

BERNARD LEWIS

EUROPE  
AND  
ISLAM

2007 Irving Kristol Lecture  
American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research

# Europe and Islam

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*Bernard Lewis*

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## Foreword

This pamphlet is the text of the 2007 Irving Kristol Lecture, delivered at the annual dinner of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research in Washington, D.C., on March 7, 2007. The Irving Kristol Award, named for the eminent author and intellectual and longtime AEI senior fellow, is the Institute's highest honor, bestowed annually by its Council of Academic Advisers. The Irving Kristol lectures (and their predecessors before 2003, the Francis Boyer lectures) are posted on the AEI website at [www.aei.org/kristolaward](http://www.aei.org/kristolaward).

The 2007 Kristol Award was presented to Bernard Lewis, the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Princeton University, and long the free world's preeminent student and interpreter of Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and the modern Middle East. Professor Lewis earned his PhD from the School of Oriental Studies at the University of London in 1939 and taught there for thirty-five years, interrupting his academic pursuits only to serve during World War II in the British Army (Royal Armoured Corps and Intelligence Corps) and for a while with a department of the Foreign Office. In 1974 he moved to the United States to accept his initial appointments at Princeton and the Institute for Advanced Study. Among historians and other scholars, Professor Lewis's stature was secured through such deep and luminous studies as *The Arabs in History* (1950), *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1961), *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (1982), *The Political Language of Islam* (1988), and *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (1994).

Following the terrorist attacks of September 2001, Professor Lewis's works attracted intense interest from a wider public seeking to understand the turmoil in the Muslim world that had exploded

with such ferocity into the West. His prescient essay, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” published in the September 2000 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, was widely reprinted and discussed. He lectured widely, counseled with top government officials, appeared on television, and wrote two new books. In *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Modern Middle East* (2002), he analyzed the fall of Islamic civilization from superiority in almost every area of human knowledge to a “poor, weak, and ignorant” backwater dominated by “shabby tyrannies . . . modern only in their apparatus of repression and terror.” In *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (2003), he assessed the prospects for liberal political institutions in the Middle East. “If freedom fails and terror triumphs, the peoples of Islam will be the first and greatest victims,” he wrote. “They will not be alone, and many others will suffer with them.”

The topic of Professor Lewis’s Kristol Lecture, delivered in his ninetieth year to a hushed audience of 1,500 guests, was “Europe and Islam.” His Kristol Award was inscribed:

*To Bernard Lewis  
Who has stood at the Bosphorus for seventy years  
Historian and interpreter across the great divide  
Sage of our pasts, presage of our future.*

CHRISTOPHER DEMUTH  
President  
American Enterprise Institute  
For Public Policy Research  
May 2007

## Europe and Islam

It is sometimes forgotten that the content of history—the business of the historian—is the past, not the future. I remember being at an international meeting of historians in Rome during which a group of us were sitting and discussing the question: should historians attempt to predict the future? We batted this back and forth, with differing, even contrasting responses. This was in the days when the Soviet Union was still alive and well. One of our Soviet colleagues finally intervened and said, “In the Soviet Union, the most difficult task of the historian is to predict the past.”

I do not intend to offer any predictions of the future of Europe or of Islam, but one thing can legitimately be expected of the historian, and that is to identify trends and processes—to look at trends in the past, at what is continuing in the present, and therefore to see the possibilities and choices which will face us in the future.

In dealing with the Islamic world there is a special reason for paying attention to history—that this is a society of unusually keen historical awareness. Unlike what is happening in America and, to an increasing extent, Europe, in the Islamic lands, and especially in the Middle East, historical knowledge, back to the advent of Islam in the seventh century, is widespread, extensive, and, if not always accurate, both vivid and detailed. During the war fought from 1980 to 1988 between two Muslim powers, Iraq and Iran, the war propaganda of both sides, addressed both to their own people and to the enemy, was full of allusions to history—not stories told from history, but rapid, passing allusions, sometimes no more than the name of a person or a place or an event. These were used in the sure knowledge that they would be picked up and understood, even by that

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significant part of the intended audience that was illiterate. Many of the allusions referred to events of the seventh century of the Common Era—events that are still vividly remembered and deeply significant. Some knowledge of history is essential if one is to understand the public discourse of Muslim leaders at the present time—both at home and in exile, both in government and in opposition.

A favorite theme of the historian is periodization—dividing history into periods. Periodization is mostly a convenience of the historian for purposes of writing or teaching. Nevertheless, there are times in the long history of the human adventure when we have a real turning point, a major change—the end of an era, the beginning of a new era. I am becoming more and more convinced that we are in such an age at the present time—a change in history comparable with the fall of Rome, the advent of Islam, and the discovery of America.

