

Religious Police in Saudi Arabia



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To Contact Publisher

E-mail: ghainaabook@hotmail.com

Fax: ++96612295019

In the Name of Allah
Most Gracious, Most Merciful

“Ye are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind. Enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them. ...” (3:110)

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Preface

Prof. Mohammed Al-Bishr

Editor and Head of the Research Team

Recent reports in the Western media and political and humanitarian organizations can be classified into four major categories:

- 1- Religious police, Wahhabism and allegations of religious extremism.
- 2- The situation of Christians in Saudi Arabia and how the religious police is dealing with them.
- 3- Alleged violent and cruel behavior of the religious police.
- 4- The status of Saudi women and how the religious police deal with them.

These are the four issues often referred to by the Western media, particularly American, the reports of the US State Department, Human Rights Watch, the press reports released by the United Nations and American research institutes concerned with Middle East studies and others.

It is not our concern in this book to dwell on everything that has been written on the Saudi religious police or try

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to cite, answer or refute allegations simply because of the magnitude of the subject. What we can do, however, is to pick out the general viewpoints and major trends which represent the main ingredients of this mental picture about the Saudi religious police; a picture which has been distorted by those press releases and reports. Before discussing these three categories, we would like to emphasize the following points:

- 1- Much of what has been written about the religious police represents only a unilateral point of view. Such representation is often devoid of truth, either because credible information on any reported adverse incident is lacking or because the person reporting the incident is ignorant of the nature of Saudi society, its values, culture and the systems prevalent in it.
- 2- Some of what has been written on the religious police concerned only individual cases in which Saudis or non-Saudis (Muslims or non-Muslims) may have been involved, but were made to appear representative of the entire Saudi society. We would like to cite here those cases in particular in which non-Muslim residents in Saudi Arabia were involved in breaking the law and were caught red-handed by the religious police. Those individuals later instigated the sources mentioned earlier to malign the religious police and, in the process, protect their own selves.
- 3- We notice that when these Western sources talk about the religious police in Saudi Arabia, they concentrate on only one aspect of the case discussed (such as, for example, apprehending an individual for a moral violation). The discussion, however, fails to mention

the religious, cultural and legal considerations that had led to the apprehension. Consequently, several important aspects of the case were misconstrued and a major party to the case – the religious police – had been ignored.

We can therefore claim that, in such cases, these sources are guilty of a deliberate misrepresentation of facts to meet the malicious ends of vested interests.

- 4- We have not come across a single piece of news, or a single political or humanitarian report in all the Western sources that mentions the positive impact of the religious police on Saudi society. This is a clear indication of the injustice and prejudice against a religious organization that is genuinely concerned with reform and with preserving and safeguarding moral values in Saudi society.
- 5- What is being written on the religious police in Saudi Arabia derives from a purely Western cultural approach to the concept of religion, life, behavior and morals. Such an approach, inevitably, clashes with the culture of other societies. The political, religious and cultural standards by which these Western sources judge the actions of the religious police in Saudi Arabia are, thus, wrong and unacceptable.

These five points are conclusions based on observing and following all that has been published on the religious police by Western sources, particularly the print media in the United States. These conclusions are the result of an in-depth reading of the topics discussed or the cases argued concerning the functions and duties of the religious police in Saudi Arabia.



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Accordingly, we will discuss the four major aforementioned categories objectively with a view to projecting the truth to Westerners, regardless of their social class or position. We believe that this point of view has to be heeded to fairly so that the truth can be discerned.

This book comprises a comprehensive view of the pivotal issues relating to the religious police in Saudi Arabia. It has been prepared by a group of Saudi academics, comprised of both men and women, that represents several Saudi universities and varied geographical areas. They all participated in giving expression to this view, each according to his/her field of specialization and interest. They are addressing this book to Western public opinion and its political, intellectual, and media sources to bare the truth, which has been lost to it because of particular political circumstances, or because of a manifest sense of religious superiority, or a suspicious media predilection. All these reasons are undeniable facts that have failed to dawn on the Western mind apparently due to the current political situation and the drastic changes that have occurred on the international arena following the September 11 events.

By addressing this publication to the Western mind we aim at removing the misunderstanding, and taking an initial step towards creating room for dialogue based on the undeniable truth.

