The Guru Gobind Singh Journal of Religious Studies

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Editorial

Secularism and Religious Fundamentalism

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia

Differentiation of the secular from the religious domain is an irreversible characteristic of modern civilization. Even those communities that take recourse to the concept of unity of religion and politics to serve as plank for their claim to being simultaneously both religious and political corporate entities require a secular dispensation for the flowering of their self-identities in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic society like that of India. Further such communities with dual character-religious and political-have to come to terms with the imperatives of secularism, even when they succeed in carving out for themselves separate States on religio-political basis-such being the nature of modern polity, which for its success has to transcend the denominational contradictions inherent in the mix-up of religion and politics.

Let us go deeper into this issue, which has become a matter of grave concern for the survival of India's national life as a result of certain recent happenings that have brought under sharp focus the questions of secularism, religious pluralism and religious fundamentalism requiring in-depth analysis in historical perspective.

Religion in its broadest, general sense implies a belief that this-worldly earthly life and man's ethical, social, economic and political activities have sense and significance, value and validity, sanctity and legitimacy only with reference to some 'outside' transcendental reality or principle. Material reality, being considered dependent upon or derived from spiritual

reality, is thought of as having no autonomy, no internal principle of dynamism of its own. The nature of this other-worldly value–source and of its relationship with this–worldly reality, and in particular with man, is differently perceived and conceptualized in different religions; but in their generality almost all religions – original Buddhism being a notable exception – invest earthly life with meaning and purpose in terms of some super–reality outside, behind or beyond the phenomena of time and space. This general belief, till the advent of the renaissance age in the West, resulted, on existential level, in the coalescence of the religious and the secular, and/or the predomination of the religious authority, edicts and institutions over the secular authority and its laws and institutions. The Western renaissance brought about a turning point in the relationship of the two domains through different routes–philosophical, sociological and political. The most significant and revolutionary breakthrough in old modes of thinking came about with Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, which with one stroke rendered material reality both insulated against and liberated from non-material reality, thus paving the way for exploration of material phenomena in terms of their own internal, autonomous patterns, principles and laws, without any reference to the so-called transcendental ones. Philosophy of empiricism stressed that reality was knowable to man only through the senses and apart from the sensory mode, man has no other intuitive, mystical or revelational access to reality. The unknowable–that not knowable through the sensory mode–became indistinguishable from 'nothingness', leaving it to the mystics to lend any substance, attribute or meaning to this 'nothingness' (*shunya*). On an other level, this new (secular) mode of thinking brought in the philosophy of humanism, which asserted that it is man who is the measure of all things and not any 'outside', transcendental reality or principle. The normative in man's life is historically

given and not transcendentally determined–this was claimed by different varieties of historicism–evolutionary, dialectical, etc. Existentialism postulated that particular 'existence' of the individual is prior to and more significant than the 'essence' standing for the ideals that are treated only as secondary abstractions from the given particularities; the transcendental absolutes are thus totally knocked out from man's reckoning of what is significant in life. Freudian psychology would like us to believe that it is not God Who created man, but man who created God as a projection from within the sub–conscious repressions.

The cumulative result of the above philosophies and ideologies since the sixteenth century was that man's life, his realm of reality, derived its sense and significance, value and validity, sanctity and legitimacy not from any outside or transcendental source but from within the this–worldly reality, from within the manifold of phenomena, from within the concrete existence of man.

It was in this philosophical and ideological backdrop that the processes of secularization in the West differentiated the secular domain of man's this–worldly activities–social, cultural, economic, political, and even ethical–from the religious domain which at best was treated as a realm in which man could, if he so desired, have an 'affair' with God to be experienced, like sex, in the privacy of one's individual life ! As is obvious from the above, the Western differentiation of the secular from the religious, or in other words, Western secularism, is based on the dualism, divorce or dichotomy of the two domains.

This Western model of secularism has been sought to be adopted in the Indian context with some adaptations such as equidistance of the secular State from all religions; acceptance by the secular State of co–existence of different

religions, and constitutional rights not only for practising religion in one's own private life but also for its propagation, which, *ipso facto*, means propagation in public life as well. The point is that the modified adoption of the Western model of secularism in our national body-politic has certain unresolved inherent contradictions. As such we have to look at the problem from a different perspective, that is, from distinctive Indian perspective, to evolve an alternative viable model of secularism in consonance with archetypal Indian ethos. Some points need to be noted in this context. First, the philosophical and ideological trends, emanating from or leading to the dichotomy between material and non-material reality, that in the West had paved the way for secularization of polity and national life, did not take place in India; no cut-off process ever started here. On the other hand, our renaissance movements that arose in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, being correlative to the reformation movements, had on the way acquired religious-revivalist undertones. *Swarajya* (national independence) was explained in terms of *Ramrajya* (equitable dispensation as envisioned by Hindu *avtar*, Lord Ram) to arouse the masses for the national freedom struggle. The other day, there was an article in a national daily wherein the author exhorted the people to take measures against environmental pollution, saying that it is their religious duty to keep earth clean as it is the abode of the Divine. This is an instance of the ingrained religious mode of approach to a matter, which, in secular idiom,means that measures against environmental pollution are essential as it endangers life on earth as well as the health of the animate beings on this planet. This brings us to the second point. In India, religion has been mediated through culture into archetypal Indian consciousness with the result that religious beliefs, cultural traditions and ritual practices have become inextricably intertwined. Thirdly, religion in the sense of *dharma*, embracing all of man's activities-*kama*, *artha*

moksha-has taken deep roots as a social phenomenon admitting of no 'privatization'.

All this would not mean that differentiation of the secular from the religious in Indian polity and national life is not conceptionally and empirically possible. The point, rather, is that in the Indian situation, the requisite differentiation–to be effective and abiding-would have to be built afresh not on the basis of dichotomy of the two domains, as in the Western model, but on the postulate of mutual compatability and relative autonomy of the religious and the secular sphere. It was this kind of revolutionary secularizing role that was played by Sikhism, during the Guru period, both on conceptual and institutional levels.

The ideological underpinnings of the medieval–age theocracy and overlapping of religion and polity were undermined by Sikhism through certain metaphysical concepts informed by a new mode of cognition that appeared for the first time in Indian speculative thought. For Sikhism, the world of time and space, that is, material reality, being creation of God, is as real as the Divine reality itself – *(Aap Sat Keeya Sab Sat)*. This worldly reality is as such, no more seen as illusory appearance or shadow–reflection of the Absolute. Further, Sikh thought envisages that though material reality partakes of the essence of Divine reality, yet the worldly reality is a creation *distinct* from the Creator *(Duee Kudrat Sajeye)*. The world has also been made self–active, and self–developing by the Creator, Who imparted to the created reality, the principles of motion and activity, once for all, making it autonomous as such. The processes of becoming–origination and development, enduring and disintegration-are seen as inherent in matter as envisioned by Guru Nank in his *Japji (Eka Maaee....)*. The phenomenal world as such is no more in need of moment–to–moment

dependence on the Absolute in the sense in which reflection is dependent upon the reflecting object, as contended by certain pre-Nanakian schools of Indian thought. The Christian notion of continual creation, continual sustenance and continual destruction also makes the world continually dependent upon God in the sense in which continual inflow of electricity is necessary to keep the bulb aglow. Islamic thought also provides for continual dependence of the world on God in that, though externally the things are the creatures of God, internally these are the ideas subsisting in the Mind of God as the Absolute Knower; the created things being the ideas, their continued existence depends upon the continual act of knowing by the Knower. On the other hand, Sikh metaphysics envisages the phenomenal world of man as relatively distinct and autonomous, being self–active and self–developing. The spiritual and the material domain of reality stand in relationship of mutal compatibility (partaking of the same essence) and relative autonomy. In other words, the relationship is of the nature of unity–in–differentiation.

This metaphysical concept of unity–in–differentiation is, in Sikh praxis, the basis of the differentiation of the religious and the secular domain on institutional level. In Christianity there has been the practice of two swords donned by the Pope who claimed to be the matrix of both spiritual and temporal authorities. In Sikhism Guru Hargobind wore the two swords of *miri* (temporal authority) and *piri* (spiritual power); but this has been the prerogative of only the Guru person. Wearing of one and not two swords by a Sikh, after baptism, means that in Sikhism there is no institution comparable to Christian Pope or Muslim Caliph who claimed to be the centre of both spiritual and temporal powers and wielder of both the authorities. In other words, there is no fusion or merger of the secular and the religious power in a single person or in a single institution. That is why Guru Hargobind erected

Sri Akal Takht (symbolizing temporal authority) distinctly outside of the precincts of Sri Harmandir Sahib (symbolizing spiritual power). That the two seats of spiritual and temporal powers have been kept apart both institutionally and physically reveals the real nature of the concept of *miri–piri* (religion–politics nexus) which is of the nature of unity–in–differentiation in which there is no fusion of the two domains or subordination of the one to the other; this ensures the relative autonomy of the secular sphere in which secular matters are to be tackled in secular ways. Guru Gobind Singh makes the *distinction* of the two domains categorically clear in his *Bachitra Natak* :

> The House of Baba (Nanak)
> And the Hosue of Babur (Wordly ruler)
> Both are creations of God:
> One reigns in the spiritual domain
> and the other in secular affairs.

The upshot of the above exposition is that in consonance with the Indian conditions, a new praxis of secularism, that is, of the differentiation of the religious from the secular, on the postulate of the mutual compatibility and relative autonomy of the two domains, is both possible and essential.

Indiscriminate mix–up of religion and politics in different ways is one of the factors involved in the emergence of the phenomena of religious fundamentalism, the root–cause of which, of course, is the growing contradiction between unitarianism and pluralism, on religious, cultural, social and political levels. Face to face with this contradiction, some elements among the minorities are trying to politicize their ethnicities, that is, their ethno–cultural, ethno–religious, and ethno–social identities in fundamentalist tones. On the other hand, some sections among the majority community are struggling to ethnicize the national polity; composite Indian

nationalism is sought to be homogenized in a particular ethno–religious form. Consequently, our secularism (which in the Nehruite conception was pluralistic in character) is under strains from religious fundamentalism of the majority as well as of the minority communities. The majoritarian religious fundamentalism is destructive, but the minoritarian religious fundamentalism is both destructive and self–destructive. The minorities face two dangers. First, their own religious fundamentalism would make their identities self–limiting and rigid at the cost of their self–expanding liberalism, exposing them to self–inflicted atrophy. Secondly, they would be facing the mightier challenge of religious fundamentalism from the other side. So, the minorities have greater stakes in secularism and religious pluralism.

Secularism in India to–day is at the crossroads where for its survival and sustenance it requires two essential pillars of religious and political pluralism. Religious pluralism is insufficient without political pluralism; the two have to act as complementary to each other for ensuring a strong liberal, secular polity and composite national life.

GURU GOBIND SINGH FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

The Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh (India), is a premier institution that was set up in the year 1966 as a part of the celebration of the 300th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Prophet of Sikh religion. Maharaja Yadvindra Singh of Patiala was its first President and he was succeeded by Governor, Sardar Ujjal Singh. The then Chief Minister of Punjab, Giani Zail Singh (who later became the President of India), was its first General Secretary. The Foundation has published over two dozen books on Sikhism and other religions in English, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Sanskrit. The Foundation displayed, in 1966, throughout the country the sacred arms and weapons of Guru Gobind Singh that had arrived from the U.K. The cost of the pillars along the Guru Gobind Singh Marg from Sri Anandpur Sahib to Sri Damdama Sahib was met by this institution. The Guru Gobind Singh Journal of Religious Studies (Quarterly) is also being published by the Foundation.

The Foundation is headquartered in its own spacious building complex, Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan, at Chandigarh, apart from another building complex, Vidyasar, at Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pradesh. The properties of the Foundation vest in the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust.

A Triple Orientation for Interfaith Collaboration

Paulos Mar Gregorios

I feel the time has come for us to stop using the hackneyed expression "Inter-Religious Dialogue", and replace it with something more to the point like "Interfaith Movement for Global Harmony and Co-operation", which is what we really aim at.

'Dialogue', in classical use, never meant two people or groups talking to each other. That was a meaning given to that hallowed English word by the Second Vatican Council in the Sixties. I think the word should be used in its original meaning in Plato - several people discussing different aspects of the same subject, and the group coming to a conclusion based on the merit of the arguments for or against any particular view. That is the meaning of the Platonic expression **dialogismos** which literally means 'reasoning through'.

What we need is not interreligious dialogue as such, though this may be needed when we have a specific problem before us (e.g. a local communal conflict) which we need to resolve by mutual discussion among the representatives of the conflicting communities. But that is only one aim, among many, of Interfaith Harmony and Co-operation.

