The Poltical Mobilization of Religion to Achieve Modernization
" a case study of Saudi Society "

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Introduction

In the summer of 1927, the Ikhwan, the fanatical farmer-warriors who Ibn Saud had planted in towns throughout the Nejd region, were aroused to anger by what they considered to be unjust restrictions of their territory and they began attacking Iraqi border settlements.

To deal with this crisis the king called for a conference at Riyadh to meet with representatives of all his tribes. Leaders and wise men came from the Hejaz, Asir, Nejd, and Hasa regions, but the religious leaders of the Ikhwan did not show up. The Riyadh conference showed the King at his best. He led the meeting as a King, but he made sure that his rulings were discussed and voted upon. He even asked for a decision on himself, saying "I want you also to consider whether I am fit for ruling you." (Beling 1980).

At this conference an interesting incident occurred which was to have considerable bearing on the modernization of Saudi Arabia. One of the charges brought against the King was that he had set up wireless stations and communicated through them, an act that was not specifically approved by the prophet.

After the opposition had been heard, the King got down from his throne and pleaded in his own defense. He pointed out that there was nothing in the Koran or the words of the Prophet against the use of wireless. And he ended by having a section of the Koran recited over the radio. Can anything that transmits the words of God be bad ?, he asked.(Beling 1980).

The Ulama (or the council of religious elders) agreed that he was right and thus sanctioned the King's use of the radio, an essential weapon if he was to pacify the scattered and rebellious tribesmen of the Ikhwan settlements. It was a first step in gaining approval for a program which was to extend to automobiles, electric lights, diesel pumps, railroads and airplanes.

The relationship between the King and the religious leaders was one of the mutual support and dependence. They helped to shape the nature of the state which emerged and they were used by the King in the promotion of his political objectives. The Ulama provided the Kingdom with something akin to a state philosophy which played a crucial role in the centralization. They promoted the expansion of religious education including a common value system in the rising generation of new state. The Ulama were involved in the direct administration of religious education to regulate public conduct through the committee for encouraging virtue and preventing vice. The Ulama's role in decision-making and in the implementation of policy can perhaps best be

appreciated with respect to the management of the Ikhwan movement. They had initially opposed the inception of the movement, contending that there was no Islamic justification for it.

Object of Study

The process of government building initiated by Al Saud is prominent in nature; it attempted to satisfy simultaneously the needs of both the religious and secular elements within the Saudi Kingdom. Consistent with the regime's patrimonial character, Al Saud attempted to balance the interests and activities of both groups, but without affecting any significant change in the political sphere. Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss the process of the political mobilization of religion to achieve modernization, and changes in the role of the religious institution in Saudi Arabia. These changes and political mobilization will be described in terms of assessing the compatibility of the traditional religious values with the process of rapid social and economic development in the country.

1 - Sociological Perspective of Religion

Religion has been recognized by many sociologists as the cultural cultural institution of human societies throughout history. Many of the research on religion was informed by the assumption that secularization was an inevitable trend. That assumption has now become a matter of dispute. Many continue to stress conflict between religion and modernization; others argue that the entire secularization thesis should be abandoned; still others suggest modifications that leave the direction of religious change in specific historical periods (Swatos 1988: 475).

Religious beliefs usually provide for an interpretation of the universe , religion also provides basic cultural values designating what is right and wrong, appropriate or inappropriate (Turner 1985: 316). The emergence of new institutions in modern societies has played a role in limiting the social domain of the religion institution. However, religious continues to play a highly significant role in the society and its development.

Religion serves a variety of functions for the individual and the social structure. However, these functions depend upon the social structure and the culture of the society. One of the functions of religion is serving as a source of identity. In a society experiencing rapid social changes, religion may provide a feeling of security and assurance. For an individual who is geographically isolated from family members, religious

groups may provide a sense of belonging. In the functional view it seems that religious beliefs, practices, and symbols contribute to the survival of the individual and society. Durkheim (1947) noted that religion serves societal functions by bringing its members to and providing a common element around which group solidarity may form. According to adcliffe-Brown, (1939) the function of most social patterns is traceable not to individual needs, but to needs or requirements of the society as a whole. He adds that religious functions, generally, are not to resolve anxiety but to create, foster, or heighten it. In general, religion has two main functions; social solidarity and adjustment to the physical and psycho-social environment. Moreover, because religion mobilizes people's emotions and sentiments about truly fundamental questions; it has great potential as both a tool for oppression and a volatile force for conflict and change.

