

TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF BERNARD LEWIS ABOUT IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEERAH

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Hazrat Muhammad(ﷺ) being the Last apostle of Allah is a complete and the best model for humanity. He(ﷺ) did not narrate any new order for life, but consist on those ethical values which were narrated by the past prophets. So we can say that Islam is a final version of the previous religions. It is the authenticity of Islamic teachings, that it guide the followers in every field of life. Hazrat Muhammad(ﷺ) was appointed not only to teach but he showed practical implementation of Islamic teachings. It is Muslim belief, that the Islam is a universal religion with universal teachings. All the previous religions were not universal, so their teachings were concern to specific period or nation. Being universal religion of the world, Islam deliver universal moralities and teachings. Hazrat Muhammad(ﷺ) was not only a prophet but a leader of the society. He(ﷺ) led his life in a society and left many example for the guidance. Now orientalist are writing about different aspects of His life. Bernard Lewis is also writing about the Prophet of Islam which is discussed in this article.

Key Words: Prophet-hood, Seerah, Bernard, Prophet, Christian

Introduction

Bernard Lewis is a representative western scholar of Islam, his thoughts play an important and vital role in religious and social life of the west. He constantly writes about the challenging social views of Islam and the Prophet of Islam. In Muslim belief there is a long chain of prophets. These prophets were appointed by Allah for a specific era and nation. Their teachings were also limited for a specific nation and time. Before *Muhammad(ﷺ)* human society was in the shape of territorial and tribal so the prophecy was also territorial and tribal. With the passage of time, when human society transformed from territorial toward universality, now there was the need of Universal prophet-hood. According to the Muslim creed this is the part of their fundamental condition to believe in all the prophets. A Muslim could never refuse any prophet. This condition is the particularity of the Islam. Bernard Lewis in his different writings presents different aspects of the Life of Holy Prophet (ﷺ)-

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1. Finality of Prophet-hood and Completion of religion

Muslims having belief that Allah is the creator of this universe, as we are his creation, and being human we are the superior creation of the universe. In all script, it is mention that Allah always guide his creation through the channel of prophecy. According to Islamic belief there were many prophets in the world. All these prophets were sent for a specific nation and era. It was *Hazrat Muhammad* (ﷺ), the last Prophet of this chain. Through him Allah completed the religion, which called Islam and this is not any new religion but it is the final version of previous religions:

“In Muslim belief, he (Hazrat Muhammad (ﷺ)) was the last of the Prophets. When he died, in 11/632, the revelation of God’s will to mankind had been completed. There would be no more Prophets and no further revelations.”¹

After the death of *Hazrat Muhammad* (ﷺ), the companions of the Holy Prophet continuously remain in struggle to extend the Islamic state and Islam in other countries outside of the Arab world. For this it was required the exercise of political and military power:

“However, though the spiritual function was at an end. The religious function remained; that of maintaining and defending the divine law and bringing it to the rest of mankind. The effective discharge of this religious function also required the exercise of political and military power—in a word, of sovereignty—in a state.”²

1.1 The Prophet of Islam as the best model.

As in his life he was a religious and political leader at the same time. Being a model for humanity it was required to be from the same race. So he did never claimed himself immortal or anything else than human:

“Muhammad had never claimed to be more than a mortal man, distinguished above others because he was the bearer of God’s Word and the leader of God’s people, but himself neither divine nor immortal. ‘Muhammad,’ says the Quran:

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِ الرُّسُلِ أَقَابِينَ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ.³

1.2 Seerah and different aspects of human life

A fundamental, recognizing component of Islam is the sweeping character of religion in the impression of Muslim. The

Holy Prophet (ﷺ),, not at all like prior originators of religions, established and represented a commonwealth:

“As ruler, he promulgated laws, dispensed justice, commanded armies, made wars, made peace, collect taxes, and did all other things that a ruler does. This is reflected in the Quran itself, in the biography of the prophet, and in the traditions concerning his life and work.”⁴

In Mecca he had a proscribed critic of the existing order; in Medina he created his own order. As head of the *Ummah*, the community of his converted and adherents, he administered, apportioned equity, gathered charges, and made peace and war. In Mecca he preached only but in Medina he practiced his divine teachings:

“in Medina he practiced. The scope of his revelation was extended from religious and moral principles to a wide range of mundane matters; its form changed from precept to law. This is clearly reflected in the Quran.”⁵

2. Muslim concept about Previous Prophets

Muslims believed that all the prophet before Hazrat Muhammad(ﷺ), were on Islam, and their teachings were initial of Islam. So Islam is the final version of their teachings:

“In this sense, the Jewish Prophets and heroes before Christ, and the Christians before Muhammad, were all Muslims – apart from those who had corrupted the revelation vouchsafed to them and gone astray.”⁶

