

SUFISM

The 'peaceful charismatic face' of Islam?

Back in July 2006 I wrote an article entitled as follows –

The 'Summer Madness' of an invite to Brian McLaren and a look inside 'The Mind' of Tony Campolo

The link to that article is http://www.takeheed.net/Assorted_Articles/Emerging_Church/SummerMadnessMcLaren.htm and in it I analysed some of what **Tony Campolo** had written in his book '**Speaking my Mind**' that had on its back cover a favourable endorsement by **Brian McLaren**.

One of the chapters that I commented on was **chapter 9** entitled '**Is Islam Really an Evil Religion?**' In that chapter **Tony Campolo** wrote something that I did not quote in my original article but which is relevant to this article. He wrote the following under a sub-heading of '**Mysticism Provides Common Ground**' –

'... a theology of mysticism provides some hope for common ground between CHRISTIANITY and ISLAM. Both religions have within their histories examples of ECSTATIC UNION with God, which seem at odds with their own spiritual traditions but have much in common with each other. I do not know what to make of the **MUSLIM MYSTICS**, especially those who have come to be known as **SUFIS**. What do they experience in their mystical experiences? **Could they have encountered the same God we do in our Christian mysticism?**' (pp 149-150).

At the end of this article I will answer the question highlighted in red that Tony Campolo posed, but for now I want to focus on those that he referred to as '**Muslim Mystics**' the **SUFIS**.

You don't need me to tell you that our radio and TV news bulletins, many column inches in our newspapers plus large swathes of what we can read online are taken up with **ISLAM** and in more cases than not it makes for disturbing and distressing listening and reading. Many of us are probably familiar with a number of the differing '**sects**' within **Islam** such as the **Sunnis** and **Shi'ites** (or **Shi'ahs**).

In '**Studies on Islam**' by Jack Budd we read on pages 59–60 –

'The **SUFFIS** are the mystics of Islam and are found in all the main streams... The aim of the **SUFFIS** is to seek a deeper spiritual interpretation of the Qur'an. They say that life is like a journey and a seeker after God is a traveller... The only object of **SUFFISM** is to lead a wandering soul stage by stage back to perfect union with God... **SUFFIS** claim that there is a distinction between a **SUFFI** and an ordinary Muslim as it touches the six articles of belief... **SUFFIS** say that a man must search for the true origin of the six pillars until the traveller reaches the state of **TRUTH**... **SUFFIS** are almost identical to Brahmins (Hindu priests) and Buddhists – (a) Union of man with God; (b) The same emanation of all things from God; (c) The same final absorption of all things into the Divine Essence.'

This similarity to some Eastern religious philosophy, thinking and practice will become more apparent especially when you watch the video linked to this article. The belief by **SUFIS** that they are more spiritual than '**ordinary Muslims**' has also led to 'friction' within Islam but in truth that is nothing new and indeed the whole history of Islam is marked with ongoing, relentless and bloody 'friction' thereby giving a lie to the claim that Islam is 'a religion of peace' – nothing could be further from the truth.

At this stage I want to cite some links that should be helpful in gaining an understanding of **SUFISM** and to quote some pertinent extracts from the links –

<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Sufism.html>

Sufism is a Muslim movement whose followers seek to find divine truth and love through direct encounters with God. Sufism arose from within Islam in the 8th-9th centuries C.E. as an ascetic movement. The movement may have been given (or taken on) the name Sufism because of the coarse wool garments they wore as a mark of their rejection of worldly things; Sufis have traditionally taken vows of poverty and celibacy. **Sufism developed religious practices focusing on strict self-control that enable both psychological and mystical insights as well as a loss of self, with the ultimate goal of mystical union with God.** The Sufi movement consists of fraternal orders in which leaders train and assist disciples in the mastery of Sufism's philosophical principles and ritual practices. Such rituals and practices include writing and reciting poetry and hymns; some of the most famous and beautiful literature of the Islamic world has been written by Sufis. **Sufis engage in a variety of ritual practices intended to help them realize union with God, such as distinct forms of ritual prayer (*dhikr*, literally "remembrance"), including the recitation of God's names,** as well as bodily rituals such as those practices by the so-called "Whirling Dervishes," a Turkish Sufi order that practices meditation and contemplation of God through spinning.

