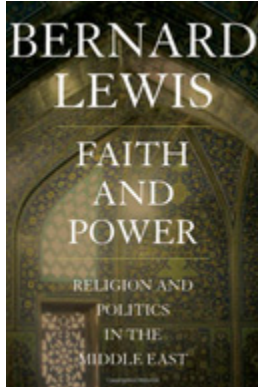




Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East

Bernard Lewis , Joanne J. Myers

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to thank you all for joining us.

It is indeed an honor to present to you a man who is universally recognized as the most influential postwar historian of Islamism and the Middle East, Bernard Lewis. The *Wall Street Journal* anointed Professor Lewis "the world's foremost Islamic scholar." *The Baltimore Sun* called him "a towering figure among experts on the culture and religion of the Muslim world." *The New York Times* wrote that "he is a doyen of Middle Eastern studies."

Bernard Lewis is nothing less than a national treasure, whose trusted voice is one that politicians, journalists, historians, and the general public have all turned to for insight about the Middle East, especially after the events of 9/11.

In Professor Lewis's [earlier visit to the Carnegie Council](#), he discussed his widely acclaimed book, [What Went Wrong?](#) But on that day, everything went right, as he nourished our hunger to understand the Islamic world. He became our teacher and guide to past centuries, when Islam and Christianity engaged in jihads and crusades, conquests and reconquests. Throughout his presentation, he conveyed a brilliant command of the subject, tremendous intensity, and an incredible wit, all attributes that I know will soon be on display for you to experience for yourself.

Today we turn to him once again, this time for a refresher course on issues that continue to haunt us and for which we search for clarification and understanding. Professor Lewis will be discussing his latest book, which is entitled [Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East](#). This work is a compendium of articles, some never published before, others published in languages other than English. Nevertheless, each essay illuminates the role of religion and government in the Islamic world and how it has shaped these societies. Each one will enrich our understanding of the nuances and historical differences between the three interrelated Middle Eastern religions—Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. As before, you will find his writings replete with the historic insight that one might expect from the world's foremost Islamic scholar.

If past is prologue, then I know how privileged we are to have the opportunity to listen to this remarkable scholar, whose encyclopedic knowledge and original thought should make for a very special lecture. Please join me in welcoming as our guest a man of incredible knowledge, known to most of us as Bernard

Lewis, but on occasion who has also answered to the moniker "Lewis of Arabia."

We are thrilled that you are here today. Thank you for joining us.

Remarks

BERNARD LEWIS: Thank you, Madame Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. I'm afraid that after that introduction, anything that I say will come as something of a disappointment. But I'll do my best to alleviate it.

Time is limited, so I'll get down to business right away.

On the subject of faith and power, obviously we are dealing with what, in Western terms, we would call relations between church and state. I try not to use that terminology, because it doesn't apply to other systems. I have to make that clear as I go along. I shall be looking at three religions, all rooted in the Middle East, historically and ideologically connected: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. I name them in chronological order.

It is customary nowadays to speak of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The term is a fairly recent one. In earlier times, it would have been found offensive on both sides of the hyphen. But the reality is an old one. It has been going on for a long time. Christianity obviously arose out of Judaism. Christians retained the Jewish Bible, renamed it the Old Testament and added a New Testament to it. That gives rise to an enormous amount of shared tradition and perceptions.

The advent of Islam, the third religion in the historical sequence, is a somewhat different matter. Muhammad, the prophet and founder of Islam, did not retain either the Old or the New Testaments. He decided that both had been corrupted by their unworthy custodians and needed to be superseded. He therefore brought a new revelation of his own. He did, however, retain important parts of the Judeo-Christian tradition—or should I say, of the Jewish and Christian traditions—which became part of Islam.

It is normal practice for all of us to see others in terms of ourselves, to attribute to others the same motives, the same patterns of behavior as we have. This is very misleading when we apply it to a different civilization, with different traditions and different backgrounds. As I said, Islam did not retain any of the Judeo-Christian Bible, but it did retain other affinities. For example, Muslims share with Jews the belief in a God who is concerned in great detail with what we eat or don't eat. Muslim rules for eating are not the same as those of Jews, but they do overlap to quite a considerable extent. It's interesting that when, at the beginning of the 19th century, Muslim governments sent the first Muslim students to Europe, they were told that they could eat Jewish food, because Jews obeyed more or less the same rules, but they must not eat Christian food because Christians would eat or drink anything.

