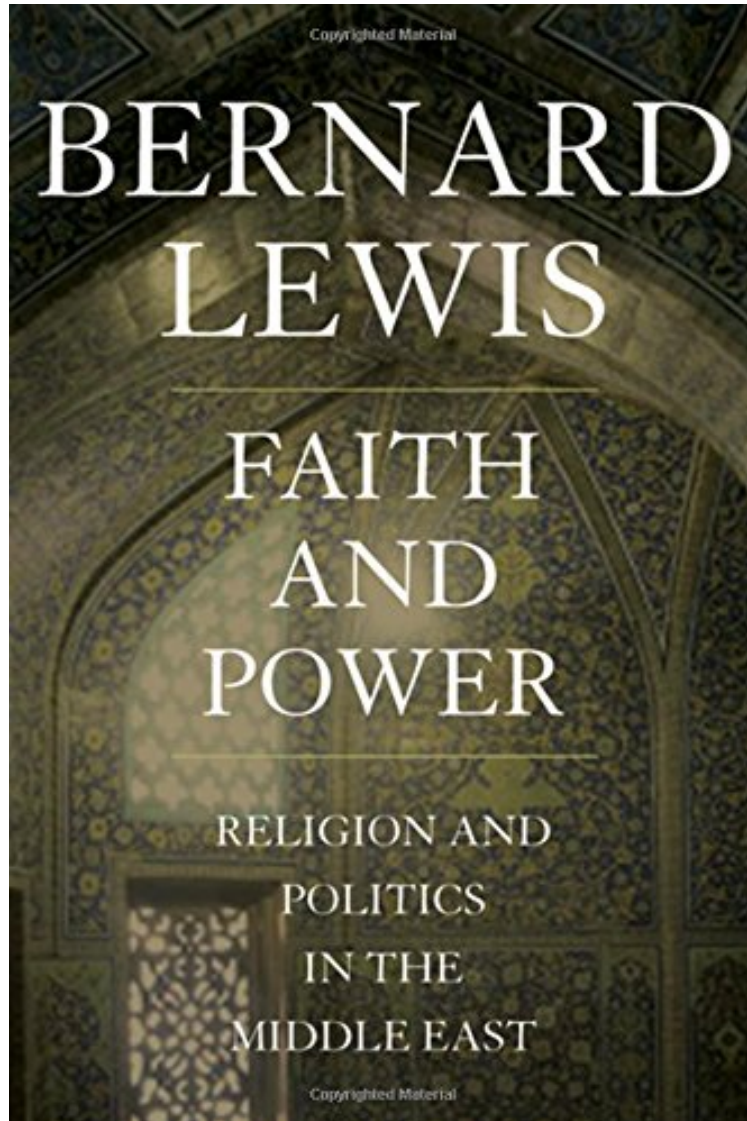


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Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East

Bernard Lewis

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Bernard Lewis : Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. FaithfulBy HHAAlthough "Faith and Power" has the appearance of a monograph, it is a collection of essays, unpublished lectures, and excerpts from Lewis's other writing. In passing, Lewis reviews fourteen centuries of conflict between Islam and Christianity: "rival faiths," he calls them, "with alternate messages to mankind." For most the Middle Ages, Islam represented a mortal danger to Europe. That