“More commonly, the term Islam is restricted to the final phase of the sequence of the revelations – that of Muhammad and the Quran.”⁷

2.1 Difference between Moses, Christ and Muhammad (ﷺ)

With everything taken into account, then again, the difference was undoubtedly less radical in Islam than in either Judaism or Christianity, in perspective of the inside and out distinctive experiences of the creators of three religions:

“Moses died before he entered the Promised Land; Christ died on the cross, Muhammad attained not martyrdom but power. During his lifetime he became a head of state, commanding armies, collecting taxes, administering justice, and promulgating laws. The resulting interpretation of faith and power, of religion

and authority, has remained characteristic of Islam throughout most of its history."⁸

The word Islam has several meanings, it is used for, a religion, a civilization, a political authority and a complete code of life. According to Lewis, Muslims believe that *Hazrat Muhammad* (ﷺ) is the last prophet of Allah, and is like the Moses and Jesus. And the book revealed on him is like the books of Turah and Gospel:

*"The word Islam has several different meanings. In the traditional sense, as used by Muslims, it connotes the one true divine religion, taught to mankind by a series of prophets, each of whom brought a revealed book, such were the Turah, the Psalms and Gospel, brought by the Prophets Moses, David and Jesus, Muhammad was the last and greatest of the Prophets; and the book he brought, the Quran, completes and supersedes all previous revelations."*⁹

2.2 Difference between Jews Christian and Muslim religion

Bernard Lewis expressed widely in many places that there were many differences in Jews, Christian and Islamic history. *Hazrat Musa* (عليه السلام) was not allowed to enter the Promised Land but rather he was passed on, similar to this *Hazrat Issa* (عليه السلام) was embarrassed and killed and his adherents were endured in mistreatment. Unlike Moses and Jesus, *Hazrat Muhammad* (ﷺ), succeeded as a head of state in his life time and led instructions for after him:

*"The Children of Israel fled from bondage, and wandered for 40 years in the wilderness before they were permitted to enter the Promised Land. Their leader Moses had only a glimpse, and was not himself permitted to enter. Jesus was humiliated and crucified, and his followers suffered persecution and martyrdom for centuries, before they were finally able to win over the ruler, and to adapt the state, its language, and its institutions to their purpose. Muhammad achieved victory and triumphed in his own lifetime."*¹⁰

*"As perceived by the Muslim tradition, the mission of Muhammad was not an innovation but a continuation—a new and this time final phase in the long struggle between monotheism and polytheism."*¹¹

3. Seerah and preaching of Islam

He faulted that it is generally considered that to spread Islam the Muslims utilize power as war and Jihad. Conversely with these ethnically characterized and geologically constrained civic establishments, Islam was on a fundamental level all inclusive in its convictions, its self-discernment, and its aspirations:

“The Muslim believed himself to be the fortunate possessor of God’s final revelation and saw it as his duty and his privilege to bring God’s truth to the rest of mankind, if necessary, by jihad, by war “in the path of God.”¹²

3.1 Instructions of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) regarding the appointment of leader

The Prophet *Hazrat Muhammad*(ﷺ), was not only a prophet but a leader of state in his life time, His prophetic and political actions are saved for the guidance of after him. In His life time He himself was the head of state and religious leader, but He did not leave any clear instruction for the selection of religious and political leader for Muslims:

“Muhammad had however left no clear instruction as to who was to succeed him in the leadership of the Islamic community and in headship of the Islamic state, and the Muslim had only the meagre experience of Pre-Islamic Arabia to guide them.”¹³

According to Lewis as *Hazrat Muhammad*(ﷺ) never give any clear instructions for the selection of a Caliph after him. So for the Arab Muslims there were only their own practice of pre-Islamic period. In that time there was no concept of a state or empire, they were in tribal system and head of tribes were elected leader. These tribal leaders were not rulers but their guardian:

“The political organization of the tribe was rudimentary. Its head was the Sayyid or Sheikh, an elected leader who was rarely more than a first among equals. He followed rather than led tribal opinion. He could neither impose duties nor inflict penalties. Rights and obligations attached to individual families within the tribe but to no one outside. The function of the sheikh’s “government” was arbitration rather than command.”¹⁴

4. Dealings with other religions in the light of Seerah

Jews and Christians in Islamic state were called “*ahal-e-kitab*”. They and their religion was respected.

