

Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists rebut Santorum: 'Equality' is their concept, too

by [Omar Sacirbey](#) in the [February 22, 2012](#) issue

Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus are accusing Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum of bigotry and ignorance after he said that equality is solely a Judeo-Christian concept.

"Where do you think the concept of equality comes from?" Santorum said on the campaign trail January 20. "It doesn't come from Islam. It doesn't come from the East and Eastern religions. It comes from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Not everyone agreed. "Santorum's presidential campaign is now playing to the lowest common denominator of religious bigotry and prejudice by attacking Eastern religions and Islam," said Aseem Shukla of the Hindu American Foundation. Santorum's comments, Shukla added, "show a profound ignorance of the teachings of Dharma spiritual traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism."

Santorum's campaign did not answer repeated requests for comment. Critics said Santorum—a devout Catholic—not only has his politics wrong but also his history.

For example, in the Bhagavad Gita, a Hindu scripture, words attributed to the god Krishna include: "I look upon all creatures equally; none are less dear to me and none more dear."

"Indian religions predate Abraham, Jacob and all that Rick Santorum was talking

about," said Sulekh Jain of Sugar Land, Texas, chairman of the International School for Jain Studies. "All souls are equal in every way. All feel pain and all feel pleasure. This concept is deeply embedded in the whole philosophy of Jainism."

Sikhs, who also trace their religion to India, were equally upset. "In Sikhism, all human beings have equal status in the eyes of God. No differentiation in status or ceremonies or rights is made between men and women, rich and poor, foreigner and countryman, high caste or low caste," said Manbeena Kaur, education director for the New York-based Sikh Coalition.

"Sikhs have had this belief in and practice of equality as a spiritual mandate long before the political revolutions that brought freedom to America and much of the Western world."

Buddhism expert Toshie Kurihara argues that equality was a foundational teaching of the Buddha.

"The Buddha preached against the caste system and advocated equality of all people. From the beginning, Buddhism espoused the concept of equality of all people," she wrote last year in the *Journal of Oriental Studies*.

The Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations said it would send Santorum a copy of the Qur'an, Islam's holy text. "The Qu'ran is the best refutation of Mr. Santorum's inaccurate and offensive remarks," said Ibrahim Hooper, a CAIR spokesman. The group cited Qur'an verses and sayings of Islam's Prophet Muhammad that support equality. For example, Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "All people are equal as the teeth of a comb." —RNS