Contributors

Dr. Ibrahim bin Saleh Al-Humaidan: Faculty member in the College of Da'awa [Call to Islam] and Mass Communications, Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University. The title of his doctoral dissertation was, Style of Debate in the Call to Islam: An Analytical Study of the Debates That Took Place in North America During Ten Years. Was head of The Translation and Research Center at the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Washington, U.S.A. and later was Vice President of the institute. He is member of the board of trustees of the Islamic College in Thailand and member of the board of directors of the International Organization for Introducing Islam. He participated in many academic conferences in Europe and the U.S.A. His publications include, Islamic Concepts in Cultural Dialogues; Dialogues, Debates and Polemics in the Call to Islam.

Professor Ibrahim bin Mubarak Al-Juwair: He is a faculty member in the College of Social Sciences, Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University, Sociology Department. He obtained his Ph.D. degree from the University of Florida in the

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U.S.A. He is an active member of a number of scientific and sociological committees and cultural and literary societies. He is also member of the Saudi Human Rights Committee. He has represented the Kingdom in several local and international conferences, among which were conferences organized by the Middle East Studies (MESA) in the U.S.A. and was a member of the Saudi delegation charged with producing a strategic document on the dialogue between civilizations for the United Nations

Among his publications: *Islamic Education and Its Impact in Treating Juvenile Delinquency*; *Human Rights Between Theory and Application*; *Globalization and the Dialogue between Civilizations*.

Dr. Omyma bint Ahmed Al-Jalahema: Assistant professor at the College of Education, Department of Islamic Studies, King Faisal University, Dammam branch. She holds a Ph.D. degree in Islamic studies specializing in creed and comparative religions. Assistant professor in the department of Islamic Studies at the College of Arts, King Faisal University, Dammam branch. She participated as a member in the third Saudi National Dialogue which was held in Madinah in June 2004. She also participated in several cultural forums inside and outside the Kingdom.

Professor Hamad bin Nasser Al-Ammar: Faculty member at Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University. He was Dean of the College of Da'awa (Call to Islam) and Mass Communications, vice rector of the university for social services and continuing education, and chairman of the Saudi Society for Da'awa Studies. He supervised and refereed a

number of academic M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations and participated in many scientific conferences and symposia inside and outside the Kingdom. He has authored more than twenty books and research papers in the field of Islamic Da'awa.

Major General Dr. Sa'ad bin Abdallah Al-Arifi: Ex-faculty member at King Fahd Security College and is now a professor under contract in the Department of Islamic Culture at King Saud University. He has occupied a number of leading positions at the security sectors. Holds a Ph.D. degree from the Department of Da'awa and Ihtisab at Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh. He has participated in numerous conferences and international academic and security seminars. He has taught in several colleges and security institutes in Saudi Arabia and has been awarded a number of military medals and decorations. He has extensive interests in the fields of security and sociology. Among his publications is: *Alhisba* [Promotion of virtue and prevention of vice] and *Public Prosecution: A Comparative Study*.

Samar Hussein Fatany: Chief broadcaster in the English section at Jeddah Broadcasting Station which is affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and Information. She has introduced many news, cultural, and religious programs. During a period of 28 years she has conducted several interviews with official delegations and prominent political personalities visiting the Kingdom. She has participated in the media coverage of many local and international conferences. She has made significant contributions in the fields of public relations and social awareness. She has also been involved in activities aiming at enhancing women's role in serving society.

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Dr. Abdul Rahman bin Muala Al-Luwaihiq: Faculty member in the Department of Islamic Culture, College of Sharia at Imam Mohammed Bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh. He has participated in many social and intellectual activities and was interviewed by the Saudi as well as the Arab media. He has participated in the second and third sessions of the Conference on National Dialogue. His most important publication is: Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims.

Abdul Aziz bin Zaid Al-Dawood: Media man and writer. He writes for the radio and the press and practiced journalism for more than two decades. Concerned with Islamic thought and cultural promotion issues. Currently he is the managing director of Al-Haras Al-Watani (The National Guard) Arabic magazine. Authored three books all in Arabic language: Fi Al-Manhaj, a self-criticism of Islamic Awakening and Government, Sirat Al-Sheikh Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al- AISheikh (an Autobiography) and Qanat Al-Hurra wa Amrakat Al-Aql Al-Arabic (Al-Hurra Channel and the Americanization of Arab minds).

Dr. Abdul Lateef bin Said Al-Ghamdi: Faculty member and chairman of the Department of Sharia Sciences at King Fahd Security College in Riyadh. He obtained his Master's degree in Islamic media and his Ph.D. degree in Islamic Sciences from Zeitouna University in Tunisia. He is a member of the Saudi ad hoc committee concerned with drawing up Islamic documents related to human rights. His intellectual output includes: The Particular Nature of the Saudi Application of the Concept of Human Rights;

Human International Law and Human Rights Law from an Islamic Perspective.