Conventionally, the modern history of the Middle East begins at the end of the eighteenth century, when a small French expeditionary force commanded by a young general called Napoleon Bonaparte was able to conquer Egypt and rule it with impunity. It was a terrible shock that one of the heartlands of Islam could be invaded and occupied with virtually no effective resistance. The second shock came a few years later with the departure of the French, which was brought about not by the Egyptians nor by their suzerains, the Ottoman Turks, but by a small squadron of the British Royal Navy commanded by a young admiral called Horatio Nelson, who drove the French out of Egypt and back to France.

Those events were of profound symbolic importance. From the beginning of the nineteenth century onward, the heartlands of Islam were no longer wholly controlled by the rulers of Islam. They were under direct or indirect influence or, more frequently, control from outside, from different parts of Europe, or, as they saw it, Christendom. It was only then that the previously unknown name “Europe” began to be used in the Muslim Middle East—a change of terminology more than of connotation.

The dominant forces in the lands of the Muslims were now outside forces. What shaped their lives was foreign actions and decisions. What gave them choices was foreign rivalries. The political



game that they could play—the only one that was open to them—was to try to profit from the rivalries between the outside powers, to try to use them against one another. We see that again and again in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth and even into the beginning of the twenty-first century. We see, for example, in the First World War, the Second World War, and the Cold War how Middle Eastern leaders played this game with varying degrees of success.

For a long time, the contenders competing for domination were the rival European imperial powers—Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy. In the final phase in the twentieth century, these rivalries acquired an explicit ideological content—in World War II, the Allies versus the Axis; in the Cold War, the West versus the Soviets. On the principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” it was natural for people under foreign rule or domination to turn to the imperial—and later, also ideological—rivals of their masters. Pro-Nazi and later pro-Soviet factions, with sometimes the same leaders, among the subject peoples of the British and French empires illustrate this well. Interestingly, there seem to have been no corresponding pro-Western movements among the Muslim peoples subject to Soviet rule. The Soviets, even on the eve of their collapse, were much more adept at both indoctrination and repression than the more open empires of the West.

That game is now over. The era that was inaugurated by Napoleon and Nelson was terminated by Reagan and Gorbachev. The Middle East is no longer ruled or dominated by outside powers. Middle Easterners are having some difficulty in adjusting to this new situation, in taking responsibility for their own actions and their consequences. I remember being asked by an Iranian lady, bitterly critical of the government in her country, why “the imperialist powers had decided to impose an Islamist theocratic regime on Iran.” But some are beginning to take responsibility now, and this change has been expressed with his usual clarity and eloquence by Osama bin Laden.



With the ending of the era of outside domination, we see the reemergence of certain older trends and deeper currents in Middle Eastern

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history, which had been submerged or at least obscured during the centuries of Western domination. Now they are coming back again. One trend consists of the internal struggles—ethnic, sectarian, regional—between different forces within the Middle East. These had of course continued, but were of less importance in the imperialist era. Now they are coming out again and gaining force, as we see from the current clash between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, on a scale without precedent for centuries.

Another change more directly relevant to our present theme is the return among Muslims to what they perceive as the cosmic struggle between the two main faiths, Christianity and Islam. There are many religions in the world, but as far as I know there are only two that have claimed that their truths are not only universal (all religions claim that) but also exclusive: that they—the Christians in the one case, the Muslims in the other—are the privileged recipients of God's final message to humanity, which it is their duty not to keep selfishly to themselves, like the followers of ethnic or regional cults, but to bring to the rest of humanity, removing whatever obstacles there may be on the way. This self-perception, shared between Christendom and Islam, led to the long struggle which has been going on for more than fourteen centuries and which is now entering a new phase. In the Christian world, now at the beginning of the twenty-first century of its era, this triumphalist attitude no longer prevails, and is confined to a few minority groups. In the world of Islam, now in its early fifteenth century, triumphalism is still a significant force, and has found expression in new militant movements.

It is interesting that in earlier times, both sides for quite a long time refused to recognize this as a struggle between religions—that is, to recognize the other as a rival universal religion. They saw it rather as between religion—meaning their own true faith—and the unbelievers or infidels (in Arabic, *kafir*). Both sides long preferred to name each other by non-religious terms. The Christian world called the Muslims Moors, Saracens, Tatars, and Turks; even a convert was said to have “turned Turk.” The Muslims for their part called those in the Christian world Romans, Franks, Slavs, and the like. It was only slowly and reluctantly that they began to give each other

religious designations, and then these were for the most part inaccurate and demeaning. In the West, it was customary to call Muslims Mohammadans, which they never called themselves; this was based on the totally false assumption that Muslims worship Muhammad in the way that Christians worship Christ. The usual Muslim term for Christians was Nazarene—*nasrani*—implying the local cult of a place called Nazareth.

