

INAUGURAL ADDRESS*

Ethical Concerns of the World Religions

Mr President, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, Prof Dr Jai Rup Singh, Vice Chancellor, Prof V. E. Sebastian, Prof Balwant Singh Dhillon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was later part of 2002 when I was invited by Dr John F Peppin, Director, Center for Bioethics, Management & Medicine, Des Moines, Iowa, USA, to write a Chapter on ‘*Sikh Perspective of Bioethics*’ for *Annals of Bioethics* [2]. When I was searching for information on bioethics from Sikh perspective point of view I could not find any from available literature. It might be due to the fact that Sikhism is generally considered as a part of Hinduism thus nobody thought to represent Sikhism while dealing with bioethics. When this Chapter was published in 2004 it turned out to be the first and unique in the *Annals of Bioethics* as remarked by Dr Peppin since it was based on principles of Nanakian Philosophy. Soon, thereafter, I was approached by Ms Catherine Sagues to write an article on ethics in Administration, **Régler un disaccord par la discussion amicable**, which appeared under **L'éthique et les affaires une quête de sens** in *Entreprendre*, Laval, Canada in 2005 [3]. Here again it was the first article in which the ethics in administration was based on principles of Nanakian Philosophy.

I am very happy to know that today a conference on ‘*Ethical Concerns of World Religions*’ is being held at the university named after Guru Nanak (1469-1539) who promulgated a unique and original philosophy during the Period of Renaissance (14th to 16th centuries) which has all the characteristics of universal acceptability for formulating ethics.

It makes me still happier that I have been honored by Prof Dr Jai Rup Singh, Vice Chancellor, and Prof Balwant Singh Dhillon to inaugurate this important National Conference on ‘*Ethical Concerns of World Religions*’.

Arthur Dobrin [5] had observed that the prevalence of religion among the people of the world may indicate that there is something about human nature that predisposes them to be religious being. He says that Gestalt psychology teaches us that people see complete pictures even when there are only partial pictures to be seen. We complete the incomplete, thereby explaining the mysterious,



L to R: Prof Dr Devinder Singh Chahal, reading the inaugural address, Prof Balwant Singh Dhillon, Director of the Seminar, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, Chief Guest, and Prof Dr Jai Rup Singh, Vice Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

constructing a picture that we call reality. Often we go to the next step — finding what we expect to be the case while our minds confirm our predictions, whether or not supported by the facts. Or more precisely, we find the “facts” to support our beliefs. This mode of thinking and behaving may be so basic that it has led some to conclude: “The *process* of forming [religious] beliefs is genetically hardwired” [6, 7]. This genetic weakness in human has already been pointed out by Guru Arjan:

ਬੁਠੀ ਬਾਤ ਸਾ ਸਚੁ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਤੀ ॥

ਸਤਿ ਹੋਵਨੁ ਮਨਿ ਲਗੈ ਨ ਰਾਤੀ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: ੫, ਪੰਨਾ -੧੮੫.

*One takes⁴ it to be true³ what is false statement^{1,2},
What is truth⁴ is not⁷ imbibed in one's mind⁶.*

AGGS, M 5, p 185 [1].

Later Edith Sitwell (1887-1964) observed the same behaviour of human (genetic weakness):

“The public will believe anything, so long as it is not founded on truth.”

My study indicates that this genetic weakness of religiosity in human is being exploited by religious fraudulent Swamis, Pundits, Sants, Babas, Mullans, Pastors, and so-called spiritual leaders (also including Fortune-Tellers,

* It is based on my article, “Basics to Formulate Religious Ethics in Sikhism”, presented on this conference held at the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar on February 22-23, 2008.

Astrologers and Numerologists) for their personal benefit. They are creating their own religious ethics based on Gestalt psychology by using unscientific and illogical ancient concepts to lure their followers. Some custodians of certain religions have been claiming that it is only their religion through which one can attain salvation. Therefore, they think that it is their divine duty to force their religion on others. It is evident that this genetic weakness is to be looked after for formulating scientifically and logically sound ethics by the theologians and researchers as the other genetic weakness about various diseases are being handled by the Geneticists and Medical Doctors.

Because of the above type of preaching by the religious mentors, the younger generation of the Current Science Age is moving away from religion and are claiming themselves as atheists. Richard Dawkins [4] says in his book, *The God Delusion*, that people are becoming atheist because there is no God.

Theologians, scholars, researchers, and students from various universities and institutes of India and also from foreign countries have gathered here for serious deliberation on ‘*Ethical Concerns of the World Religions*’. Before formulating any ethics for specific type of people, it is important to understand the intrinsic meanings of ‘ethics’ since it is defined differently by different scholars and ethics of one religion are different than that of the others. Ethics are generally understood as follows:

- 1 *the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment; moral philosophy*
- 2 *a treatise on this study*
- 3 *the system or code of morals of a particular person, religion, group, profession, etc.*

However, Dobrin [5] says that ‘ethics’ is an abstraction whose content shifts with time and differs from place to place. Moreover, some use morals and ethics as distinct terms, while others use them as synonyms.

