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Respect of religions crucial if world wants real peace

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When I was growing up, my parents made me go to church. Sunday morning. Sunday night. Wednesday night. I went years without missing a service.

So, when I got to college I promptly stopped attending worship. Slowly but surely, however, I started to feel something missing in my life.

There was obviously more to my parents' unwavering devotion to my moral development than I had previously realized.

It was only after I spent some time doing it my way that I discovered the true value of regular thought and reflection on ultimate realities that extend far beyond the physical realm.

As C.S. Lewis astutely observed: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

I suspect my journey is not unique. On some level, we all look for enlightenment as to the meaning of our existence. And for most of us, this is a very personal quest.

Problems tend to arise, however, when we feel the answers we derive are somehow more truthful than those arrived at by our fellow travelers – that somehow our understanding of God and how he wants us to live is more trustworthy than the conclusions reached by others.

As we all know, religious differences are at the heart of some of our most persistent and volatile conflicts, both domestic and abroad.

The solution is not to abandon our belief in a higher power altogether or to continually fight amongst ourselves as to who has the more accurate interpretation of scripture, especially when we can't even agree on what texts are indeed sacred.

If we have any hope of getting along with each other – individually or collectively – our only viable option is tolerance and respect for divergent viewpoints.

Aaron W. Hughey
Bowling Green

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