Our larger goal is peace and harmony among peoples, within the nation, as well as among nations, races and regions. It implies mutual acceptance of people of differing

faiths, based on understanding and respect for the others, as well as willingness to live and work together with each other, for common service to global humanity, without anyone being required to compromise one's own legitimate convictions. Dialogue is hardly the appropriate word for this, because that word has acquired connotations of just two people talking to each other. Even its classical meaning of a group sitting down to reason through a problem falls short of our goals.

I have in mind three basic points of reorientation for interfaith cooperation today. We should be grateful for what the interfaith movement has accomplished in the last thirty years or so. It has created an amazing network of contacts among the leadership of the various religions. These leaders now know each other, and within certain limits, trust each other. They can communicate with each other and when necessary, come together for an interfaith meeting or for solving a common problem. That is certainly great progress beyond what the situation was in the first half of this century, when still the adherents of each religion caricatured others, and thought one's own was the only true faith. It is in the light of the experience of forty years of interfaith experience that I venture to suggest the following three basic reorientations.

I. GREATER EMPHASIS ON THE SPIRITUAL THAN ON THE INTELLECTUAL

Religion is not a matter of words or just talking. Authentic faith or religion is a power which manifests itself through mediating the presence of the Transcendent, and through extraordinary love and compassion towards all. Intellectual formulations and theological explanations are meaningless unless the reality to which they refer is manifestly present. The reality of faith should be self-attesting; it should be such as can be directly experienced across the boundaries of religious belonging.

Quite often our interfaith meetings become ordinary talking shops without any manifestation of real faith-power. Then they become boring and depressing, as well as occasions for self-advertisement and self-advertising. It is unnecessary to talk so much in our interfaith meetings. Silence, worshipful, prayerful, richly meaningful and creative silence, would be much more productive. Some of us experienced this less talkative and more productive kind of interfaith meeting at the World Congress of Spiritual Concord, held at the Vanaprastha Ashram, Rishikesh, from December 5 to 12, 1993.

In a whole week when we lived together, ate together and prayed together, there were no speeches, no papers, no discussions. Instead we had 14 different kinds of meditation led by people from all religions - Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Sufi and so on. The leaders of meditation did not advertise their own religions, as it often happens in interfaith meetings. Instead they opened up the treasures of their religion for direct experiencing by people of other faiths. We were about 200 people, about 90 from abroad and the rest from India, all fairly highly educated people. The various forms of meditation bound us together in love and devotion to the Transcendent; they did not divide us. We sang and prayed and even peaceably danced with the Sufis. The common experience of the Transcendent welded us together into one interracial, interfaith, global family and gave us a foretaste of paradise.

I believe that this experience can be duplicated at the local level by small interfaith groups, provided there is the right kind of leadership, enough of genuine prayer, meditation, singing and worship, and much less of talking and self-exhibition with self-advertising and showing off. Intellectual activity should be there, but pointing to the experience of the Transcendent and making such holy experience possible, not making inauthentic speeches

advertising one's own religion and trying to convince other people that the solutions to all problems are available only in one's own religion. Words can be used, but words which help us to go beyond words, to the vibrant reality of the life-enhancing Spirit.

This shift in emphasis from the intellectual to the spiritual is the first reorientation I would like to see in our interfaith activities. Once religion becomes less talk and more worship, it will also become more authentic. In this connection there is one other point I wish to make - and that is about the spiritual quality of those who lead interfaith gatherings. We see so much of dishonesty, egoism, greed for power and money, and even personal moral corruption among the interfaith leadership that comes together in these meetings. If religious leaders do not exhibit moral and spiritual maturity and integrity, people lose faith and religion ceases to commend itself. It has happened every time in history when religious leadership has lost integrity, and ours is particularly a time of pervasive inauthenticity and corruption among the religious leadership in all countries.

One sees that really spiritual people often do not like to attend interfaith meetings. I can think of my esteemed friend, Baba Virsa Singhji Maharaj, who usually declines invitations to attend interfaith meetings. He tells me that he fails to sense the presence of God in most interfaith gatherings. But what we need, to make interfaith meetings genuine and authentic, is the presence of people like Babaji who can communicate spiritual energy by just being present. In the case of three of my most esteemed friends in India, I find the same pattern. Bab Virsa Singh, the Dalai Lama, and Swami Chidanandaji (of Divine Life Society), exude spiritual energy generated by a life of intense personal discipline. It is not the content of what they say that builds you up, but their very being and presence. If interfaith cooperation is to be effective, we need

more spiritual leaders of that calibre, and our gatherings should be such that the authentic spiritual person can be at home in them.

A first pre-requisite for more fruitful interfaith cooperation seems to be spiritual regeneration with each religious group, particularly among the leaders. Our interfaith meetings themselves should be such as would bring about spiritual regeneration in all participants.

II. CONCERN FOR THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY

Religious organisations are usually more concerned about their own self-aggrandisement, with the quest for power and property and vain glory for themselves, than about what happens to humanity. What brings us together in interfaith gatherings is often a desire for a platform of some kind, rather than the genuine desire to work with others for the welfare of humanity.

Humanity needs help. Our species is becoming less and less able to find its way through life. Civilisations rot due to some sickness at the roots. We have not yet learned to live together on this little Spaceship Earth without hurting each other and destroying ourselves in the process. The institutions we have created are all becoming anti-human and beyond our control. We need new institutions, for the political economy, for science and technology, for culture and education, for healing and communication - institutions with the age-old values of love and compassion built into them.

Our science experts confess their inability to deal with the fundamental questions of life. Modern Science does not have, so far, a method to deal with questions of human fulfilment and the meaning and purpose of life. Our universities and educational institutions have given up the quest for truth. They have become factories for mass-producing the workers who will run the machines of a consumerist society.

People vaguely expect the religions to give spiritual orientation and help with finding life-fulfilment and a creative purposiveness for life. But they also know that most of the religious leaders are out of touch with, or incapable of, dealing in a creative way with the stark realities of this world and therefore can only repeat old cliches which long ago lost their relevance and meaning.

We should come together as adherents of various religious groups, not to advertise ourselves, but to consider what we can do together to help humanity find its way in life. The religious traditions should be able to open up before humanity new and more humane ways of living together and praying together and working together with a commitment to the welfare and fulfilment of the whole of humanity. They should enable people to rightly assess the drawbacks of the present civilisation, and to assist humanity in the process of laying the foundations for a new civilisation. This new civilisation should be based not on consumerism and greed, not on commodity development and making money, not on perpetuating this industrial-urban-technological society which has already rendered so many people barren and soul-less, but on creative and all-comprehending love and compassion, on enabling people to find fulfilment in life and orientation for a creative life of service to all. We owe to humanity and not just to people of one's own race or religion or nationality or class.

Interfaith harmony and cooperation should be undergirded and held together by this common commitment to the whole of humanity and not just to our own religious communities. We should consciously discipline ourselves to stop talking about how all the solutions to all human problems are in one's own religion. That is simply self-advertisement which does not help humanity at all. On the contrary if one can confess all the anti-human things which people of one's own

religion have done in the past, we would all sound more authentic.

Commitment to the whole of humanity implies commitment to a few basic principles. These principles can be grounded in anyone's own religion, but can also be stated in non-religious language. Let me point out a few of these basic principles :

1. The unity of human race as such, transcending all religious, ethnic, national and other barriers;
2. The unity of the human race with all living beings, and also with the whole of organic and inorganic reality on which all life is dependent;
3. The dignity and worth of all human beings and the responsibility of society to provide the appropriate socio-economic structures to make sure that all human beings can live a life worthy of that dignity, and find meaning and fulfilment in life;
4. The imperative and urgent need to remove all injustice from society and to provide structures that ensure social, cultural and economic justice for all human beings;
5. The human responsibility to eliminate and ban all nuclear, chemical, bacteriological, biological, and other weapons of mass destruction from the face of the earth;
6. The need for the whole of humanity to rise up in protest against and peacefully confront the frightening upsurge of terrorism and violence in our societies across the globe, the criminalisation of our politics, the growing militarisation of our societies, and the alliance of military power with political/cultural, financial/economic and urban industrial/technological forces as a major threat to justice, peace, environmental health and human security in the world.

7. The need to liberate science/technology itself as well as scientific/technological research and development from its bondage to the powerful giant corporations and the defence establishments of the world which use science/technology for exploitation, profiteering as well as bestialization, brutalisation and destruction of humanity.

This list could be further prolonged, but enough has been said to indicate what we mean by commitment to the whole of humanity. In order however for the interfaith movement to cope intelligently with these important issues, it would be necessary to go beyond the formal leadership of the religious groups in our interfaith thinking together; we should enlist competent lay people from all the religions in the process of coming together to reflect, on a spiritual basis, on the problems now confronting humanity. In order to enlist the best of the laity in our different faiths, the religious leadership should become sufficiently enlightened and mature enough to understand what the common people and the informed experts are saying to us. The religious leadership should be sufficiently free and secure in themselves, to be able to acknowledge the superior knowledge and abilities of our own laity, and to draw them into interfaith harmony and cooperation without fear of losing our present monopolistic control of the interfaith movement.

III. REINTEGRATING A MULTI-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE INTO ALL OF LIFE–FACING THE CHALLENGE OF THE EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT

The European Enlightenment of the 18th century laid down some of the principles of present-day Western civilisation. By education and cultural osmosis, all educated people all over the world have become children of the European Elightenment. The builders of our nations, like Nehru or Soekarno, Jinnah or Ataturk, were all very much children

of the EE, and their thought was shaped by the ideas and values of the EE. The central elements of the EE are the following :

a. a proud and revolutionary insurgent affirmation of the freedom, autonomy, and adulthood of the educated individual, over against all religious or other systems that hold the individual in thrall;

b. a bold and sweeping repudiation of all external authority, including that of religion or tradition, revelation or scripture, all of which are ascribed to the infancy and childhood of humanity;

c. a total reliance on the capacity of the unaided human reason to know all truth and to do all things; later developed into the principle of critical rationality as the locus of final authority, beyond which there is no appeal;

d. the secularisation of society, that is, the emancipation of knowledge and thought, property and social institutions from all forms of religious influence and control, the underlying idea being that the human person is responsible to oneself and not to any Transcendent Force, Power or Person; the consequent eclipse of God from all public life including the University and the school, the healing system, the mass communication media and so on;

e. the development of modern science/technology, an educational system based on it, and an urban-industrial culture using science-technology and the educational system to globalise and perpetuate itself;

f. the skilful utilisation of the above five elements (a to e) to expand the economic hegemony and cultural domination of the White peoples over the whole of humanity and the entire globe and its oceans and space;

g. as a consequence of the above, the persistent erosion of human values and their replacement by the values of a greedy, acquisitive, commodity culture seeking mainly dominant power, accumulation of wealth, creature comfort and instant gratification of the senses.

Great names are associated with the EE - for instance, Voltaire and Rousseau, Hume and Kant, Goethe and Goya, Herder and Hegel, Newton and Bacon, Condorcet and Robespierre, Adam Smith and Charles Darwin, to mention a few at random. These European writers, philosophers, artists and activists gave shape to a civilisation which even the rural child in India today is made to absorb without question.

It is this European Enlightenment and its secular/scientific culture that banished religion from public life and forced it into the margins of private choice and voluntary support. The present situation cannot be changed without the religious leadership coming to see that the present position of religion either on the margins of public life or in the illegitimate manner in politics, is largely due to the very nature of the secular culture of the European Enlightenment.

Bringing religion back into its proper central position in public life does not mean going back to the pre-Enlightenment past in our cultures, though there may be lessons to be learned from that past like the following.

1. It is antihuman to impose any one particular religion on society or individuals; it is not for the government to decide what religion any particular person should adhere to.

2. The state shall not give exclusive or particular privileges to adherents of any one religion. There cannot be a state religion, even when 99 percent of the national population belongs to that religion. Even Islamic law should accept this as a valid principle, sanctioned by the Holy Qur'an.

3. The freedom not to belong to any religion is a fundamental human right, which should be respected by the state. People with so-called secular beliefs should be just as free as the adherents of the various religions. But even secularism, which is basically a religious commitment, cannot be that of the state, or be particularly promoted by the state.

4. The state's responsibility in relation to organized religion shall be threefold; (a) to enact laws and to enforce them so that the adherents of one religion do not attack other religions, except in friendly and open and respectful mutual criticism, and no religion seeks to promote itself at the expense of others; (b) to ensure that no religion develops practices that are against civil law or are anti-life (e.g. environmental pollution or disruption), or anti-human (e.g. human sacrifice, practice of immorality); (c) to promote actively the study and practice of the better or more universally dharmic elements in all religions, such as services to the poor and the needy and the sick, promotion of education and culture in multi-religious contexts, caring for and championing the oppressed, the downtrodden and the victims of injustice, innovation in the patterns of multi-religious living together with mutual respect and compassion, etc.