Prof. Othman bin Saleh Abdul Mohsen Al-Amer: Director general of education and supervisor of Girls' Education in Hail region. He is former dean of Teachers' College in Hail and associate professor of Islamic culture in the same college. He is an active member of a number of cultural, academic, educational and social service societies and committees and has also participated in several conferences and forums inside and outside the Kingdom. He has authored many research papers in the field of Islamic culture.

Dr. Fat'hiya bint Hussein Al-Qurashy: Assistant professor at the College of Arts and the Humanities, Sociology Department, King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah. A supervisor of post-graduate studies for girls, she has an M.A. in literature and a Ph.D. in social sciences. She has participated in several social and cultural activities that deal with the position of Saudi women in light of social changes . She has submitted many research and work papers in her field of specialization.

Lubna Wajdi Sanousy Al-Tahlawi: She works as a journalist for the Riyadh-based Al-Jazirah newspaper. She is a member of the Saudi Society for Information and Communication and the Saudi Journalists Association. She has contributed outstanding articles to a number of Saudi and Gulf newspapers and magazines. She has represented the Kingdom in several conferences, forums and symposia.



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She has studied English and French at LEMAN College in Switzerland. She is now preparing for an M.A. thesis in mass communications. Among her published works is: Scientific and Practical Methods to Improve the Image of Saudi Arabia Abroad.

Dr. Mazen bin Salah Matbakani: Associate professor at King Saud University. He has a Ph.D. degree and has written his dissertation on Islamic studies by Orientalists. He is member of the Arab-American Association of Professors of Mass Communications. He has participated in many international conferences on the relationships between the East and the West. He has been frequently interviewed by the media. His academic output includes: Research on Contemporary American Orientalism; An Inside View of the West; The West in Its Confrontation with Islam.

Prof. Mohammed Al-Bishr: Obtained his Masters and PhD degrees in political communication from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, USA. His area of specialization relates to intellectual, cultural and inter-civilization studies. He often appears in the Saudi and Arab media. His publications include: Introduction to Political Communication, Intercultural Communication, The Philosophy of Skepticism and Phenomenology in Human Communication.

Dr. Mariam bint Rashid Al-Tamimi: Assistant professor of origins of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) at the Girls' College of Arts in Dammam. She actively participates

in women's social and intellectual activities and attends activities related to issues pertaining to Muslim women.

Dr. Noora bint Khalid Al-Saad: Faculty member, Sociology Department, College of Arts, King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah. She has obtained her M.A. from the University of Minnesota in the U.S.A. and her Ph.D. in sociology from Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh. She is chairperson and a member of a number of scientific committees and has participated in many social and women's activities. She has taken part in several international conferences and intellectual discussions including: "Human rights between war and peace," "Islam Stand on Terrorism," and has also taken part in the second Conference on National Dialogue. Her intellectual output includes: Cultural and Social Effects of Globalization and The Image of the Muslim Woman in the Western Media.

Hidaya bint Darweesh Salman: A Saudi writer and journalist. She is the chairperson and editor-in-chief of the first electronic newspaper for Saudi women. She has supervised the women's sections of several Saudi dailies in Riyadh. She was the first correspondent for the Saudi Press Agency (SPA). She is member of the women's committee of the Saudi Association for Information and Communication and of the advisory board of "Saudi Women," a biographical dictionary. Among her publications: Assassination: Dialogues about Politics, Culture and Literature.

World Call to Do Good

(Mohammed Al-Bishr)

- **Introduction**
- **Why are we addressing this book to the People of the Book?**



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Introduction:

Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) came with the call to all people urging them to do good. This call complemented the message that Jesus (peace be upon him) and the other messengers before him came to convey. In the Holy Qur'an, God described those who responded to the call of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) as people that love all that is good because they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in God.

In the Qur'an, which is the Muslims' holy book that was sent to guide them and all others, we find a verse which has a sublime meaning. In this verse God almighty says: *“Ye are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind. Enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them.”*

This verse contains four significant meanings for the lives of Muslims and an invitation to non-Muslims to share in these meanings:

- 1- **The people that love all that is good enjoin what is right.** This part of the definition of the good people has preceded that part that says they “forbid what is wrong”, because man has, originally, a pure, clean and sound

innate nature and therefore needs more benevolence to be able to do good when he is enjoined to do so.