Civil religion is one of the area in which new thinking has been generated about the relations between religion and the State (Bellah 1980). Thus civil reigion performs adual function for the society; it legitimates the social order, evoking commitment and consensus; and it permits specific social policies to be criticized in light of transcendent ideals. Smelser (1988) pointed out that civil religio allows religious values to influence the state, on the one hand, and gives the state a means of influencing religion, on the other.

The religion of Islam is a continuation of the other two major religions, Christianity and Judaism. However, Islam has succeeded in balancing the material and spiritual needs. Kotb (1953) points out that the nature of Islamic belief about human life makes it essential for social justice to take into account both material and human factors. Islam does not divide the individual into body and soul, into differing intellectual and spiritual sides. In Islamic societies, there is intense conflict between conservative religious leaders and those who favor the more secular values of western civilization.

In many third world countries religion has become intimately associated with nationalistic sentiments and activities. With political independence already a fact in many of these societies, a major purpose of the politico-religious parties has been all but eliminated (Johnstone 1988). Furthermore, as Smith (1971) pointed out that third world societies began to question the view of governments as being ordained by the God, and of governmental leaders as Gods or direct agents of God. These societies, including the Saudi society, have not become as secularized as most societies of the west, though this process seems to be on the rise.

Secularization starts usually accompanied by a great deal of political conflict, which only calls attention to the major and often controversial place of religion in human societies.

2 - Religion and the State Establishment

The legitimacy of the early Saudi government was primarily driven from the Wahhabi faith (an Islamic school of thought). Historically, there was a direct cooperation between the founder of Saudi Arabia (King Abdulaziz) and the Ulama (religious leaders and scholars) which laid the foundation of the Saudi state. The relationship between the king and the religious leaders was one of a mutual support and dependence. The Ulama helped to shape the nature of the state as it emerged. They were used by the King in the promotion and legitimization of his rule and policies. The Ulama provided the kingdom with something akin to a state philosophy which played a crucial role in the centralization of the king's power. The Ulama were involved in the direct administration and development of curriculum of the religious education. In addition, they played the key role in establishing morality standards and regulating public conduct through the committee for encouraging virtue and preventing vice.

The King encountered stiff resistance from the conservative Wahhabi Ulama when he decided to incorporate Ijtihad (creation of new Islamic rules by reasoning) within the Wahhabi legal system which permitted the evolution of the modern state. In addition, introduction of Ijtihad laid the foundation for an expanding legal system which included Sharia (Islamic law) and Islamic courts. Many of the functions of Islamic courts were similar to secular courts of law in the continental European pattern (Long, 1975). Although relatively few members of the Ulama have sought to accept modernization, most have tried to undo the changes that have occurred. They have often objected to the emancipation of women and their attitude toward science in schools was a negative one. They have greatly influenced the creativity in literature and art, and in recent years the production and screening of motion pictures and television programs. They have demanded observance of the Islamic worship practices such the daily ritual prayers, the pilgrimage, the fasting during Ramadan, and the dietary laws. They have generally struggled for the maintenance of an Islamic state, an Islamic constitution, and an Islamic law.

In the face of intractable challenges of modernization and industrialization, the members of the religious institution continue to exert considerable influence throughout Saudi Arabia. They attempt to check the government's impulses for rapid modernization and development. They are the forces of tradition in the otherwise rapidly changing society.