The most difficult task is perhaps to straighten out the relation between science and religion. It is science which has not only ousted religion from the centre of life and banished it to the margins, but has also attempted to take over from religion an exclusive and dominantly central position in society. Science has no claim to dominate society, for its knowledge-gathering technique is faulty and distortive of reality, as well as inadequate when we come to the central questions of meaning and fulfilment in life. Science, and the technology based on it, have certain legitimate and essential

functions in society, to make it possible for humanity to subsist and sustain itself. But science/technology, as a global human enterprise, should not be allowed to dominate society or to oppress and exploit people and befuddle their minds as they are doing now in many instances. By its arrogant pretensions it is doing even more damage to humanity than religion did in the past.

Renewed religion, and only renewed religion, has a major role in bringing science back into proper perspective as a major tool available to humanity. Religion as it is today has no right to enter into this kind of a critique of science/technology in society until it can (a) put its own house in order and produce an authentic quality in itself, and (b) acquire the basic competence to enter into an informed critique of science/technology and its present role in society and the academy and the economy.

This last is a big challenge to the Interfaith movement. Just attacking science/technology will be like Don Quixote battling the windmills, comic and unproductive, as well as ludicrously self-defeating. The combination of spiritual power with intellectual competence is a rare commodity in the present day world of religions. Taking on the European Enlightenment, which though now on the downswing still remains pervasively powerful, calls for competence of the kind that science/technology itself cannot provide; but without high competence and self-attesting spiritual power, religion will only make a fool of itself.

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As the present interfaith movement, which has much to its credit by way of accomplishment, proceeds along these threefold lines of advance, the One Transcendent Power that leads humanity to its destiny, will bless our humanity with new foretastes of goodness and peace, with love and joy in the Spirit. And the religions will, by the same grace of the Transcendent, renew themselves, as well as our societies.

Theoretical responses to evil : Sikh perspective

Balkar Singh

The commonly perceived and dictionary meanings of evil are "absence of good and morally wrong, wicked, causing injury, mischief, trouble or pain and characterised or accompanied by misfortune and suffering."(1) Evil aspects of life are an accepted part of man's potential perfection. However Nicholson observed in reference to Divine attributes that all created things are mirrors in which Absolute beauty is reflected. What is ugly has its due place in the order of existence no less than what is beautiful, and equally belongs to the Divine perfection. Evil, therefore like good is equally relative and relevant in life.(2) The author further observed that in Islamic perspective, Paradise is the mirror of absolute 'jamal', Hell of absolute 'jalal', and the universe is the form of these Divine attributes. Evil, as such, does not exist, although it has its appointed place in the world of opposites. What we call evil is really the relation of some parts and aspects of the whole to other parts and aspects, in a word, all imperfection arises from our not looking at things *sub specie unitatis*.(3)

It is easy to conclude from this that all the physical entities can be explained as antithetical. Reason for this can be traced in the fact that every thing positive is tied to negative. For scientific explanation we can take the example of electricity. Even in daily life, pleasure or pain, and success or failure can easily be conceptualised as antithetical terms. But the existence of evil should not be viewed as an agency to create

confusion. This is an established truth that even in the physical world, negative is a natural condition for the positive attributes of a thing. So, theoretically whatsoever exists in the universe must partake of evil. The condition of total good is perhaps not possible because goodness if not relative will be simply theoretical. This spiritual context of good and evil is duly recognised in Sikhism. The man in the grip of evil fails to attain *Naam* :

> Foul thinking, false, is evil in extreme
> With faults laden, with defects replete;
> One with understanding false utters what is worthless;
> By evil thinking gripped, the Name he fails to attain(4)

The founder of Sikhism is Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and the living inspiration (Guru) for the Sikhs is *Bani* compiled in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Thus Sikhism is the latest entry into the revelatory relgions of the world. *Naam*, as mentioned above, is the appropriate device *(jugati)* for transcendence. Human body, an abode or vehicle for good and evil, in the context of Sikhism, is also an opportunity to transcend all limitations, which body as a source of evil creates. Problem lies in the improper use of this opportunity. Lack of consciousness and incapacity to identify the purpose of life becomes the source of evil, as this possibility is inherent in man's situation. To be able to trascend evil, we must in the first place identify its full extent. To be freed from evil one is supposed to struggle hard under the guidance of the Guru. Human life is an occasion given by God for the purpose of spiritual-realisation which of necessity requires the mastery over the baser instincts in man. Guru thus revealed the truth to man :

> With the gift of human incarnation granted to thee,
> Now is Thy opportunity to have union with God.(5)

Faith and necessity for the union with God is central to

all religions but it becomes beyond man when it is carried too far. Western secular scholars like Jung analysed the role of God and have concluded that not only does God condone and even encourage wickedness in man, he himself is wicked or, at least, amoral.(6) I quote him to indicate the way religion has been misunderstood. But fortunately nowadays religion is being viewed as an academic subject like other disciplines. One of the reasons for this distortion could be the role played by the practising religions by limiting religion to magic, myth and miracle providing a basis for its critics to form a wrong view of it. Secondly, these scholars tend to look at the peripheral matters and ignore the centrality of divine message. Since the centrality of the message is the cultivation of the *Naam* character for which terms like *Sachiar, Gurmukh* and *Brahm Giani* are used in the Sikh tradition according to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib.* In the light of this, it is accepted that Divine compassion has ordained good and evil in every thing but centrality in the spiritual context has not been granted to both. Only good has been accepted as pivotal for religious pursuits and the evil has been identified as a challenge to the sacred. Guru's views regarding the engrained evil in man are as under :

> The five elements from the attributeless void were manifested,
> Wherefrom is the body compounded and man in action engages.
> Evil and good actions on the forehead are recorded,
> Whereby are seeds of sin and well-doing sown.(7)

Though this is liable to be interpreted as God's will, yet properly understood it should indicate that evil exists as a challenge which the Sikh is supposed to accept and overcome it. Sikh has to be one with God of the following attributes :

> He is the Sole Supreme Being; of eternal manifestation;
> Creator, Immanent Reality; Without Fear;

Without Rancour; Timeless form; Unincarnated;
Self-existent; Realized through Divine grace.(8)

This is Master's command and the realization of these virtues will provide the Sikh strength to bear the good and bad with equanimity. This state of mind is not which never makes mistakes because of not having the responsibility. In Sikhism one is not supposed to deny the existence of evil nor to escape it. Theoretically what man is and does is not due to him only but to a necessity of nature. Thus man is central in spiritual context. The spiritual strength of such a man lies in his acting with God, for God and through God. This God-oriented man in Sikhism is known as a *Gurmukh*. This is Sikh perspective of religion. In order to tread this arduous journey, discriminating knowledge *(Bibek)* is needed. This *'Bibek'* is not possible in case the mind is intoxicated with egoism. In order to understand and overcome this failing the Guru has to say that :

What is good for him, man thinks is harmful;
What truth is told, he takes to be poison.
He distinguishes not wherein his triumph or discomfiture lies;
Such is the involvement of the materialist in the World.(9)

So good, theoretically is not absence of evil. Both are essential parts of the being of man. But evil becomes real weakness when one submits to it. That is why evil is closely associated with ego. Ego is ignorance and darkness, inaction. Man needs to live with ego triumphantly. Consciousness and resolve for living truth is a step in the right direction :

Is there a hero who our egoism may shatter.
And from this sweet-tasting substance turn the mind away ?(10)

So ego, the self-centred state of mind is known for its fascination for the wrong also. Man is often slothful in doing good but he is quick like a tiger in doing evil. This will lead to ensnaring of man. Evil can not be eliminated but it can be overcome. In order to control the evil at the level of mind and behaviour, one will have to be imbued with friendly affection for all. It will be possible only if one qualifies to view joy and sorrow alike. The ego must be triumphed if the true self is to be cultivated. Man, according to Sikhism is eternal, is essence *(joti)*, but at the same time he is bound to operate in time. This factor is explained in the composition *pahrei* (The Hours) composed by Guru Nanak. In the words of Prof. Gurbachan Singh Talib this composition in its imaginative sweep treats of the folly and inanity of life passed in absorption in worldly pursuits. Man is apostrophized as the Merchant. His sojourn on this earth is meant for making the true gain, which is spiritual merit. Istead, he lets it go waste in ignorance and the pursuit of that which does not last. Human life figures as the night, at the end of which appears the hour of 'reaping' with sickle of death.(11) In the four quarters of night the sequence of development is casting in womb, putting God out of mind, absorbing in wealth and desire and finally reaping the field by Reaper God. One who does not understand this game of evil is like a being in the well of darkness, with the result that one will be unable to discriminate between good and evil. This is the result of being disjoined from the source of spiritual life. It has also been illustrated by an anology of frog. Although frog lives in pure water but instead of quaffing Amrit eats weeds. Similarly an unenlightened man fails to escape evil :

> Frog ! never shalt thou acquire illumination.
> Eating of these weeds, though in pure water abiding,
> Thou yet knowest not of amrita (nectar).(12)

So, if man behaves like a frog he will be defeating the purpose for which man was created. Guru expected that man should grow to the level where he can save himself. Guru showed the way for this and set the example. Guru helps man to help himself. Where the gap between worshipper and worshipped is not narrowed, there ritual purification will not purify the man. Man in this condition will stagnate, spiritual purification is possible only in a system and Sikh system is to live in Sabad-Guru. One can purify oneself through obedience to His ordinance and Will (Hukam and Raza). If the mind is fouled by sin or evil, it can be cleansed only with devotion to God.(13) Recitation of *Naam* is an infallible medium for harmonisation of the worshipper and the worshipped. This infallible Sabad-model is revealed for the mankind through the Sikh Gurus. It is why the abode of suffering and maladies can be demolished with *Bani* which is the Sikh model for humanity :

> This utterance from the primal Divine source has come,
> That all anxiety is annulled.(14)

Theoretically Sikhism takes the reality of evil as a necessary part of the creation because poison and nectar both are the fruits of the same tree of this world. This mystery has to be unravelled on man that in the guidance of the holy word *(Bani)* poison and nectar can be reckoned alike. When this illumination comes, the evil of egoism is lifted. The model granted for this is Sabad-Guru. It is the realization of the holy word. It is establishing the temple of truth (Dharamsal) where likeminded devotees assemble *(Sangat)*. For this gentle governance in the world, the Guru conceptualises thus :

> Now is the gracious Lord's ordinance promulgated
> None to another shall cause hurt
> All mankind now in peace shall abide
> Gentle shall the governance be.(15)

In order to face the agony of the evil, the sole support of God is appropriate. Very few are expected to devote themselves to the holy word of God *(Sabad)* because of the domination of evil in man's nature. This is the common and universal model given by the Sikh Gurus, for annulling all sufferings of man. In the closing seal *mundavani*, the holy Granth Sahib is symbolised as the sealed Salver carried to a bouquet, as was customary at royal courts. In conformity to the 'Salver' images are used the terms 'partake' and 'consume'. Coming at the end of the holy Book, this piece is the closing seal. Another meaning of *mundavani* is a riddle, an enigma. Which is the salver and what is conained in it ? The enigma is solved in the hymn itself.(16) The Guru says :

> In this salver are lying three viands-truth, content and contemplation.
> Also lying in it is the Lord's ambrosial *Naam*,
> Substance of all existence.
> Whoever partakes of it, consumes it,
> Saved shall be.
> This substance no way can be discarded-
> Ever in heart cherish it.
> The world, darkness-enveloped, by touch of the Master's feet is crossed:
> Thus, saith Nanak, all that is visible,
> Is seen as manifestation of the Supreme Being.(17)

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   Durmati jhuthi buri buriari.
   Auguniari auguniari.
   Kachi mati pheeka mukhi bolai durmati naamu na

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   Bhaye prapati manukh dehuria.
   Gobind milan ki ih teri baria.
   Avari kaj terai kitai na kam.
   milu sadh sangati bhaju kewal naam.
6. Zachner R.C., *The City Within The Heart*, London, Unwin Paperbacks, 1980, p. 29
7. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1038
   Panch tatu sunhu pargasa.
   Deh sanjogi karam abhiasa.
   Bura bhala dui mastaki likhe papu puni bijaida.
8. *ibid*, p. 1
   Ik Onkar Satinamu Kartapurakhu Nirbhau
   Nirvairu Akal murati Ajuni Saibhan
   Gur Parasadi.
9. *ibid*, M. 5, p. 180
   Jo bhalai so bura janai.
   Sachu kahe so bikhai samanai.
   Janai nahi jit aru har.
   Ihu Valeva sakat sansar.
10. *ibid*, M. 5, 212
    Hai koi aisa haumai torai.
    Isu mithi te ihu manu horai.
11. English Transalation, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Patiala, Punjabi University, Vol. I, p. 155
12. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, M. 1, p. 990
    Dadar tu Kabahi na janasi re.
    Bhakhasi sikalu basasi nirmal jal Amritu na lakha lakhasi.

