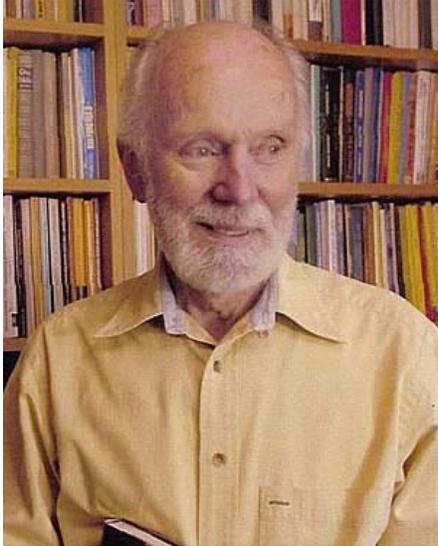


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Rev. Hew McLeod (1932-2009): A Master Decadent Of 20th Century

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Los Angeles, CA: Academic world lost one of its most controversial Sikh scholars of all times: Hew McLeod, a Christian missionary projected as agnostic, passed away quietly in Dunedin, New Zealand on July 20, 2009.

Hew, as he was known to his friends, found himself in Kharar-Batala, Punjab, India as a missionary where according to him he “discovered lack of direction and started searching something in the history of Punjab”. Coming in contact with the missionary, C. H. Loehlin, who had done some work in Sikh history, perhaps initiated his interests in Sikhs and Sikhism. Hew argued that Loehlin guided him for pursuing textual analysis of Sikh scriptures - A claim falsified by Loehlin’s daughter. It took him five years to collect data and leave for London to pursue a PhD, on Guru Nanak, under A. L. Basham.

In academics every dissertation requires peer review. However, Hew’s thesis was an exception beyond imagination of intellectual world because Basham, as far as Gurmukhi, Punjabi and Sikhism were concerned, was a complete illiterate. Hew through his decadence, as believed by his opponents, managed to acquire scholarship and become a self proclaimed Sikh historian.

Ensuing years proved his innocence, portrayed to Indian Sikh historians and the great Sikh scholar Ganda Singh, was a mere charade.

Hew’s works on Sikhism came under strict scrutiny by Sikh scholars, untainted from the controversial methodologies of Western scholarship. He, from the beginning, vastly undermined the penmanship of authentic Sikh scholars because of their inability to rebut his research, especially due to the challenge of translation and change in the meaning of Gurmukhi and Punjabi into English. Almost all of his research conclusions about Sikh Gurus and Sikhism have been critically disclaimed by several scholars both from India and the West as well. His audacious research leaves behind a trail of deception, treachery and intrigue.

Commenting on his demise Raminderjit Singh, a McLeod critic, said among several of Hew’s controversial and much criticized studies, one is his work on *janam-sakhis* (Janam sakhis are written historical “narrations”, a tradition started by Sikhs from the period of Guru Angad, by congregants and devotees).

Using the *janam-sakhis*, Hew states “that they offer insufficient evidence to support the claims of life of Sikh Gurus, exemplifying Guru Nanak’s visit to Baghdad, that it compels us “to regard it as an unsubstantiated possibility”, – which is an undeniable travesty”. Adding further Raminderjit said when he met Prof. Pritam Singh, “he was very upset that Hew had diverged from the truth by insinuating that *janam-sakhis* are fictitious “how the academic world allows such subterfuge in Sikh research where the scholar fabricates data to prove his point is a mystery he said”.

Referring to Hew’s study on Sikhism, Jasbir Singh Mann, who remained in touch with him since his arrival at Toronto in 1980s, opined that scholars need to pay closer attention to his deductions.

Summarizing some of Hew's research, Mann said "unquestionably his passing brings to close a dark period of Sikh literature contortionism", "Sikhs will not be able to defend their authentic literature that Hew convincingly distorted to malign Sikhism, and his debauchery is unparalleled to any other".

His absurd style of research, Mann said, has some unequivocal academic flaws: For instance Hew questioned the authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir (Adi Granth) and affirmed that it is a copy of Banno Bir merely by relying on writings and research of Gurbakhash Singh (1877-1950), a rather shady scholar who himself had not examined the Kartarpuri Bir.

Raminderjit pointed out that "Hew not only questioned the authenticity of Adi Granth but called Baba Nanak a Bhagat, a Sant of north Indian tradition". Both, Mann and Raminderjit agreed that Hew established Sikh studies in the West and initiated few academic parameters for reflecting on traditions of Sikhism. They however, disagreed upon the methodology Hew applied in researching Sikhism and Sikh Scripture and pointed out that several well recognized literates, over period of time, questioned McLeod's intentions.