3 - Changing in the Societal Culture

Anthropologist agree that cultures and their institutions change continuously (Malefijt, 1968). Transformations, influenced by internal and external factors, may proceed so rapidly or may be so gradual that they are barely noticeable from one generation to another. Internal factors affecting the rate of change include receptivity to new ideas, the amount of freedom of inquiry and of competition, the degree of cultural elaboration, the population size and density, and the degree of harmony between cultural and social values. The most important external factor affecting cultural changes is the degree of contact with other groups. Therefore, changes from within the religious institutions are usually slower due to lesser interactions with outside cultures. In general, religious changes take place by the addition of new elements, discarding of old ones, or modification of existing ones. New elements may originate within the culture itself, but they are most frequently borrowed from others. In the process of cultural diffusion, the adoption of cultural elements of one society by the other depends to some extent on the awareness of the two societies of each other cultural patterns, including religion. The degree of acceptance of new cultural elements will largely depend upon their compatibility with existing ones, especially, the religion.(Al-Zahrani 1986).

4 - Religion in Use

Since some common human desires are so far beyond reach, religion will always be needed as a human organization to provide general commentator based on supernatural assumptions. Religion provides a sense of security for the individual while interacting with new situations. Some believe that to gain a degree of societal unity and to establish a positive perception of transformations that have produced the modern society, religion must provide new interpretation to accommodate components of the modernized society, which otherwise may be in conflict with religious values. The new interpretation of Islam was used by the Saudi rulers to eliminate the public fear of conflicts between religion and modernization. The transformation process was accompanied by a formal application of Islamic laws and maintaining the social values of the society during its modernization. For instance, King Fisal, used Islam as an instrument to manage the modernization process when he said, "Our religion requires us to progress and advance and to bear the burden of the highest tradition and best manners. What is called progressively in the world today and what reformers are calling for, be it social, human, or

economic progress, is all embodied in the Islamic religion and law." (Al-Farsy, 1980:58).

As a consequence of the Saudi ruler's two pronged policy of ongoing Wahhabism as the state ideology and instituting limited administrative and social change, the Saudi polity has exhibited tensions and conflict between two groups: (1) the secular-educated Saudi's who advocated more socioeconomic and political reforms, and (2) the religiously inspired traditionalists who desired to retain the religious character of the polity. Balancing the tension between the two is the King who converts tension into balance and binds society together through conflict no less than collaboration. The government hoped to institute a viable socioeconomic order based on Wahhabism but has been forced over time to adjust to changing circumstances. They attempted to respond to accommodate emergent situations but continued to invoke religion as a means to rationalize those changes.

The first and most elaborate reform program was initiated in 1962 as a result of demand and external pressures. The reform program was traditional and religious in tone, and introduced in order to improve ... a new system of government based on the principles of Islam. A basic law will be promulgated, drawn from the Quran, the sunnah of the prophet and the acts of the Orthodox Caliphs. It will set forth the principles of government and the relationship between the governor and the governed (Al-Zahrani 1986).

5 - Challenges by the Government

It is known that religious institutions in Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia have an influence over politics, the way of life, and ideology. The Saudi government and society adopt the Wahhabi school of interpretation of Islam. According to this school, laws should be derived from a very strict Islamic doctrine and should be administered by Islamic courts. The religious laws are enforced by a religious police force. Therefore, a Saudi's attitudes towards politics, ethics, society, and law are inescapably molded by Islam. Since the beginning of the new Saudi state the King had supreme executive and legislative powers, in consultation with the council of Royal Advisers, and the heads of the various independent agencies. Royal decrees, recorded in the official Gazette, Umm al Qura, have the force of law. The religious institution in the central Saudi Arabia viewed with a great displeasure what they considered departures from established customs. In a consultation conference held in 1927 the religious leaders argued that many of the new

laws, such as taxation, were unlawful and contrary to the Sharia (Sharabi, 1970).