Interfaith Dialogue

A call to Deeper understanding of the Divine

Marcus Braybrooke

A welcome feature of the Year of Inter-religious Understanding and Co-operation in 1993 was the endorsement given to it by many spiritual teachers. Indeed, leaders of major religious communities have in recent years increasingly stressed the need for interreligious dialogue. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, for example told a Jewish-Christian conference in Jerusalem, 'We share in a common task of speaking of the eternal to a world which is dominated by the present'. In a world where religious and ethnic pluralism have replaced the dominance of one religion peoples of all faiths, he said, should behave towards each other like neighbours. 'Dialogue calls us into partnership to work against the domination of the religion to the exclusion of others in any nation state'.(1)

Following the massacre at Hebron, when a Jewish settler on the West Bank entered the mosque and murdered some thirty Muslims, the Jewish community in Britain was quick to condemn the atrocity. The Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, said, 'Violence is evil. Violence committed in the name of God is doubly evil. Violence committed against those engaged in worshipping God is unspeakably evil'.(2) At the Conference in New Delhi in 1992 on Sikhism and Other Religions, many Sikh leaders stressed the need for mutual respect.(3) They could, of course, appeal to the teaching of Guru Nanak and other gurus.

Other religious leaders too in emphasizing the need for interreligious understanding have found it important to stress that this is consistent with deep commitment to a particular faith. They also have sought to show - perhaps by rather selective use of texts - that mutual respect for those of other religions is taught by the traditional authorities of their religion. It is important for them to do so if they are to persuade their followers.

A particularly good example is a lecture on 'the Interfaith Imperative' by the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks. In that lecture, he argues strongly from traditional Jewish sources for mutual respect between religions. He pointed out that according to the Rabbis there are thirty seven occasions in the book of Moses when the command is to love, not the neighbour, but the stranger. Again, he siad, that Jewish mystics used to ask why the stork was an unclean bird. Its name, Chassidah, means the compassionate one. How can a brid called compassion be unclean ? But for whom the mystics asked, did the stork have compassion ? Only for its own. True compassion knows no bounds. Dr Sacks also observed that the story of Babel came before the call of Abraham. 'Just as after Babel there is no single universal language, so there is no single universal culture, no single universal tradition and no single universal faith. The faith of Abraham left room for other ways of serving God; just as the English language leaves room for French and Spanish and Italian'.(4)

Another example of the attempt to find support for dialogue within traditional sources is a paper by Professor Dawud O S Noibi on 'The Qur'an's Approach to Inter-faith Co-operation', given at a conference in New Delhi in February 1993. In that paper he made a case for Muslim respect for other faiths on entirely Islamic grounds. In the Qur'an respect is taught for Jews and Christians, who are called 'People of

the Book'. Professor Noibi suggested that the phrase 'people of the book' should be translated as 'followers of earlier revelations'. He stressed that the Qur'an teaches that God has sent every people a prophet. He suggested that Rama and Krishna and Zoroaster should be seen as prophets of Allah.[5]

The importance of finding support in traditional sources for interfaith understanding and co-operation is obvious. Only then will the majority of believers abandon suspicion of others and support interfaith activity, which is still too often marginal to a religious community's main concerns. Yet this search for endorsement from traditional sources is in contrast to the approach of many pioneers of the interfaith movement, such as Unitarians or Baha'is or very liberal members of other religions, who spoke of the need for rethinking traditional attitudes. Indeed, in the Christian churches the challenge is still posed by theologians such as John Hick and others who adopt a pluralist position.[6] Yet if you have first to become a pluralist before you see the necessity of inter-religious understanding, the interfaith movement is likely to remain marginal and be suspected of being an embryonic new religion.

The pluralists and universalists, however, remind us that dialogue should be dialogue in truth. It is not just a matter of understanding and respecting what others believe. Dialogue raises questions about our ultimate beliefs.

Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks, as we have seen[7], has argued powerfully from traditional Jewish sources for the importance of interfaith understanding. He stresses the plurality of religions. 'Our moral and spiritual lives are as plural as languages'.[8] He accepts that there are universal requirements of morality, but warns that both tribalism and universalism end in human sacrifice. Tribalism seeks to

impose the identity of the tribe on others. Universalism does not allow for difference and plurality.

This is an attractive and powerful rationale for a minority faith. It puts mutual respect in the place of competitive mission. It allows a minority group to affirm its own identity without being a threat to others. Yet it suggests that whilst there is a public world in which we live together that we each retreat home behind locked doors of faith. Presumably children are educated in separate religious schools. This may be good for their spiritual nurture, but may aggravate communal differences.

It also evades the question of whether our different understandings of the divine are complementary or convergent. For many pioneers of the interfaith movement, dialogue is a way in which we grow in our awareness of the Divine. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a distinguished Indian philosopher, who became President of India and who was a patron of the World Congress of Faiths, argued in his *Kamala Lectures* that in the new world society religions 'are approximating to one another'. The universal elements in them, he said, would be emphasized and 'the gradual assimilation of religions will function as a world faith'.(9) 'The time has come', he wrote in his *Religion in a Changing World*, 'for us to join in unity of spirit'.(10) In a similar way, Professor Seshagiri Rao, in his 1982 Younghusband Lecture, said, 'In the context of the emerging world community, all the great religions are useful, necessary, and complementary to one another as revealing different facets of the one Truth'.(11) Dr Robert Runcie, in his Younghusband Lecture, quoted Paul Tillich that 'in the depth of every living religion there is a point at which religion itself loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and to a vision of the spiritual presence

in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence'.[12]

The approach rests on several assumptions. The first is a recognition of the relativity of all human language. Leonard Swidler, of Temple University, argues in his *The Meaning of Life at the Edge of the Third Millenium* that our understanding of truth statements has been 'deabsolutized'. All statements about reality are conditioned by their author's historical setting, intention, culture, class and sex. The limits of language are also recognized and it is seen that all knowledge is interpreted knowledge. Reality speaks to each person with the language he or she gives it. We are not in a position to make ultimate, unconditioned truth statements. Religious truth is communicated through symbols, metaphor and poetry. Rituals and creeds point beyond themselves, whereas too often they have been given the authority that belongs only to God.[13]

This recognition of the limits of language and human knowledge is also an affirmation of the Mystery of God who transcends our understanding. Pluralism, Stanley Samartha, an Indian theologian writes, is 'the homage which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the infinite'.[14] Bishop George Appleton, a former Chairman of the World Congress of Faiths, spoke of 'The mystery of the final Reality to whom or to which we give different names, so great and deep and eternal that we can never fully understand or grasp the mystery of Being'.[15]

Thirdly, this approach takes seriously the belief that God's concern is for every person and that, therefore, the insight and experience of each person is valuable. One may, in discussion, suggest that a person's views, whilst true to his or her experience, do not do justice to some experiences of other people. One may suggest that others have drawn wrong

conclusions from their experience. There is room for debate and disagreement. But the dramatic change is from thinking that we have a truth, formulated in words and guaranteed correct by God, which is to be proclaimed and defended, instead of recognizing that each person's insight is of value. For me, in any case, belief in Jesus Christ is trust in a living person and no person is fully encapsulated in words about them.

If we begin to see that each person's deepest convictions are significant, we replace argument and hostility by respectful listening. His or her insight, like my own, is partial but nonetheless significant. This, I think, is what Swami Vivekananda was saying at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions. He quoted from the Bhagavad-Gita that 'Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths, which in the end lead to Me'.(16) Later, he said of the Vedas that they are 'without beginning and without end. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times'.(17) In the same way, a Christian's understanding of Jesus, is shaped by the community of faith to which she or he belongs.

The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Unit, which has collected accounts of many peoples' religious experiences, has indicated what a wealth of religious experience there is to draw on. If we are willing to listen, we shall discover that many people have a treasured insight to share. Indeed, as I understand it, the Bible is the attempt of those who are met by God, particularly in the New Testament by God in Christ, to share that experience so that others may make it their own.

Too often Christians have appeared to communicate truth about God, rather than inviting others to discover for

themselves the divine love. as William Temple said, revelation does not offer truth concerning God, but the Living God Himself.(18)

To accept as genuine the claims of a person of another faith to have been met by God is a major advance in inter-religious understanding. It is this, for example, that Rabbi Tony Bayfield does in *Dialogue with a Difference*, a book arising from a Christian-Jewish dialogue group. He writes, 'What is it then that I feel compelled to say ? It is this. I believe that many Christians find in the life and death of Jesus as described in the New Testament and in the tradition which flows from those events the fullest disclosures of the nature of God and God's will for them. Such faith involves no necesary error or illusions'.(19) The Orthodox rabbi and scholar, Professor Irving Greenberg has said that God, whose love was already made known to Jews, reached out to make his love known to Gentiles through Christianity. 'There is enough love in God to choose and to choose again'.(20). In a similar way, a growing number of Christians now recognize that God's covenant with the Jewish people has never been abrogated.

The experience of the other that one accepts as a genuine experience of the divine may not be the same as one's own experience. One may question the conclusions the other draws from his or her experience. Yet its genuineness is acknowledged.

Beyond this, however, may come the recognition not only that the experience of the other is genuine, but that it is religiously significant to me. Some time ago, the World Congress of Faiths invited Bishop Kenneth Cragg, a Christian scholar of Islam, to lead a conference about Islam, but not one which was only descriptive, but one which helped Christians to see the significance of Islam for their own religious life.

Another example of the suggestion that the teachings of one faith are relevant to those of another may be found in Raimundo Panikkar's introduction to *The Vedic Experience.* Acknowledging that the Vedas are linked for ever to the particular religious sources from which historically they spring, he suggests the Vedas are a monument of universal religious - and thus deeply human - significance. The anthology invites readers to appropriate the basic experience of Vedic Man, 'not because it is interesting or ancient, but because it is human and thus belongs to us all'.(21)

When Swami Vivekananda, who was himself an active reformer of Hinduism, said 'we accept all religions as true', I doubt whether he meant that they are equally true, although critics have understood him in this sense.(22) Rather, I think he was accepting that each person's experience was a genuine experience of God, However inadequate or misunderstood. This, I believe, gives a religious significance to dialogue. As we learn of the experiences of others, our own knowledge of the Divine is increased. As Rabindranath Tagore said, 'To reject any part of humanity's religious experience is to reject truth'.(23) Fr. Bede Griffiths has also written, 'All the great revelations are as it were messages from that transcendent world'.(24) This is the basis for the hope that religions are convergent and that dialogue helps us grow in understanding of the Divine.

This leads too towards both a world theology and shared spiritual exploration. In 1981, Wilfred Cantwell Smith wrote, 'Henceforth the data for theology must be the data of the history of religions. The material on the basis of which a theological interpretation shall be proffered, of the world, Man, the truth, and of salvation - of God and His dealings with His world - is to be the material that the study of the history of religion provides'.(25)

Just as a Christian theologian reads the works of Christians of any denomination, so as we think about the great issues of life and death, we may draw upon the wealth of humankind's religious traditions. John Hick's book *Death and Eternal Life* is an example of this. In it, he tries to discover the insight enshrined in the various religious traditions of the world and to see how these different insights illuminate each other.(26)

In *Dialogue with a Difference*, I wrote a paper reflecting on the possibility of affirming belief in a God of Love in the shadow of the Shoah. I drew upon both Jewish and Christian resources and there is a Jewish response to my article. A similar approach was shown in a WCF weekend conference arranged several years ago when the theme was 'Our Strength in Sorrow'. People of different faith spoke of the resources they had found in their own tradition to help in times of difficulty, but often participants, discovered that they could find help in each others' traditions.

My first book, written nearly twenty years ago, was called *Together to the Truth*. It was a study of developments in the last one hundred and fifty years in Hinduism and Christianity and was an attempt to test out the theory of Professor William Hocking that in their responses to the modern world Hindusim and Christianity were both changing and in that process coming closer to each other. In my conclusion, I wrote, 'The changes in both religions suggest that one world faith will emerge by a process of reconception. As the great religions respond to the world in which they live and to each other, so their fundamental insights will develop and broaden. This is quite different from an easy and artificial amalgam of diverse creeds. It is a growing together of living, developing organisms'.(27) I think now, I would hesitate to speak of 'one world faith'. The particularity of each religion is significant and its unique contribution to the whole relates

to that particularity. Yet as a religious tradition emphasizes those truths which are most central so it discovers its closeness to the central witness of other great faiths. All religions too have to respond to a quickly changing world.