<http://www.nimatullahi.org/what-is-sufism/>

The substance of Sufism is the Truth and the meaning of Sufism is the selfless experiencing and actualization of the Truth. **The practice of Sufism is the intention to go towards the Truth, by means of love and devotion. This is called the *tarigat*, the spiritual path or way towards God.** The sufi is one who is a lover of Truth, who by means of love and devotion moves towards the Truth, towards the perfection which all are truly seeking. As necessitated by love's jealousy, the sufi is taken away from all except the Truth.... Sufism is a school for the actualization of divine ethics. It involves an enlightened inner being, not intellectual proof; revelation and witnessing, not logic. By divine ethics, we are referring to ethics that transcend mere social convention, a way of being that is the actualization of the attributes of God.

<http://sufism.org/>



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atKMRZ5snTA>

“Is Sufism a part of Islam?”

<http://www.gotquestions.org/sufism.html>

Question: "What is Sufism?"

Answer: A movement within Islam, Sufism is the mystical side of Islam. Perhaps this is one reason traditional Muslims have distanced themselves from Sufists. Sufism focuses on giving love and devotion to God. Because Sufists believe that material possessions hinder one's devotion, they are often considered ascetics. Although centered around Islamic doctrine, Sufism teaches that harmony with God comes through spiritual poverty, love, devotion, and the selfless remembrance of God (**usually done by chanting**).

Jesus (called Isa by Muslims) said the greatest commandment is to love God with all the heart, soul, and mind (Mark 12:30). But by putting money, prestige, possessions, self, and sinful desires ahead of God, we have all failed to love Him. We have disobeyed God's commands and offended His holiness. We deserve to be separated from God forever in hell (Romans 6:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:9)

Thankfully, the Lord Jesus did love God perfectly. He died on the cross to save believing sinners, enabling them to love God wholeheartedly. "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (1 Peter 2:24-25).

Jesus' death and resurrection is the answer for Sufists. While Sufism cannot grant a relationship of love with God, Jesus can! As followers of Jesus, true Christians can love God and others: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:7-11)

<http://www.allaboutreligion.org/sufism.htm>

Sufism – What is the Christian view of Sufism?

Sufism presents God as one who is indefinable. Their definitions are circular, so flamboyant and extreme as to lend no enlightenment, only a sense of a being that is unreachable. Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Wāsitī said: "*As his essence is not caused, so his attributes are not caused: to attempt to display the eternal is to despair of understanding anything of the realities of the attributes or the subtleties of the essence (of God.)*" As Christians, we, too, hold to a lofty view of God; we believe that He is above all. No one is like Him; no one can be called alongside to compare with Him. But the glory of the incarnation is that God was manifested in human form. Jesus Christ came to make the lofty God knowable to all mankind.

Hebrews 1:3: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

While the Sufis whirl around chanting during their *zikr*, giving themselves over to total abandonment, vulnerability, and susceptibility, we who believe in Jesus Christ offer up our worship with soberness and joy. We are awake, conscious, aware, fully known and seeking to know more and more of God.

2 Timothy 1:7: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

What **SUFISM** is promoting is basically their version of practices that in many instances bear a striking similarity to practices that are passed off as being Christian in certain strands of professing Christendom. A very enlightening article from a Christian standpoint that highlights these similarities can be found on

www.lighthouse-trails-research.com/contemplativprayerarticlebyray.doc

Another practice associated with some **SUFIS** is a very animated form of whirling-dancing. In a BBC programme called '**Sacred rivers with Simon Reeve**' broadcast on 5 October 2014, Mr Reeve devoted that programme to **The Nile** tracing it from its source right through to its delta. En route he stopped at various locations including **Khartoum** in Sudan. There he showed a group of **SUFIS** known as '**whirling dervishes**' going through their energetic 'dance' routine. He described them as going into a '**trance-like state**' and his guide explained they were experiencing '**union with god**'.