The declaration of war came almost at the very beginning of Islam. According to an early story, in the year 7 of the Hegira, corresponding to 628 C.E., the Prophet sent six messengers, with letters, to the Byzantine and Persian emperors, the Negus of Ethiopia, and other rulers and princes, informing them of his advent and summoning them to embrace his faith or suffer the consequences. The authenticity of these prophetic letters is doubted, but their message is accurate in the sense that it does reflect a view dominant among Muslims since early times.

A little later we have hard evidence—and I mean hard in the most literal sense—in inscriptions. One of the famous sights of Jerusalem is a remarkable building known as the Dome of the Rock. It is in several ways significant. It is built on the Temple Mount, a place sacred to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Its architectural style is that of the earliest Christian churches. The oldest Muslim religious building outside Arabia, it dates from the end of the seventh century and was built by Abd al-Malik, one of the early caliphs. Specially significant is the message in the inscriptions on the building: "He is God, He is one, He has no companion, He does not beget, He is not begotten" (*Qur'an*, IX, 31-3; CXII, 1-3). This is clearly a direct challenge to certain central principles of the Christian faith.

Interestingly, the caliph proclaimed the same message with a new gold coinage. Until then, striking gold coins had been an exclusive Roman, later Byzantine prerogative, and other states, including the Islamic caliphate, imported them as required. The Islamic caliph for the first time struck gold coins, breaching the immemorial privilege of Rome, and putting the same inscription on them. The Byzantine Emperor understood the double challenge, and went to war—without effect.

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The Muslim attack on Christendom and the resulting conflict, which arose more from their resemblances than from their differences, has so far gone through three phases. The first dates from the very beginning of Islam, when the new faith spilled out of the Arabian Peninsula, where it was born, into the Middle East and beyond. It was then that Muslim armies from Arabia conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa—all at that time part of the Christian world—and began the process of Islamization and Arabization. From there they advanced into Europe, conquering Spain, Portugal, Sicily, and the adjoining regions of mainland southern Italy, all of which became part of the Islamic world, and even crossing the Pyrenees and for a while occupying parts of France.

After a long and bitter struggle, the Christians managed to retake some but not all of the territories they had lost. They succeeded in Europe, and in a sense Europe was defined by the limits of their success. They failed to retake North Africa or the Middle East, which were lost to Christendom. Notably, they failed to recapture the Holy Land, in the series of campaigns known as the Crusades.

That was not the end of the matter. In the meantime the Islamic world, having failed to conquer Europe the first time, was moving towards a second attack, this time conducted not by Arabs and Moors but by Turks and Tatars. In the mid-thirteenth century the Mongol conquerors of Russia were converted to Islam. The Turks, who had already conquered hitherto Christian Asia Minor, advanced into Europe and in 1453 captured the ancient Christian city of Constantinople. They conquered the Balkans, and for a while ruled half of Hungary. Twice they reached as far as Vienna, to which they laid siege in 1529 and again in 1683. Barbary corsairs from North Africa—well-known to historians of the United States—were raiding Western Europe. They went to Iceland—the uttermost limit—in 1627 and to several places in Western Europe, including notably a raid on Baltimore (the original one, in Ireland) in 1631. In a contemporary document, we have a list of 107 captives who were taken from Baltimore to Algiers, including a man called Cheney.

Again, Europe counterattacked, this time more successfully and more rapidly. The Christians succeeded in recovering Russia and the

Balkan Peninsula, and in advancing further into the Islamic lands, chasing their former rulers whence they had come. For this phase of European counterattack, a new term was invented: imperialism. When the peoples of Asia and Africa invaded Europe, this was not imperialism. When Europe attacked Asia and Africa, it was. This notion served as a double source of inspiration—of resentment for the one side, of guilt for the other. The West, no doubt because of its Judeo-Christian heritage, has a long tradition of guilt and self-flagellation. Imperialism, sexism, racism are all Western terms, not because the West invented them—they are part of our common human and perhaps also animal heritage—but because the West was the first to identify, name, and condemn them, and to wage a struggle against them, with some measure of success.

This European counterattack began a new phase, which brought European rule into the very heart of the Middle East. It was completed in the aftermath of World War I; it was ended in the aftermath of World War II. In our own time, we have seen the end of European, including Russian, domination in the lands of Islam.