On the other hand, of course, there is this major affinity between Christianity and Islam, in which both resemble each other and differ from Judaism. I hope you see where I'm leading. Let me try to explain. I'm sure you have all heard the name of a Franciscan monk called [St. John of Capistrano](#). His name still adorns the map of California. He devoted much of his life to waging war against what he saw as the two great enemies of Christendom, the Jews and the Muslims. Many of his collected sermons are attacks on one or the other or both. He tried to organize pogroms of the one, crusades to the other, and didn't do too badly.

Among his many accusations against the Jews, there is one which stands out in that it is accurate. He said the Jews maintain and even advance this absurd idea that everybody can be saved in his own religion. For once, St. John of Capistrano was right. The Jewish Talmud says quite explicitly that the righteous of all peoples have a place in Paradise. Judaism is for the Jews and those who care to join them, but it is not an exclusive claim to Paradise.

Here we come to the major resemblance between Christianity and Islam. Christians and Muslims share

the belief—or should I say divided the belief—that they were the fortunate recipients of God's final message to humanity, after which there would be no other, and any pretense at one was a falsehood.

When you have two religions side by side with the same self-perception, obviously conflict is inevitable. This gave rise to the long series of wars and ideological, as well as military, conflicts between the two triumphalist religions. "Triumphalist" is the term that has been devised to describe those religions that claim exclusive truth, as against "relativist," for those who are prepared to believe that others may be right, too.

The history of the struggle between Islam and Christianity is a very long one, starting with the very beginning of Islam. Remember that in the seventh century, when Islam in its present form was born, the whole of the Mediterranean was Christian. The countries which are now called Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa—all those were part of Christendom. The Arabs brought Islam out of Arabia, conquered all those places, and began what became the process of Arabization and Islamization in those previously Christian countries. From there, they advanced across the Mediterranean into Europe, conquering Sicily and Spain, which they held for quite a while, even advancing into France. Then the Christians managed to stage a response to this, which was partially successful, partially unsuccessful. The reconquest of Spain and Sicily succeeded. The attempt to reconquer the lost lands of Asia and North Africa failed. The Crusade was an extension of that, and that, as you know, failed.

That was the first Muslim attempt to invade and conquer Europe.

The second came with the advance of the Ottomans into Europe, the [Ottoman Empire](#). The Turks conquered Anatolia, a previously Christian country, in the 11th century. Then they went on and conquered Constantinople, which became Istanbul, and conquered a large part of southeastern Europe. Twice they reached as far as Vienna, to which they laid siege. And it wasn't only that part of Europe. The Barbary corsairs, whom we think of as pirates, but who thought of themselves as waging maritime jihad in a holy war against the infidels—the Barbary corsairs were part of the jihad, as I said. They were what, in Western naval parlance, one might call privateers, raiding Western shipping and carrying off vast numbers of captives from Western countries for sale in the slave markets of North Africa. They raided very far. They raided the British Isles, Penzance, Baltimore—I mean the original one in Ireland—even as far away as Iceland and Madeira. This continued for centuries. This was part, as I said, of the second great Muslim attempt to take Europe, one which brought the Ottoman armies to the walls of Vienna and the Barbary corsairs as far as Iceland and Madeira.

That, too, was repelled. Eventually they were driven out. The counterattack from Christendom was so successful that it culminated in the establishment of the Western empires in previously independent Muslim countries.

Now I think we are witnessing the third attempt, not by military conquest, but by migration and demography. This migration is something entirely new and very remarkable, if one looks at it in the context of Muslim history. As I'm sure you know, the Muslim religion is a legal religion, with a very elaborate juristic literature, containing rules and regulations for every aspect of human life. One of the problems considered in the Shariah, the juristic literature, is, what is the position of the Muslim under non-Muslim government? How is he supposed to behave?