- 2- **To forbid what is wrong.** Because no matter how good a man is, he is not infallible and can commit errors which are contradictory to his innate human nature and good morals. If men were perfect they would be angels and would not need anybody to guide them to what is right. Therefore, if the individuals that form a particular people undertake the duty of forbidding what is wrong, then they must be the ones who love good.
- 3- **Believing in God.** Enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong are two prerequisites for believing in God, for God has enjoined what is right but some people have forgotten it and need to be reminded of it and be made to like it. He has also forbidden what is wrong, but this wrong has surfaced in the words and behavior of individuals and therefore they need somebody to tell them about it and make them aware it is wrong or reprehensible and to forbid them from doing it so that good can prevail and be enjoyed by everybody.
- 4- **Inviting the People of the Book (Jews and the Christians)** to believe in God and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong so that they can become part of the people described as the People that do good mentioned by the Holy Qu'ran. God has mentioned the Jews and the Christians in particular in this verse because they are the closest people to Muslims. Hence this call was addressed to them so that they would follow this great moral principle and believe in God, thus also becoming a people that does good.



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Why are we addressing this book to the People of the Book?

In this book we are dealing with an important issue tackled by political, intellectual, and media sources in the West. This issue concerns Muslims all the more because it has been enjoined by their religion and they themselves have been applying it in their behavior and conduct. This issue is: enjoining all that is good and forbidding all that is wrong. We consider this issue a very important one in our lives because all good resides in it, having a bearing on the individual, society and state levels.

Nevertheless, what a Westerner knows about this issue is only a collection of incorrect facts, some misleading information about its details, and a distorted picture on how it is applied inside Saudi society in particular.

We would not be writing this publication if the addressees were nationals of countries or peoples who are unacquainted with religion or who do not believe in God; for in this case they would attach no weight to religion and would not know about the moral values of doing good and virtue. But we are addressing it to the closest peoples to Muslims.

Institutions of social reform and the societal police

- **Introduction**
- **Calls for reform in the West**
- **The legislative and application aspects of the value of the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice**
- **Religious police – a social reform institution in Saudi Arabia**



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Introduction:

Moral degeneration has become prevalent in many societies in the world and has taken many manifestations in practices that violate the innate nature of and morals of man. They include homosexuality, gay marriages, and feminism which has declared war on men, religion, history and even God describing Him as masculine! Other degenerate practices include moral deterioration like women refusing to raise their children because it is an unpaid job! In reaction to such moral disintegration, several appeals were made through various specialized humanitarian institutions in the world. It was absolutely necessary that society, in many countries, should support these appeals for morality. This support led to the formation of reformatory institutions and anti-vice squads that derive their values from religion, morality and social customs. These calls or institutions of civil society assumed several names, but they all aim at ensuring decency within their societies.

Has the “Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV)” become one of the mainstays of civil society in Saudi Arabia in view of its role of preserving morals, this of course, not a modern Saudi innovation, but is a principle ordained by heavenly

laws which enjoin what God has ordered and forbid what He has banned. These heavenly laws have spelt out all that is to be followed and all that is to be shunned. This principle is the basis of all the Prophets' calls, beginning with Adam and ending with Mohammed – the last of God's prophets and messengers.

The heavenly messages that preceded Islam concentrated on only one point on which the message was based; namely, monotheism, worshiping God only, responding to the calls of God's messengers, and acting in accordance with God's laws.

Abraham, the father of prophets (peace be upon him), based his message on calling to do what is right (that is, worshiping only God) and forbidding what is wrong (such as worshiping idols, which is neither harmful nor beneficial). In his dialogue with his people, Abraham questioned and denounced their practice of worshiping idols and showed them that only God had control over everything and deserved to be worshiped. His call then developed from mere preaching to threatening and, finally, to smashing the idols, so that monotheism prevails and only Allah would be worshiped.

God's prophet, Hud (peace be upon him), based his message to his people on enjoining what is right and worshiping only God and forbidding the polytheism practiced by their ancestors and showing its futility and falsehood.

God's prophet, Lut, called on his people to adhere to uprightness with which God has endowed every human being so that men will not satisfy their lusts on men in preference to women. Lot denounced such vile acts in a

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questioning style that condemned and stigmatized them, as God Almighty said: “Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you?”

God’s prophet, Shu’aib (peace be upon him), called on his people and ordered them to worship God alone. He forbade them to do mischief on earth and asked them not to squat on every road and hinder people from following the path of Allah. He told them to stop enticing true believers away from their religion which God has sent them and, in their dealings, to refer to God’s just laws and adhere to moral values in their conduct and behavior as prescribed by God’s Sharia.