Among Wahhbin groups joining will some secular people and government thinks that the traditional or classical or classical Islamic concept of law and its role in society that constitution a must formidable obstacle to progress. Western jurisprudence has provided a number of different answers to questions about the nature of law, finding its source variously in the orders of a political superior, in the breasts of the judiciary, in the silent, anonymous forces of evolving society. For Islam, this question admits of only one answer, which the religious faith itself supplies. Low is the command of Allah "God" and the acknowledged function of Muslim jurisprudence is to discover the terms command. Thus religious law was to float above Saudi society as a disembodied soul, representing the aspire. (Coulson 1965) Argue that the Islamic theory law does not grow out of or develop along with evolving society, therefore, there is a clash between the dictates of the rigid and static religious law and any impetus for change or progress that a society need. To avoid the domination of the religious institution in the government, created the council of ministers to prescribing the rules and procedures of administrative and legislative action, and in establishing the framework for future legislative development. However, the King still possessed final authority in all executive and legislative matters. "The functions of the council were to draw up the policy of the government, internal, external, financial and economic, educational and defense, and all public affairs, and to supervise its execution, legislative authority and executive authority and administrative authority. International treaties and agreements shall not be regarded as effective, except after its approval by the King (Sharabi, 1970 232-233).

6 - Religion and the Educational System

The separation of education and religion was a slow process up to the development plans, the religious powers managed to subdue all attempts to secularize the curriculum. The idea that the government should control the educational system began with the modern trend to modernize all societal aspects. Berger (1982) points out that because moderation and secularist have gone hand-in-hand in recent history and in the contemporary world, it is important to understand that not only was it not always so, but that modernization itself has religious roots. Educational facilities that still exist today in the various regions of Saudi Arabia from the era pre-World War I accurately reflect the status of the

education system of the country in that era. In addition to the Kuttab (elementary Quranic schools), the provinces had specialized in teaching circles known as the halaqa (circle) in the house of prominent Ulama and in major mosques. Private schools sponsored by individual benefactors such as the Al-Falah schools in Makkah and Jeddah were the only providers of formal education.

The organization of the formal secular education in the country took place in 1925 when King Abdelaziz ordered the establishment of the Directory General of Education. The Ulama opposed the introduction of secular education out of fear that it would damage the fabric of Wahhabi society. Through the persistence of King Abdelaziz, a significant progress took place. Based on the religious nature of the society and consistent with the government justification of change in religious terms, Saudi educational planners indicate that the purpose of education is to have the students understand Islam in a correct and comprehensive manner, to plant and spread the Islamic creed, to furnish the student with the values, teachings and ideals of Islam, to equip him with various skills and knowledge, to develop his conduct in constructive direction, and to develop the society economically, socially and culturally.

The same objectives were reiterated in the first, second and third five years plan (1970-1985) which stressed maintaining the religious and moral values of Islam over the developing human resources. While the influence of religion on education may be relatively easy to maintain at the primary and even intermediate levels, it is more difficult to do so at the secondary and higher levels. Religious subjects cannot dominate the curriculum of all colleges, and students cannot be monitored at all times when they study abroad. Interestingly enough, the number of students enrolled in religious programs is less than those in secular institutions. The main secular universities in the country are King Saud University, King Abdelaziz University, King Faisal University and King Fahad University. The main religious universities are the Islamic University in Medina, Ummul-Qura University in Makkah and the Islamic University of Imam Muhammad Iben Saud in Riyadh. Although the Ulama have opposed education for women, Saudi educational planners introduced such education in 1960. The official recognition of women's right for formal education was granted in 1959 when a royal speech was delivered stating that a decision had been made to open government schools for girls under the control of a committee supervised by the Grand Ulama. The placement of female education under Ulama control was a necessary measure to secure their approval. A year later, the General Presidency of the schools of girls was created. This body is effectively a ministry governed by a religious leader with the same powers, privileges, and status as those of a ministry.

The educational policies stated by the Ulama reflect the government's desire to develop materially and yet retain Wahhabi fundamentalism along with engineering and computer science. But the reality of the situation points to an erosion of religious education and the increase in the number of secular schools. The political implications of the increase of secular-educated Saudis have two main impacts. First, this group's desire for greater political participation will exert pressure on the political system to achieve some social reformations. Second, the growing population of secular-educated Saudis means an emerging "World view" at variance with that of the elders and the Ulama. Consequently, their role in government and society will heighten tension and conflict between them and the traditionalists.