It's interesting, the circumstances in which they consider it. One is the Muslim who is taken captive, a prisoner of war or something like that, or seized in a raid. Two is the Muslim who goes on business, a diplomat or a merchant who has to travel in the lands of the unbelievers. Three is the unbeliever in the land of the unbelievers who suddenly sees the truth and is converted to Islam. Four, which was added at a much later stage in Islamic history, the position of the Muslims, their homeland is conquered by the unbelievers and ceases to be under Muslim rule.

The jurists discuss all these things at great length. What they never even considered as a possibility is that Muslims might voluntarily emigrate from Muslim lands to non-Muslim lands, creating a totally new

and unprecedented situation—unprecedented, that is to say, in Muslim doctrine, Muslim law, and, most important, Muslim experience. This new situation is one that the jurists are still wrestling with.

I want to say something now about problems of identity and loyalty. There is a significant difference in this between the perceptions in the Western world—in the Christian or, as some people call it nowadays, in the post-Christian world—and in the Islamic, and by no means post-Islamic, world. We tend to think of the world divided into nations, nation or country. In American usage particularly, "nation" and "country" are virtually synonymous. In British usage they are not. When I first came to this country and some of my colleagues at the university told me that during the summer they were proposed to drive across the nation, I was horrified. To English ears, that suggested the massive ill treatment of large numbers of people. Nowadays, I've got used to it. "Nation" and "country" are virtually synonymous.

They don't apply in the Middle East. If you look at the map of the Middle East, the Middle East and North Africa, you will see some strange things. One is that the frontiers are almost all straight lines. The frontiers in Europe have evolved from centuries of struggle over identity and control. The frontiers in most of the Muslim world were drawn with pencils and rulers on maps, mostly drawn by European diplomats and imperialists. These are new creations, new identities, with rare exceptions, of which the most outstanding, of course, is Iran.

The idea of patriotism, self-definition by country and loyalty owed to country, is a modern innovation in the Muslim world. Previously identity was defined by religion. This was the primary loyalty. What they saw was not a nation subdivided into religions, but a religion subdivided in various ways—regional, local, ethnic, tribal, and so on—of new great importance. One sees this if one reads not only Muslim historians, but even Muslim newspapers until fairly recently.

For example, I was reading not long ago an account by an Ottoman diplomat. An Ottoman diplomatic mission was sent to Vienna to negotiate for the emperor. He describes their arrival. He said, "We were greeted by an escort of six infidel officers." He meant, of course, Austrian officers. But that wasn't the point. He didn't say that: "six infidel officers." And so it goes on. The word "Austria" or "Austrian" hardly appeared. It's the land of the infidels, and the people are the infidels. That is the basic "us and them."

One sees this even in the earliest newspapers, 19th-century newspapers, for example. I remember reading in one newspaper, "There was an accident yesterday on the bridge and two infidels were killed." That's what matters. This is the basic identity.

That is beginning to change. Nationality is beginning to enter into people's perceptions. But it's still comparatively new, and I would go further and say, comparatively shallow. The basic identity, and therefore the basic loyalty, is by the religious community to which you belong.

That, I think, is important also in understanding Muslim perceptions of what is going on in the world today. With identity goes loyalty. That, of course, again, is supremely important. In the modern era, there has been, of course, a vast change in the Muslim world. All sorts of new political configurations have emerged. For the first time, we are seeing the formation of nation-states. For the first time, we are seeing the development of something which might be called patriotism. This, I think, is an extremely important and significant development. But it isn't so easy to get rid of the associations, the classifications, and, let's face it, the loyalties of the past. That is the situation which we in the Western world confront and which, more importantly, the people of the Islamic world confront.

One last thing which I want to say something about, and that is the one which inevitably occupies our attention. That is the theme of terrorism. I think I can say quite clearly and explicitly that the various types of action which we call terrorism are not only not encouraged, they are expressly forbidden by Shariah, by the Muslim holy law. It is true that waging war is a religious obligation, but precisely because it is a religious obligation, it is regulated by religious law. Even the medieval Shariah texts go into astonishing detail about what is permitted and what is not permitted. The Shariah requires that proper warning be given before beginning hostilities. It has elaborate regulations regarding the treatment of

civilians, of women and children, and—of particular interest to me—the aged. It discusses prisoners, how they may be treated. It discusses the question of what weapons may be used. This may come as a surprise to you: They discuss and, for the most part, reject the use of chemical weapons.