In the message conveyed by Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is the basic moral value from which all other Islamic values derive. It is the moral value prescribed in the Holy Qur’an, which is the constitution of Islam where God says: “Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity.” This verse contains an explicit command from God to do what is right and forbidding what is wrong, linking this sublime value to a belief in God. Islamic scholars have concluded that according to what they have learnt from the Holy Qur’an, any nation that has abandoned this duty deserves the same punishment which nations that came before Islam were meted out when God’s anger and curses fell upon them.

Muslims adopted the principle of *Hisbah* [Enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil] and continued to apply it. Thus, they have come to know the position



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of Al-Muhtasib [one who is in charge of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil] for a period of over fourteen centuries. During the caliphate of Ali bin Abi Talib (the fourth caliph of the Islamic nation after the death of Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him), the title “shurtah” [police] was assigned to this religious position in view of the fact that it was a legal position, the responsibility for which should ultimately be assumed by the caliph, or Muslim ruler among whose duties was to apply the Shariah law in order to ensure safety and security.

Calls for Reform in the West

Dr. Mazin Motabagani

Arab and international media are busy reporting that the Western world is going through a stage of acute moral decline; that the fine moral values and ideals have degenerated and disintegrated before a big tide of corruption. What has encouraged such reports to continue is the spate of movies produced in Hollywood which presents this picture of moral decline and even backs it up by portraying acts of corruption and immoral acts. Among the manifestations of such moral deterioration are the spread of lewdness, illicit sex, drugs, crimes from thefts to rapes, same-sex relationships, as well as alcoholism and drug addiction.

Nevertheless, any researcher in Western societies will find that not a single day passes without there being calls for adhering to moral values and principles and fighting vice. This is especially so when immorality reaches alarming proportions such as the rise in acts of crime among juvenile delinquents, the increase in the number of rapes of minors, crimes committed by policemen, the disruption of social ties among individuals, the growing

pattern of selfishness, the lack of cooperative spirit and dislike for voluntary social work.

As for the general concern about the decline in moral values, James Baker, former US Secretary of State, once wrote an article in which he referred to the declining morals and values in American society. This is a clear indication that some Western intellectuals have begun to express open concern for such declining morals. Baker stated that 73% of the American people feel that America is suffering from such a moral decline and from an increase in illegitimate sexual relationships and violence. They also feel that the judicial and educational systems are incapable of stopping this decline. This may be one of the reasons that have inspired Baker into opening an institute, which has a department dealing with research and special studies related to religion and morals.

This department is especially interested in the problem of drugs, how to deal with it and put an end to it. A conference on drugs, held by Baker's institute in 2002, brought together academicians, healthcare experts, leaders of the drug reform movement, representatives of drug policy organizations, and law-enforcement and judicial officials from the U.S. and around the world to share their views on the drug problem.

The institute published the findings of the conference on its website (www.bakerinstitute.org). The conference lamented that the "war-on-drugs" has been largely unsuccessful. This scourge was still strong and was getting even stronger and worse. The institute noted that it will continue to pursue research and open debate on local and national drug policies in the hope of developing policies



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that are “pragmatic, commonsense-based, human-rights-driven, and focused on reducing the death, disease, crime and suffering associated with drug use.”

At the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in 1995, the association’s president, Professor Robert D. Putnam, declared that American society suffered from a rupture in its structure and that the Americans, especially the post-television generations, no longer participated in social activities and were more selfish and less willing to help others. He attributed the development of these negative traits to television. (*Washington Post*, September 3, 1995).

Baker and Putnam were followed by others such as the Penn National Commission on Society, Culture and Community. Its chairman announced that values and morals in American society were deteriorating. Then we have Judith Rodin who pointed out the increase of, what she called, “signs of uncontrollable anger” which are displayed on television accompanied by acts of sadism and vituperation of others. Another national committee was set up and given the name of “National Commission on Civic Renewal”. It was chaired by Sam Nunn, the retired Senator. Among the functions of this commission was to conduct research and submit its findings on the fields of entertainment, politics, sports and the judiciary system.

In order to emphasize the importance of upholding these moral values, many societies, associations and churches have done outstanding work to combat moral deviation and crime. The American National Public Radio (NPR) announced an instance of a businessman opening a sex store at the border between two states in order to evade the

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laws against opening such shops in both the states. But the inhabitants of the neighboring villages got in touch with their local authorities in order to close down the store. The radio also said that the villages also complained to the companies of truck drivers, who frequented the store. This instance clearly indicates there are people in American society, who strive to close down such stores even though the law may permit it. It also proves that the need to adhere to morals is only human and that man's innate nature calls for upholding virtue and morality.