“For the Muslims, Jews and Christians were people who had been offered God’s truth in its final and perfect form, of which their own religions were earlier, imperfect, and abrogated forms, and yet had willfully and foolishly rejected it.”¹⁵

4.1 Attitude of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) with different conquered societies

The historical background of the relations between the Muslim states from one viewpoint and its non-Muslim subjects and later, neighbors on alternate starts from the period of Holy Prophet (ﷺ). The Holy Quran and the Muslim conventions let us know about *Hazrat Muhammad*(ﷺ)'s dealings with the Jews of Medina and of the northern Hijaz, with the Christians of *Najran* in the south and some Christians in the north, and with the agnostic who constituted most of the Arabian populace:

“For the pagan the choice was clear: Islam or death. For Jews and Christians, possessors of what were recognized as revealed religions, based on authentic though superseded revelations, the choice included a third term: Islam, death or submission, submission involved the payment of tribute and the acceptance of Muslim supremacy. Death might be commuted to slavery.”¹⁶

4.2 Prophet’s dealing with Jews

In the early period of his rule as leader of Medina, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) collided with the three major inhabitant Jewish clans. Each of the three were overcome and, as per the Muslim conventions, two were given the decision in the middle of transformation and banish, and the third, the Banu Qurayza, in the middle of change and passing. Islamic severity about Jews in Quran and the conventions of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ):

“The bitterness generated by the opposition of the Jewish tribes to Muhammad is reflected in the mostly negative references to Jews in the Quran and in the Biography and traditions of the Prophet.”¹⁷

4.2 prophet’s dealings with Christians and History of Christian Muslim relations

Contacts with Christians amid the Prophet's lifetime were preferably less imperative and all that much less petulant than with Jews. The relations of Prophet with Christian clans and adjustment

in the northern Hijaz, and later in southern Arabia, were all in all managed by treaties, the most well-known of which was that concluded with the Christians of *Najran*. By its terms the Christians were allowed to rehearse their religion and run their own particular undertakings, on condition that they paid a settled tribute, offered neighbor lines to the Prophet's delegates, give supplies to the Muslims in time of war, and shunned usury:

"No doubt because of the rather more peaceful relations between the Prophet and the Christians, references to them in the Quran are more favorable than to Jews. A much-quoted passage reflects the Prophet's differing experiences with the followers of the two earlier religions: "you will surely find that the most hostile to the Believers are the Jews and the idolaters, while those who say: 'we are Christians'".¹⁸

Towards the end of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ)'s life, the expansion of the Muslim state brought it into contacts and sometimes into conflict with Christian tribes, and a somewhat less benign attitude toward Christians is reflected in Muslim scripture and traditions:

"But in general, while these on the whole express a far more sympathetic attitude towards Christians than toward Jews, the subsequent development of Islamic law makes no such distinction between the two."¹⁹

Political issue postured by the connection between the Muslim and non-Muslim and its solution in Quran:

"As chief magistrate and later ruler of the community of Medina, the Prophet had Jewish subjects; as sovereign of the Islamic state he had relations with both Christian and Jewish neighbors in other parts of Arabia."²⁰

Islam is characterized against Christianity by verses dismissing the incarnation and the trinity, against Judaism by entries forsaking a percentage of the Jewish dietary laws. Much more critical than the dismissal of Christianity or Judaism, it was the dismissal of agnosticism - the principle adversary against which the Prophet battled and from which he won the primary body of this believers:

"Inevitably, the struggle against paganism brought Islam closer to Judaism and Christianity, seen, if not as allies, then as kindred faiths opposed to a common adversary"²¹

After the death of Holy prophet (PBUH), the sway of Islam was extended across a vast territory reaching from the Atlantic in the west to borders of India and China, and at times even beyond these borders, in the east. In these recently obtained domains there were extensive, critical, and settled religious groups; there were additionally old set up legitimate and regulatory frameworks controlling how these groups were dealt with. The most essential of these frameworks - undoubtedly the one and only experienced amid the early developmental centuries of the Islamic state - were those acquired from the old domains of Persia and of Rome:

“The overwhelming majority of the new subjects of the Islamic state were Christians of various churches. In all these countries there were Jewish minorities, sometimes of considerable size. In Iran, too, there were Christian as well as Jewish populations, but majority of the Iranians professed the religion of Zoroaster or one of its variants. It is clear, however, that large number of Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians adopted the Muslim religion and became part of Islamic society.”²²

There are significant differences in the fate of three religions after the Muslim conquest. Zoroastrianism fared worst. The pre-Islamic Persian state, dissimilar to the Christian state, was totally overcome and crushed, and every one of its regions and individuals were brought inside of the grasp of Islamic caliphate:

“Christianity was defeated, not destroyed by the rise of Islam and the establishment of the Islamic state. But the processes of Arab settlement, of conversion to Islam and assimilation to the dominant culture, gradually reduced the Christianity---when and at what stage is impossible to say---from a majority of a minority of the population.”²³

Judaism interestingly survived. Jews were more acclimated to affliction. For them, the Islamic victory simply implied a change of bosses, in many places in fact to improve things, and they had officially figured out how to adjust and persist states of legislative issues, social, and monetary handicap. In the main countries of the Middle East, in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and to a lesser extent Iraq, Christianity showed greater endurance than in North Africa, and Christian minorities survived in significant numbers.

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