BERNARD LEWIS

FAITH AND POWER

RELIGION AND
POLITICS
IN THE
MIDDLE EAST

Faith and Power

This page intentionally left blank

BERNARD LEWIS

Faith and Power

*Religion and Politics
in the Middle East*

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2010

For Fouad Ajami
in appreciation of his scholarship,
friendship, and courage

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Foreword

In a famous passage in the New Testament, Christians are enjoined to "render....unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). In these words, a principle was laid down, at the very beginning of Christianity, that became central to both Christian thought and practice and that is discernible throughout Christian history and all over Christendom. Always, there were two authorities, God and, symbolically, Caesar; dealing with different matters, exercising different jurisdictions; each with its own laws and its own courts for enforcing them; each with its own institutions and its own hierarchy for administering them.

These two different authorities are generally known in the Christian world as "church" and "state." In the long and varied history of Christendom, the two have always been there—sometimes in association, sometimes in conflict; sometimes one predominant, sometimes the other—but always two and not one. The doctrine of the separation of the two is now accepted, in practice and sometimes in law, in most if not all of the Christian or post-Christian world.

In Islam, until comparatively modern times, such a doctrine was not only nonexistent but would have been meaningless. One can separate two things; one can hardly separate one. For a Muslim in classical Islamic times, the mosque is a building—a place of worship and study. The word was not used in the Christian institutional sense, because there was no comparable institution—that is, until modern changes took place under Western influence and example. In classical Islam, church and state are one and the same. They are not separate or indeed separable institutions, and there is no way of cutting through the tangled web of human activities and the authorities that regulate them; allocating certain things to religion, others to politics; some to the state and some to a specifically religious authority. Such familiar pairs of words as *lay* and *ecclesiastical*, *sacred* and *profane*, *spiritual* and *temporal*, and the like have no equivalent in classical Arabic (except to a limited extent among Arabic-speaking Christians), since the dichotomy that they express, deeply rooted in Christendom, was unknown in Islam until comparatively modern times, when its introduction was the result of external influences. In recent years, these external influences have been attacked, discredited, and weakened, and the ideas that they brought, never accepted by more than a relatively small and alienated elite, have become even weaker. And as external influences weaken, there is an inevitable return to older, more deep-rooted perceptions.

The political differences between the three interrelated Middle Eastern religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, are clearly expressed in the narratives that constitute the sacred foundation history of the three. Moses led his people out of bondage and through the wilderness but was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. Christ died on the cross, and his followers were a persecuted minority until centuries later they converted a Roman emperor and entered into a long and problematic relationship with the Roman and then other states.

Muhammad, the Prophet and founder of Islam, achieved worldly success during his lifetime, becoming the head of a state that was soon to grow into an empire.

As the Ayatollah Khomeini reminded us, the Prophet Muhammad founded not only a community but also a polity, a society, and a state of which he was the sovereign ruler. As such, he commanded armies, made war and peace, collected taxes, proclaimed and enforced the law, and did all those things a ruler normally does.

All this meant that from the very beginning of Islam, from the lifetime of its founder, in the formative memories that are the sacred, classical, and scriptural history of all Muslims, religion and the state are one and the same. This intimate connection between faith and power remained characteristic of Islam in contrast to the other two religions.

There are other historical differences. Christianity arose amid the fall of an empire. The rise of Christianity parallels the decline of Rome, and the church created its own structures to survive in that period. During the centuries when Christianity was a persecuted religion of the downtrodden, God was seen as subjecting His followers to suffering and tribulation to test and purify their faith. When Christianity finally became a state religion, Christians tried to take over and refashion the institutions and even the language of Rome to their own needs. For a large and significant group of Christians, Rome, not Nazareth or Jerusalem, became the center of Christendom; Latin, not Aramaic or Hebrew, its sacred language. Islam, in contrast, arose amid the birth of an empire and became the basis of a vast, prosperous, and flourishing realm, created under the aegis of the new faith, and expressed in the language of the new revelation— Arabic. Although for St. Augustine and other early Christian thinkers, the state was a lesser evil, for Muslims, the state—that is, of course, the Islamic state—was a necessity ordained by divine law to defend and promulgate God's faith and to maintain

and enforce God's law. In this perception of the universe, God is seen as helping rather than testing the believers, as desiring their success in this world and manifesting His divine approval by victory and dominance.