In '**Larson's New Book of Cults**' we read this on pages 97-98 –

'The most exotic variant of Islam proposes to reach God, not through the Five Pillars, but by entering trance states induced by dancing... While the average Muslim is content in submitting to the will of Allah, the SUFI wants an immediate, ecstatic experience of oneness with God. The means to accomplish this is a once-secret rite of twirling dance manoeuvres. It was Rumi (a Turkish mystic who was an early advocate of SUFISM in the thirteenth century) who adapted Asian SHAMANISTIC practices and formed a ritualistic approach to Islam. His disciples became known as 'whirling dervishes' (dervish means 'beggar' in Turkish)... Rumi watched a goldsmith at work one day and as a result was brought into a state of whirling ecstasy. He developed a special dance routine requiring a twirling motion... Dervishes turn for an hour or more at a time without any sign of fatigue, REPEATING THE NAME OF ALLAH IN PRAYER to the accompaniment of a musical beat (Cecil: Earlier a connection to Hindu Brahmins was mentioned and as I typed this I was reminded very forcibly of a similarity with the HARE KRISHNAS, a Hindu sect, who likewise engage in animated, musical repetition of the name of their god in the 'HARE KRISHNA' mantra. This energised activity is known as SANKIRTANA and you can read a helpful item on this link <http://www.krishna.com/phenomenon-sankirtana>). Eventually they enter an unconscious trance state and fall on the floor (Cecil – reminders here of hyped-up charismatic events and phenomena such as the so-called 'Toronto Blessing') an act that is supposed to represent an 'awakening from indifference'. Though traditional Islam has had little impact on the counterculture of youth in America (Cecil – this revised book was published in 1989) **SUFISM** has attracted more than 6,000 adherents.

That last phrase '**in America SUFISM has attracted more than 6,000 adherents**' leads nicely into what I want you to see now – to see what **SUFIS** have to say for themselves and so if you go to the following link you can watch 3 programmes that show what they believe and practice – the first focusing on a **SUFI** community in America. The link to go to is

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db1t6-Gy_I

The first programme '**Living Sufism**' was liberally 'populated' with examples of '**mind-emptying**' repetition to the accompaniment of music, drumming and a physical rocking motion. In this it bears similarities to the **Hare Krishnas** who likewise chant and repeat the name of their 'god' often to the accompaniment of music, drumming and animated action. Towards the end of this programme I was also visibly struck by the '**staring eyes**' of a stout man and then the '**glazed look**' of others engaged in these practices. This '**mind-emptying**' process leading to '**staring**' or '**glazed**' eyes of course has also appeared in some supposed 'Christian' circles particularly extreme charismatic situations like those associated with the '**Toronto Blessing**', 'the '**Pensacola Revival**' or the '**Lakeland Revival**'. Another 'feature in common' in these supposed 'Christian' situations would be the important role played by 'repetitious chorus singing' that engenders an almost hypnotic, trance-like state. These close similarities point to one conclusion namely that '**the spirit**' behind all of these diverse but similar spiritual manifestations is one and the same. This first programme and those that followed also showed how skilfully **SATAN** is able to blend a measure of truth with large doses of 'spiritual poison' – a mixture that can so easily deceive the unwary.

The second programme '**Eternal Life**' again contained truths about man being physical and spiritual with an eternal soul but once more highlighted the important role of 'mind-altering/emptying' repetitious chanting leading to hypnotic, trance-like states. One section even reminded me of a scene from the movie 'Young Sherlock Holmes' where a pagan Egyptian cult were engaged in similar 'worship chanting'.