It is possible to combine deep commitment to the truth we already acknowledge with a humility and openness to the truths that others treasure. By sharing, we both grow in our appreciation of the wonder of the divine. Yet the deepest meeting is not intellectual discussion, but in spiritual sharing where we meet in the 'cave of the heart', which is the abode of the Spirit.

It is important, then, that people of different faiths learn to understand each other and to co-operate for the benefit of all people. It should not, however, be forgotten that interfaith dialogue is also a calling to us, by both intellectual and spiritual sharing, to grow in our appreciation of the wonder and the mercy of the Divine, who is greater than anything we can say of Him.

'Some sing His noble attributes and exalted state.
Some express Him through philosophical intricacies and ratiocination.
Some tell of His giving life and taking it away.
Some sing of His taking away life and giving it back.
Some sing of His transcendence;
To some He is ever manifest.
Millions upon millions discourse endlessly of Him.
Eternally He doles out gifts;
Those receiving them at last can receive no more.
Infinitely the creation receives from Him sustenance.
He is the Ordainer;
By His Ordinance the universe He runs.
Says Nanak, Ever is He in bliss,
Ever fulfilled.(28)

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24. Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, Collins, 1989, p. 267.

25. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward a World Theology*, Macmillan 1981.

26. John Hick, *Death and Eernal Life*, Collins, 1976. Another example is the discussion between Christians and Buddhists about Kenosis and Sunyata.

27. Marcus Braybrooke, *Together to the Truth*, CLS, Madras, 1971, p. 156.

28. *Adi Granth*, Japuji,3.

Contribution of Sikhism towards Human Welfare*

Harnam Singh Shan

Sikhism is the youngest and the most modern of the world religions, Being a wholly original and practical religion, having the whole humanity in view for its welfare and amelioration, it has been acclaimed by Bradshaw as the "Faith of the New Age" and "Summum bonum for the modern man".

It has made valuable contribution towords the uplift of men and society in almost all spheres - thought, conduct, outlook, organisaiton and cultural patterns, etc.

It arose, five centuries ago, as a new mode of humanitarian thought, heralding a new conception of the Ultimate Reality, a new vision of the Universal Man, a new altruistic ideal of democratic state and a new pattern of a casteless and classless society.

Equating God with Truth and Love of God with Service of Humanity, it urges self-realisation and recognition of the Creator through His Creation. Exhibiting a just, catholic and tolerant temperament, it admits no discriminating distinction of any kind anywhere and guarantees each individual his fundamental rights and freedom of conscience. Envisioning a new cultural ethos and an ideal social order - mental, spiritual, physical, social and political-transcending all types of religious exclusiveness, formalism and ego-centric

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individualism, it brushes aside all claims of incarnations and intermediaries, and advocates direct communion with the Almighty.

Sikhism gives optimistic hope of salvation by Divine Grace, while leading a normal householder's life with virtuous conduct, remembering God, adoring Nature, doing work, performing duties and sharing earnings with fellow-beings, as against pusuing enforced celibacy, barren asceticism and mortification of human frame to attain it. It has set forth a strong moral force against the exploitation of man. Ideal man by following its tenets and traditions neither fears nor frightens, remains stable and steadfast in all eventualities, embodies the universal spirit of liberation and tolerance, and seeks God's blessings for the welfare of the whole humanity in his daily prayers. Its cosmopolitan outlook, liberal essence and glorious traditions have contributed thus significantly for its age and limitations, towards human uplift and well-being by offering the message of good cheer for all mankind and by furthering goodwill, general happiness and collective moral values for the society, both at home and abroad, for building a new and peaceful pluralistic world order.

The Interfaith Movement

challenges and opportunities for the twenty-first century

Alan Race

The Interfaith Movement is the name for a process rather than an organization. In a sense, it is what we are all inescapably cautht up in - as people, as organisations, as religious institutions. We struggle to make sense of the symbolic world of 'the religious other', where 'the religious other' is our neighbour, our business partner, our shop-keeper, our spouse, our friend, our intellectual sparring partner, and so on. Precisely because dialogue can take so many forms in so many settings, the notion of the Interfaith Movement itself is bound to remain to a degree elusive. Perhaps we should not even call it the ' Interfaith Movement' but the 'Inbetween-the-Faiths Movement', that is, a happening in the space between religions.

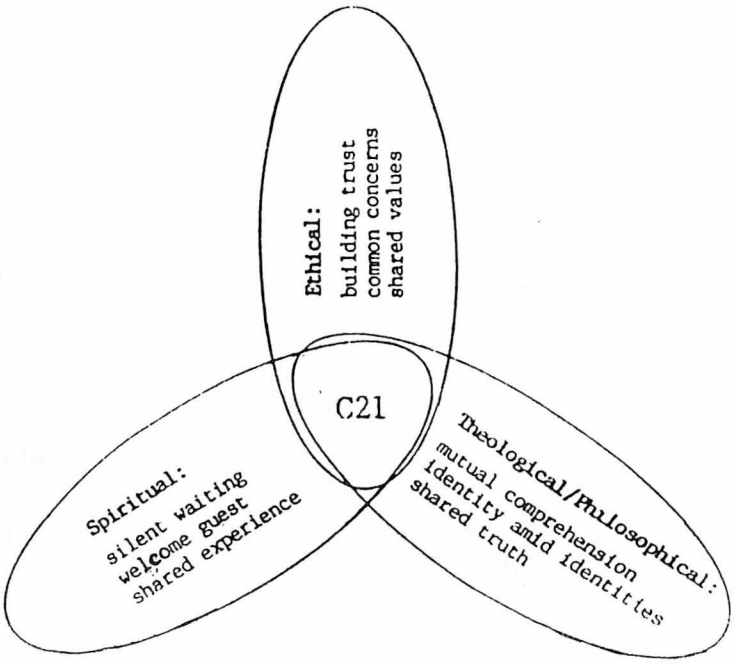
Historically, religions have competed with one another; they have often clashed and turned to war; they have absorbed truths from each other; some have found ways of living together. People of religious traditions, therefore, encounter one another today shaped by that past. But I think there is also a sense in which today's encounters have some fresh contours. We expect not only to tolerate 'the religious other' with respect, not only to cooperate, but also to learn from one another. That changes things. It also adds to the tentativeness about our encounters, for we are unsure about how far that mutual learning process might take us. Yet it

also entails that the challenges and possibilities for the future are for each of us, as part of our traditions, to become as fully self-conscious as possible about the very process of encounter itself.

Most of us have been taught that it is sufficient for us to respond to experience out of a single tradition. 'Our' tradition has taught us spiritual values, has nourished us through countless times of celebrating joys and enduring pains, has taught us our way about the universe. It will not be enough in the future to live out of one tradition alone. We have entered an era when that attitude has become inadequate in relation to the interdependent world which we are becoming. Certainly, traditions have borrowed from one another in the past. But we need now to carry on this process of encounter, agreement and disagreement, fully aware of the limitations and possibilities that each tradition carries. With that kind of self-consciousness we might be able better to avoid the negative and potentially violent eruptions that can accompany cultural and religious encounter.

Le me illustrate the extent of the challenge of interfaith encounter by showing its effect in three main areas of religious commitment - the Spiritual, the Ethical and the Philosophical/Theological. These three areas can be distinguished for the sake of analysis, though they belong together as part of a whole outlook in any one tradition. Each area has three intertwined phases and I shall say more about each phase in turn. The following diagram might help to visualise what I have in mind.

(C21 indicates the twenty-first century, and the centre of the diagram remains intentionally untidy). What happens in each of these three areas of religious commitment when we take the multifaith context of our interdependent world seriously ?



1. Spiritual

All religions are founded on a basic vision, delivered from experience. The vision may be focused in a book, a person, a legend, nature, or even experience itself. In turn, the religious practices of a tradition exist to re-present that basic experience. Whether elaborate or simple, highly ritualistic or minimal, the practice reproduces the power and evocative awareness of living in the presence of what we call the Transcendent though the use of this term is by no means unproblematic.

As we encounter the basic experiential dimension of a tradition that is unfamiliar to us, our first step must always be *silent waiting.*

a. Silent waiting

This disposition is necessary because 'the religious other' is likely to be very different from what we have known

hitherto. What we see on the surface of a religious practice tells us very little about the real transactions that are taking place on the inside of people in particular settings. Therefore we need to learn to be attentive to what the spiritual practice induces in people. For example, what is happening on the interior of the Jew as he or she rehearses the hisotry of the chosen people in prayers and singing ? When Christians speak of bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ, what do they intend by the words they use ? When Buddhists bow before a statue that depicts the fearlessness of the Buddha, what is being induced in the Buddhist as he or she performs that gesture ? Because we are so unacquainted with the spiritual practices of the other there is an obligation to wait silently, without prejudging, so that we may eventually gain some insight into what is being enacted through the various ritual gestures and religious practices that religious people perform.

b. welcome guest

As we cease to prejudge others - calling them idolaters or *naive* God-worshippers, for example - we will be allowed into the sacred space of others as guest. Guests come closer to the heart of others; they cease to be merely observers. They come to see how it is that the basic vision of a tradition is reproduced through the symbolic form of ritual and practice - how Passover recalls for Jews the liberating action of God, for now as well as the past; or how the distribution of *prasad* at the Hindu Temple after *arti* binds together the love of God and the devotion of the worshipper. We will taste - sometimes literally - this from the inside. We will come to see the 'holy ground' of 'the religious other'. And symbolic practice not only reproduces, as it were, the significance of the past, but it awakens us to the truth once glimpsed in the past as relevant for the present. As someone said of the Christian Christmas, it is celebrated because it activates the reminder that God

is continually coming to us; the coming once at Christmas and the continual coming reinforce each other as part of the meaning of the particular religious celebration.

c. shared experience

It may be that in time we will move further from observer to guest to shared experience. In other words, we may come to be affected by what we discover on others' sacred ground. Perhaps we may even incorporate something of that discovery into our own tradition, to reshape it in the light of new encounters. For example, in Christian thought now there is a huge discussion going on about how to translate or 'inculturate' (to use the technical term) the Christian message in cultural forms other than the Western form. So on a recent visit to India, I witnessed many Christian groups who celebrate their basic religious vision through the cultural forms of Indian holiness - the priest wearing the robes of the Hindu *sannyasi*, and offering the lamp of fire as part of Eucharistic worship. The Christian framework is clear, but the cultural form has been adapted. Again, I suspect that if we sat long enough in Jain temples, many of us might recover some of the respect for the animal and non-animate creation, so desperately needed today, and which our involvement with the exploitative economic expansion of western politics over the last 200 years has devalued.

I am not suggesting here that people of different religious commitments experience the same experience in their spiritual practices - I do not think they do. But there is sufficient 'family resemblance' between them to be able to absorb aspects of traditions which are not inimical to one's own.

2. Ethical

Turning now to the second loop of my diagram - the Ethical - I suspect that it is here that people from different traditions

will find it easiest to discover common ground. All religions promote behavioural change in the light of basic intuitive visions, and the needs of the world are so painfully acute that there seems enough for the Interfaith Movement to attend to for the time being. But I think there is also a 3-fold spiralling movement here that we need to explore.

a. building trust

A first step between peoples of different traditions would be to rediscover, or even forge for the first time, a foundational attitude of trust. Without trust then religious peoples will scarcely learn to cooperate at all. Solving problems between alienated factions is at root a matter of rebuilding trust. But of course there is a long record of centuries of mistrust to overcome. Trust, therefore, will be directed initially at overcoming the stereotypes religions have of one another. Some examples are : Christians worship three Gods; Hindus worship wood and stone; Sikhs are warriors at heart, Buddhists are not bothered about the world; Muslims like to have holy wars, and so on. There is a long list. Someone once said to me that the things that religious people complain about in other religious people are generally fictitious. If that is so it is urgent that we should learn basic trust between peoples, between different versions of what it means to be human.

b. common concerns

As we learn basic trust, we come to share some common concerns, and we learn cooperation for the sake of building a better world. Of course we join with anyone to do this. But it may be that cooperation between the religions could have a striking impact in certain areas because the concerns themselves reveal the strong ties between religion, race, and culture. Some obvious examples are racism, refugees, discrimination in housing and jobs. On a bigger scale, if the religions learned to overcome their basic mistrust then some

of the roots of war stand a chance of being dissolved. Most wars have religious antagonism at their roots.