There is a partial exception to this in the minority and opposition sects that arose within Islam. Among the Shi'a, one finds an almost Christian-style conception of suffering and passion. This, combined with Muslim triumphalism, sometimes produced an explosively powerful social force.

These perceptions from the early history of Islam still have important consequences at the present time, notably in their effect on the shaping and character of Muslim self-awareness. Perhaps the most important and far-reaching of these effects is that for most Muslims, Islam rather than anything else is the ultimate basis of identity, loyalty, and therefore authority. In most parts of the modern world, it is usual, at different times and for different purposes, for people to define themselves collectively in a number of ways—by country, by nation, by race, by class, or by language, as well as some other criteria. All of these have their place in Islamic self-perceptions as reflected in historical writings, and sometimes that place is even an important one. But overall they are seen as secondary. For most of the recorded history of most of the Muslim world, the primary and basic definition, both adoptive and ascriptive, is not country or nation, not race or class, but religion, and for Muslims, that of course means Islam. In their view, it is religion that marks the distinction between insider and outsider, between brother and stranger, and at times between friend and enemy. Other factors, other loyalties no doubt operate, at various times and in various places, but to become effective, they had to assume a religious or at least a sectarian form. Two examples may suffice to illustrate this point: the first is the report of a military mission sent by the Ottoman sultan to Vienna in the seventeenth century. The note reports that "when we arrived we were welcomed by a group of

five infidel officers who escorted us into the city." He means, of course, Austrian officers, but that is not what he says. The second example comes simply from a reading of nineteenth-century newspapers in Istanbul: "There was an accident on the bridge, and one unbeliever was injured." Both illustrate, in different ways, how religion was perceived as the ultimate basis of identity.

A striking example of the difference between Muslim perceptions of identity and loyalty and those of other religions can be seen in the conduct of international relations. The heads of state or ministers of foreign affairs of Christendom do not forgather in Christian summit conferences, nor does any group of them hold meetings on the basis of their current or previous adherence to one or another church. Similarly, the Buddhist states of East and Southeast Asia do not constitute a Buddhist bloc at the United Nations, nor for that matter in any other of their political activities. The very idea of such a grouping, based on religion, may seem to some observers in the modern world as absurd or even comic. It is, however, neither absurd nor comic in relation to Islam. Fifty-seven governments—monarchies and republics, conservatives and radicals, exponents of a variety of doctrines— have built up an elaborate apparatus of international consultation and, on many issues, cooperation. The Organization of the Islamic Conference, with fifty-seven members, has just celebrated its sixtieth anniversary. This organization holds regular, high-level conferences, and despite differences of structure, ideology, and policy, its members have achieved some measure of agreement and common action.

A similar difference may be seen in internal politics. Here, too, the difference between the Islamic countries and the rest of the world, though less total, is still substantial. In countries that practice multiparty open democracy, there are political parties that call themselves Christian or Buddhist. These are, however, very few, and even for some of these, religious themes play little

or no part in their appeals to the electorate. In most Islamic countries, in contrast, religion is an even more powerful factor in internal than in international affairs.

Since Islam is perceived as the main basis of identity, it necessarily constitutes the main claim to loyalty, to allegiance. In most Muslim societies, the essential test by which one distinguishes between loyalty and disloyalty is usually religion. What matters here is not so much religious belief or theological conviction, though these are not unimportant; what matters is communal loyalty. And since conformity is the outward sign of loyalty, it follows that heresy is disloyalty, and apostasy is treason. Despite the vast changes of the last century or two, Islam has clearly remained the most accepted form of consensus in Muslim countries; Muslim symbols and appeals are still the most effective for the mobilization of social forces, whether behind a government or against it.

Thus, along with identity and loyalty, authority, too, is determined by Islam. In most Western systems of political thought and practice, sovereignty comes by inheritance and tradition or, in more modern times, from the people. Dynastic succession was, of course, well established in the Islamic lands, as everywhere else in the world, and such dynasties as the caliphs of Baghdad and the Ottoman sultans played a major role in Muslim history. But succession was by some form of nomination or selection. Primogeniture—the right of succession of the eldest son of the ruler—was unknown in the Islamic lands until it was introduced from Europe in modern times. It is now widely practiced in Muslim countries, including some republics.