Khuswant Singh, in a forward once wrote: "Dr. McLeod carried his thesis forward and cast doubts on the metamorphosis of the pacifist Nanakprastha Sikhs to the militant fraternity of the Khalsa. He described it as more due to the large scale incursion of the Jats into the Khalsa Panth rather than as something planned out by the Sixth Guru Hargobind, and the last Guru Gobind Singh. He questioned the authenticity of the baptismal ceremony of the Baisakhi of 1699, the *raison d'etre* of the Khalsa Panth bound by the symbols of the faith, the five kakkas and discounted the Rehatnamas as subsequent complications and often contradictory of each other".

Many authors have extensively published their works questioning Hew's research. Dr. N.Q. King, a well respected scholar articulates: "Whatever Dr. McLeod intended many readers will ask his books wrong questions and get the wrong answers....The reader seeking the well-springs of what Sikhism is will not be assisted....Nowhere in these books is there an attempt to tell us what it is. The reader wishing to know about the heart of Sikhism will turn to these books and be offered meticulously and exhaustively carried out drills in certain methods of Western criticism. The readers' desires and the books purpose differ".

Gurdev Singh, a Sikh historian, on examining Hew's work explained that "McLeod examines various sources of the life of Guru Nanak only to reject them. Even the Adi Granth, which treasures the hymns (bani) of Guru Nanak and his successor Gurus, is ignored despite specific reference in some of them to the contemporary events like the invasion of Babar, the depredations that followed and the sufferings of the people. He doubts the context of 'Babar-vani' and other suggestive verses as he refuses to believe that Guru Nanak was present at Saidpur when that city was sacked".

Gurdev Singh in a book he edited "*Perspective of Sikh Tradition*" critically analyzed McLeod's work and brings forward certain discrepancies in his research. One of Hew's wrongful inference, he pointed out, was: "It is misleading to call Guru Nanak the founder of Sikh religion as he did not originate a new school of thought or set of teachings. What Guru Nanak offers us is the clearest and most highly articulate expression of the nirguna sampradaya, the so-called Sant tradition of Northern India, a system which he inherited, reworked according to his own genius and passed on in a form unequalled by any other representative of the tradition. It was the influence of Nath doctrine and practice upon Vaishnava bhakti which was responsible for the emergence of the Sant synthesis."

Gurdev Singh candidly exposes McLeod's misconceptions, according to G S Sundhu, a staunch Sikh, that "the ten Gurus never preached one set of religious doctrines or system and particularly the third Guru created new institutions on the old Hindu lines, the very thing Guru Nanak has spurned. Sixth Guru onwards teachings of Guru Nanak were completely given up in favor of a militant pose in response to socio-political situations",

Hakam Singh, a Sikh scholar, was surprised at Hew's school of thought for publishing literature demeaning the Sikhs that was well reviewed by Gurdev. He was referring to Gurdev's salient points that he thought are derogatory to Sikhs: (a) "The arming of the Panth would not have been the result of any decision by Guru Hargobind but because of Jat influx in the Sikh fold "The growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems which prompted a militant response, (b) "The traditional account about the founding of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of the year or 1699 (A.D.) cannot be accepted as there are "compulsive reasons for scepticism", and "the traditions relating to the period of Guru Gobind Singh must be in some considerable measure, set aside. The slate must be wiped clean and must not be scribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century. (c) "The Sikh code of discipline, Rehat Maryada, and Sikh symbols were evolved during the eighteenth century as a result of gradual growth, though the tradition declares they were definitely settled by a pronouncement of Guru Gobind Singh and were a part of the Baisakhi day proceedings in 1699 (A.D.), (d) "Though the Gurus denounced caste system and preached against it, yet they did not seem sincere or serious in removing caste differences", (e) 'The succession of the Granth Sahib as Guru of the Sikhs, ending the line of personal Gurus on the death of Guru Gobind Singh, was not because of an injunction of Guru Gobind Singh himself but was a subsequent adoption by the Sikhs, who were fighting for their existence, to meet the needs of the Panth for cohesion, and (f) authenticity of the current version of Guru Granth Sahib which is widely accepted and used by the Sikhs is open to question since there are three manuscripts (Birs) available which are not entirely identical".

Daljeet Singh, a Sikh writer also scrutinized Hew's research. For McLeod, he writes "Nathism and Vaishnavism are "the elements of Sant Mat that Guru Nanak is said to have reworked and put forward. Making comparison of these two systems with Sikhism Daljeet Singh has brought out the distinction features of Guru Nanak's teachings which are not only in conflict with the Sant Mat, but unequivocally reject them".