The third programme '**Losing Self**' again highlighted great similarities with the Hindu philosophy of the **Hare Krishnas** – particularly about looking within the body to find the real '**self**' and '**the light within**' (also something that many 'New Agers' would subscribe to). In a little book called '**Search for Liberation**' it is recorded on page 3 that the 'modern founder' of the Hare Krishnas, **Swami Prabhupada** said to **John Lennon** '**remember that Krishna is the real friend of every living entity and that He is sitting as a friend within everyone's heart**'. Towards the end of the programme one man said '**We come from Allah and are going to Allah**' - very similar to what we read in another Hare Krishna book called '**The Science of Self Realisation**' that states on page 4 '**the real destination of life... is to go back to Godhead**'. A lady called **Irina Tweedie** made many 'Eastern religious' philosophical statements when explaining her understanding of **SUFISM** and perhaps this is not surprising when you examine the area of influences on her life. This can be done by going to

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irina_Tweedie

It was heartening to hear the frankness with which a politely spoken English **SUFI** nailed '**the lie**' peddled by so many in positions of influence that '**Islam means peace**' when he stated clearly that '**Islam means SUBMISSION**' and he also confirmed that **Islam is both SPIRITUAL and POLITICAL** – something that Western politicians need to awake to.

Overall I found these programmes spiritually disturbing to my soul particularly with the endless ‘**mantra-chanting**’ in praise to Allah and the regular ‘**bowing down**’ to Allah that the Lord Jesus Christ refused to do when invited to do so in **Matthew 4:9**.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

SUFISM seeks to portray itself as an Islamic grouping that is totally divorced from the warfare, barbarism and terror that is deeply associated with the other sects within mainstream Islam. However, **Robert Spencer**, in his book ‘**The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam**’ writes the following on page 156 –

‘**Tamerlane (1336-1405), the bloody conqueror of Central Asia was probably a member of the Naqshbandi SUFI sect of Islam. This is noteworthy because the SUFIS are often presented today as a peaceful, tolerant sect of Islam; however their history is full of jihad (e.g. Chechnya).**

In addition, **Patrick Sookhdeo** in his book ‘**Global Jihad: The Future in the Face of Militant Islam**’ wrote on page 194 –

‘**However, not all the mystics of Islam have been inclined towards pacifism. Some have initiated movements of religious and social revolt against non-Muslim powers. SUFI-LED rebellions against Western colonial powers may be said to have begun in the Caucasus in the late eighteenth century under the SUFI leader Sheikh Manaur Ushurma who led a violent resistance against the Russians. In the 1810s Naqshbandiyya SUFISM became established in the region under Sheikh Khalid al-Shahrazuri, who was strongly antagonistic to what he called “the enemies of religion, the cursed Christians”. A particular cause of Muslim resentment was the Russian ban on slave trading and raiding. The capture of Christian Armenians and Georgians for sale as slaves in the Middle East had become a significant source of income for the Muslims of the region... The SUFI militant opposition to Russia was centred on the militant Naqshbandi-Muridiyya order which from 1834 was led by Imam Shamil. Some other examples of SUFI-LED rebellions against Western colonialism have already been described in chapter 5. They include Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (d.1831) who resisted British colonisation of the Mughal Empire in India, the Mahdist revolution of Sudan where many of the earliest Muslim missionaries and teachers were SUFIS (1882-1898), the Sanusiyya movement in Libya (1837-1931) and Abd al-Qader in the Maghreb (1808-1883). Examples of SUFI-LED rebellions against Muslim regimes considered not Islamic enough include Usuman dan Fodio in West Africa and also the dervish-led rebellion of Kurds under Sheikh Said, the hereditary chief of the powerful Naqshbandi SUFI order against the newly formed Turkish Republic in 1925.’**

Furthermore, this ‘**peaceful charismatic face of Islam**’ that **SUFISM** seeks to portray simply does not exist within historic and traditional Islamic ideology that is based upon properly understood (chronological) teachings from the Koran, the Hadith and as exemplified in and by the life of Mohammed. **SUFIS**, like all non-Christians, are spiritually ‘lost’ and their minds are blinded by ‘**the god**’ of this world – **and that answers the question posed earlier by Tony Campolo on page 1 of this article.**

Jesus Christ says **“Come unto me”** (Matthew 11:28). He also says **“I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me”** (John 14:6). Jesus has died **“to save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21) and promises **“Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out”** (John 6:37). **JESUS ALONE** is **“able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God BY HIM”** (Hebrews 7:25) – may many **SUFIS** discover that glorious unshakable truth

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 7 October 2014