Osama bin Laden, in some very interesting proclamations and declarations, gives his view of the 1978–1988 war in Afghanistan which, it will be recalled, led to the defeat and retreat of the Red Army and the collapse of the Soviet Union. We tend to see that as a Western victory, more specifically an American victory, in the Cold War against the Soviets. For Osama bin Laden, it was nothing of the kind. It was a Muslim victory in a jihad against the infidels. If one looks at what happened in Afghanistan and what followed, this is a not implausible interpretation.

As Osama bin Laden saw it, Islam had reached its ultimate humiliation in this long struggle in the period after World War I—when the last of the great Muslim empires, the Ottoman Empire, was broken up and most of its territories divided between the victorious allies, and when the caliphate was suppressed and abolished and the last caliph driven into exile by secular, Westernizing Turks. This seemed to be the lowest point in Muslim history.

In his perception, the millennial struggle between the true believers and the unbelievers had gone through successive phases, in

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which the former were headed by various dynasties of caliphs, and the latter by the various imperial Christian powers that had succeeded the Romans in the leadership of the world of the infidels—the Byzantine Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the British and French and Russian empires. In this final phase, he says, the world of the infidels was divided and disputed between two rival superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The Muslims had met, defeated, and destroyed the more dangerous and the more deadly of the two. Dealing with the soft, pampered, and effeminate Americans would be an easy matter.

This belief appeared to be confirmed in the 1990s when the world saw one attack after another on American bases and installations with virtually no effective response of any kind—only angry words and expensive missiles dispatched to remote and uninhabited places. The lessons of Vietnam and Beirut (1983) were confirmed by Mogadishu (1993). In both Beirut and Mogadishu, a murderous attack on Americans, who were there as part of U.N.-sponsored missions, was followed by prompt and complete withdrawal. The message was understood and explained. “Hit them, and they’ll run.” This was the course of events leading up to 9/11. That attack was clearly intended to be the completion of the first sequence and the beginning of the new one, taking the war into the heart of the enemy camp.



In the eyes of a fanatical and resolute minority of Muslims, the third wave of attack on Europe has clearly begun. We should not delude ourselves as to what it is and what it means. This time it is taking different forms and two in particular: terror and migration.

Terror is part of the larger issue of violence and of its use in the cause of religion. Islam does not, as some would have us believe, share the pacifist aspirations of early Christianity. Islamic theology and law—like Christian practice if not theory—recognize war as a fact of life and in certain situations commend and even require it. In the traditional view, the world is divided into two—the House of Islam where Islamic rule and law prevail, and the rest, known as the

Dar al-Harb, the House of War. Later, for a while, some intermediate categories were introduced, to designate regimes with limited autonomy under Muslim suzerainty.

War does not mean terror. Islamic teachings, and more specifically Islamic law, regulate the conduct of warfare, requiring respect for the laws of war and humane treatment of women, children, and other non-combatants. They do not countenance actions of the type now designated as terrorism. Islamic doctrine and law forbid suicide, which is regarded as a major sin, earning eternal damnation. The suicide, according to Islamic teaching, even if he has lived a life of unremitting virtue, will forfeit paradise and will go to hell, where his punishment will consist of the eternal repetition of the act by which he committed suicide.

These rules and beliefs were generally respected in classical Islamic times. They have been eroded, reinterpreted, and explained away by the various schools of present-day radical Islam. The young men and women who commit these acts of terror should be better informed of the doctrines and traditions of their own faith. Unfortunately they are not; instead the suicide bomber and other kinds of terrorists have become role models, eagerly followed by growing numbers of frustrated and angry young men and women.

The other form, of more immediate relevance to Europe, is migration. In earlier times, it was inconceivable that a Muslim would voluntarily move to a non-Muslim country. The jurists discuss the question of a Muslim living under non-Muslim rule in the textbooks and manuals of Shari'a, but in a different form: Is it permissible for a Muslim to live in or even visit a non-Muslim country? And if he does, what must he do? Generally speaking, this was considered under certain specific headings.

The first case is that of a captive or a prisoner of war. Obviously he has no choice, but he must preserve his faith and return home as soon as possible.

The second case is that of an unbeliever in the land of the unbelievers who sees the light and embraces the true faith—in other words, becomes a Muslim. He must leave as soon as possible and go to a Muslim country.

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The third case is that of a visitor. For long, the only purpose that was considered legitimate was to ransom captives. This was later expanded into diplomatic and commercial missions.

