

BERNARD LEWIS' VIEWS ON BASIC INEQUALITIES RECOGNIZED IN ISLAM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Apr 20, 2019

Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (editors) state in their work, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, Volume I (Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., New York, London, pp. 4-6, that even though “Islam recognizes neither caste nor aristocracy,” “however, Islam does recognize certain basic inequalities, in its doctrines as well as in its practice. Most important among these are the three basic inequalities of master and slave, man and woman, believer and unbeliever. While a whole series of radical movements of social and religious protection arose among the Muslims, condemning and seeking to overthrow the barriers which arose from time to time between rich and poor, highborn and lowborn, Arab and non-Arab, white and black—all of which were seen as contrary to the true spirit of Islamic brotherhood—there were no movements of protest to question these three basic distinctions, sanctified by the Quran itself and regulated in detail by Holy Law, establishing the subordinate status of slave, the woman, and the unbeliever.

All three inferior categories had their place and were seen as necessary for the conduct of the business of society” “Women could not become men; slaves could be freed, but only by legal process and by the will of the master and not of the slave. Unbelievers, on the other hand, were such entirely by their own choice. Their status of inferiority was voluntary – Muslims might say willful—and they themselves could easily end it at any time by an act of will. From the point of view of the Muslim, unbelievers were people to whom the truth had been offered in the final and perfect form of God's revelation, which they had willfully and foolishly refused.

Islam recognizes Judaism, Christianity, and a rather mysterious third party, the Sabians, as earlier, incomplete, and superseded forms of Islam itself.... Those who are not so qualified, in other words those classified as polytheists and idolators, are not entitled to the toleration of the Islamic state and for them, according to the law, the choice is the Quran or the sword. The latter might in certain circumstances be commuted to slavery.

The Medieval Muslim, like the medieval Christian, believed that he alone had the true faith and that those who believed otherwise would roast in everlasting hellfire.

The position of *dhimmi*s was in general tolerable but insecure. Humiliation was part of the pattern. The Arabic word *dhull*, meaning lowliness, abasement, abjectness, is often used by Muslim writers in this connection to denote the sense of humility which was felt to be appropriate to the non-Muslim and more especially the Jewish subject.