To visit government ministers as a multi-faith delegation makes a difference. In the United Kingdom the recently established Inner Cities Religious Council, which is a government-sponsored body trying to elicit cooperation from the faith-communities of Britain for the sake of reversing the deprivation of many of our inner city areas, provides a platform for interfaith cooperation. Opportunities for cooperation at many levels abound. At a global level, bodies like the UN are wanting to consult religious opinions on disputes around the world. It would be a shame, to say the least, if the religions failed to cooperate with one another because they could not rise above their centuries of mistrust.

c. shared values

As religions learn to cooperate they will be faced with questions about the shape of their ethical values, and particularly whether there is scope for developing a sense of 'shared values'. Values vary of course, markedly both within traditions and also between traditions. Therefore, the discovery of 'shared values' will not be a necessary or automatic discovery. But the question whether there is some core of values shared between the traditions is a real one. The 1993 conferences at Bangalore and Chicago, commemorating the first World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago, put forward an initial move in this direction in a document signed by religious leaders from many traditions around the world, entitled, *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic.* Let me read you a short extract :

> "We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.
>
> We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to

be lived in heart and action...
We affirm there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families, communities, races, nations and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behaviour which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the conditions for a sustainable world order."

The *Declaration* then went on to speak about the interdependent nature of our world, and about commitment to at least four directives - non-violence and respect for life; solidarity and a just economic order; tolerance and a life of truthfulness; equal rights and partnership between men and women.

But there are problems in the language of shared values. Traditions might use the same word, but does it have the same meaning across the religious boundaries ? Does Buddhist compassion, Muslim mercy, and Sikh love mean the same thing ? In one sense 'no', because ethical values derive their significance from the religious framework of which they are a part. But in another sense 'yes'. As one Christian theologian has put it : 'It might be better to see the different faiths, not as in radical opposition but as having a range of agreed values, but varying ways of interpreting them in the light of a developing understanding of the world.'

The notion of a global ethic has problems, but we have to start somewhere. As a starting-point, it is a noble ideal. If all of us allowed such an ideal to interact with our own tradition perhaps our ethical sense would be enlivened in new ways. There is enough in the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic,* however, for us to pursue well into the next century. For a start, it would encourage us not to compare the best in one's own tradition with the worst in others. And, secondly, it would spur us on to finding ways in which ethical traditions can interact with the corporate structures of our globe - the

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places of financial decision-making and political strategy. The ethics of most traditions are geared to individual responses to life or to ambulance responses to tragedy. The 19th and 20th century sociological awareness that we are makers of destiny and not simply victims of it has immense ethical challenges - which we now need to face together. Muslim economic decisions in Saudi Arabia and political decisions in the Christian United States affect the lives of millions around the globe. A self-critical approach to 'shared values' could make an immense difference to the future well-being of the earth itself. This is hugely idealistic. But religions now have an obligation to be idealistic.

3. Theological/Philosophical

I have called the third loop of my diagram the 'theological/philosophical', and I use that conflation because not all religions acknowledge the reality of the transcendent in theistic terms. It needs to be acknowledged that this third area of the journey for the Interfaith Movement is probably the most intractable. We might learn to value the experience of 'the religious other'; we might learn to cooperate for a better world; but the interpreting mind also needs to be involved in our interreligious relationships, and the challenges at this level are threatening for many people. It is threatening because while the other areas have the potential to bring people together, the intellectual and belief structures of the communities of faith seem to keep them firmly apart. There are those who are content simply to say that the traditions are incommensurate at these levels. But it seems to me that a religious interpretation of human experience cannot avoid asking the questions about the relationship between the religions at the theological/philosophical levels.

a. mutual comprehension

The first step in this dimension is towards mutual

comprehension : straining to hear what others are saying and intend by the concepts, explanations, word-pictures and symbols that they use. In this there will be the need to clear away past misunderstandings. Some examples of this include : realising that 'the Law' for Jews means something to them which Christians and others have consistently misconstrued; or, the 'Son of God' language of Christians about Jesus is easily misconstrued by outsiders; or, the Hindu term, *satcitananda* - what does it mean for Hindus ? Further, there is need to recognise that religions change and develop, So it is not quite right to say that Christians believe this about 'X', or Sikhs believe that about 'Y'. What the notion of 'God' is in Christianity has become pluriform in our day. Some Jews are busy reinterpreting their commitment of God in the light of the holocaust. Some Muslims are beginning to face scriptural criticism of the Qur'an. Our mutual comprehension, it seems, will be to some extent on a moving screen.

b. identity amid identities

Should we achieve a degree of mutual comprehension we will then be better placed to accept our own particular identity as one identity among many. (Remember I am speaking of this as a recognition from those who are religiously committed, not simply as a cultural fact). We may come to see that all traditions offer what one Christian theologian has called a limitlessly better possibility in life than the one which pertains at present. Each tradition may use a different language to express this, and perhaps the very experience of this better possibility will be different - Buddhist enlightenment is not Christian salvation, or Hindu liberation, or whatever. But we will accept that what is happening within and through the different communities of faith as authentic, as real, as true. So we notice, again, a family resemblance between the traditions, but one which does not require us

to mix them up or prejudge them according to our own categories. What can help here is the acceptance that religious affirmations at the theological/philosophical level are tangential. That is to say, the language of religious belief points to the truth, it does not describe the truth in some simple or straightforward way. Of course, to say that leads us to the fascinating questions of whether religious truths can be shared truths in the future.

c. shared truth

So we come to the third phase of my third loop of the diagram : is 'shared truth' a meaningful notion in any sense ? At one level, it is correct to say that the traditions are incommensurable in that they use their different languages and symbols, art forms and rituals,etc., to bring about change in spiritual perceptions and advance in religious awareness. But many of us are not content to let the matter rest there. If 'my' tradition is true, what about the truth of others ? Does it mean that I should think of *them* as lying in outer darkness, wholly in error or inspired by demonic forces ? Those in the Interfaith Movement believe this view to be profoundly mistaken. Basically it cuts across the point about accepting the validity of the other in their particular authenticity or uniqueness. It also goes against the grain of most traditions which recognises the arrogance in the stand that only 'my' tradition can be of the truth. At their best the traditions have always recognised the existence of holiness and wisdom in other forms and guises. But is this sufficient ?

At a recent conference, the Buddhist speaker said that his tradition valued holy people and exemplars from other traditions. But on further investigation it turned out that he held his own tradition to have just that little bit better edge as a more authentic path of religious truth. Similarly, Muslims with their categorisation of Jews and Christians as

'people of the book', and Christians with their attitude that other ways are a 'preparation for the gospel', retain their own traditions as somehow providing the measure of religious truth everywhere. Nearly always we reserve a little corner in the mind for retaining the eventual superiority of one's own tradition.

The 1993 centenary conference of the Parliament of the World's Religions at Bangalore discussed two possibilities in the way forward. The first group, influenced mainly by a Buddhist perspective, said that we must commit ourselves to a *process* of mutual dialogue and exchange, a process that will result in the mutual transformation of all of us. Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and so on, will be different in the future - but self-consciously different as a result of this commitment to one another in dialogue. Our changing identity will be the result of a committed relationship with 'the religious other' But there is no need to postulate some supposed common ground behind the different concrete traditions. The future lies in the commitment to the process of mutual transformation, which the interfaith movement stimulates.

Second group did want to affirm something about a common ground, though they were careful about the language they used. We can, and must, postulate an ultimate reality which animates the traditions. There cannot be a plurality of religious ultimates, which is what the first view gives you. But we won't say that is a common essence of religion or that a common experience lies behind the traditions. But we can say that there is one transcendent reality which is glimpsed through varying lenses, each culturally limited, each distinctive. The 'Gods' (of theistic belief) or the 'no-Gods' (of trans-theistic belief) are the products of the interaction between that unknown hidden reality and the experienced religious life of different

communities. All traditions at this point make a theological/philosophical distinction between ultimate-reality-in-itself and ultimate-reality-as-filtered-through -cultural-and-historical-lenses. That still leaves scope for plenty of disagreement and argument about all kinds of assumptions : for example, whether human beings are governed by reincarnation or a single life; whether the universe was created or exists eternally. Mostly we never know the answers to these questions, but they remain fascinating in their own right, and we can dispute about them, even if the religious reality of 'salvation' or 'liberation' is not dependent on answering them.

Bangalore did not choose between these two views, and perhaps this was wise, given our state of knowledge and interaction to date. Anyway there are many more views around than these two broadly based ones, and it is in the nature of change that more will emerge. For the moment, we are bound together in the one world we all share. That means that, at the least, we should become committed to a self-conscious process of mutual transformation as a result of encounter, irrespective of whether we wish to affirm the additional hypothesis of one ultimate transcendent reality animating all the traditions. Where this process will lead will be for the future to decide. As it is, the possibilities of a new era in religious understanding are immense.

So there is my map of what I think the twenty-first century holds in store for the Interfaith Movement. The ramifications extend to every area of religious life - spiritual, ethical and theological/philosophical. My feeling and observation is that the encounters have begun at many levels - in neighbourhoods, in conferences, through friendships, through marriages, in bus queues, at places of work. In the future we shall not live out of one tradition alone; to do so

will be insufficient for the one plural world which we are coming to inhabit. There is much fear about the future. Across the globe, communities are entrenching, and fundamentalisms of all kinds are emerging. In order to pave the way for a different future we need to involve ourselves in the three dimensions of the religious life, valuing 'the religious other' as inextricably part of my own identity. There are the riches of **varied spiritualities** to savour; there is the task of building together a better world based on **shared ethical principles;** there is the need to explore philosophical and theological understanding, so that we are not overcome by the vertigo of it all. The agenda is there. Let us address it *together.*

A version of this lecture was first given at the World Goodwill Seminar in London on 13 November 1993.

Sikh-Christian Dialogue

W. Owen Cole, John Parry, and Piara Singh Sambhi

Sikhism is an ethically monotheistic religion which was first preached in India by a Punjabi mystic and visionary named Guru Nanak (1469-1539). He was succeeded by nine other human Gurus (spiritual preceptors) who continued his work. Considerable emphasis is placed upon divine grace, obedience to God's will *(hukum)*, the service of fellow human beings *(seva)*, their equality regardless of class or caste, race and gender, and on social justice. The Sikh scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which contains the poetical revelations which were given to the Gurus, is the focus of worship and most other religious ceremonies. However, it is not the object of worship.

1. Dialogue between Sikhs and Christians at a formal level is something which has happened only rarely. There are several reasons for this. First, the two religions did not really meet until the mid-nineteenth century. Secondly, the encounter, when it did eventually take place, was between Christians who entered the Punjab as missionaries seeking to convert rather than learn about the Sikh faith. On the Sikh side the natural defensiveness which this provoked, coming as it did at the end of prolonged exposure to Muslim evangelism, was accompanied also by a basic belief that all ethically monotheistic religions are authentic. In this respect, the discovery of Christianity posed few theological problems for Sikhs.

2. Christianity emerged in a Jewish context, against the background of Israel's faith and religious heritage. Jesus is understood by Christians as the fulfilment of ancient hopes, and as the inauguration of a fresh stage of God's work in the world - yet in continuity with the parent tradition. In the Indian subcontinent Sikhism emerged in the sixteenth century against the background of the age-old culture as a faith which is seen by its adherents as a new and distinct revelation. This is now contained in the Sikh scriptures, *the Guru Granth Sahib* and the *Dasam Granth.*

Historically, however, the story of the two religions with regard to the cultures in which they grew up differs considerably. Christianity was both rejected by and rejected Judaism and went on to establish itself in the world of Greek philosophy which affected its theology. Eventually it became the dominant religion of the western world with consequences which have sometimes been disastrous for its Jewish parent. Sikhism, on the other hand, remained within India and essentially in its regional homeland, the Punjab. Consequently it continues to be rooted in the language and culture of that area whereas Christianity's Jewishness became much less easy to discern, so much so that one may actually encounter Christians who do not know that Jesus was a Jew. A further contrast is perhaps most clearly seen in the scriptures. Those of Christianity were written in Greek, though it was not the language of Jesus and the Apostles. The *Guru Granth Sahib* and *Dasam Granth* are written in the script used for writing Punjabi. The language bears a close resemblance to modern Punjabi though Persian, Sanskrit and Hindi are also present.

3. Christianity, as a missionary religion, which Sikhism is not, in the old sense, may be said to have had a part in shaping Western perceptions of Sikhism. The soldier-administrators who first became aware of it tended to regard it as a Hindu sect somewhat influenced by Islam.