With the advance of the European counterattack, there was a new issue in this ongoing debate. What is the position of a Muslim if his country is conquered by infidels? May he stay or must he leave?

We have some interesting discussions of these questions, after the Norman conquest of Muslim Sicily in the eleventh century, and more especially from the late fifteenth century, when the reconquest of Spain was completed and Moroccan jurists were discussing this question. They asked if Muslims might stay. The general answer was no, they may not. The question was asked: May they stay if the Christian government that takes over is tolerant? (This proved to be a purely hypothetical question, of course.) The answer was still no; even then they may not stay, because the temptation to apostasy would be even greater. They must leave and hope that in God's good time they will be able to reconquer their homelands and restore the true faith.

This was the line taken by most jurists. There were some, at first a minority, later a more important group, who said that it is permissible for Muslims to stay provided certain conditions are met, mainly that they are allowed to practice their faith. This raises another question: what is meant by practicing their faith? Here we must remember that we are dealing not only with a different religion but also with a different concept of what religion is about, especially in regard to the Shari'a, the holy law of Islam, covering a wide range of matters regarded as secular in the Christian world even during the medieval period, and certainly in what some call the post-Christian era of the Western world.

All of these discussions relate to the problems of a Muslim who, for one reason or another, finds himself under infidel rule. The one possibility that, it seems, never entered the minds of the classical jurists was that a Muslim might, of his own free will, leave the House of Islam and go to live, permanently, in an infidel land, the House of War, under infidel rule. But this is what has been happening, on an ever increasing scale, in recent and current times.



There are obviously now many attractions which draw Muslims to Europe, particularly in view of the growing economic impoverishment of much of the Muslim world and the worsening rapacity and tyranny of many of its rulers. Europe offers opportunities for employment and benefits even for unemployment. Muslim immigrants also enjoy freedom of expression and levels of education which they lack at home. Even terrorists have far greater freedom of preparation and operation in Europe—and to a degree also in America—than they do in most Islamic lands.

There are some other factors of importance in the situation at this moment. One is the new radicalism in the Islamic world, which comes in several kinds: Sunni, especially Wahhabi, and Iranian Shi'ite, dating from the Iranian revolution. Both of these are becoming enormously important factors. We have the strange paradox that the danger of Islamic radicalism or of radical terrorism is far greater in Europe and America than it is in most of the Middle East and North Africa, where rulers are more skilled and less inhibited in controlling their extremists than are Westerners. Nevertheless, growing numbers of Muslims are beginning to see Islamic radicalism as a greater danger to Islam than to the West.

The Sunni kind is mainly Wahhabi, a radical version of Islam that first appeared in the remote district of Najd in Arabia in the eighteenth century. Among the converts to Wahhabism were the House of Saud, the local tribal chiefs. With the Saudi conquest of the Hijaz in the mid-1920s and the formation of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom, what was previously an extremist fringe in a marginal country became a major force in all the lands of Islam and beyond. Wahhabism has benefited greatly from the prestige and influence and power of the House of Saud as controllers of the holy places of Islam, of the annual pilgrimage, and of the enormous wealth that oil has placed at their disposal.

The Iranian revolution is something different. The term revolution is much used in the Middle East. It is virtually the only generally accepted title of legitimacy. But the Iranian revolution was a real revolution in the sense in which we use that term of the French and Russian revolutions. Like the French and Russian revolutions in

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their day, it has had an enormous impact in the whole area with which the Iranians share a common universe of discourse—that is to say, in the entire Islamic world, Shi'a and Sunni, in the Middle East and far beyond.

Another question much discussed nowadays is that of assimilation. How far is it possible for Muslim migrants who have settled in Europe, in North America, and elsewhere, to become part of the countries in which they settle, in the way that so many other waves of immigrants have done?

There are several points which need to be considered. One of them is the basic differences in what precisely is intended and understood by assimilation. Here there is an immediate and obvious contrast between the European and the American situations. For an immigrant to become an American means a change of political allegiance. For an immigrant to become a Frenchman or a German means a change of ethnic identity. Changing political allegiance is certainly easier and more practical than changing ethnic identity, either in one's own feelings or in one's measure of acceptance. For a long time, England had it both ways. A naturalized immigrant became British but did not become English.

I mentioned earlier the important difference in what one means by religion. For Muslims, it covers a whole range of different things, usually designated as the laws of personal status; marriage, divorce, and inheritance are the most obvious examples. Since antiquity, in the Western world many of these have been secular matters. The distinction between church and state, spiritual and temporal, ecclesiastical and lay, is a Christian concept which has no place in Islamic history and therefore is difficult to explain to Muslims, even at the present day. Until modern times they did not even have a vocabulary to express it. They have one now.

