

'A priceless heritage destroyed by Islamic barbarians': Dawkins outrages Muslims with comments over extremists damaging library

- **Richard Dawkins's tweet over library in Timbuktu, Mali, causes offence**
- **Some of 600,000 followers say professor was unjustly attacking Islam**
- **Later clarifies he 'does not of course mean all Muslims are barbarians'**

By Mark Duel

Atheist Richard Dawkins has managed to outrage another religion after calling Muslims 'barbarians'.

The 71-year-old author of *The God Delusion* was referring to the severe damage caused by Islamist extremists to a sacred library in Timbuktu, Mali, but his comments were seen as insulting to Muslims.

Oxford University academic Professor Dawkins told his 600,000 Twitter followers on Tuesday: 'Like Alexandria, like Bamiyan, Timbuktu's priceless manuscript heritage destroyed by Islamic barbarians.'



Comments: Richard Dawkins said Timbuktu's manuscript heritage was 'destroyed by Islamic barbarians'

But his comments were criticised, with some followers claiming he was unjustly attacking Islam and others saying he should be considering vandalism acts by Christians, reported the **Daily Telegraph**. Muslim Twitter user 'Shawa5i Al Nasser' from the United Arab Emirates said: 'You call us barbarians, truly no respect', before later adding: 'How do you explain this "destroyed by Islamic barbarians?"'

Professor Dawkins responded to the comments by saying: 'You mean you were one of those who burned the books in Timbuktu? No? I thought not. So I wasn't calling you a barbarian was I.' He also said to all of his followers: 'I was calling Islamic barbarians barbarians', adding: 'By "Islamic barbarians" I mean those Muslims who are also barbarians. I do not of course mean all Muslims.'



Richard Dawkins

@RichardDawkins



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Backlash: Professor Dawkins's comments on Twitter were criticised, with some followers claiming he was unjustly attacking Islam and others saying he should have considered vandalism acts by Christians

Professor Dawkins later added: 'Xtian (Christian) barbarians murder abortion doctors. Most Xtians (Christians) are not barbarians. Stalin was an atheist barbarian. Most atheists are not barbarians.'

'By "Islamic barbarians" I mean those Muslims who are also barbarians. I do not of course mean all Muslims'

Richard Dawkins

On Monday Islamists were said to have burned down the world-famous Ahmed Baba Institute library containing priceless manuscripts and artefacts. Timbuktu's mayor Ousmane Halle said: 'They torched all the important ancient manuscripts. The ancient books of geography and science. It is the history of Timbuktu, of its people.' However a South African university said yesterday that the extremists damaged or stole only a limited number of manuscripts in Timbuktu before they fled the fabled desert city.



'Priceless heritage': Some of the 20,000 preserved ancient Islamic manuscripts which rest in air-conditioned rooms are displayed at the Ahmed Baba Institute in Timbuktu, Mali (file picture)

People in the city reported that there was no malicious destruction of any library or collection, said the University of Cape Town, which helped fund a state-of-the-art library to house manuscripts.

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Ousmane Halle, Timbuktu's mayor

The Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks claimed last year that a 'profoundly anti-Semitic' comment in Professor Dawkins's *The God Delusion* likened God portrayed in Jewish texts to a fictional villain. But Professor Dawkins said he was 'anti-God' rather than 'anti-Jewish' and claimed the allegation from Lord Sacks was 'ridiculous'.

Meanwhile, Professor Dawkins and former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams will debate the role of religion in the modern world at the Cambridge Union Society tonight. Union president Ben Kentish said it should be a highlight of the debating society's 200-year history. 'Our speakers are the most renowned commentators on this subject,' he added