You may say, chemical weapons in Shariah? Yes, exactly. There were several kinds of chemical weapons which were known and could be used. One was to poison the water supply of the city that you were besieging. Another was poisoned arrows and missiles of various kinds containing poisonous elements. These were known and used, and they are, for the most part, forbidden.

Suicide is explicitly forbidden by Shariah. Here the position is very clear. It is said that even if a man has lived a life of unremitting virtue, a totally religious, pious, virtuous life, if he commits suicide, he goes straight to Hell. Suicide is the unforgivable crime, and the punishment of the suicide is the eternal repetition of the act by which he committed suicide.

One can only wish that the Muslims had a better acquaintance with their own religion and their own doctrines and teachings.

In the modern age there have been, of course, many attempts to reinterpret these teachings, even by those who profess to be authorities on the holy law. So, for example, suicide is evil and is forbidden, but if you take a sufficient number of the enemy with you, then it's permissible, and so on and so on - all sorts of arguments like that. But, as I say, if one goes through this literature, one is left wishing that Muslims had a better acquaintance with their own laws and their own traditions.

I think I'll stop on that point.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Do the Sunni refer to the Shia as infidels, or do the Shia refer to the Sunni that way?

BERNARD LEWIS: Sometimes informally, but normally they do not.

Let me go back a step. Within Islam, there is a certain permissible level of difference of opinion that's characteristic of Muslim doctrine from the Middle Ages. There's even a saying ascribed to the Prophet, "Difference of opinion within my community is God's blessing"—or "God's mercy," actually. Difference of opinion was accepted. There are different schools of jurisprudence, different doctrines, and one may belong to one or another. Each holds its own principles and regards the others as different but still as Muslim.

The question that arises is, at what point does one pass the degree of permitted difference? The notion of heresy is a Christian notion. There is no exact equivalent in Muslim terminology. In the Muslim view, you have permitted difference of opinion. If you go beyond the permitted difference of opinion, then you are something worse than a heretic; you are an apostate. An apostate is one who is a Muslim, but renounces the Muslim faith and turns to something else. That is a major capital offense. The only penalty for that is death. It's so serious an offense that even if the apostate recants and repents, he must still be put to death, because for so serious an offense, only God can give forgiveness.

Differences between Sunni and Shia—normally, they were prepared to tolerate each other, in the sense of still being Muslims, though that didn't, of course, prevent them from fighting each other.

[Question inaudible—on the future of Israel]

As you know, I'm a historian, which means my business is the past. I'm not a prophet. I'm an ancient historian—applying the adjective to the historian rather than to the history.

But I think the basic question is this: What is it about? Is the argument about the size of Israel or is it

about the existence of Israel? If the argument is about the existence of Israel, obviously there is no possible compromise; there is no possible agreement. There is no intermediate situation between existing and not existing. If it's about the size of Israel, then it becomes a nice, simple question, like Alsace-Lorraine or Texas, which may eventually be settled, after a long period of struggle, both military and diplomatic.

That's the best I can do by way of prophesy.

QUESTION: How much information is actually available on the life of the prophet Muhammad? And is any of it true?

BERNARD LEWIS: There is an authorized biography of the Prophet which is accepted by Muslims as authentic and accurate. That was, I think, generally accepted for a long time.

Western scholarship has taken a different view. There have been a number of different studies of the Prophet by various scholars in the West, who have subjected the classical biography of the Prophet to close scrutiny. Some of them dismiss it almost entirely and some accept most of it, except parts. But there's no agreement on the subject, no.

There was a very hot debate about this question in the Soviet Union a number of years ago, when the Soviet Union was still alive and well, or at least looked well. There was an organization there which was called the [League of the Militant Godless](#), the function of which was to fight against religion, all religion, in the Soviet Union. It was divided into various sections. There was the Muslim section, meaning the anti-Muslim section, the Christian section, meaning the anti-Christian section, and the Jewish section, meaning anti-Jewish, and so on. The section dealing with Islam published a great deal of material in the Soviet Union at that time. One of the lies was that Muhammad never existed, that he was a totally mythic figure. But that has not been generally accepted by any serious group of scholars.