In the traditional Muslim view, however, the ultimate source of a ruler's authority is neither his predecessors nor the people, but God. And since God is the source of authority, it is He who delegates and empowers the head of state, He, too, who is the sole source of law and indeed of legislation. If the ruler is God's ruler and the law that he enforces is God's law, then obedience

to him is a religious obligation, and disobedience is a sin as well
as a crime, to be punished in the next world as well as in this
one. If the ruler does not draw his power from God, he is a
usurper; if the law he administers is not God's law, he is a tyrant.
In such a situation, the duty of obedience lapses and is replaced
by a duty—not merely a right—of disobedience.

Muslim jurists and theologians, over the centuries, produced
a considerable literature discussing such questions as legitimacy
and usurpation. How does a ruler become legitimate? When
does he cease to be legitimate? In what circumstances does the
subject have the right or rather, in Islamic terms, the duty to
disobey him and ultimately to remove him? Islam has its own
corpus of revolutionary ideologies, its own record and memory
of revolutionary actions, which still have a powerful evocative
appeal. Recent events in Iran and in some other countries have
given these memories a new relevance.

For most of modern history—more than two centuries in
some areas, shorter periods in others—the heartlands of Islam
were subject to the influence, the dominance, and at times the
direct rule of European imperial powers. During this period of
European domination and therefore influence, there was a series
of different Islamic responses: acceptance and imitation, rejec-
tion and revolt. It is surely significant that when there was a
genuine popular outbreak involving the masses and going
beyond a small educated elite, the movement expressed itself not
in nationalist, not in patriotic, not in social or economic, but in
Islamic terms. During the first major phase of European expan-
sion into the Islamic lands in the nineteenth century, when the
British Empire was absorbing the Muslim northwest of India,
when the Russians were conquering the Caucasian lands, and
when the French were invading North Africa, in all three places
the most effective and persistent resistance was Islamic—
organized by Islamic brotherhoods, led by Muslim religious
leaders. The careers of Aḥmed Brelwi (d. 1831) in India, of

Shāmil (d. 1871) in Dagestan, and of ʿAbd al-Qādir (d. 1883) in Algeria all express the markedly religious character of this first major resistance in the Islamic world to the advance of imperial Europe in all three places.

In due course, all three were crushed, and a period of acceptance and some measure of accommodation followed. Muslim subjects of the three major empires—the British, the French, and the Russian—began, despite some opposition, to learn the languages of their imperial masters and even to adopt some of their cultural patterns.

A second phase in Islamic resistance came toward the end of the nineteenth century, when for the first time we find the word *pan-Islam* used to denote an explicitly political movement aiming at a greater unity of the Islamic world against European encroachment and domination. Already at that time we see what became a characteristic feature of such movements—the distinction between two kinds, one state-sponsored and used mainly diplomatically, the other oppositional and sometimes with more than a tinge of social radicalism.

By the early twentieth century, the European empires seemed to be the leading powers in the world, and constitutional and parliamentary government was therefore seen increasingly as the formula for success. This perception, expressed in the constitutional revolutions in Iran and the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century, was reinforced by the victory of the Western powers, the main standard-bearers of this form of government, in 1918. For a while, there were some stirrings of a new Islamic militancy, but with the consolidation of the secular Kemalist republic in Turkey and of the Soviet Union in Transcaucasia and Central Asia, this phase of Islamic activity ended, and a period of secular movements began—in some areas nationalist, in others socialist, in many both at the same time.

By the late thirties, this process was under attack, and the first stirrings of a new kind of militant Islam could be discerned.

This process was apparently halted in the early fifties by powerful rulers, notably in Iran and in Egypt, which had been the main centers of militant Islamic activity. Though the Shah in Iran and President Nasser in Egypt differed in many significant respects, they seem to have agreed in seeing militant Islamism as a threat to the kind of regime each was trying to establish, and in using whatever means were feasible to keep it under control. In Iran, the Shah failed and was overthrown and replaced by a militant Islamic regime. In Egypt, Nasser's successor is still in power but is increasingly threatened by radical Islamic opposition forces.

Such forces are now active all over the Islamic world and beyond, targeting first those they see as apostates and traitors at home, and beyond them, the ultimate enemy—the world of the unbelievers.

The following studies deal with a number of different aspects of the relationship between religion and government in the Islamic world—not between church and state, but rather between faith and power.