Since ‘ethics’ means ‘morals’ but morality is also considered differently by different religions as are considered ethics, therefore, it is also necessary to understand the intrinsic meanings of ‘morality’. Many individuals and groups might define a moral act or state in many different ways:

- To move the society towards the principle of ‘*equal liberty and justice for all*’.
- To follow the dictates of God (or other deity/deities).
- To follow strictly the teachings of their sacred books and their traditions.
- To follow strictly the edicts issued by the highest authority of the religion.

In most of the religious preaching about ethics and morality very little attention is paid about the “*equal liberty and justice for all*” instead emphasis is that the followers are threaten to be of high morality and follow strictly the dictates of the authority of their religion otherwise God (or other deity/deities) will be angry and will punish them. Many people try to be moral and good mannered and follow the authoritative dictate under this threat of punishment by God and going to Hell.

Richard Dawkins [4] says that most atheists who do not believe in divine judgment, and most theists who do, act moral. Some of both groups act consistently immoral. The claim that belief in God is essential or aids moral behavior is wrong, and any amusing theistic claim that they have “better” morals, despite acting under a reward and punishment system, is deeply questionable. Who is more moral? Those who act for the sake of goodness itself, or those who do good acts under the belief that failure to do so results in hell? In this connection Albert Einstein says:

“*If people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot in deed.*”

The above point of morality raised by famous atheist of the world, Richard Dawkins, and the Noble Laureate, Albert Einstein, a great scientist of 20th century, is worth deliberating by all the participants.

In this respect I want to point out that Guru Nanak has ascribed an attribute, *Nirvair* – without enmity, to God in the ‘*Commencing Verse*’ (commonly called Mool Mantra) in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. If we keep this attribute of God in mind then it is evident that Dawkins and Einstein are right to issue the above statements. Now I want to pose a question to the Sikh theologians:

Are both Einstein and Dawkins not conveying the message of Guru Nanak?

The conference is to deliberate on ‘*Ethical Concerns of the World Religions*’, which is a very big and sensitive issue. The theologians and scholars of each religion are very good at formulating ‘Bioethics’ to be followed by the Medical Doctors, Geneticists, and Scientists, and ‘Ethics’ for Government, Politicians, and Administrators but have not paid any attention to formulate ‘Ethics’ to move the society towards the principle of ‘*equal liberty and justice for all*’. However, their emphasis remained on “Ethics” to follow strictly the edicts issued by the highest authority of the religion. On the other hand I am not aware of if there are any ethics for the custodians of any religion in the world.

I would like to pose a question to the participants:

Should there be some ethics for the custodians of religions?

I am posing the above question because there has always been tension within every religion of the world right from the very beginning. Matters of authority are contentious, because it is often unclear who speaks for a religion:

Who is to say what the authentic beliefs are?

Who is to say what interpretation is valid and which not?

Is a religion what its leaders say it is or is it what the people practice or is it what its Holy Scripture(s) says?

The answer to the above questions lies in the following principle of Nanakian Philosophy:

ਜਬ^੧ ਲਗੁ^੨ ਦੁਨੀਆ^੩ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ^੪ ਸੁਣੀਐ^੫ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ^੬ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੬੬੧.

As long as^{1,2} one lives in this world³ one must listen⁵ to others⁴ and express⁶ oneself to the others (to find the truth).

AGGS, M 1, p 661.

That is why we have gathered here to deliberate on this very important and sensitive issue, *Ethical Concerns of the World Religions*.

Finally, I must congratulate Prof Balwant Singh Dhillon and the organizers of this conference for picking up this very important and sensitive issue, *Ethical Concerns of the World Religions*.

With these few words I declare the Conference open and wish all success to the organizers and the participants for serious deliberation and hope they will come up with definite recommendations of ethics for their respective religion for the present. However, it is a continuous process since some ethics would change with time and new ethics

are to be formulated for new issues.

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He falls on their feet to appease them.

But still he begs for food and cloths from other people.

He does not know that practicing such wrong methods leads to ignorance.

Nanak says:

Since the idol cannot give any food and cannot save anybody from dying.

Therefore, it is like an ignorant argues with other ignorant.

AGGS, M 1, p 1240-1241.

In spite of the above facts the idol worshipers are still worshipping the idols by imagining it as the manifestation of God. If that is the case even then God has not given anything as explained above because the idol worshiper (Pundit) still go to other people to beg for food and clothes.

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