of much of our world's unrest.

Given religious turmoil's predominance and stubborn history, is there really any hope that we can still this tumult and move toward healing? The founder of this magazine and healer in her own right, Mary Baker Eddy, thought so and devoted one of her early sermons, *The People's Idea of God*, to precisely this topic. In her opening words, she noted that real progress is "a step more spiritual," and that reform is not a product of human wisdom, but rather "the crumbling away of material elements from reason." To this 19th-century reformer, healing in matters such as religious strife would occur not so much by human consensus and compromise as by spiritual revolution—by people gaining divine insight into God's true nature, which would lift humanity to "more spiritual latitudes" (p. 1).

A common assumption is that if humanity could simply learn to be more tolerant of others' religious beliefs and creeds, we could live together more amicably. As logical as that assumption appears, its fallacy lies in its very hypothesis—that our various religious doctrines and creeds might somehow prove compatible. Yet the very beliefs we might try to accommodate, in fact, can set religions apart

because too often they advocate domination of one religion over another, or even the annihilation of other religions, and therefore can become the source of division. A realistic outlook does not hold too much expectancy for their amalgamation.

Looking more deeply into this subject, we need to let these materially-based elements of reason crumble away and find the root issue. Mrs. Eddy observes in her sermon, "The improved theory and practice of religion and of medicine are mainly due to the people's improved views of the Supreme Being." And later she noted, "Proportionately as the people's belief of God, in every age, has been dematerialized and unfinited has their Deity become good . . . This more perfect idea, held constantly before the people's mind, must have a benign and elevating influence upon the character of nations as well as individuals, and will lift man ultimately to the understanding that our ideals form our characters . . ." (pp. 2-3).

So in following this line of thought, it's clear that the root of religious warfare, then, lies not so much in our differing creeds, as in our ignorance of the divine character. Each of us, no matter what our religious orientation, can unite in a solemn prayer to know God aright. It may be challenging to think outside our religious box, but if God is universal and omniscient, then clearly this divine Being has the capacity to define itself, to awaken in each one of us an appreciation of Divinity's nature and essence.

Often in the egotism of human thought, assumptions are crafted from the familiar—what we are used to and have lived with. History has shown that too often our sense of God is molded after human character. Obviously a humanly crafted God would have definite human characteristics and foibles such as anger, revenge, partiality, and mutability. It would be better if we could perceive that the

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good in human character—which reflects the divine presence—solely characterizes our understanding of God. But a humanly conceived God is just that—human, dualistically conceived, a God of error and truth, evil and good, wrath and benevolence. Only as we find God to be Godlike and not humanlike will we find the roots of peace and harmony. This finding is not so much a theological quest as a daily practice. As we *live* our understanding of the complete goodness of the divine nature, we prove it for the benefit of others.

Knowing God as Spirit means that we look at and live in the world with a spiritual perspective, through a spiritual lens. We willingly worship God as Spirit by dematerializing our sense of reality, by relying more on the substance of Spirit as constituting real value and worth. This may involve a bit of mental housecleaning, letting go of material reliance and practices so far as is practical and constantly moving to a more inspired attitude and a less conventional response to demands in our lives. This is a matter of putting God first in practice more than in theory. Most of the world's religions embrace some version of the Golden Rule—doing unto others what we would want done to us. Putting that sentiment into daily living would certainly revolutionize the way we do business, conduct foreign affairs, or simply treat our friends and family members. Likewise with the Ten Commandments. By following them faithfully, we can find new approaches to what we worship or hold most sacred in life, as well as discern how to live morally and ethically. The point here is that living our bond with God has consequences, which, when prayerfully considered and integrated into our lives, act as a powerful catalyst to peace among nations as well as among individuals.

Knowing God as divine Love itself means that we can rise to that altitude of action that seeks only healing and spiritual advancement. Living God as Love seeks the solution that blesses all, finding the approach that lifts everyone higher. Living God as Love is unconditional in its approach and outlook. It seeks not so much human justice as divine mercy—the re-

alization that being embraced by the presence of God sets all things straight, reforms negative or destructive points of view and practices, and impels right thoughts and actions.

Relying on a God that is unconditional Love means that we do not limit what is possible—who can be saved, who are the chosen. The disciple Peter in all his righteousness had to learn that God is no respecter of persons, and so do we. Living God as Love seeks to see others as God sees them, as expressive of the divine character. Love knows only the perfection and the wholeness of its creation, and as challenging as that concept may seem to us, it is the basis for all healing in our world. The wisdom of the world is to analyze; the wisdom of Love is to yield—yield to the divine facts of what God is and does.

Praying for the cessation of religious warfare is not a matter of getting others to shape up. It is a participatory activity—the joy of playing out in our lives what our bond with God demands. The way we live, more than our words—certainly more than our religious dogma—affects our world. There is nothing more influential than a divine fact proved and lived. This influence is not just the individual act of a person, but a uniting with the divine Principle that holds within itself the will and ability to set all things right. The more we see our lives as in unity with the divine purpose and less as personal statements, the more effective will be our prayers to end religious warfare.

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