What are the European responses to this situation? In Europe, as in the United States, a frequent response is what is variously known as multiculturalism and political correctness. In the Muslim world there are no such inhibitions. They are very conscious of their identity. They know who they are and what they want, a quality which

many in the West seem to a very large extent to have lost. This is a source of strength in the one, of weakness in the other.

Another popular Western response is what is sometimes called constructive engagement—*Let's talk to them, let's get together and see what we can do*. This approach dates back to early times. When Saladin reconquered Jerusalem and other places in the Holy Land, he allowed the Christian merchants from Europe to stay in the seaports where they had established themselves under Crusader rule. He apparently felt the need to justify this, and he wrote a letter to the caliph in Baghdad explaining his action. The merchants, he said, were useful since “there is not one among them that does not bring and sell us weapons of war, to their detriment and to our advantage.” This continued during the Crusades and after. Even as the Ottoman armies were advancing into the heart of Europe, they could always find European merchants willing to sell them weapons, and European bankers willing to finance their purchases. The modern purveyors of advanced weaponry to Saddam Hussein yesterday and to the rulers of Iran today continue the tradition. Constructive engagement has a long history.

Contemporary attempts at dialogue also take other forms. We have seen in our own day the extraordinary spectacle of a pope apologizing to the Muslims for the Crusades. I would not wish to defend the behavior of the Crusaders, which was in many respects atrocious. But let us have a little sense of proportion. We are now expected to believe that the Crusades were an unwarranted act of aggression against a peaceful Muslim world. Hardly. The first papal call for a crusade occurred in 846 C.E., when a naval expedition from Arab-ruled Sicily, estimated by contemporaries at seventy-three ships and ten thousand men, sailed up the Tiber and attacked Rome. They briefly seized Ostia and Porto, and plundered St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and St. Paul's Cathedral on the right bank of the Tiber. In response, a synod in France issued an appeal to Christian sovereigns to rally against “the enemies of Christ,” and the Pope, Leo IV, offered a heavenly reward to those who died fighting the Muslims—less specific than the Muslim promise of which it was

probably a reflection. It is common practice in war to learn from the enemy and, when feasible, to adopt his more effective devices.

Two-and-a-half centuries and many battles later, in 1096, the Crusaders actually arrived in the Middle East. The Crusades were a late, limited, and unsuccessful imitation of the jihad—an attempt to recover by holy war what had been lost by holy war. It failed, and it was not followed up.

A striking example of the modern approach comes from France. On October 8, 2002, the then-prime minister, Monsieur Jean-Pierre Raffarin, made a speech in the French National Assembly discussing the situation in Iraq. Speaking of Saddam Hussein, he remarked that one of Saddam Hussein's heroes was his compatriot Saladin, who came from the same Iraqi town of Tikrit. In case the members of the Assembly were not aware of Saladin's identity, M. Raffarin explained to them that it was he who was able "to defeat the Crusaders and liberate Jerusalem." When a Catholic French prime minister describes Saladin's capture of Jerusalem from the largely French Crusaders as an act of liberation, this would seem to indicate a rather extreme case of realignment of loyalties or at least of perceptions. According to the parliamentary record, when M. Raffarin used the word "liberate," a member called out, "Libérer?" The prime minister just went straight on. That was the only interruption, and as far as I know there was no comment afterwards.

The Islamic radicals have even been able to find some allies in Europe. In describing them I shall have to use the terms "left" and "right," terms which are becoming increasingly misleading. The seating arrangements in the first French National Assembly after the Revolution are not the laws of nature, but we have become accustomed to using them. They are often confusing when applied to the West nowadays. They are utter nonsense when applied to different brands of radical Islam. But they are what people use, so let us put it this way.

The radical Islamists have a left-wing appeal to the anti-American elements in Europe, for whom they have replaced the Soviets. They have a right-wing appeal to the anti-Jewish elements in Europe,

replacing the Nazis. They have been able to win considerable support under both headings, often from the same people. For some in Europe, hatreds apparently outweigh loyalties.

There is an interesting variation in Germany, where the Muslims are mostly Turkish. There they have often tended to equate themselves with the Jews, to see themselves as having succeeded the Jews as the victims of German racism and persecution. I remember a meeting in Berlin convened to discuss the new Muslim minorities in Europe. In the evening I was asked by a group of Turkish Muslims to join them and hear what they had to say about it, which was very interesting. The phrase which sticks most vividly in my mind from one of them was, "In a thousand years they [the Germans] were unable to accept 400,000 Jews. What hope is there that they will accept two million Turks?" They sometimes use this line, playing on German feelings of guilt, to advance their own agenda.

