



Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East

By Bernard Lewis

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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.

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Editorial Review

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)

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Review

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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.

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