

## Fliers at the Peace Parade

On July 23, 2006, as services at the Bethel Baptist Church were ending, Pastor Kent Brandenburg heard loud chanting and drumming outside. When Brandenburg remembered that a Peace Parade was being held by local Sikhs, he saw an opportunity; some years ago, he developed a flier to reach out to the growing Sikh community in El Sobrante, California. Brandenburg ran out to the parade route, where he saw large images of Sikh gurus moving by on flatbed trucks. He spent a few minutes handing out fliers while complimenting the Sikhs on their festive attire.

Brandenburg later wrote about his outreach to the Sikhs on his blog:

Twenty years ago when we started the church ... right away we began meeting many Sikhs while going door to door. Like with every other person in this area, we became concerned with the salvation of the Sikhs. The Bible teaches that there is salvation only in Jesus Christ, and that outside of Him is destruction (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; John 3:18, 36). This is not a new message. This message has been preached by Bible-believing Christians for two-thousand years.<sup>1</sup>

The flier, "Please Consider These Words of Love My SIKH Friend," cited Biblical passages and Sikh scripture. It began:

Mool-Mantar says, 'God is the Eternal Truth.' If we were to agree on this, even as in John 14:6, the Lord Jesus Christ said, 'I am the truth,' then neither of us would be afraid of hearing the truth. Bible Christianity and Sikhism contradict in doctrine. Both could not at the same time be truth.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the conclusion of the flier, it warned:

Without believing in Jesus Christ, you, my Sikh friend, will die in your sins, and in so doing, will be condemned to Hell forever. Receive Jesus Christ alone as your Lord and Savior today, turning from your sin and your religion.<sup>3</sup>

A week later, Brandenburg was contacted by a reporter from the *Contra Costa Times* regarding the objections of the Sikh community to the flier. The subsequent article quoted Mr. J.P. Singh, the president of the El Sobrante Gurdwara Sahib: "To coexist in this country in love and peace, I think there has to be an acceptance of other people's religions."<sup>4</sup> Singh objected to the content of the flier and questioned the appropriateness of seeking converts during the Peace Parade, saying, "I feel it would be offensive, if the Christians were having an event, to pass out Sikh literature."<sup>5</sup> Singh added that Sikhs do not seek converts, as they believe in the equality of all religions.

In the days and weeks after the parade, Brandenburg received many negative responses to the fliers, including several letters from the Sikh community. He also was contacted by a local businessman who ran Bianco's Deli, adjacent to the church. Mr. Bianco, having learned that some of the fliers were distributed from the deli parking lot, wrote to the gurdwara leadership and Brandenburg. Describing the flier's content as "hate speech," Bianco wrote: "I want you to know that I strongly condemn such attitudes, and I'm embarrassed and

disappointed that my neighbors would treat you, (also my neighbors) in such a manner."<sup>6</sup> In addition, the El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Committee publicly condemned the church's distribution of fliers at the parade.<sup>7</sup>

In the wake of the controversy, Brandenburg posed a series of questions on his blog, "What is Truth?" He questioned the definition of "hate speech" and wondered how the peaceful distribution of materials could be seen as "bullying." He asked about the limits of free speech, and whether it would be likely that the town would permit a parade in which Bible verses were broadcast over loudspeakers, particularly if it was in front of a gurdwara.

Brandenburg added, "Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' That's exclusive, yes. It is also something that has been preached here since the first Pilgrims got off the Mayflower." He continued, "We can't be intellectually honest and not judge important things like what we believe about eternity. ... Jesus told believers to warn about Hell in his kingdom parables in Matthew 13. If rejection of Christ results in Hell, we can't be loving by saying nothing. If we love health, we must hate disease. Truth is antithetical."<sup>8</sup>

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pastor Kent Brandenburg, "My Sikh Issue: Pluralism Versus Relativism," July 12, 2007 post on blog, "What is Truth," [http:// kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/](http://kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/), accessed January 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Please Consider These Words of Love My SIKH Friend," *Contra Costa Times* Web site, [http://www.cctextra.com/multimedia/pdf/bethel\\_baptist\\_church.pdf](http://www.cctextra.com/multimedia/pdf/bethel_baptist_church.pdf), accessed January 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Lochner, "Sikh Leader Objects to Pamphlet" *Contra Costa Times*, August 27, 2006, via Lexis-Nexis, accessed January 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Pastor Kent Brandenburg, "My Sikh Issue: Pluralism Versus Relativism," July 12, 2007 post on blog, "What is Truth," <http://kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/>, accessed January 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.