From this may have come the popular but erroneous description of Sikhism as a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. As Christians they respected the monotheistic and ethical nature of Sikhism and the loyalty and trustworthiness of the Sikhs themselves. Some of the ablest Sikh scholars were educated in Christian colleges with the result that they often expressed the teachings of Sikhism through the Christian concepts which they had acquired. Only now are Sikhs reconsidering its conceptual framework and Christians and western scholars rethinking their understanding of the Sikh faith.

4. A consequence of this reappraisal has been the realisation that Christians have often held and transmitted distorted views of other faiths. Judaism has been summed up as legalistic, Islam as cruel or fanatical, Hinduism as polytheistic. Sikhism has suffered from being erroneously described as a militant form of Hinduism. Media misrepresentations of events in Punajb in recent years have served to endorse this far from correct image. (In 1992 Amnesty published a report which was severely critical of the Indian Government's disregard for Sikh human rights).

5. The first formal meeting of Sikhs and Christians took place at Batala in the Punjab in October 1963. The need for Sikhs and Christians to enter into dialogue at the present time is prompted by the movement of Sikhs to most of those countries which were once ruled by the British or are English-speaking and to the United Kingdom itself. In many parts of the world Sikhs and Christians are neighbours. Those who would enter into such dialogue should recognise that Sikhs have their own distinctive world view, religious beliefs and practices. Those who would convert Sikhs should be aware of these so that they may be respectful of their full humanity as they seek to awaken them to Christ. Other Christians might believe that knowledge of these would enhance their own faith, providing them with fresh insights

into the ways that people respond to the call of God and the ways in which God speaks to humankind.

6. The number of Sikhs world-wide is slightly larger than the Jewish population (about 16 million). Their distinctive beliefs about the nature of God, woman, grace and human nature, in particular, present areas for creative discussion with people of other faiths.

7. There are many areas in the story of Sikhism with which Christianity will feel an affinity. The most important are :

a) *The emphasis on history.* Sikhism is firmly anchored in history and takes history seriously, Its Gurus were historical figures, living between 1469 and 1708 CE. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were many martyrs as the religion faced almost incessant persecution. They are remembered frequently as inspirational figures. Many Sikh places of worship *(gurdwaras)* are built on sites of historical significance. Sikhs believe that history has a goal and purpose.

b) *Criticism of formal religion.* The Gurus, especially the first, Guru Nanak, who provided a model for his successors, were severe critics of formal, outward and nominal religion. They spoke of the inward nature of spirituality and a need for personal renewal. (Interestingly, the process of institutionalisation saw developments, *as also some accretions* in Sikhism, as in Christianity, which appear to contradict the emphasis of the earliest days of the movement.)

c) *Spritítual revival.* Sikhs believe that the Gurus were men divinely inspired to preach the Word *(shabad)* of God to an age which had forgotten, no longer knew, or was neglecting the Truth. They were initiators of a spiritual revival.

d) *Grace.* The *Guru Granth Sahib* abounds in references to grace. Scope is given for human effort which is deemed to be a moral necessity but spiritual regeneration depends solely on the grace of God.

e) *The Scriptures.* The teachings which were revealed to the Gurus are embodied in the *Guru Granth Sahib* which is respected as the Word of God. This is seen both in the way that Sikhs study it and submit themselves to its teachings but also in the manner that they treat it physically, according it ceremonial aura which resembles that given to Mughal emperors.

f) *Sikhism is a community religion.* Attendance at corporate worship is a strongly encouraged practice. There is no such thing as a solitary Sikh. An important teaching is that spiritual growth is developed in the company of saintly people. The name given to the community is 'Panth'. A local congregation is called a 'Sangat'. In 1699 the Tenth Guru created the Khalsa, a new 'family' of initiated Sikhs bound by a strong code of spiritual and moral conduct. Sometimes the *Khalsa* has been interpreted in narrow, exclusive terms but Sikhs will also use the expression inclusively to refer to all ethical monotheists whatever their religion.

g) *Seva,* the unrelenting service of humanity, is a primary obligation upon Sikhs. As God's grace is unceasingly poured out on everyone, so those who are conscious of having received it must be gracious in their response to anyone in need.

h) *Worship is egalitarian.* Any believer capable of conducting it may do so, man or woman. There are no priests or ministers though sometimes a *granthi* will be employed to read the scriptures during the day, teach and care for the *Gurdwara.*

i) *God is beyond categories of gender* - but is personal in the sense that prayers and worship may be offered to, and help and guidance received from, God with whom a personal relationship is possible.

8 Sikhs have always expressed a concern about aspects of religion which distort or hide the truth as they understand it. Within Christianity they might point to the following :

- a priesthood is alone capable of administering certain sacraments, and with it the division into lay and ordained members of the church. For them, this fractures the unity of humanity which is based on the unity of God as much as divisions of gender, race, or even religion, do. Sikhs would not appreciate the concept of 'the priesthood of all believers' which many Protestant Christians cherish. 'Ministry of all believers' is a phrase they might prefer.
- the assumption on the part of some Christians that the ordained ministry should not be fully open to women.
- a belief in miracles which somehow suggests that God needs to keep interfering in creation which, for Sikhs, is constantly subject to the divine *hukum* (command or will).
- the need for salvation and the effectiveness of one man in achieving this. 'Regeneration' is a term Sikhs would prefer. This is effected through grace.
- the belief that God becomes incarnate other than through the spirit of God being infused into all humankind.
- the very existence of Sikh spirituality is a challenge to those who consider this something which is possible only through the Holy Spirit within the *ecclesia.*

- the Trinity, which seems a denial of monotheism.
- the equation of Christianity with European culture. This has been an important part of the Sikh experience.
- the interpretation of Heilsgeschichte (salvation history). How does the coming of the Kingdom, which Christians talk about, relate to the Sikh statement '*Raj karega Khalsa*' (the Khalsa shall rule) ? In other words, what is the purpose and destiny of history ?

9 There is a need to take seriously and consider carefully all that has been written so far in this brief statement. It will be seen that many apparent differences which exist between Sikhs and Christians may be the result of bad explanations of Christian belief and poor examples of Christian conduct leading to misunderstandings. The most glaring example may be the concept of God and especially the Trinity which can easily seem to be thinly veiled polytheism - and may be for many Ghristians.

10 Sikh-Christian dialogue has a very short history and there are many issues which merit attention. Some aspects which might then be explored are :

- the meaning of vicarious suffering, especially with regard to Guru Tegh Bahadur and other Sikh martyrs.
- human-nature, the need for enlightenment and/or redemption.
- the Incarnation : Is God manifested in a God-filled humanity, the *Panth*, or a God-filled individual, Jesus ?
- a recognition that although Christians seem to have respected the ethical monotheism of Sikhs when they encountered it in India, there are still some Christians who fail to recognize and value Sikhism as an independent religion in its own right.

- the concept of the Word, referred to as *Logos* and *Shabad* by the respective religions.
- the nature of true discipleship, especially in terms of the need to obey God's will.
- the spirituality of the two religions particularly as it is manifested in the lives of individuals as well as in the communities of faith.
- the nature of God's grace which is a central tenet of both faiths.

11 Many Christians who have found themselves in contact with the Sikh community acknowledge that their faith has been enriched, challenged and strengthened. The enrichment has come through sharing spiritual insights. The challenge has been the result of addressing the deep-searching questions which have been asked by their partners in dialogue. Faith has been strengthened because dialogue demands the clear presentation which can only be brought about through a deepening in one's understanding of the Gospel.

Punjabi Pioneers in California

Mohinder Singh

Strong sense of Punjabi identity created by the Punjabi pioneers in California got its first major shock with the partition of India in 1947. Punjabi Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, who had been living as members of an extended family sharing their joys and sufferings in an alien land, suddenly found themselves divided as Indians and Pakistanis because of division of their country. Recent political developments in Indian Punjab created a further split among the Punjabi diaspora in California and the historic Sikh Temple of Stockton is no longer a popular rendezvous of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh Punjabis. Perhaps the only Gurdwara in the world where visitors sat on chairs and ate *Prasad* in plates with spoons and paper napkins provided by the mangement, quickly fell in line with other Gurdwaras as a result of management passing under the control of pro-Khalistani elements.

Under the changed circumstances focus has shifted from the common Punjabi identity to the reconstruction of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh identities. Establishment of chairs of Hindu and Sikh studies in the Canadian and American Universities has provided further fillip to this process of reconstruction of communal identities. It was during my participation in one of the conferences organised by the newly established chair of Sikh Studies at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor that I came across an interesting study by Prof. Karen Leonard – *Making Ethnic Choices, California's Punjabi Mexican Americans*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia

1992. Since Prof. Leonard's paper attracted considerable scholarly attention I thought of going deeper into the issues which have resulted into loss of identity among the second generation of Punjabis born out of the wedlock of pioneer Punjabis and Mexican women. Karen Leonard, who is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine, was considerate enough to introduce me to her major project and some of her friends who formed subject of her scholarly studies.

A careful perusal of the findings of Prof. Leonard shows that the pioneer Punjabis who decided to make the Imperial Valley their home faced many difficulties created by the host communities and the federal laws, which did not allow them to bring their wives or own any lands. Known as they are for their spirit of adventure and enterprise these Punjabi pioneers were not discouraged and soon overcame the legal hurdles first by marrying Mexican women, whom they found culturally and ethnically more compatible than the Anglos, and later owning the lands through proxy either in the name of their Mexican wives or children. How quickly the Punjabis had adopted themselves to their new home - a mini Punjab - is evident from the description of the valley in their letters to relatives back home. Karen thus quotes Puna Singh, who moved to northern California in 1924.

> "... On arriving in the Sacramento Valley, one could not help but be reminded of the Punjab. Fertile fields stretched across the flat valley to the foothills lying far in the distance. Most of the jobs available were agricultural and I found many Punjabis already working throughout the area....." (p.34).

She quotes another Punjabi pioneer who wrote about this new "Land of Five Rivers" and found striking similarities between the two :

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She quotes another Punjabi pioneer who wrote about this new "Land of Five Rivers" and found striking similarities between the two :

> "In my story the 'Land of Five Rivers' was Sacramento Valley. The river Sutlej was Feather River. The rest of the four rivers – American, Bear, Yuba and Sacramento. My Bhakra (Dam), the Oroville Dam. My Govind Sagar, the Oroville Lake. The city of Anandpur Sahib, the nearby town of Paradise. The Shivaliks, the Sierra foothills. There was Naina Devi, our Mount Shasta. And yes, the Jawalamukhi, the Lassen Volcanic Park. Obviously, I was carried away by my imagination. Yet, the reality was not left far behind. The water, like the water in the Punjab, had the same urge to run downward. The distant hills had the same charm. The fire in Jawalamukhi and in the Lassen Volcano has the same way to burn things." (p. 35)

While the Punjabi pioneers were mainly responsible for converting the desert along the Mexican border east of San Diego into a fertile valley, the host community did not accept them as welcome members of the society. Because of their own cultural complexes and Punjabi life styles these men lived in groups, cooked together, washed their laundary in public the way they were doing in Punjab and invited ridicule from the locals. However they took consolation that they were not alone to suffer discrimination since the Chinese and the Japanese were also facing similar opposition and ridicule from the local Anglos and Americans. One reason for the Punjabis being disliked was that they were prepared to accept much lower wages and by living in groups in most frugal manner and still save and send money back home. This attitude of the Punjabis and also that of the Chinese and Japanese created hostility among the local white labour who generally demanded much higher wages.

Karen's study shows that there were very few women in the imperial valley in the early years. On the basis of census

she mentions that there were 8900 males compared to 4691 females. Among the females there was not a single Punjabi woman while among 88 Chinese there were only two women. After making some money through hard work men thought of settling and started looking for brides. While the Swiss got "mail order brides" the Japanese got "picture brides". Arrival of the first Japanese woman is thus described by Karen :

"When the talk got around that Mr. Masanori Moriyama, the father of melon growers decided to take a wife from his native land after he made a fortune, the bachelors became excited. Because in those days there was not a single married man, so it was all bachelors' households.

"Then the day came for Mr. Moriyama's bride to arrive. About 200 farmers who heard this abandoned their spades and hoes and rushed to the station and waited anxiously for the train to arrive. She was the first Japanese woman they would see since they came to America, so it was no wonder the expression in their eyes changed. Finally the train arrived, and the bride got off the train. The groom, who had been waiting hurriedly, put his new bride on the buggy; sitting on the driver's seat he whipped the horse once, and the horse started trotting. At that moment a cry of "banzai" rose. Both the horse and the driver were surprised by the roar and speeded the pace. The delirious crowd did not wake up from their dreams easily, and they ran after the buggy." (pp 40-41).

