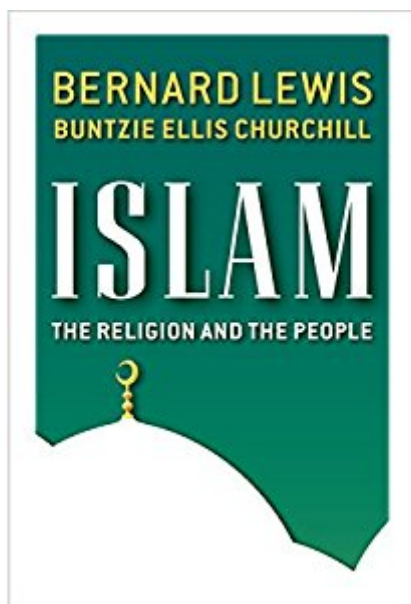


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# Islam: The Religion And The People



## Synopsis

Praise for Bernard Lewis    "For newcomers to the subject[el]Bernard Lewis is the man."    TIME Magazine    "The doyen of Middle Eastern studies."    The New York Times    "No one writes about Muslim history with greater authority, or intelligence, or literary charm." • British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper    "Bernard Lewis has no living rival in his field." • Al Ahram, Cairo (the most influential Arab world newspaper)    "When it comes to Islamic studies, Bernard Lewis is the father of us all. With brilliance, integrity, and extraordinary mastery of languages and sources, he has led the way for[el]investigators seeking to understand the Muslim world."    National Review    "Bernard Lewis combines profound depth of scholarship with encyclopedic knowledge of the Middle East and, above all, readability."    Daily Telegraph (London)    "Lewis speaks with authority in prose marked by lucidity, elegance, wit and force."    Newsday (New York)    "Lewis's style is lucid, his approach, objective."    Philadelphia Inquirer    "Lewis writes with unsurpassed erudition and grace."    Washington Times    An objective, easy-to-read introduction to Islam by Bernard Lewis, one of the West's leading experts on Islam    For many people, Islam remains a mystery. Here Bernard Lewis and Buntzie Ellis Churchill examine Islam: what its adherents believe and how their religion has shaped them, their rich and diverse cultures, and their politics over more than 14 centuries. Considered one of the West's leading experts on Islam, Lewis, with Churchill, has written an illuminating introduction for those who want to understand the faith and the global challenges it confronts and presents. Whatever your political, personal, or religious views, this book will help you understand Islam's reality.    Lewis and Churchill answer questions such as...    • How does Islam differ from Judaism and Christianity?    • What are the pillars of the Islamic faith?    • What does Islam really say about peace and jihad?    • How does the faith regard non-Muslims?    • What are the differences between Sunni and Shi'a?    • What does Islam teach about the position of women in society?    • What does Islam say about free enterprise and profit?    • What caused the rise of radical Islam?    • What are the problems facing Muslims in the U.S. and Europe and what are the challenges posed by those minorities?   

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Of the making of books about Islam, there is no end, especially not in the post- 9/11 environment. Unfortunately, books about Islam published to a popular readership too often fall into the mutually exclusive categories of hagiography (e.g., those by Karen Armstrong) or demonology (e.g., those of Robert Spencer). Well, almost mutually exclusive. Stephen Schwartz manages both to sanctify Sufism and demonize Wahhabism in the course of one book (*The Other Islam*). What is needed is a just-the-facts-ma'am approach, which is what Bernard Lewis and Buntzie Ellis Churchill provide in *Islam: The Religion and the People*. Lewis is a nonagenarian Orientalist of international repute and impeccable scholarship, formerly of Princeton University. Churchill is a past president of the World Affairs Council and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He has authored numerous books on Islam, Arabs, Turks, and all things Middle Eastern. This is their first book together. In addition to its just-the-facts-ma'am approach, this book is welcome for its concision, evenhanded tone, historical depth, and scope of coverage. This book introduces the reader to the broad spectrum of ethnic groups that identify themselves as Muslim, their faith, their scripture (the Koran), their religious habits, their attitudes toward nonbelievers and deviant believers, their divisions (especially Sunni versus Shia), their history, their attitude toward government and the economy, the role of women, and the challenge of "radical Islam." It also does a good job of comparing and contrasting Islam with its predecessor religions, Judaism and Christianity, and of outlining the competing schools between and within Sunni and Shia Islam. An Appendix addresses issues of Arabic language, the Muslim calendar, and food and drink.

I am an avid student of Middle Eastern History, Military History and Foreign Policy History, and while I know the basics of Islam, I am by no means well versed in its subtleties or religious tenets, modes of worship, etc. So this slim volume seemed an excellent opportunity to learn something about a

religion that weighs so heavily on the subjects above. Unfortunately, what I got was a book that felt like the outline for a much larger book and which says almost nothing about the life and message of Mohammed. This absence of any discussion of the actual religion of Islam is so puzzling (and glaring) it is almost hard to explain. The best way I can think of is to imagine a non-Christian reading a book ostensibly about Catholicism in which the only discussion of Christ's life is "The apostles spread Jesus' message throughout the Mediterranean basin, eventually supplanting the official pagan religion of Rome." Well, OK, but what was the message? Why did they spread it? Why was it embraced? Etc. These questions apply equally well to Islam and would seem fundamental to any outsider understanding the religion and yet none are addressed. The authors do a succinct job of explaining the spread of Islam and the various schisms it has faced, but they never actually explain at all what it is Muslim's believe and in what ways it is different from other religious traditions (i.e. Isaac vs Ishmael as the heir of Abraham). Moreover, vastly more lines are spent on Islamic Humor than is spent on what Mohammed did or said or is believed to have done or said.

If you are interested in learning about Muslim customs, dialect, and dress, this book is for you. If you're looking for an in-depth analysis of the history and current state of Islam as a religion, keep looking. Some people may find it interesting to learn the names of the various Muslim garments (none of which I can now remember), but I suspect most people that look into this book will be searching for something with a little more investigation into the background and meaning of Islam and the current thinking of Muslim people. And there is very little of that to be found here. Even the chapters dedicated to what I thought would be the more informative aspects of the book are rather shallow. Analyses of the status of Muslim women and of the reasons for the Islamic world's regression in technology and economics are less than inspiring. In fact, nearly everything in this book, except for various Arabic words and their definitions, seems commonplace and well-known. Really nothing ground-breaking or understanding-inducing to be found. This book also fails to provide any sort of depth in its analysis of Islamic history, the Koran, or the prophet Mohammad. Surprising given the title of the book, but fitting considering the rest of the content. The book does include a few Koranic quotes that help explain Muslim tendencies toward war and conquest and provides the very ambiguous conclusion that Islam is really neither a "religion of peace", nor a backward and dangerous religion of the sword. Ridiculously un-funny excerpts meant to demonstrate "Islamic Humor" appear throughout the book.

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