

Reuters misreports about the Yazidi

Reuters reported that Al Qaeda was the prime suspect in suicide bombings that cost the life of at least 175 Yazidis, a non-Islamic Kurdish group that lives in northern Iraq, Syria and Turkey and has its own religion. Reuters gave some facts about the rather unknown group. But many of the facts were either inadequately presented or simply wrong.

According to Reuters the Yazidi adhere to a syncretic religion that combines Islamic, Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian (Nestorian) influences. Reuters says they have often face persecution "because the chief angel they venerate as a manifestation of God is often identified as the fallen angel Satan in biblical terminology."

Yes and no. It is indeed a heavily syncretic religion and indeed they have been wrongly taken to be devil worshippers. But concerning their syncretism it is actually not really clear what exactly were the influences forming the Yazidi and concerning the devil worship: it is not because of the Biblical fallen angel story - it is because of the Koranic. In the Bible the fallen angel Lucifer is more related to a story where he wants to be worshiped as God. He gathers followers and the result is a battle between the angels in heaven. In Koran it is Iblis (who is a jinn rather than an angel) who does not wish to bow to the humans when God tells the angels to do so. Iblis does not bow because he says he is made of light and the humans are made of clay. Thus his jealousy makes him turn away from God and become the Satan.

The Yazidi on the other hand modified the story. Wikipedia relates that when their Melek Taus ("angel of God") is given the choice to bow to God, he refuses. God does not get angry, but instead exalts him for his right choice. The angels are made out of the substance of God and thus should not bow before the humans. God had put it before the angels as a test, and Melek Taus chose correctly.

Reuters on the other hand said that when "when the devil repented of his sin of pride before God, he was pardoned and replaced in his previous position as chief of the angels."

Whatever be the more accepted version among the Yazidi (not ruling out that different communities recount different stories since there is no real scripture of their religion), in any case, it is the same Koranic story but with quite a different ending. And it is this difference in the story which gave rise to the misunderstanding that the Yazidi's would be devil worshippers.

Reuters also says that Yazidis are antidualists. The article states that "they deny the existence of evil and therefore also reject sin, the devil, and hell." Nonetheless a bit later Reuters contradicts itself by reporting that the "Yazidis consider marriage outside their faith a sin punishable by death to restore lost honour."

And indeed in April 2007 twenty three Yazidis were executed as a reaction to a cellphone-recorded video that had been circulating in Iraq showing the stoning to death of 17 year old girl that was in love and had been going out with a Muslim boy.

The very closed up Yazidi group has many other religious restrictions besides the intermarriage restriction. Some of them, like not insulting religious man, are widely respected, others, like not eating lettuce, are less strictly adhered to. The strongest punishment for possible transgressions within the Yazidi community is expulsion.

The Yazidi community, Reuters said, believes "they were created quite separately from the rest of mankind, not even being descended from Adam". According to Wikipedia they are different, exactly because they come from Adam and not from Eve.

And finally Reuters also mentions Sheikh Adi, a Yazidi saint to whose Tomb Yazidis hold their most important pilgrimage. The article calls him "a 12th century Muslim mystic whom the Yazidi believe to have achieved divinity through metempsychosis." But metempsychosis is a Greek philosophical term for reincarnation and not 'a practice' like meditation, fasting or prayer that can get you closer to God as the Reuters explanation makes one think. Even more so, the metempsychosis idea of the Yazidi is more closely related to the recurrent incarnation throughout history of divine beings taking a human form on earth and not to the reincarnation of humans on their path to the divine.

The original Reuters article:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL15754339>

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