This raises the larger question of toleration. At the completion of the first phase of the Christian reconquest in Spain and Portugal, Muslims—who by that time were very numerous in the reconquered lands—were given a choice: baptism, exile, or death. In the former Ottoman lands in southeastern Europe, the leaders of what one might call the second reconquest were somewhat more tolerant, but not a great deal more. Some Muslim populations remain in the Balkan countries, with troubles still going on at the present day. Kosovo and Bosnia are the best known examples.

The question of religious tolerance raises new and important issues. In the past, during the long struggles between Muslims and Christians in both eastern and western Europe, there could be little doubt that the Muslims were far more tolerant, both of other religions and of diversity within their own religion, than were the Christians. In medieval Western Christendom, massacres and expulsions, inquisitions and immolations were commonplace; in Islam they were atypical and rare. The movement of refugees at that time was overwhelmingly from West to East and not, as in later times, from East to West. True, non-Muslim subjects in a Muslim state were subject to certain disabilities, but their situation was vastly better than that of unbelievers and misbelievers in Christian Europe.

These disabilities, acceptable in the past, came increasingly into conflict with democratic notions of civilized co-existence. Already in 1689, the English philosopher John Locke, in his *Letters Concerning Toleration*, remarked that “neither Pagan, nor Mahometon, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion.” In 1790, George Washington, in a letter to a Jewish community leader in Newport, Rhode Island, went even further, and dismissed the very idea of toleration as essentially intolerant, “as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.”

By the late seventeenth century the practical situation was much better in Western Europe than in the Islamic lands. And from that time onwards the one got better, the other got worse. Discrimination and persecution did not disappear in the West but, with the glaring exception of the Nazi interlude in continental Europe, the situation of religious minorities was better in the confident, advancing West than in the threatened, retreating East.

Muslims, and also many of their non-Muslim compatriots, did not see it that way, but thought of toleration in somewhat different terms. When Muslim immigrants came to live in Europe they had a certain expectation, a feeling that they were entitled to at least the degree of toleration which they had accorded to non-Muslims in the great Muslim empires of the past. Both their expectations and their experience were very different.

Coming to European countries, they got both more and less than they had expected. More in the sense that they got in theory and often in practice equal political rights, equal access to the professions, welfare, freedom of expression, and other benefits.

But they also got significantly less than they had given in traditional Islamic states. In the Ottoman Empire and other states before that—I mention the Ottoman Empire as the most recent—the non-Muslim communities had separate organizations and ran their own affairs. They collected their own taxes and enforced their own laws. There were several Christian communities, each living under its own leadership, recognized by the state. These communities ran their own schools and their own education systems, and administered

their own laws in such matters as marriage, divorce, and inheritance as well as religious observance. The Jews did the same.

So you had a situation in which three men living in the same street could die and their estates would be distributed under three different legal systems if one of them happened to be Jewish, one Christian, and one Muslim. A Jew could be punished by a rabbinical court and jailed for violating the Sabbath or eating on Yom Kippur. A Christian could be arrested and imprisoned for taking a second wife. Bigamy is a Christian offense; it was not an Islamic or an Ottoman offense. By similar reasoning, Jews and Christians were exempt from the distinctively Islamic rules. They were allowed to eat, even in public, during the sacred month of Ramadan. They were permitted to make, sell, serve, and drink wine, as long as they did all these things among themselves. Some documents in the Ottoman archives discuss a problem which was apparently of concern to the judicial authorities: how to prevent the drinking of wine by Muslim guests at Christian and Jewish weddings. The simple and obvious solution—to impose the ban on alcohol on everyone—was apparently not considered.

Muslims do not have that degree of independence in their own social and legal life in the modern, secular state. It is no doubt unrealistic for them to expect it, given the nature of the modern state, but that is not how they see it. They feel that they are entitled to receive what they gave. As a Muslim in Europe is said to have remarked, presumably in jest: "We allowed you to practice and even enforce monogamy; why should you not allow us to practice polygamy?"

Such questions—polygamy, in particular—raise important issues of a more practical nature. Isn't an immigrant who is permitted to come to France or Germany entitled to bring his family with him? But what exactly does his family consist of? They are increasingly demanding and getting permission to bring plural wives. The same ruling is also being extended to welfare payments and other benefits.

