

# PBS MUHAMMAD FILM RAISES QUESTIONS

In August, a three-part documentary, "The Life of Muhammad," debuted on PBS to much critical acclaim.

No one likes to see his religion trashed, and with regard to "The Life of Muhammad," Muslims have nothing to worry about. The New York *Daily News* said the film could be subtitled "Islam 101," boasting that "If it helps with greater understanding, it has done its job." A professor who appears in the series praised it for its "balance."

However, a look back at PBS' treatment of the Catholic Church yielded few films that could reasonably be dubbed "Catholicism 101," or that could in any way be praised for promoting "greater understanding." In fact, most of the films were flagrantly imbalanced.

Nowhere was Muhammad depicted in the series. This is said to be in keeping with Koranic prohibitions against showing images of the prophet. But the Koran only condemns idolatry; it does not forbid representations of human beings. Indeed, there are illustrated Korans that depict Muhammad. Also, if showing human figures is taboo, why did Muhammad allow his wife, Aisha, to play with dolls? (She was 6-years-old when he married her, and 9 when the marriage was consummated; he was in his fifties.) Moreover, Muhammad himself kept copies of Jesus and Mary from destruction.

Oxford professor Tariq Ramadan erroneously said in the film that "We never represent or have any images of any of the prophets." Faris Kermani, the producer and director, does not deny that Ramadan is wrong. He simply says that he decided to respect "the current Muslim view, understanding that this has not always been the case." So kind.

PBS has a long history of disparate treatment when it comes to portrayals of Islam and Catholicism. Its treatment of Islam has not always been fair, either.