

There Is but One God

By Ed Brennan -- October 2003 Pastor's Column

"You and I are all children of one faith, the diverse paths of religion are fingers of the hand of one Supreme Being, a hand extending to all, offering completeness of spirit to all, and eager to receive all."

Kahlil Gibran, who was inspired both by his Lebanese Christian upbringing and the Sufi Muslim tradition, wrote these words for his Arabic and American readers. He also wrote, "we are one in Spirit and if we would but listen to the voice of our soul God would reveal this truth".

Kahlil's words came to mind as I sat in the St. Paul Armenian Church in Fresno on September 11th for the "Interfaith service of consolation, compassion, and world peace". The bulletin listed about 30 participating religious leaders, numerous musicians, vocalists, hymns, and even a Taize Chant.

The congregation that day was a cross section of God's people reflecting various cultures and beliefs. We were Hindu, Hebrew, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Sikh, Baha'i, Native American, Religious Science, Unitarian, Latter Day Saint, and Brahma Kumaris. The theme for the service was "Let all we do this evening be done in a spirit of peace and unity".

We had been invited to come to this service to sanctify the day, and bear witness to our common humanity. Readings from the world scriptures revealed another shared truth: that we are all equal in the eyes of God. By the end of the service for "those that had eyes to see and ears to hear," it was apparent that God has revealed the same message of love to all people each in their own language and their own culture. It is only in keeping the commandment to love God and to love our neighbor that we will find peace.

Nothing said that evening resonated stronger with the Spirit of Truth than a pledge given by Rabbi Josef Germaine. At the end of his message he turned to the Arab religious leaders and pledged to show love and concern for those Palestinians that some would have him believe were his enemies. Turning to the congregation he challenged us to prayerfully search our own hearts and where we find hatred to turn that hatred into love.

For those who would follow in the footsteps of Jesus the love of God and neighbor is far more important than religious orthodoxy. Jesus and the early Christians shared in the Jewish attitude that ideas about God were essentially a private matter. Jesus was led by the Spirit to live by an alternative wisdom not centered in traditions or in institutions. He taught his followers to pray directly to God without mediation. He condemned as "man made laws" those traditions that would separate us as clean or unclean, worthy or unworthy. Answering the concerns of his apostles He insisted that all who are not against them were for them, and the powers of God were not meant for him alone.