The contrast in the position of women in the two religiously defined societies has been a sensitive issue, particularly in the age of Muslim defeat and retreat. By defeat in battle, the Muslim was made keenly aware that he had lost his supremacy in the world. By the

growth of European control or influence, including the emancipation of his own non-Muslim subjects, he had lost his supremacy in his own country. With the European-inspired emancipation of women, he felt he was in danger of losing his supremacy even in his own house.

The acceptance or rejection of Shari'a rule among Muslims in Europe raises the important question of jurisdiction. In the traditional Sunni juristic view, the Shari'a was part of Muslim sovereignty and jurisdiction and was therefore only applied in the House of Islam, that is to say in countries under Muslim rule. A minority of the Sunnis and the majority of the Shi'a took the view that the Shari'a also applied to Muslims outside the House of Islam, and should be enforced when possible.

But at no time, until very recently, did any Muslim authority ever suggest that Shari'a law should be enforced on non-Muslims in non-Muslim countries. The first instance of this new approach was when the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran pronounced a death sentence for the crime of insulting the Prophet, not only against the Muslim author Salman Rushdi, living in London at that time, but also against all who had been involved in the preparation, production, and distribution of the book—that is to say the English, presumably non-Muslim editors, printers, publishers, and booksellers. It was followed by an increasing number of other attempts to enforce Shari'a law in Europe and more recently in other places where Muslims have settled. A notable example was the Muslim response to the famous or infamous Danish cartoons. No less notable were the various European responses to Muslim anger and demand for punishment, ranging from mild reproof to eager acquiescence.



Where does Europe stand now? Is it third time lucky? It is not impossible. The Muslims have certain clear advantages. They have fervor and conviction, which in most Western countries are either weak or lacking. They are for the most part convinced of the rightness of their cause, whereas Westerners spend much of their time in



self-denigration and self-abasement. They have loyalty and discipline, and perhaps most important of all they have demography—the combination of natural increase and migration producing major population changes, which could lead within the foreseeable future to significant Muslim majorities in at least some European cities or even countries.

The Syrian philosopher Sadiq al-Azm has remarked that the remaining question about the future of Europe is this: “Will it be an Islamized Europe, or a Europeanized Islam?” The formulation is a persuasive one, and much will depend on the answer.

But the West also has some advantages, the most important of which are knowledge and freedom. The appeal of genuine modern knowledge in a society which, in the more distant past, had a long record of scientific and scholarly achievement is obvious. Present-day Muslims are keenly and painfully aware of their relative backwardness compared with both their own past and their rivals’ present, and many would welcome the opportunity to rectify it.

Less obvious but also powerful is the appeal of freedom. In the past, in the Islamic world the word freedom was not used in a political sense. Freedom was a legal concept. One was free if one was not a slave. Muslims did not use freedom and slavery as a metaphor for good and bad government, as we have done for a long time in the Western world. The terms they used to denote good and bad government are justice and injustice. A good government is a just government, one in which the Holy Law, including its limitations on sovereign authority, is strictly enforced. The Islamic tradition, in theory and, until the onset of modernization, to a large degree in practice, emphatically rejects despotic and arbitrary government. The modern style of dictatorship that flourishes in many Muslim countries is an innovation, and to a large extent an importation from Europe—first, without any ill intent through the process of modernization, strengthening the central authority and weakening those elements in society that had previously constrained it; second, through the successive phases of Nazi and Soviet influence and example.

Living under justice, in the traditional scale of values, is the nearest approach to what the West would call freedom. But with the

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spread of European-style dictatorship, the idea of freedom in its Western interpretation is also making headway in the Islamic world. It is becoming better understood, more widely appreciated, and more ardently desired. It is perhaps in the long run our best hope, perhaps even our only hope, of surviving this latest stage—in some respects the most dangerous stage—of a fourteen-century-old struggle.

## About the Author

**Bernard Lewis** is the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies, Emeritus, at Princeton University. He is widely recognized as the West's preeminent student and interpreter of Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and the modern Middle East. He received his PhD in 1939 from the University of London's School of Oriental Studies and taught there until 1974, when he moved to the United States to accept an appointment at Princeton University and the Institute for Advanced Study. His distinguished academic career was interrupted only by his service during World War II in the British Army (Royal Armoured Corps and Intelligence Service) and then in the Foreign Office. He became an American citizen in 1982.

Mr. Lewis has published more than twenty landmark books, including *The Origins of Ismailism* (London, 1940), *The Arabs in History* (Oxford University Press, 1950), *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 1961), *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), *The Political Language of Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 1994), *What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Modern Middle East* (Harper Perennial, 2002), and *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (Random House, 2003).

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