7 - Religion and Modern Regulations

In theory, only policy deriving from the Sharia, as determined by the King in consultation with the Ulama, could be considered legislative. But for practical purposes there has been an increasing volume of administrative decrees dealing with the expanding needs of a rapidly modernizing state. Fiscal regulation, economic planning, developmental plans, and the like have been provided in the form of adminis trative decrees. Saudi Arabia, since Abdelaziz, has been responsive to the need to adapt and change to the exigencies of the modern world. However, changes have not been at the expense of the government's own political authority. In the early 1960's the idea of the need for a written constitution was advocated. The King knew that a written constitution would eliminate the royal family role of ruling the country, and that a written constitution may encourage the secular educated and the military to take over the government. Therefore, the King tried to defend himself and used the religious leaders to support his policy. In a speech in Makkah in 1963, King Faysal obliquely attacked the principle of a man-made constitution. What does a man aspire to? He wants "good." It is there, in the Islamic Sharia. He wants security. It is also there. Man wants freedom. It is there. He wants remedy. It is there. He wants propagation of science. It is there. Everything is there, inscribed in the Islamic Sharia (Gaury: 1966, p. 167) Since a written constitution would have imposed legislative restrictions on the ruler, the plea to live by and uphold the Sharia as a total way of life was also an oblique ideological defense of the authority of the ruler. The Ulama served as a constant backup for the government policy. In general, the King tried to regulate social, political, and economic development within the framework of the Sharia.

8 - The Regulation of Saudi law

The King is given authority under the Shariah to do whatever is necessary for the welfare of the people through issuing regulations. By this mean, Saudi Arabian adapts to change and achieves progress. For instance, at the time of the Prophet there were no automobiles, airports, or commercial companies; today Saudi society has the applicable motor vehicle regulations, airport regulations, regulations for companies, and so on.

a. Regulation of Business Activity

The first major group of regulations promulgated under the new direction concerned the vital area of the regulation of business activity and attracting foreign capital and needed foreign expertise to the Kingdom

b. Financial Revival and Economic Development

Financial revival and economic development are the government's prime concern; therefore, the government has adopted and will continue to adopt strong and important measures to lay down substantial programs for reform that continuously spur economic activity. Thus, the regulations for investment of foreign capital which were signed in 1964, provided the base to attract foreign capital and expertise to the Kingdom. In July 1965, regulations for companies, were issued, defining and regulating the various types of companies. In 1962 the regulation for commercial agencies was issued. In the 1970's many regulations were issued which deal with the procurement and for the execution of projects and works, contracts values commission, and intercessions.

c. Labor and Welfare Regulations

Labor regulations were promulgated in Saudi Arabia, 1947, about the time ARAMCO was preparing for major oil production following World War II. Suffice it to say, in regard to these early regulations, that one of their important features were to remove labor disputes from the jurisdiction of the Shariah court with its strict rules of evidence to the newly created administrative agency, the Labor Office. However, the need for a modern and more comprehensive regulation to better administ

er the ever increasing complexities of employee relations resulting from the industrial expansion was recognized by the government. These regulations were adopted from modern countries and were redesigned in 1969 with new changes and additional regulations such as the social insurance.

d. Judicial regulations

The judicial regulations were promulgated in July, 1975. It set the tone that inorder for the judiciary to be effective, it should be completely independent and non-political. These regulations provide that the Sharia courts shall consist of:

A. The Supreme Judicial Council
B. The Appellate Court
C. General courts
D. Summary courts.

The Supreme Judicial Council is composed of eleven members and in addition to looking into Sharia questions submitted to it by the King and the Minister of Justice, it reviews death and other severe punishment sentences handed down by the lower courts. The Appellate Court is headed by a chief judge who sits with either three or five judges, depending upon the seriousness of the case before it. This court reviews criminal cases, family law, and inheritance cases appealed to it from the lower courts. The general courts will normally consist of one judge, except in cases involving death or severe punishment which calls for a decision rendered by three judges. The summary court issues decisions by a single judge. The qualifications regarding character, education and training that a candidate for a judgeship must meet are spelled out. Appointment and promotion in the judiciary is by royal order passed by the decision of the Supreme Judicial Council.

