

Was Muhammad Really the ‘First Anti-Racist in Human History’?

OCT 23, 2020 2:00 PM BY STEPHEN M. KIRBY

In June 2020, Dr. Craig Considine, a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Rice University, produced a video titled “Who Is the First Anti-Racist in Human History?” In this video Considine identified Muhammad as that “First Anti-Racist.” Considine noted:

Arguably, Prophet Muhammad was the first person in human history to declare, in no uncertain terms, that no person is above another by virtue of race or ethnicity. This declaration is crystallized in one of the Prophet’s notable speeches: His Last Sermon, as it is known, which was delivered on Mount Arafat in 632 A.D. In that sermon, the Prophet Muhammad unequivocally condemned racism when he said: “All mankind is descended from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab. And a non-Arab has no superiority over an Arab. A white person has no superiority over a black person, nor a black person has any superiority over a white person, except by piety and good action.”

Ever since then, Prophet Muhammad’s teachings on racial equality have inspired human beings to strive for racial equality and justice for all. [\[1\]](#)

Considine’s video and its transcript, along with numerous other articles that include variations of Muhammad’s statement about Arabs and non-Arabs, and whites and blacks, populate the internet. And Muhammad is lauded as a man who was centuries ahead of his times in terms of race relations.

Did Muhammad really make such a statement during his “Last Sermon”? Strangely, this statement is not found in early classical works by authoritative Muslim scholars where the “Last Sermon” is mentioned. [\[2\]](#) It is also not found in popular modern works where the “Last Sermon” is mentioned; included with these modern works is *The Sealed Nectar*, which was awarded First

Prize in 1979 by The Muslim World League (Mecca) in a worldwide competition for a new biography of Muhammad.[3]

It is found in neither the six authoritative *hadith* collections nor in *Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas*. [4]

It is found in only one *hadith* collection: *Musnad Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal*, collected by Imam Bin Hanbal (780-855 AD), the founder of the Hanbali School of Islamic Sacred Law. Only four of the 15 volumes of the *Musnad* have been translated into English and these four do not mention that particular statement of Muhammad. Consequently, I have relied on the following translation of Muhammad's statement as reportedly found in another part of the *Musnad*:

From Abi Nadrah al-Mundhir Ibn Malik Ibn Qut'ah...[Muhammad said] Indeed an Arab has no excellence over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any excellence over an Arab, nor does a white person have any excellence over a black one, nor does a black person have any excellence over a white one, except through taqwa. [5]

It would appear that Muhammad was indeed a pioneer in the condemnation of racism, especially between whites and blacks.

However, there is a problem here. There were numerous reports that Muhammad was "white"; [6] and lest there would be any confusion about that matter, an early Muslim scholar stated that anyone who claimed that Muhammad was black should be killed. [7]

And the white Muhammad owned black slaves. Muhammad:

1. Had a black slave boy named Mid'am. [8]
2. Had a black male slave camel driver named Anjasha. [9]
3. Had a black male slave as a doorman. [10]
4. Had black slave girls. One of these slave girls committed fornication and Muhammad ordered that she be given 50 lashes after her postpartum bleeding had ended. [11] And a black slave girl played a drum for Muhammad's entertainment. [12]
5. Used two of his black slaves to purchase another slave. [13]

So how can the white Muhammad be considered the "first anti-racist" when he owned black slaves? How could he state that whites and blacks had no superiority over the other when he was obviously superior to his black slaves?

The answer is found in the final part of Muhammad's statement where he says that whites and blacks have no superiority over each other "except through *taqwa*."

In looking at different versions of Muhammad's statement, especially when it is quoted by non-Muslims, the word *taqwa* is often replaced by general phrases such as "piety and good action," and "personal piety and righteousness."

However, the word *taqwa* has nothing to do with such ecumenical generalities. It rather means obeying the Muslim god Allah:

The reality [haqiqah] of pious devotion [taqwa] is doing what Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He) has commanded you to do, forsaking what He has forbidden you to do, and being patient with His workings...His decrees of destiny...and all the rest of His trials and tribulations. [14]

It also means fearing Allah:

Taqwa is defined as fearing Allah when a person fears from Almighty Allah then he will not commit sins. Taqwa incorporates consciousness and fear of Allah as well as piety. Piety is basically righteousness that can be only obtained by the obedience of Almighty Allah and refrain from His prohibitions... In Holy Quran and Sunnah Taqwa is define [sic] as the concept of protecting oneself from the Hellfire by following the orders of Allah Almighty, by doing what He (SWT) has commanded and by avoiding what He (SWT) has forbidden... [15]

Taqwa means fearing and acting on the commands of Allah, [16] and Muhammad spoke frequently about the "taqwa of Allah." [17]

Here it is important to emphasize that Allah, the god of Islam, is not the same as the God of Christians and Jews. Consider this from a Muslim website:

But what the Muslim should use in his worship... and all other circumstances when referring to Allah, may He be exalted and glorified, is the word "Allah" as it is, because that has become a symbol for the Muslims and something that distinguishes them, and it helps to avoid any confusion between what they mean and what others mean when they say "God" [my emphasis], as others may sometimes be referring to Allah, but sometimes they may be referring to something else... [18]

The Koran and the teachings of Muhammad make it abundantly clear that Allah is not the same as the God of Christians and Jews. [19] And when Muslims refer to "believers" they are referring only to Muslims; Christians and Jews in particular are not considered to be "believers." [20]

So the word *taqwa* is used exclusively to refer to Allah, the god of Islam, and it is only the worship and fear of Allah that determines excellence and superiority among people. As Dr. 'Abd al-Salam Ibn Burjis noted about Muhammad's statement:

And in this hadith, excellence is confined to taqwa and it is negated in anything other than taqwa. [21]

This means that Muslims are inherently superior to non-Muslims.^[22]

Conclusion

Muhammad's statement is commonly understood as proclaiming that no person is superior to another by virtue of race or ethnicity. But that is not what Muhammad said.

As we have seen, *taqwa* means following the commands of Allah, the god of Islam. So in reality, Muhammad said that excellence/superiority is determined by one's belief in, and adherence to the commands of Allah. By virtue of that fact, Muslims are inherently superior to non-Muslims, who by definition do not believe in the Muslim god Allah. Consequently, the white Muhammad could have as many non-Muslim black slaves (and any other color of such slaves) as he wanted.^[23]

The significance of the word *taqwa* is also important to understanding Koran 49:13:

O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, Well-Acquainted.

This Koran verse is often used to support the claim that Islam teaches that people of various countries and ethnicities are all equal and should learn to know each other and get along in peace. In reality, the focus of 49:13 has nothing to do with different people being equal and learning to live together in peace; this verse simply states that of all the people created, the Muslims, who have *taqwa*, are the "most honourable" in the eyes of Allah.

So the use of the word *taqwa* means that in the above *hadith* Muhammad said nothing about "racial equality and justice for all." Muhammad simply pointed out that only fear and worship of Allah were what determined excellence and superiority; those who did not have *taqwa*, non-Muslims, were by virtue of that fact no better than any other non-Muslim.

Muhammad was an "anti-racist" only in the fact that he divided all people into two, non-racial categories; he said:

One is only a righteous believer [Muslim] or a doomed evildoer.^[24]

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of six books about Islam. His latest book is *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials*.

[1] Dr. Craig Considine, "Who Is the First Anti-Racist in Human History?," *New Muslim*, June 11, 2020, <https://www.newmuslim.net/featured/who-is-the-first-anti-racist-in-human-history/>.

[2] From the 8th – 18th Centuries:

Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad (Sirat Rasul Allah)*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 649-652.

Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi*, trans. Rizwi Faizer, Amal Ismail, and AbdulKader Tayob, ed. Rizwi Faizer (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 539-541, and 543-545.

Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari: The Last Years of the Prophet*, Vol. IX, trans. and annotated Ismail K. Poonawala (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 109-115.

Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Sa'd ibn Mani' al-Zuhri al-Basri, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, trans. S. Moinul Haq (New Delhi, India: Kitab Bhavan, 2009), pp. 213-235.

'Imaduddeen Isma'eel ibn Katheer al-Qurashi, *Winning the Hearts and Souls: Expeditions and Delegations in the Lifetime of Prophet Muhammad*, trans. Research Department of Darussalam (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2010), pp. 239-357.

Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab at-Tamimi, *Abridged Biography of Prophet Muhammad*, ed. 'Abdur-Rahman bin Nasir Al-Barrak, 'Abdul 'Azeez bin 'Abdullah Ar-Rajih, and Muhammad Al-'Ali Al-Barrak (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2003), pp. 309-310.

[3] Modern works:

Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad, A Biography of the Prophet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 252-254.

Robert Spencer, *The Truth about Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 160-161.

Martin Lings, *Muhammad, His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006), pp. 348-351.

Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad, A Prophet for our Time* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), pp. 193-194.

Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar* (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2008), pp. 538-546.

Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *When the Moon Split, A Biography of the Prophet Muhammad* (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2009), pp. 390-397.

