

# Non Christian Religions - Sikhism

(An Excerpt from “Non Christian Religions” for LBTS BI511 Comparative Religions coursework by Pastor Ed Rice)

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Sikhism is one more reformation of Hinduism that is significant for some analysis. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Islam's ruthless and violent god, Allah, was set quite at odds with Hindu's non militant *Brahma*. This harsh contrast caused one inquiring student of the village of Talwandi in the Punjab province of India to ask “What is the true name of God?” His answer supposedly came at age 33 when in a vision God offered him a cup of nectar and told him “I am with thee. I have made thee happy, and also those who shall take thy name. Go and repeat Mine, and cause others to do likewise. Abide uncontaminated by the world. Practice repetition of my Name, charity, ablutions, worship, and meditation ... My name is God, the primal *Brahma*. And thou are the divine Guru.”<sup>1</sup>

Sikhism is less of a reformation of Hinduism and more a reconciliation or harmonization of Hinduism with Islam. Consider the challenge of such a reconciliation. Hinduism uniting with Islam is a union of pacifism with militant activism; a union of reincarnation and endless rebirths in a caste system with self martyrdom to achieve a blessing of 'heaven' with Allah; a union of the triune *Brahma* mixed with polytheism and a sacrificial appeasement of many gods to a unified god called Allah, whose wrath is only appeased by repetitive praying 7 times a day. Nanak did indeed have a conflict in his mind and unifying this conflict from a vision he had, brought about a new religion called Sikhism.

Nanak, who was told in his vision, “Thou are the divine Guru,” appointed Lihina, a rope maker, as his successor. Lihina changed his name to Anged, (bodyguard) appointed his

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1 Josh McDowell & Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville TN, p 400.

successor and his successor his, and his, his. When the tenth successor died, in 1708 A.D., the Sikhs turned their loyalty to the '*Granth Sahib*' as their written authority. It is a strange conglomeration of certain Hindu ideas and certain Islamic ideas mixed with interpretation which rejects the whole of each. Sikhism indeed makes for a strange theology.

A unique problem in Sikhism is found in their written record that some might call their 'scripture', (A term this author holds sacred for the writings of Jehovah God.) the Sikhs call it the '*Granth Sahib*.' It is composed in six different languages and several dialects. There are but a handful of scholars who could read it and it is thus unavailable to those who would do extensive study in its precepts. The theology is thus a riddled mystery interwoven into a book of mystery.

Sikhism did attempt to leave the polytheism of Hinduism and contrive a solid monotheism. "There is but one god, whose name is true, creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, unborn, self existent, great and bountiful. The 'True One' was in the beginning."<sup>2</sup> Although this description of their god begins to approach the Bible's description of the true God who reveals himself, as the eternal self-existent one, it stays deceitfully short, surrounded in an abstract principle of philosophy of god being only impersonal truth and reality. Sikhism has no personal Creator and Father, ergo it is lost in a philosophical abstractness.

Sikhs carried some characteristics of Hinduism into their belief system. They each have a theoretical belief in a supreme unity, while practically having a great variety of designations for deity, to include theistic pantheism, where god is present in everything. What 'salvation' may exist is found by faith in the grace of god with some *karma*, *yoga*, and transmigration of souls mixed in for good measure. Sikhs do divorce themselves from Hindu polytheism holding rather

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2 Ibid., McDowell & Stewart, p 402, quoting M.A. McAuliffe, *Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings, and Authors*, London, Oxford University Press, 1909, p 35.

to some form of monotheistic pantheism. They divorce themselves from the Hindu's pilgrimages, ritualism and hermit asceticism. They reject the Hindu holy writings, preferring their own, also rejecting the Hindu degradation of women, infanticide and vegetarianism.<sup>3</sup>

Sikhs hold to some Islamic concepts as well. Their concept of god includes his being a supreme personal being with a sovereignty of a supreme absolute ruler. There is a certain mercilessness mixed with his arbitrariness. "Salvation," as it is, if it is, requires submission to this god. Worship is through repetition of the name of the deity. Great importance is in repeating prescribed prayers, a devotion to the founder, and an extreme reverence for sacred writings, even to the point of daily repetition by all followers. In Sikhism, as in Islam, there is a series of subsequent leaders prescribing a powerful militaristic 'church'<sup>4</sup> state. Both stress unity, despite multiple sects and both vehemently denounce idolatry while advancing a central shrine concept, in Amritsar for Sikhs, and Mecca for Islam.

Despite all this common ground with Islam, Sikhism founders were not so ruthless or violent as Islamic Muslims, their deity is not so violent and their sacred 'scriptures' are ascribed to as many as 37 teachers, while Islam holds to only one author, Mohammed. Sikhs also have no fasting prescribed nor do they recognize a decisive judgment day, while Muslims fast in Ramadan and seek a final judgment day.

Molding together two false religions yields a conglomerated quagmire of both. Although it defies all logic and reason loyalists to Sikhism are loyalists indeed.

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3 Ibid., McDowell & Stewart, p 403.

4 Church is actually derived and used from the Greek word, *ecclisia* which was the unified, organized, independent, autonomous, called out, assembled body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is used here because the Roman Catholic misuse of the term taught us to understand what a 'church state' really is.