changed with the West's successful defense of Vienna and the French occupation of Egypt under Napoleon in 1798. It was the French conquest of Egypt that initially brought Western influence to the very center of the Middle East. From the Islamic point of view, the Christian enemy had somehow managed to establish a transitory military supremacy. Eventually, the heartlands of Islam became subject to the influence, dominance, and, at times, direct rule of Europe's imperial powers (Britain, France, and Russia) who deprived most of the Islamic world of sovereignty. Foreign rule was seen as tyranny, and the overriding political aim of the Islamic states of the Middle East was to end it and to regain independence. Islamic polity, Lewis reminds his reader, defines itself by religion, that is, as a society in which identity and allegiance are determined by the acceptance of a common faith. The distinction between church and state, spiritual and temporal, ecclesiastical and lay, is a Christian concept that has had no analogue in Islamic history. Muslims typically are very conscious of their identity. They know who they are and what they want, and Lewis adds that this is "a quality that many in the West seem to a very large extent to have lost." In an Islamic state, there is in principle no law other than Shari'a, the holy law of Islam. In the traditional order, the only lawgivers were of the ulema, doctors of the holy law who were at once jurists and theologians. The Prophet Muhammad, as head of state, not only promulgated the law but also applied and enforced it. His successors did the same. Lewis makes a distinction between Islamic fundamentalism and Islam itself and makes the point that most Muslims are not fundamentalists, and further, that most fundamentalists are not terrorists. "At no point," he writes, "do the basic texts of Islam enjoin terrorism and murder. At no point do they ever consider the random slaughter of uninvolved bystanders." Yet, no one can deny that Islamic terrorism is a reality. Lewis is forced to acknowledge calls to violence on the part of Muslim authorities. The 1998 "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for the Jihad against Jews and Crusaders" was supposedly signed by Osama bin Laden and leaders of militant Islamist groups in Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The document holds that "To kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able, in any country where this is possible." Even so, Lewis explains, "The fundamentalist aim is to end the corruption of Islamic society and restore the God-given holy law of Islam." That, of course, is not characteristic of Islam as a whole. In Lewis's account, two main id compete at present in the Middle East region, with two diagnoses of the sickness of the society and two prescriptions for its cure. One of them is the modernist, usually secularist approach, the idea that it is possible and necessary for the Islamic lands to become part of modern civilization; or put frankly, the region is backward and impoverished because it clings to outmoded ideas and institutions. The remedy for the modernist is that of Kernel Ataturk in Turkey. The other solution, governed by a revulsion against Western civilization, is that of the fundamentalist who holds that what is wrong in the Muslim world is that Muslims have not been faithful to their inherited traditions. The remedy is to return to the roots of authentic Islam. Where does Europe stand now, Lewis asks? From the first irruption of Muslim Arabs in the seventh century to the second Turkish Muslim siege of Vienna in 1683, the pattern of relationship between [European Christendom and Middle Eastern Islam] was one of Muslim advance and Christian retreat, and the issue of the struggle was the possession of Europe." For the greater part of their history, Muslims had been accustomed to a position of supremacy and dominance. Muslims had ruled, unbelievers had submitted, and the leaders of the infidels, both at home and abroad, had recognized the supremacy of Islam. In the broad realms of the Islamic empires, the Christian populations had either embraced Islam or accepted a position of tolerated subordination. Will Islam be successful in its third attempt to take over Europe? It is not impossible, Lewis believes. Muslims have certain clear advantages. The growth of Western self-doubt and self-criticism provides fertile ground. Muslims have fervor and conviction, which in most Western countries is weak or lacking. They have loyalty and discipline, but most of all they have demography on their side. The combination of natural population increases and uncontrolled immigration have produced major population changes which could lead in the foreseeable future to significant Islamic majorities in some European nations with corresponding political power. While their political impact is limited at present, the children of the newcomers will be native-born. It will not be possible in the long run to deny them citizenship. The consequence of a population many millions strong of Muslims born and educated in Western Europe will have immense and unpredictable consequences for Europe. Christianity itself poses no threat to Islam. "While Christian power," Lewis writes, "might at times have seemed a threat, Christian religion was never, and the very idea was an absurdity. How could a Muslim be attracted to an earlier, abrogated version of his own religion, and moreover one professed by subject peoples whom he had conquered and over whom he held sway." "Faith and Power" is suffused with Lewis's broad historical knowledge and the insight that comes from years of reflection. Given Lewis's somewhat romantic interpretation of its past, Islam could not want a more steadfast apologist.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. interesting review
By RKDR Interesting review from a scholar. Lots of good information, but I liked his "Notes on the century" to be much more readable and enjoyable. This one sounds more like a scholarly paper. Repetative at times.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good but goodly repetitive
By IstOrient As much as I enjoy reading Bernard Lewis' other publications, this one does contain some useful and interesting information but that useful information has been repeated many times. Each article deals with different topics but same old arguments one can find on Lewis' other books.