Credits

1. "License to Kill," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 6, November–December 1998, pp. 14–19.

2. "Europe and Islam."—This was a paper delivered to a symposium held in Castelgandolfo, by invitation of the Pope, in 1987. The proceedings were published in German under the title *Europa und die Folgen*, edited by Krzystof Michalski, published in Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1988.

3. "Religion and Politics in Islam and Judaism," Published in Hebrew translation in a volume of miscellaneous essays, *Ah'eret (Otherwise)*, edited by Aharon Amir, Guy Ma'ayan, Amir Or, Jerusalem, 2002.

4. "Islam and Liberal Democracy," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1993, pp. 89–98.

5. "Free At Last? The Arab World in the Twenty-First Century," *Foreign Affairs* March–April 2009, pp. 77–88.

6. "Gender and the Clash of Civilizations." This is based on two lectures; one delivered at the University of Lucca, in Italy, on 17 December 2005; the other at the University of Tel Aviv in 2003. The lectures differ, but overlap. Neither has been published in the original English. A Hebrew

translation of the Tel Aviv lecture, based on a transcript, was included in a Hebrew volume on women in the Middle East, edited by Ofra Bengio, and published in Tel Aviv in 2004. The article included in this volume is based on the two lectures, but with extensive changes and revisions.

7. "Propaganda in the Middle East." A first brief sketch on this topic was published by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Faculty of Humanities, in their series *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Vol. 25 (2001), pp. 1–14, and was reprinted in *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, pp. 97–113. Most of the study included in this volume is new and unpublished.

8. "Democracy and Religion in the Middle East." This was originally a paper presented to a conference held in Vienna on 3 July 1997 and published in German translation in the review *Transit*, Winter issue 1997. A Hebrew translation was published in the journal *Keshet* in the fall of 2004. Published in English in the Bassam Tibi *Festschrift*.

9. "Peace and Freedom in the Middle East." Unpublished.

10. "Democracy, Legitimacy, and Succession in the Middle East." This was part of a symposium held under the auspices of the Fondazione Magna Carta in Rome and published by them in a small book, *La Rivoluzione democratica contro il terrorismo*, edited by Fiamma Nirenstein, Mondadori, Rome, 2005.

11. "Freedom and Justice in Islam." This was a lecture delivered on 16 July 2006 to Hillsdale College and published by them in *Imprimis*, Vol. 35, No. 9, September 2006.

12. "Europe and Islam," American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research 2007 Irving Kristol Lecture, delivered 7 March 2007, and published as a booklet later in the same year.

13. "Freedom and Justice in the Modern Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, Number 3, May–June 2005, pp. 36–51.

This page intentionally left blank

License to Kill

Osama bin Ladin's Declaration of Jihad

O N February 23, 1998, *al-Quds al-'Arabī*, an Arabic newspaper published in London, printed the full text of a "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders." According to the paper, the statement was faxed to them under the signatures of Osama bin Ladin, the Saudi financier blamed by the United States for masterminding the August bombings of its embassies in East Africa, and the leaders of militant Islamist groups in Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The statement—a magnificent piece of eloquent, at times even poetic Arabic prose—reveals a version of history that most Westerners will find unfamiliar. Bin Ladin's grievances are not quite what many would expect.

The declaration begins with an exordium quoting the more militant passages in the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, then continues:

> Since God laid down the Arabian peninsula, created its desert, and surrounded it with its seas, no calamity has ever befallen it like these Crusader hosts that have spread in it like locusts, crowding its soil, eating its fruits, and destroying its verdure; and this at a time when the nations contend against the Muslims like diners jostling around a bowl of food.

sample content of Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East

- [read The Labyrinth of Dreaming Books online](#)
- [click Philosophy and Education: Introducing Philosophy to Young People](#)
- [The Ultimate Survival Manual (Outdoor Life): 333 Skills that Will Get You Out Alive here](#)
- [read online World of Hummingbirds](#)

- http://tuscalaural.com/library/The-Labyrinth-of-Dreaming-Books.pdf
- http://crackingscience.org/?library/Philosophy-and-Education--Introducing-Philosophy-to-Young-People.pdf
- http://www.khoi.dk/?books/Allegheny-Front.pdf
- http://fitnessfatale.com/freebooks/In-Montmartre--Picasso--Matisse-and-the-Birth-of-Modernist-Art.pdf