Being unable to bring their wives from India because of legal restrictions, Punjabis formed relationships with local women and those who wanted stable life started marrying. Because of strong anti-Punjabi bias among the Anglos, these Punjabi pioneers turned to Mexican women whom they found culturally and ethinically more compatible. But what really disturbed the Punjabi pioneers was the concept of courtship, romantic love and extra-marital affairs and Mexican women's

right to divorce. Equally shocking was the fact that at lower socio-economic levels many Mexican men and women entered into free unions without civil or religious marriages. The marital histories of the Mexican and Mexican-American women who married Punjabis often featured multiple marriages or sequential marriages, producing children by several husbands, a concept totally alien to the Punjabi culture. Mola Singh, a Punjabi pioneer, thus describes this novel experience in the new homeland :

> "In this country, it's a different class of people. You can't force love here, women go where they want to, even if they're married, even with three or four kids..... A woman can have four husbands, a man can have two or three women. What you gonna do, that's the way with love....." (p. 105)

Poor Mola Singh soon lost his second Hispanic wife also this time during an evening at drinking party in his home :

> "Then in 1934 or 1936, this Maria went away. She went to a man who worked for me, Galindo. We were having a big party, with my cousin Lalu (the single one, my cousin brother who farmed with me), and Buta Singh and his wife, and Mola Singh and Julia, and my father. It was big party, we all drank. And that Mexican boy..... I wanted someone to make food, so I called Maria to get him to come in the kitchen to make food. She said, "Yes, he'll come, if I call him." And he did come, he made *roti* and other things. We ate, and we Hindu men all watched the lovers. We saw how they looked at each other. We all knew.
>
> Mola said, "You know what she's doing, I won't let mine do that."
>
> I asked her, "Do you love him more ?"

> She said, "Yes, I love him more." So I hit her, and I kicked them both out, they went to Mexico." (pp 105-06)

In spite of having quickly lost two wives due to divorce, Mola Singh remained steadfast in his support of Western concept of romantic love. Again it is Mola Singh's account that shows how Punjabi men thought of love. According to Karen he learnt the meaning of love in the United States during an affair with an elderly white woman in the Imperial Valley and described how he had gone in love. In his personal life Mola Singh became supporter of the idea of love between men and women, initially based on sexual attraction as the best basis for a relationship.

However, majority of Punjabis did not share Mola Singh's views and preferred to stay stable in their married lives and disliked the idea of extra-marital loyalties. Typical of Punjabi men's jealous possession over land and women some of them even murdered their wives when they became doubtful of their marital fidelity and in certain cases murdered the men suspected of having affairs with their wives. Some men divorced their wives because "they went out shopping in the town, bought and used make up and went dancing," which was alien to the Punjabi male temperament. Mexican women did not like their Punjabi husbands' habits of sending money home, to the Sikh Temple in Stockton and the Ghader party. Some Maxican wives complained of being forced to cook for all their husband's friends and washing their clothes. When one woman getting fed up with this threatened, "Either he goes or I go", the man quickly moved to a separate home to avoid losing his wife. One Punjabi put up an interesting notice in a local newspaper :

> "To whom It May Concern : [She] Having left my bed and board, I am no longer responsible for the debts of my wife, Maria Juarez Singh."

Notwithstanding above tensions most Punjabi men lived happily with their Mexican wives, produced children and shared common social and material culture. While none of the Mexican wives learnt Punjabi and their Punjabi husbands could not master Spanish still they could manage the daily routine very well. During a recent visit to my daughter in California I found an interesting working arrangement with their Mexican baby-sitter. While my daughter talked to her in English, her mother-in-law spoke Punjabi-both languages being alien to the Mexian mind. On finding as to how they communicated I noticed it was the language of signs and commonsense that helped carry on the routine.

However, it were the second generation of mixed Punjabis born out of the wedlock of Punjabi men and Hispanic women who faced peculiar difficulties because of their bi-ethnic identity. Since invariably all the early Sikhs married Mexian women, their children were raised not strictly in the Sikh tradition. While the men retained their faith in Sikhism they allowed their Mexican wives to follow Christianity. However, on every Sunday they all visited the Sikh Temple in Stockton, which was the first Gurdwara in the Imperial Valley, established in 1912. It were not only the Sikhs and their Mexican wives and children but also other Punjabis both Hindus and Muslims who visited the Gurdwara every Sunday. That was perhaps one reason that the Sikh Temple of Stockton became a major centre of Indian nationalist activities and headquarters of the revolutionary Ghadar Party. Again there was no segregation of men and women. To most of the second generation kids Stockton Gurdwara was where one met "Other Hindu kids". Another woman described, "The Stockton temple that is where we met the Khan kids every year, coming from Phoenix to pick peaches".

Prof. Leonard thus describes the ups and downs of the historic Sikh Temple.

"'At the Stockton Sikh Temple, political struggles over temple management were fierce in the late 1940s, with new leaders institutionalizing social and specifically Sikh religious reforms. Permission was secured from Amritsar in the Punjab to use chairs instead of sitting on the floor, and *prasad* (consecrated food) was served on paper plates with spoons and paper napkins. Turbans and beards, discarded by most attenders, became an issue when the first clean-shaven temple secretary, Balwant Singh Brar from Yuba City, was elected in the 1940s. The second clean-shaven secretary was Nika Singh Gill (1947-1948). Both leaders were younger than most of the early pioneers... Gill led to crusade to admit Dalip Singh Saund and his Anglo wife to temple membership (and Dr. J.N. Sharma and his English wife)". (p. 167)

It was the partition of India in 1947 which alienated the Punjabi Muslims and recently the developments in Punjab which have weaned the Punjabi Hindus away from the Sikh Temple in Stockton. Quickly falling in line with revivalist movement in Punjab, the Punjabi Sikhs in California, particularly those in Stockton also said goodbye to their old traditions of composite Punjabi culture and turned the historic Sikh Temple of Stockton into a rendezvous of Khalistani supporters. Didar Singh Bains, a second generation Sikh who moved from El Centro to Yuba City and made a fortune from his 6000 acres of orchards, took control of the Sikh Temple in Stockton.Earlier a clean-shaven and married to a woman of Punjabi-Mexican origin, Bains became an *Amritdhari* in 1981 and is one of the Trustees of the Sikh Foundation of U.S.A. While most Sikhs celebrated their new found identity Mola Singh is perhaps the only survivor among the Punjabi pioneers who could not reconcile to this change :

"About our churches here, everybody went to the Stockton once - Hindu, Muslim, everybody went. Afterward, these days now, I don't know what they're doing.
It belonged to everybody, the public, anybody could go. One thing I don't like, not for that new group, not everybody can go.

Before, the Hindu men married women here. You know, everybody married white women, everybody married Mexican women, everybody went to church. And our people, everybody went and sat on chairs. That was before, not now ....."

World University of Sikhism

The idea of WORLD UNIVERSITY OF SIKHISM has been stirring in the minds of the Sikh people over the last few decades and has been deliberated upon at different levels from time to time. It got enthusiastic response from eminent scholars from India and abroad who participated in the International Seminar on Sikhism and Inter Religious Dialogue organised from January 4-6, 1992 at New Delhi by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation (India).

The move envisages the establishment of a centre of higher learning of research with inter-disciplinary approach — an aspect that has so far remained neglected by traditional interpretations of Sikhism at the existing centres of Sikh studies both in India and abroad.

There will be a number of areas of research. The first relates to the unprecedented challenges before the Sikh society arising out of its self-consciousness about its distinct identity; the existential situation of the Sikh people has brought them face to face with new realities of life – a situation which requires new intellectual cognition. Secondly, the challenges of modern civilization have to be taken into reckoning in any futuristic perspective on Sikh religion and society. In this connection, the role of Sikh religion, in particular, in shaping the 21st century society and civilization would receive special attention of the

University. Thirdly, the Sikhs, who are fast becoming an international community with significant presence in different parts of the globe, are, today, encountering as district groups, challenges of the surrounding faiths and cultures; this inter-action also requires continual ideational input to enable the Sikhs in different countries to have creative interface with other communities and to adjust with them while preserving their own cultural moorings. The phenomenon of Sikh diaspora would be a significant area of attention. Fourthly, the role and significance of Sikh religion in the ongoing inter-religious dialogue on global level would be another field of research that will be taken up by the University.

The Sikh community is, today, at the cross-roads of its history, its destiny, faced with external and internal challenges of unprecedented nature and magnitude. What is needed is a new ideological perspective, through intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue, for the future of Sikhism and the Sikh society as well as for the future role of Sikh religion in shaping the 21st century society.

With the collapse of the classical communist world-view, a new world-view is emerging in which the spirit would be playing a vital role. Sikhism, being essentially a religion of spirit, is destined to make its historic contribution in evolving the new world-view.

The proposed University would address itself to such basic issues on ideational level; this is how this University would, it is hoped, be not just another centre of higher learning.

As regards the pattern of the University, it would be closer to the concept of a residential University. There will be a number of departments for research and interpretation by whole-time Faculty members and scholars, besides fixed-tenure fellowships, in the domains of Sikh philosophy; Sikh ethics and values; Sikh music; Sikh history and traditions; Sikh art and literature, and Sikh praxis. Visiting Professorships will also be arranged by the University. The Sikh Scripture and other sacred writings will be got translated into major languages of the world.

The project, under the auspices of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust, has been taken in hand as a part of the celebrations, in 1999, of the 300th anniversary of the creation of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh.

Jagdev Singh Jassowal
President
Guru Gobind Singh
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SIKHISM TODAY : THE CRISIS WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Contemporary Sikhism is passing through an unprecedented crisis. The Sikh intelligentsia is either unaware of or indifferent to the uneasy questions thrown up by this situation, contends Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (the author of the seminal book THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SIKH DOCTRINE - 1983) in this book : SIKHISM TODAY : THE CRISIS WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

He has raised some very pertinent questions here. Has Sikhism reached an *impasse* where it requires an internal reformation for its survival and progress, *a la* the protestant reformation that brought Christianity out of the middle ages into the modern times ? Do Sikhism and contemporary Sikh community have a common destiny in the sense that the survival and progress of the one depends upon the other ? Or do they have distinct destinies ? If so, what is the relationship between the two ? In other words, what is the nature of the existing relationship between the universal in Sikhism and its historical determination in the form of the Sikh community as it has developed since 1699, in particular ? Is the universal in Sikhism exhausted in its one concrete historical determination ? Is the self-development of the universal in Sikhism coming to an end before its fullest expression ? Or will this self-developing logos have further expressions in other historical determinations ? Will Sikhism provide a living ideology that could answer to the cultural, social and political concerns of the Sikhs arising out of their ethno-social, and ethno-political development as an *ethnos* in interaction with the surrounding realities. ? How are these concerns arising out of the given spatio-temporal context, going to have orientating influences, if any, upon the future course of Sikhism as a religion and a philosophy ? How to square up the religious institutions and structures, inherited from the Sikh historical tradition, with the institutions and structures of the Western democratic, secular traditions as these have been adopted and adapted in India ?

These questions, raised for the first time in the annals of Sikhism, have been thrown up as challenges by the contemporary situations in the Indian and global contexts.

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Sikhism Today : The Crisis Within and Without

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GURU GOBIND SINGH FOUNDATION (INDIA) GIVES A CALL FOR CELEBRATING 1999 AS THE YEAR OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

(The following Memorandum was personally delivered at the U.N.O. Office in New York in September, 1992 by a delegation of the Foundation led by Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia. We call upon religious organisations and institutions the world over for endorsing this Call through resolutions, copies of which may be sent to the Foundation for the follow-up action).

A unique event of great world historical significance occurred at Sri Anandpur Sahib in India in the year 1699 when the tenth and last Prophet of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh, created the Order of the Khalsa, through the sacrament of baptismal 'Amrit'. The Guru thereby institutionalized the universal, humanistic teachings of Guru Nanak who in the medieval age had envisioned a new civilization characterized by a new value pattern based on the primacy of the human spirit.

Here was a unique prophetic message : the humanity of God and the divinity of man – a concept from which emanate, in a sense, the ideals enshrined in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter, which, *inter alia*, reaffirms "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and of nations, large and small."

We are approaching in 1999 the 300th anniversary of that divine moment in the flux of time that changed the very course of history, particularly in the Indian sub-continent.

This would be a historic occasion for the Sikh community all over the world not only for introspection and retrospection but also for foreseeing and forethinking.

More than that this would be an occasion for the peoples of the world to renew their commitment, on the threshold of the coming century, to the unfettered and uninhibited self-expression of the human spirit realizable in a new pluralistic world order.

Therefore, we call upon the peoples of the world to celebrate 1999 as the Year of the Human Spirit.

We call upon the United Nations to take a l[illegible] of the Human Spirit, so as to highlight the one[illegible] manifold of social, cultural, religious, econom[illegible]

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