[4]

Abu 'Eisa Mohammad ibn 'Eisa at-Tirmidhi, *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, trans. Abu Khaliyl, 6 Volumes (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2007)

Muhammad bin Ismail bin Al-Mughirah al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 9 Volumes (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 1997)

Abu'l Hussain 'Asakir-ud-Din Muslim bin Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naisaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. 'Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, 8 Volumes (New Delhi, India: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2008)

Abu Dawud Sulaiman bin al-Ash'ath bin Ishaq, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, trans. Yaser Qadhi, 5 Volumes (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2008)

Abu 'Abdur-Rahman Ahmad bin Shu'aib bin 'Ali bin Sinan bin Bahr An-Nasa'i, *Sunan An-Nasa'i*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 6 Volumes (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2007)

Muhammad bin Yazeed ibn Majah al-Qazwini, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 5 Volumes (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2007)

Malik ibn Anas ibn Malik ibn Abi 'Amir al-Asbahi, *Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas: The First Formulation of Islamic Law*, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (Inverness, Scotland: Madinah Press, 2004)

[5] Dr. 'Abd al-Salam Ibn Burjis Ibn Nasir Al-Abd al-Karim, *Prophetic Ahadith in Condemnation of Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Sunnah Publishing, 2012), p. 28.

[6] For example: *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 1, Book 3, No. 63, p. 92; *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 7, No. 2340, p. 44; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 1, No. 486, p. 294; and Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal ash-Shaibani, *Musnad Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal* (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2012), Vol. 1, No. 1300, p. 587.

[7] Qadi 'Iyad ibn Musa al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad, Messenger of Allah: Ash-Shifa of Qadi 'Iyad*, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (Norwich, UK: Diwan Press, 2011), p. 387.

- [8] *Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas*, 21.13.25, p. 179; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 3, No. 2711, p. 323; and *Sunan An-Nasa'i*, Vol. 4, Nol. 3858, p. 449.
- [9] *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 7, No. 2323, p. 38; and *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, Book 78, No. 6161, p. 106.
- [10] *Jami At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 6, No. 3318, p. 50; *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 3, Book 46, No. 2468, p. 376; Vol. 6, Book 65, No. 4913, p. 363; and Vol. 9, Book 95, No. 7263, p. 227; *Musnad Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal*, Vol. 1, No. 222, p. 144.
- [11] *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 1, No. 332, p. 212; and *Musnad Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal*, Vol. 1, No. 1142, p. 530.
- [12] *Jami At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 6, No. 3690, p. 368. Abu Hurairah, a close companion of Muhammad, also had at least one black slave girl: *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 2, No. 2174, p. 566.
- [13] *Sunan An-Nasa'i*, Vol. 5, No. 4189, p. 126; *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Vol. 4, No. 2869, p. 107; and *Jami At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 3, No. 1239, p. 49, and No. 1596, p. 360.
- [14] Shaikh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, *The Sublime Revelation: Al-Fath ar-Rabbani*, Trans. Muhtar Holland (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Al-Baz Publishing, Inc. Kindle Edition), p. 358.
- [15] "Importance of Taqwa in Islam and its Benefits from Quran," *Quran Reading*, January 2, 2018, <http://www.quranreading.com/blog/importance-of-taqwa-in-islam-and-its-benefits-from-quran/>.
- [16] For additional examples of *taqwa* referring specifically to Allah, see: *Prophetic Ahadith in Condemnation of Racism*, p. 81; *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Vol. 5, p. 527; *Sunan An-Nasa'i*, Vol. 6, p. 480; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 5, p. 588; *Jami' At Tirmidhi*, Vol 6, p. 640; Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir Al-Qurtubi: Classical Commentary of the Holy Qur'an*, Vol. 1, trans. Aisha Bewley (London: Dar Al Taqwa Ltd., 2003), p. 780; and Jalalu'd-Din al-Mahalli and Jalalu'd-Din as-Suyuti, *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, trans. Aisha Bewley (London: Dar Al Taqwa Ltd., 2007), p. 1369.
- [17] For example: *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 3, No. 3124, p. 570; *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 6, No. 3445, p. 172; and *Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas*, 18.5.13, p. 113.
- [18] "Translating the names and attributes of Allah into other languages and swearing by them," *Islam Question & Answer*, April 16, 2012, <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/171528/translating-the-names-and-attributes-of-allah-into-other-languages-and-swearing-by-them>.

[19] Stephen M. Kirby, "Do We All Believe in the Same God?" *FrontPage Mag*, December 22, 2014, <https://archives.frontpagemag.com/fpm/do-we-all-believe-same-god-dr-stephen-m-kirby/>.

[20] Stephen M. Kirby, "The Fantasy Islam of the University of Chicago's Fred Donner (Part 1)," *Jihad Watch*, January 30, 2019, <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2019/01/the-fantasy-islam-of-the-university-of-chicagos-fred-donner-part-1>.

[21] *Prophetic Ahadith in Condemnation of Racism*, p. 29.

[22] The inherent superiority of Muslims over non-Muslims is stated in Koran verses such as 3:110, 98:6 and 98:7.

[23] For more information about Muhammad's involvement with slavery go to *The Perfect Man Truth* at <http://perfectmantruth.com/slaves.php>.

[24] *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 5, No. 5116, p. 419.