By the way, it's interesting that all this violently anti-Semitic propaganda in the Soviet Union did not occasion any protest in the Muslim world.

QUESTION: As a practicing Muslim growing up [in Pakistan], I was always taught that there were many ways to get to Heaven, and while we considered this to be the best, we did not look at it as the only path. Maybe that's the function of Islam in Asia, because we did grow up in the Indian subcontinent, where, while Muslims ruled, they were never the majority, and the population of the subcontinent continued both their Hindu faith and their Buddhist faith and, later, a new religion of Sikhism.

But even going back to the text, when we were taught it in translation, it said very clearly that there should be no compulsion in religion, and the Jews and the Christians—I guess there was another group described in there—

BERNARD LEWIS: [The Sabians](#).

QUESTIONER: The Sabians—were People of the Book.

I would like your comment, a little bit of elaboration on this. I know that there are those who believe that everybody who doesn't believe like them—and they would probably include me—which is more of the [Wahhabi](#) sect—that the rest must change or they are all heretic. But that's, from my growing up, a very small minority of our faith.

BERNARD LEWIS: Yes, it is true that Islam not only permits, but requires a certain measure of tolerance of other religions. As you said, three are specified, the Jews, the Christians, and the rather mysterious Sabians. The mysterious Sabians were extremely useful. Since nobody knew exactly who they were, this provided a label which one could apply to any group that one wanted to tolerate.

There were certain minimum requirements for a religion to be tolerated. It had to be monotheist. It had to reject idolatry, which created problems in India, obviously. It had to have a certain ethical basis.

In modern times, the question is no longer the same. It's no longer Muslims ruling over non-Muslims. It's non-Muslims ruling over Muslims. That, of course, created an entirely new situation, for which the classical juristic literature provides no guidance. This was a possibility which obviously never occurred to them. They did begin to discuss when the reconquest took place in Spain. We find the jurists in Morocco discussing the situation: If the infidels conquer a Muslim country, what does a Muslim do? May he stay if the new rulers are tolerant—in the case of Spain, that proved an entirely hypothetical question—or must he go anyway? There's a whole literature discussing this question, giving various answers to it.

At first the general view was that, if the regime is tolerant and allows Muslims to live a true Muslim life, they may stay. The opposition view—notably, a certain Moroccan jurist called [Wansharisi](#)—was that if the non-Muslims are tolerant, then the danger is even greater and it's more important that they should leave. With the massive conquests of Muslim countries by non-Muslim rulers, that obviously became an entirely theoretical question.

QUESTION: You said that suicide is banned. I've read that. Forget the Shia and the Sunnis. But by and large, when they have suicide bombings, they are basically indiscriminate. Sunnis are killing Sunnis, and Shia—how does that equate with any part of the past religion? Forget about today. In other words, how do they justify killing themselves, not infidels?

BERNARD LEWIS: It doesn't equate. One can only wish that these people had a better acquaintance with their own religion. These questions are raised in the classical juristic and theological literature. The answers are very clear. Suicide is forbidden. The question is asked, may one commit suicide if one takes a large number of infidels with one? The general answer is no. Later, in more modern times, some began to answer yes. That was part of the change which has taken place.

Nowadays, of course, as you know, suicide has become very acceptable. But it is quite explicitly forbidden by Muslim law, by Muslim tradition, by Muslim theology.

There is a story told, for example, of the Prophet himself, that after one of the battles in which he and his forces engaged against the infidels, a mortally wounded Muslim was lying on the battlefield, and he killed himself with his own sword in order to shorten his pain, knowing that he was dying anyway. The Prophet said, "He has forfeited Paradise. He has preempted Allah."

QUESTION: If I understood you correctly, at the beginning of your presentation you seemed to suggest that there was a new wave of conquest by means of migration and—

BERNARD LEWIS: I didn't use the word "conquest."

QUESTIONER: Well, that's what I understood. What did you mean? That's not my question, but if I'm incorrect, then I won't continue.

Let me continue with the question. Then you can correct me.

If that is indeed the case, is the so-called conquest or taking over of the infidels' land a result of migration or is the migration, by design, in order to bring in many, many numbers of people in order to create the new demography?