9 - Religion and the Rise of the Middle Class

The growth of the oil industry in Saudi Arabia stimulated social and economic development which occurred within the framework of traditional values and institutions. The expansion of tertiary education in Saudi universities or abroad led to the growth of graduates in such fields as sciences, technology, medicine, law and social sciences. These university educated individuals contributed to the growth of a middle class. Members of this class were quickly absorbed into the country's economic, political and social spheres. With the oil revenues, Saudi government

launched a program of rapid modernization and the demand for
professionals from the new middle class was on the rise. But within the
Saudi middle class, there was a conflict between the professionals
with their secular education and the traditional middle class. In the social
sphere, familial, kinship and religious ties remain strong despite the new
advent of the new middle class. Although the nuclear family system has
begun to emerge, the extended family system remains the norm. Hussain
(1984) argues that "The separation of household symbolizes a divergence
in outlook which is as much a gap in education and experience as a gap in
generations. This break is not oftentimes by any means. The son allows
proper respect and love for his father by visiting him daily if possible and
maintains the strong personal bond that unites him with other members of
his extended family. In some cases, a large family group maintains a
cluster of nuclear and extended family households in one section of town
so that all family members are close to each other without being under the
same roof.

The impact of other attitudinal changes associated with the new
middle class has not been felt yet. For example, whereas the new middle
classes are generally monogamous and entertain progressive views about
the role of women in Saudi society, the Ulama and the old middle classes
oppose such views. Moreover, the new middle class has not exerted much
influence. In making policy decisions, the King regularly meets the
important members of the royal family, the Ulama, and the tribal leaders.
However, it should not be long before the middle class succeeds in making
its impact on Saudi society. Many of the younger royal princes who
actually run the country have studied in colleges and universities in the
United States and Europe and are entering government and military
services. On the other hand, their relations with the religious institution
are not as strong as the their father or the founder of the state. The
stronger this class grows and the more its members replace the thousands
of foreign professionals in the country, the more politically and socially
influential it will become. Such changes in social structure will be crucial
to the centers of power in Saudi society.

10 - The Limitation of the Role and Religious Institution

Saudi polities both as a way of life and as a "political ideology".
Under strict Wahhabi interpretation there is no distinction between
spiritual and temporal matter. The laws are Islamic and are administered
by Islamic country. Religious regulations are enforced by a religious
police force. However, the traditional Wahhabi social and political order

is now threatened by social changes created by modern economic and technological advances.

The development of the bureaucracy has greatly affected the Saudi political process by channeling the exercise of political power into a relatively organized system of administration based on established procedures and regulations. Of course, there is a gap between how the system appears on an organizational chart and how it actually operates. In practice, government administration is still highly centralized with little or on delegation of authority by the ministers and agency heads beyond a few trusted agents.

11 - The Basic Strategic Principle of the Develpoment Plans

Ministry of Planning declared the main objectives of the development plans is simply to benefits the Saudi society. It, therefore, becomes necessary:

1. To create in Saudi citizens an awareness of the objectives and requirements of development and the handling of the tools of development.

   A. Information through the public media using religion to promote the social values of work as an important and respectable activity in order to change attitudes towards certain occupations which at present are not acceptable to some people.

   B. The dissemination of culture by encouraging literary authorship and the spread of public libraries; as well as by establishing museums and the preservation of historical and archaeological sites

   C. The establishment of a National library with a collection of books and manuscripts which would include every Saudi author.

2. To increase the attention given to the handicapped and to introduce national programs for their rehabilitation and welfare.

3. To provide more care for all children in all fields, and at all levels.

4. To reduce compulsory military service.

5. To introduce some basic military subjects into secondary school curricula.

6. To expand anti-illeteracy and adult education programs.

7. To give more attention to local community programs based upon the effective participation of citizens in the planning and implementing of local projects.

8. To give attention to preventive medicine and health education; increasing the effectiveness of preventive and curative institutions in safeguarding the citizen, and to widen the scope of health programs.