There is no doubt about Sikhs and their history. The Panth, Granth and Maryada, according to Man and Raminderjit, are well preserved. They said even a non-Sikh, Hari Ram Gupta, a renowned Indian historian specialized in Punjab History, gave a detailed account of the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi of the year 1699 A.D. which is based on authentic evidence that negates Hew's boisterous claim voiced without justifiable cogent material.

Furthermore, they said Ganda Singh and Professor Harbans Singh, both acclaimed Sikh scholars, wrote separately with unimpeachable evidence regarding installation of Guru Granth Sahib as Eternal Guru ending the line of human succession. And, "Jagjit Singh studied in detail the caste system which prevailed in Hindu society and ascertained that Guru Nanak and rest of the Gurus not only rejected it but also took effective steps to wean away the Sikhs and eradicate all distinctions of castes and status". "He effectively controverts Dr. McLeod's thesis about the "militarization of Sikh movement that it was the influx of Jats that led to it".

Adding to the long list of scholars who repeatedly brought out Hew's wrong doings in literature, Sangat Singh, a high ranking Indian official, in a paper presented at International Sikh conferences in 2000 opened the eyes of Sikhs, according to Hew's opponents, by publishing accounts that every Sikh must know. He exposed that "Intelligence including the powerful Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) tells us that the appointment, in post 1984 era, of Dr. S.S. Bal as Vice Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) and of Dr. J.S. Grewal , ex-Vice Chancellor of GNDU, as Director of prestigious Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, was because of RAW's recommendation. Dr. J.S. Grewal and Dr. S.S. Bal, two clean shaven members of History Department, Punjab University, Chandigarh, donned long hair, with one of them suppressing his cigarette smoking, and both of them were appointed Professors in Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, and Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana respectively while McLeod must have got his returns in other terms. A long lasting association was established between them and they kept one another in harness.

Splitting up of the Congress party, and running of the Union Government with the help of Left Front communists, made a lot of dubious scholars to don leftist/pseudo leftist mantle and occupy Chairs in Indian universities with Government patronage. Will it be farfetched to say that McLeod's position now was that of Dr. Faustus who, in dictionary terms, sold his conscience for material gains? The intelligence all over made payment in cash, without taking receipts. Even in case where payment was made in my presence, it is difficult to prove anything: it would be a case of one affidavit against another. To say that McLeod was an independent scholar pursuing his scholasticism objectively will be a travesty of truth".

Sangat Singh further enumerated that "McLeod has excelled himself in inventing, fabricating, mutilating, falsifying, distorting and tampering with facts.....He is lucky, for there is no Ayatollah Khomeini among the Sikhs. His caricature and demeaning references to Sikh Gurus and Sikh scriptures are in no way less blasphemous than what Salman Rushdie in Satanic Verses did to the Prophet, his Wives, and the holy Koran".

Licensed as Rev. William Hewat McLeod on December 12, 1957, he was appointed to succeed Ryburn in India in 1957. Having acquired special training in printing and accounting, he was predestined to perform overseas missionary work and sailed to India on April 4, 1958 as "Own Worker, Bible class movement". In India he became manager of the Mashal Press and according to Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand "engaged in special research on Sikhism" and left for London in July of 1963 only to return to India in 1965. In 1998, contrary to the belief of his friends that Hew was agnostic, he became a convener of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa and since 2000 remained a member of its historical records reference group. His last rights were carried out on July 24, 2009 at the Chappell of Knox College of Duniden, New Zealand.

Hew's most trusted flag bearers: Gurinder Singh Mann and Pashaura Singh highlighted his literary contributions to the Sikh studies in various articles on the net. Pashaura's response to Hew's untimely demise was rather painstaking "Alas! Alas! Alas!" He wrote "I was shocked to hear the news of the sad demise of my mentor and a world-renowned scholar of Sikh Studies, Professor W.H. McLeod. About two weeks ago, he fell and broke his collar-bone. He was in the intensive care unit after a surgery in the hospital".

Indeed it is unfortunate; Sikhs have lost a Christian missionary, turned atheist, so intently immersed in Sikh studies. Hew leaves behind a trail of deception and intrigue that Sikhs will, now, never be able to objectively address. Regrettably his demise brings out the few wavered crawling out of the woodwork. The Sikhs condole his passing because neither the family nor the departed soul realizes what he has done. May the *Wahe Guru* give strength to Hew's friends in academia to endure his impertinent path so decadently carved for them.

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