BERNARD LEWIS: It's interesting. The whole factor of migration is a comparatively modern one. In earlier times, as I think I remarked before, the jurists discuss at great length the position of the Muslim under non-Muslim rule, as the captive, the visitor, the convert, and so on. What never entered their minds as a possibility was that Muslims would voluntarily migrate to non-Muslim countries. This is now happening on a grand scale.

I think, to begin with, it's what you might call normal migration, people going to other places where they can get a better life, get jobs and the like. But it has also begun to assume a different character, if one looks at the demography and the immigration figures. It begins to look as though this might indeed be "the third lucky," a Muslim attack on Europe. Certainly the figures suggest that within a comparatively short time Europe will have a Muslim majority. Many Europeans are very concerned about this. So are many Muslims.

[Sadiq al-Azm](#), a Syrian philosopher, wrote a very interesting study on this. It's in Arabic. He ends by saying that the only question that remains about the future of Europe is, will it be an Islamized Europe or a Europeanized Islam?

An interesting question, I think you'll agree.

QUESTION: You have said that Shariah forbids hurting women and children, the elderly, and certainly committing suicide. If these things are indeed forbidden, and they are carried out almost on a daily basis today as well, can you give us some insight as to why there have been so few Muslim voices speaking out against this?

BERNARD LEWIS: I wish I had an answer to your question. I'm afraid I don't. I am, as you are, appalled at the silence of the Muslim world on these clear violations of their own laws and traditions.

QUESTION: Is there a difference in religion and politics in the Middle East as compared to non-Arab lands, such as Asia?

BERNARD LEWIS: Thank you. That's a very good question. May I rephrase it slightly and, instead of religion and politics, say church and state?

In the Western world, religion and politics were represented by two different institutions. In the New Testament, Christians are instructed to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's, Caesar meaning the state and God meaning the church.

The word "church" has two meanings. It's a building which is a place of worship and study. It's also a great institution, with its own laws, its own customs, its own history, its own personnel, and so on. In that sense, there is no equivalent in Islam at all. The mosque is a building. That's all. We cannot in any sense speak of the mosque as an institution.

The reason is very simple. Jesus was crucified, and his followers were a persecuted minority for centuries, until they were able to convert a Roman emperor and gradually take over. Islam triumphed during the lifetime of the founder. Muhammad was not persecuted. He was not put to death. He became the ruler, the head of a state which soon became an empire. He did what rulers do. He not only promulgated laws, he enforced them. He raised armies, he fought wars, and so on and so on and so on.

So in the sacred traditions of Islam, you have all sorts of matters which in the Western world would be regarded as secular. In the Islamic tradition they are in no way separable from the rest. The whole idea of a separation between church and state is alien to Islam. In classical Arabic, you don't have any pairs of words corresponding to "religious and secular," "sacred and profane," "spiritual and temporal," and so on and so forth. That's a vocabulary which was eventually developed in Arabic by Arabic-speaking Christians and didn't come into Islamic usage until comparatively modern times. This whole issue was unknown, and therefore meaningless.

Now, of course, it has become very meaningful. We have seen now for some time a gradual imitation of Western and, more specifically, Christian practice in the Muslim world. There is now in many Muslim countries a kind of religious organization, with a hierarchy of [muftis](#) and others running it Christian-style. You see this most clearly in present-day Iran, where they have created the Muslim equivalent of a papacy

and college of cardinals and, above all, an inquisition.

QUESTION: You mentioned the Ottoman and Muslim articles referring to the Austrians as infidels. I was interested to know how it's different from the imperialistic European articles referring to Arabs and Muslims as barbarians or savages. Is it just a question of terminology or does it go beyond that?

BERNARD LEWIS: In the Western world, it was normal to classify people by nationality. This has been the modern practice. In doing that to their new imperial subjects, they were treating them no differently from the way they treated themselves and their own subjects at home. It was simply applying the same system at home and abroad, which is, of course, what the Muslims did, too, the other way around. They conquered territories in Europe and Asia and Africa, and they applied a religious classification.

We all tend to see others in terms of ourselves. It's part of human nature.

QUESTION: Maybe it's bravado, but the president of Iran wants to annihilate Israel. If the president were here, what would you say to him? How would you address the youth of Iran? That pretty much will possibly change the makeup of the country.

