



Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE

The Duties of the Caliph

by Al-Mawardi

In 632 the first caliph or imam—a leader of the Muslims—was elected to succeed Muhammad. Under the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad in the 1000s, a legal scholar named Al-Mawardi wrote *Ordinance of Government* to describe the powers and duties of the caliph. What were the caliph's ten duties in the conduct of public affairs?

The duties of the Imam in the conduct of public affairs are ten:

1. To maintain the religion according to established principles and the consensus of the first generation of Muslims. If an innovator appears or if some dubious person deviates from it, the Imam must clarify the proofs of religion to him, expound that which is correct, and apply to him the proper rules and penalties so that religion may be protected from injury and the community safeguarded from error.
2. To execute judgments given between litigants and to settle disputes between contestants so that justice may prevail and so that none commit or suffer injustice.
3. To defend the lands of Islam and to protect them from intrusion so that people may earn their livelihood and travel at will without danger to life or property.
4. To enforce the legal penalties for the protection of God's commandments from violation and for the preservation of the rights of his servants from injury or destruction.
5. To maintain the frontier fortresses with adequate supplies and effective force for their defense so that the enemy may not take them by surprise, commit profanation there, or shed the blood, either of a Muslim or an ally.
6. To wage holy war [*jihā[m]d*] against those who, after having been invited to accept Islam, persist in rejecting it, until they either become Muslims or enter the Pact so that God's truth may prevail over every religion.
7. To collect the booty and the alms in conformity with the prescriptions of the Holy Law, as defined by explicit texts and by independent judgment, and this without terror or oppression.
8. To determine the salaries and other sums due from the treasury, without extravagance and without parsimony, and to make payment at the proper time, neither in advance nor in arrears.
9. To employ capable and trustworthy men and appoint sincere men for the tasks which he delegates to them and for the money which he entrusts to them so that the tasks may be competently discharged and the money honestly safeguarded.
10. To concern himself directly with the supervision of affairs and the scrutiny of conditions so that he may personally govern the community, safeguard the faith, and not resort to delegation in order to free himself either for pleasure or for worship, for even the trustworthy may betray and the sincere may deceive. God said, "O David, we have made you our vicegerent on earth; therefore, judge justly among men and do not follow your caprice, which will lead you astray from God's path."

from Bernard Lewis, ed., *Islam from the Prophet Muhammed to the Capture of Constantinople* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), Vol. 1, 150–51, 171–79. Reprinted in Peter N. Stearns, ed., *Documents in World History*, Vol. 1 (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 114–115.

Activity Options

1. **Summarizing** Create a two-column chart. In one column, list the caliph's religious duties. In the other column, list his nonreligious duties. Share your chart with classmates.
2. **Using Aural Stimuli** Invite a religious leader in your community—such as a priest, a rabbi, or a minister—to speak to the class about his or her duties in the conduct of public affairs. Then write a paragraph in which you compare the duties of the guest speaker with those of the caliph.