9. To improve the capabilities of individuals to increase their income thereby removing the resulting social imbalance.

10. To pay more attention to social welfare programs in all fields and to induce private sector participation by encouraging the establishment of yet more private benevolent societies.

11. Pay more attention to youth welfare programs; to develop the capabilities of young people and to enable them to gain mental and physical skills in the fields of culture, science and sports.

12 - The Role of the Religious Leaders

The expansion in government administrative structures was accompanied by increased jurisdiction of these structures over a large number of societal areas, including those formally regulated for religion and the religious establishment. For example, the jurisdiction and activities of the Domestic Council profoundly affected the position of the Ulama in two ways. First, although the Ulama were represented in the council, their representation was limited to two members, thus minimizing their presence and influence. Second, the councils jurisdiction affected areas that formerly came under the exclusive control of the Ulama, such as the administration of Awqaf (assets dedicated for charity), religious schools, and education. The extent of the Ulama's participation in the newly founded structures was influenced by the needs and orientation of the political sphere. The Ulama were given prominence when religious legitimacy was needed, and they assumed a secondary position when their stands contradicted that of the ruler, or when other sources of legitimacy were invoked. As the process of redistribution of power neared completion, the Ulama lost whatever limited autonomy they had enjoyed. They become paid civil servants whose status, income, and general activities were governed by state regulations and objectives. The incorporation of the Ulama in to the state administration continued the use of religion and the religious establishment as a source of legitimacy. The Ulama's role in society and their activities in the administrative structure were channeled through the following fields and agencies: the Committees for Commanding the Good and Forbidding Evil; the Directorate of Religious Research, religious education, the Ministry of Justice; Preaching and guidance of Islam at home and abroad; Supervision of girls' education; Supervision of Mosques and awqaf; notaries public; and spreading Islam and consolidating the government international prestige through the activities of Muslim organizations, such as the World Muslim League and the world assembly of Muslim Youth.

13 - The Oppositions to Change in Saudi Society

The opposition falls into two broad categories: first, ideological and revolutionary, and second, fundamentalist and reactionary. From the mid-1950's, Arab nationalist ideals entered Saudi Arabia through immigrant oil workers who often retained links with plitical and social organizations (Halliday, 1974). Many of the opposition contains the heaviest concentration of young Saudis. These young bureaucrats, many of whom hold degrees from western universities, are articulate and ambitious and are gradually filling traditional administrative positions. Moreover, as the Saudi people become more and more secularly educated, the strength of the religious sanction and of the power of religious social control will decline. Thus, the opposition movements have been unable to make much direct gain against religious values and traditions which permeate all levels of Saudi society.

The second is fundamentalist reaction of the Ulama support the government modernization plans which gives some indication as to their conflict relationships. Since the late 1920's, the government has tried to reconcile religious traditions with modernization. For example, in the 1930's the King was denounced by the Ulama over the introduction of the telephone and the automobile until he demonstrated their utility in spreading the word of God. In the 1940's, the Ulama objected to oil concessions being given to Americans on the grounds that it was selling Muslims into bondage to nonbelievers. Some Ulama helped the King to defend his situation by asking this question "had not the Prophet employed nonbelievers." In the 1950's, the issue of the introduction of state income tax was settled in favor of the utilization of traditional Zakat (alms giving) as a form of state levy. The introduction of the radio was condemned until it was shown to be a vehicle for the transmission of the word of God. In the 1960's, opposition to female education was resolved through religious supervision; opposition to the full female form on Saudi television was resolved by the employment of non-Saudi women; opposition to state economic planning was countered by concern for Islamic values and social welfare. While a new Islamic synthesis has been evolving, it is clear that the Ulama have been steadily losing ground to the state. Progressive bureaucratization and receipt of state funds for religious purposes have further eroded their independent powers of decision making. However, in 1979, the Grand Mosque in Makkah was seized by a group which appeared to be a fanatic Wahhabi sect. Their aims were to icite sedition against the government and to secure rigid

application of Islamic law. According to the rebels, the King with his
government had forfeited their right to rule on the grounds of moral
deviation from the Sharia. Saudi government might dismiss the seizure of
the Grand Mosque as the work of religious deviants. Al-Alam (1979)
argues that failure to respond to traditional religious sensitivities might
lead to a fundamentalist revolution. On the other hand, curtailment of
social and economic development might lead to reaction from the
modernizer, particularly the new middle class.