Bernard Lewis is recognized around the globe as one of the leading authorities on Islam. Hailed as "the world's foremost Islamic scholar" (Wall Street Journal), as "a towering figure among experts on the culture and religion of the Muslim world" (Baltimore Sun), and as "the doyen of Middle Eastern studies" (New York Times), Lewis is nothing less than a national treasure, a trusted voice that politicians, journalists, historians, and the general public have all turned to for insight into the Middle East. Now, Lewis has brought together writings on religion and government in the Middle East, so different than in the Western world. The collection includes previously unpublished writings, English originals of articles published before only in foreign languages, and an introduction to the book by Lewis. Acclaim for *What Went Wrong?* A New York Times Bestseller "Replete with the exceptional historical insight that one has come to expect from the world's foremost Islamic scholar." --Karen Elliott House, Wall Street Journal Lewis has done us all-- Muslim and non-Muslim alike--a remarkable service.... The book's great strength, and its claim upon our attention, [is that] it offers a long view in the midst of so much short-term and confusing punditry on television, in the op-ed pages, on campuses and in strategic studies think tanks." --Paul Kennedy, The New York Times Book Review Acclaim for *From Babel to Dragomans* "Lewis has long been considered the West's leading interpreter of Mideast culture and history, and this collection only solidifies his reputation." --National Review "For more than four decades, Lewis has been one of the most respected scholars and prolific writers on the history and politics of the Middle East. In this compilation of more than 50 journal articles and essays, he displays the full range of his eloquence, knowledge, and insight regarding this pivotal and volatile region." --Booklist

From Publishers Weekly Well-known Middle East historian and analyst Lewis collects essays and speeches in his latest book, rather incoherently organized around the titular theme of faith and power. Since the text lacks footnotes, the reader may wonder if Lewis is presenting historical fact or his own opinions, weighted toward a dark view of Islam, which could explain his appeal to neoconservatives. His assertions, for instance, that early Muslims had no respect for or understanding of Christianity and that Muhammad conquered Mecca run contrary to what many other scholars, as well as practicing Muslims, write and believe. His understanding of the Qur'an is shallow; he criticizes the Muslim term khalifa, meaning caliph or leader, as showing Muslim ambition because of the term's vagueness, but the Qur'an specifically cites the term khalifa in a well-known verse enjoining Muslims to be the vice-regents or khalifas of God on Earth. In his chapter analyzing Osama bin Ladin's fatwa against the United States, he fails to mention that fatwas are not binding on Muslims, misleading the reader into believing that Muslims, on the whole, abide by them. His obstinately Eurocentric view has him criticizing Muslims for all manner of far-flung vices, such as failing to learn European languages and music. Readers looking to learn more about Islam and the Middle East should seek a less rigid text. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Acclaim for *What Went Wrong?* A New York Times Bestseller: "Replete with the exceptional historical insight that one has come to expect from the world's foremost Islamic scholar." --Karen Elliott House, Wall Street Journal "Lewis has done us all - Muslim and non-Muslim alike - a remarkable service.... The book's great strength, and its claim upon our attention, [is that] it offers a long view in the midst of so much short-term and confusing punditry on television, in the op-ed pages, on campuses and in strategic studies think tanks." --Paul Kennedy, The New York Times Book Acclaim for *From Babel to Dragomans*: "Lewis has long been considered the West's leading interpreter of Mideast culture and history, and this collection only solidifies his reputation." --National "For more than four decades, Lewis has been one of the most respected scholars and prolific writers on the history and politics of the Middle East. In this compilation of more than 50 journal articles and essays, he displays the full range of his eloquence, knowledge, and insight regarding this pivotal and volatile region." --Booklist About the Author Bernard Lewis is Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. His most recent books include *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, and *What Went Wrong?*, two of which were national bestsellers.