

# Jesus christ and reconciliation

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The revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ is the center of our faith. Incarnating both the fullness of God and the fullness of humanity, Jesus Christ initiates a new creation, a world unified in relationship as God originally intended.

We believe that Jesus Christ makes real God's will for a life of loving community with God, with the whole human family and with all creation. Through Jesus Christ, Christians believe God offers reconciliation to all. " In Christ God was reconciling the world to [God]self" (2 Corinthians 5: 19).

It is our Christian conviction that reconciliation among people and with the world cannot be separated from the reconciliation offered in Jesus Christ. And Jesus teaches us that if we would offer our gift at God's altar, we must first be reconciled to our brothers and sisters in the human family (Matthew 5: 24). The hope of a cosmic reconciliation in Christ is also central to Christian scripture: " The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the Children of God" (Romans 8: 21).

Jesus Christ is also the focus of the most vexing questions regarding how Christians understand their relationship with men and women of other religions. Christians agree that Jesus Christ incarnated--and incarnates still--the inexhaustible love and salvation that reconciles us all. We agree that it is not by any merit of our own, but by God's mercy that we are reconciled.

Likewise, Christians also agree that their discipleship impels them to become reconciled to the whole human family and to live in proper relationship to all of God's creation. We disagree, however, on whether non-Christians may be

reconciled to God, and if so, how. Many Christians see no possibility of reconciliation with God apart from a conscious acceptance of Jesus Christ as incarnate Son of God and personal savior.

For others, the reconciling work of Jesus is salvific in its own right, independent of any particular human response. For still others, the saving power of God is understood as a mystery and an expression of God's sovereignty that cannot be confined within our limited conceptions. Defining the uniqueness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ in the light of such passages as " I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14: 6) and " There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12) is a question with which we must still struggle.

As Christians we recognize that Jesus is not central to other religious traditions. For brothers and sisters in other communities, the mystery of God takes many forms. Observing this, we are not led to deny the centrality of Christ for our faith, but to contemplate more deeply the meaning of St. Paul's affirmation: " Ever since the creation of the world, (God's) eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things [God] has made" (Romans 1: 20).

Christians disagree on the nature and extent of such " natural revelation" and its relation to salvation. No matter what our view on this may be, we can be open to the insights of those who receive the light which enlightens everyone born into the world (John 1: 1-9).

We recognize that scripture speaks with many voices about relationship with men and women of other religious traditions. We need to devote further attention to issues of interpreting scriptural teaching. But as to our Christian discipleship, we can only live by the clear obligation of the Gospel.

When Jesus was asked, " What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he, referring to his Jewish tradition, answered, " You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37-39). Love of God and love of neighbors cannot be separated. We rejoice in our common conviction that Jesus calls us to ministries of reconciliation.