14 - Conclusion

Religion has been the central cultural institution of Saudi society. The
power of religion comes from people's commitments to religious beliefs,
and their willingness to identify with such beliefs. Religious beliefs are
used as a frame of reference to define a situation. However, the role of the
religion institution can be changed within a society. This change may take
place when values change, which usually happens very slowly. Changes
in the society may have a chance of acceptance as long as the religious
values continue to be reflected in the new institutional arrangements.
Many writers would agree with Weber that modernization is a process that
slowly but surely pushes religion to the periphery of human existence.
While modernization does involve secularization, it does not necessarily
eliminate the role of religion. Saudi society from the beginning had
adopted two policies, Wahhabism as an ideology and modernization as a
goal. However, an unseen conflict continued to exist between the secular
educated Saudis who advocated more modernization and political reform
and the religiously inspired traditionalists who desired to reaffirm the
religious nature of the policy. For the government it was an exercise in
balancing the demands of religion against the goal of modernization. The
government played this game well. Historically, the government has
maintained the support of the fundamentalists by defending Saudi
Arabian's traditional values and supporting the religious establishment with
grants and favors while gradually pushing the country in the direction of
modernization. The government policy in solving crisis arising from
conflicts between the religion institution and modernization is to initially
accede to the demands of the religious power and later diverting attention
to some other issue or indirectly with holding some of the ulama
privileges. In 1924 Wahhabis demanded that government banish tobacco
sales, a major source of revenue for the merchants and source of taxes for
the government. The King did as the ulama demanded. The following
year when the ulama appeared for their annual stipends, the King informed

them that since the tobacco tax was lost he could not longer pay them their allowances. Within a short period of time tobacco reappeared in the markets. The oil wealth which plunged Saudi into the technological revolution created two main social factions. One incline towards modernization; the other seeks to uphold and maintain the primitive purity of the wahhabi faith. Berger (1982) almost solved this problem which the Saudi society faces when he pointed out that "Religious ideas can be used to legitimate almost anything. A religion has legitimate modernity, also it can legitimate counter modernity." Changes in the role of religious institutions in Saudi society are becoming a reality. This reality created a situation in which every move toward modernization made by the government had to be justified in religious terms. It's keeping government and religion intertwined ensured against the rise of a rival political movement drawing its strength from religious fanatics. Never was protection of the faith separated from any public decision. Seemingly innocuous decisions were carefully undertaken and defended. For example, the government's public announcement that a saris of national parks would open in the Assir (southern part of the country) sought to reassure the population. Planners, however, expect these projects can be implemented with a minimum of impact on the country's social values. It was with this attitude that the government presided over modernization, warily walking the fine line between progress and preservation of the Saudis' sacred traditions. Religion remains a viable institution in Saudi society, although religious belief expressed in new forms and with new ramifications for changing lifestyle. The role of religious institution is changing in many different ways and for different reasons. From a sociological point of view it remains to be seen whether the changes in the role of religion at the center of the controversy are actually adjustments to the conditions in which we live, changes that continue to reflect the same strong values, or whether they actually indicate value changes at the cultural level. It could be concluded that while all institutions face the necessity of adapting themselves to a changing society. Changes in one institution compel changes in other institutions. Therefore, there is a intense conflict between conservative religious leaders and those who favor the more secular values of the west. These conflicts, however, leds to the major trends in religion today which is the growth of fundamentalist groups. Sociologists have observed that fundamentalist revivals, take place in time when social changes have led to turmoil, uncertainty, and the erosion of familiar values. When people find themselves confused, throated, or even appalled at changing conditions, they may see a "return to basics" as a solution.

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