

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIKHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Despite the surface similarities between the two religions Sikhism and Christianity are based on very different philosophies and practised for widely differing ends. When talking with a Sikh don't begin by listing what you consider the shortcomings of Sikhism. But do get to know how his beliefs and practices influence the way he thinks about spiritual matters..

SCRIPTURE

As the Guru Granth Sahib is made up entirely of poetry it is rich in mysticism and can be interpreted differently by different people. It is more a hymnbook than a statement of faith. The Bible does have some mystical passages but there is also a great deal of straightforward -'moral and ethical teaching, and statements about God's character and his activity in the world.

THE NATURE OF GOD

Guru Nanak emphasized the oneness of God and his role as the supreme creator. He presented him as supremely a God of love. But Nanak had no place for God's wrath. Men and women, he said, should not fear God's anger but be afraid of not receiving all the benefits of his love. In contrast to Sikhism the Bible declares that God is righteous and holy. When his holy standards are violated he displays his wrath. Yet his wrath is not incompatible with his mercy and love. It is meant for the ultimate good of mankind. .

In some ways the Sikh concept of God is contradictory. Whereas some statements

seem to mean he is personal others state that human souls eventually merge back into God, who is' an impersonal essence. The Westerner cannot resolve these apparently contradictory statements but Sikhs seem to have no difficulty in doing so. God is said by them to be both the creator and the created, the fisherman and the fish, the water and the net.

THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

Sikhs deny the reality of man's sinful nature. They teach that people are essentially good; the divine spark within them needs only to be fanned into a flame of goodness. On the other hand, the Bible teaches that men inherit a sinful nature from Adam; a person's guilt must be atoned for. Guru Nanak taught that a man's sins are moral lapses caused by his environment. They may be cleansed through meditation and prayer.

UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

This is the area of greatest disagreement between Sikhs and Christians. Sikhs reject the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to God. They say he is one with

Moses, Mohammed, Buddha and the Gurus~ and that all paths to God are equally valid. The concept of faith in a person and the saving action of his death and resurrection are totally absent from Sikhism.

SALVATION'

The Gurus taught that if deliverance is sought in the proper manner all will eventually receive it. Nevertheless most Sikhs are uncertain of salvation.

Grace is viewed as something, which God bestows on those he chooses. A man or woman receives salvation when

it is in their destiny to do, so. But given, enough time and rebirths all will eventually reach that point. So Sikhs believe that there is no such thing as eternal damnation; all -will eventually achieve deliverance from the bondage of earthly life. Therefore ultimately no one is lost but is re-united with the divine absolute.

There is no personal resurrection. The human soul is of the same essence as God, comes from God and will eventually be merged back into him. Heaven and hell are not places where individuals live for eternity but refer to different stages of a person's earthly life. In contrast Christians believe that those who receive Christ as their Savior are adopted into God's family. After their earthly life is over they will have eternal fellowship, with him in heaven. They will not lose their unique personal identity: Similarly hell, is a reality where those who have rejected the Lord will spend eternity.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Christians believe that the presence and power of the Holy spirit is essential if a person is to live as God intends he should (Galatians 5:13-26). Sikhs believe in the presence of the divine soul within man but don't look to it as a means of helping them to live their earthly life. They have no satisfactory answer to the question of how a man can live a life that pleases God except, 'try harder'. Christianity makes impossible demands on a man or woman but at the same time indicates that the Holy Spirit is the power through whom these may be fulfilled. The concept of the Trinity is foreign to Sikhs.

However their concept of Guru, Nam and Shabad (chapter 6) could be useful in explaining it.

GOOD AND EVIL

Despite the stress on the love of God in Sikhism there is a darker side. Sikhs believe that both good and evil come from God. Though some of them think evil spirits exist they have no sense of an evil being who opposes God. Sikhs are never told to resist the devil, as a Christian is, because they do not believe in him. Evil, they believe, is the result of a person making wrong choices.

MEDITATION

Sikhs believe that meditation on the Granth draws them closer to God; it cleanses a person from sin and instills godly qualities in him. They see it as a means of salvation. Christians do not believe that meditation can set anyone free from sin but do value it as way of drawing closer to God, hearing his voice and discerning his will.

SIKHISM CANNOT SAVE

Despite all the similarities between Christianity and Sikhism the latter cannot save anyone. Its teaching falls short of God's revelation in the Bible; which makes it clear that only a personal faith in what Jesus did on the cross can qualify a person for salvation (John 1:12). Sikhs deny that God ever came to earth in the flesh and died for men's sins. They fall into the heresy of the Galatians, which was a mixture of grace, human merit and self-righteousness (Galatians 3). Some of the terms that Sikhism uses are familiar to Christians: However their content and meaning is

different, so they are not adequate for salvation.

THINGS TO DO EITHER

1. If a Sikh friend has any criticisms about Christians, listen to them. If they are the result of misunderstandings try to clear them up. If Christians were unnecessarily hurtful, apologise for them.
2. At your next meeting start to talk about beliefs you have in common. Then gently introduce those over which you differ. Be gracious about how you do this. Don't get into an argument.
3. Ask your Sikh friend to tell you what Sikhs believe about:
a) God's plan for mankind b) How one can find salvation c) the Holy Spirit
Then tell him what Christians believe about these matters.
4. Set aside time to pray for your Sikh friend especially bringing to mind anything you have talked about concerning the things of God.

OR

1. If you do not yet have a Sikh friend get to know someone of that religion in the ways already suggested in this book.
2. Work out how you would explain to a Sikh the Christian truth about atonement for sins. Use simple, everyday words rather than religious terms.

(Reference: Lions, Princesses and Gurus-Chapter 13, Ram Gidoomal & Margaret Wardell).