BERNARD LEWIS: What I would say to the president I can't repeat in polite company.

As regards the youth, I think that is our best hope. There is a great deal of evidence from various sources that the present regime in Iran has become extremely unpopular. Thanks to the wonders of modern communications, there are ways of keeping in touch undreamt-of in the past—and, as I said, many indications of a rising discontent within the regime, directed, more particularly, against the president. There are two oppositions in Iran at the present time. There's the opposition within the regime and the opposition against the regime. Both of them are against the president.

QUESTION: Professor Lewis, can you tell us about the Muslim concept of free will? Is it a deterministic religion or is there free will that would allow these young students to indeed defy the religious doctrines as propounded by the ayatollahs?

BERNARD LEWIS:

This has been an ongoing debate for many centuries within the Muslim world. Among Muslim writers on the subject, including both the classical philosophical and juristic literature, you find both points of view. On the one hand, there are those who say that everything is preordained; everything is determined by fate. There is a saying attributed to the Prophet, "Nothing shall befall us save what God has written down for us." That's attributed to the Prophet. On the other hand, there are others that insist that there is free will.

I think the best answer to this is given by a Muslim tract—I'm afraid I don't remember the author's name, but it's a classical Muslim tract—who says that he feels that the best answer to this question, which, as I said, was intensely debated for centuries in Islam—he says that it's like a game of chess. Your fate is determined by the throw of the dice, but you still have choices and you can win or lose the game.

QUESTION: Islam is a proselytizing religion. Having said that, apparently there is something engaging about it, because lots of people have been converting over the last decades. I know this may not be a question for historians, but what would be your guess as to the appeal of Islam for nonbelievers?

BERNARD LEWIS: You're right, of course, that Islam is a proselytizing religion. Islam and Christianity, as far as I know, are the only two religions that claim exclusive truth, and in being the fortunate recipients of God's final message, they have to bring it to the rest of the world and not keep it selfishly to themselves, like the Jews, with their revelation.

Having said that, that still leaves room for difference.

There is also the important point that a certain measure of tolerance is obligatory. It's part of the Shariah. But it's limited, and circumstances change with what goes on.

One of the obligations of a Muslim, according to Shariah, based on the Qur'an itself, is jihad. The word "jihad" literally means "striving." It's used in two different senses. One is what you might call moral striving, to better yourself and to better the society in which you live, and the other is the military sense and can accurately be translated as "holy war." Precisely because holy war is the religious obligation, it is, as I said before, elaborately regulated and all kinds of misbehavior is excluded.

QUESTION: I just want to make a quick comment. Sort of like the woman from Pakistan who was raised in a more tolerant tradition, I was raised in a mainstream Protestant Christian tradition, and to believe in a loving, compassionate God—Christian values—and to believe that just because other people don't know Jesus Christ, that doesn't mean they aren't accepted by God. When you keep saying the Christian religion insists on only that faith, can you elaborate on why you're saying the Christians believe that? Because that's not how I was raised.

BERNARD LEWIS: As I understand it—correct me if I'm wrong—the Christian belief is that theirs is the final revelation; there is no revelation subsequent to the mission of Jesus. It has been developed in various ways since then. This is God's final message to humanity, which must therefore be circulated to all humanity in the fullness of time. Muslims have approximately the same point of view about their religion. For them, the Christian revelation is the semifinal, so to speak, and theirs is the final one.

Now, what to tolerate? Generally speaking, until most Christian countries ceased to be devout, their general attitude on religion was very intolerant. It was intolerant of other religions. It was intolerant of deviant versions of their own religion. The toleration of dissent really comes with religious indifference. When the Muslims ruled Spain, Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived side by side in reasonable harmony. When the Christians reconquered Spain, first the Jews and then the Muslims were expelled. One finds that pattern, generally speaking, in the long engagement between the two.

In the Western world, tolerance is an aspect of indifference. In Islam, it is part of the religion. But, of course, that tolerance is strictly defined. There are limits to what may be tolerated. The application, of course, is another matter, too.

JOANNE MYERS: If there are no more questions, I would just like to pick up on what you said. We threw the dice and won this afternoon.

I would like to ask you to join me in thanking Professor Lewis for a very memorable afternoon.

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