Using women in pornographic movies and perpetuating this immoral activity led many women in Canada to demonstrate against the stores that marketing these video tapes. They believed that such films degraded women and were manifestations of the persecution from which they suffered. The court recommended that such videos be confiscated.

As for the fight against alcohol, the weekly newspaper, *The Guardian* (June 9, 1996) published a long article titled "The Battle of the Bottle Breaks", in which it reported the anti-drug war. The campaign was so fierce that the alcohol-producing companies had, in spite of the huge amounts of money spent on advertisements, reported losses. A proof of this can be found in the declaration made by George Hacker, head of the anti-alcohol campaign that "America has become a dry land as 40% of the American people have announced that they are abstaining from drinking alcohol." The article also cited the example of a woman, pregnant in her ninth month, who ordered an alcoholic drink in a restaurant in Seattle, US. But the waiter refused to serve her the drink. The woman complained to the owner of the restaurant who fired the waiter, but public

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opinion stood by him and he was reinstated.

If we move to the other side of the Atlantic, we find that sex abuse of children has sparked much interest in the European countries. A conference was held in Stockholm on August 28, 1996, to discuss sex crimes against children and their sexual exploitation. France was among the European countries which declared its intention to confront this problem. French authorities waged a large-scale war against networks that sexually exploited children. The French government issued strict laws to punish perpetrators of crimes against children. Some of these perpetrators were forced to undergo therapy for a number of years.

The Danish government has also announced a number of measures against its citizens traveling to the countries of south-east Asia for “sex tourism”, or what was called by the secretary general of the Danish Children Protection Association “the tourist rape of minors.”

As Europe has been suffering from other problems such as “white slavery traffic”, the judiciary committee affiliated to the Council of the European Union has promulgated a special anti-white-slavery law following the rise in the crime of trading in women and forcing them into prostitution.

Moreover, as the problem of rape in Britain worsened, the London police have issued instructions to women on how to avoid rape.

Some of these instructions were:

1. To dress decently.
2. To avoid sitting on the upper floor of buses if the vehicle is empty and to sit as close toward the driver as possible.
3. To keep their hands free and not put them in their

pockets, so as to be ready to defend themselves.

In spite of these instructions, the *London Times* reported that the British police placed the blame on girls because they overexposed their physical attributes and thus exposed themselves to the danger of rape. This opinion was voiced by an old American woman lawyer thirty years ago, at a time when instances of rape multiplied in US society. She advised women not to go out alone, but to be always escorted by a blood relative – with whom she could not wed by law or religion.

The British police has benefited from the experience of the Muslim community in Britain. This is what Ian Murray, a *London Times*' editor, called the power of the people which succeeded in ridding society of the red-light zone, which is a metonymy for drugs and prostitution. In Birmingham, a number of Muslims met after evening prayer and set up a vigilance body to drive away prostitutes and drug pushers. They succeeded in eliminating these scourges within three weeks. The inhabitants of the area state that they could now sleep peacefully at night as they had got rid of the menace of motorists driving down to pick up prostitutes or buy drugs.

Among the methods used for fighting moral depravity is the setting up of societies which call for the preservation of virginity. One of these was a movement called "True Love Can Wait." The idea of this movement was to ask people to abstain from pre-marital sex and to retain one's virginity till marriage. This movement has become stronger and has spread in Britain and America.

In Germany, some groups were formed that called for a halt to violence and sex on television. These groups were supported by the cultural and social circles and the

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print media in order to stunt the rapid increase in violence, crime and sex on German television. These circles called for putting a limit to the scenes of violence and sex on German television stations so as to protect the new generations. They held several symposia in Europe – in France in particular – in order to protect children from the explicit scenes shown in movies and TV programs. These symposia emphasized the need for more safeguards to prevent children from being exposed to such programs.

The Canadian government has also set up a special police force and named it Anti -Drug and Vice Moral Squad (*Toronto Star*, April 7, 1990).

In America certain parties were so concerned about and horrified by the growing immorality in the West in general and in the U.S.A. in particular, that they started to look for means to propagate moral values and virtue. Accordingly, a group of Harvard professors wrote a book titled: *Is It Possible to Teach Morals?* The book advocates the inclusion of morals subjects as part of university curricula.

Another group, known as “The Angry Fathers”, was also formed in the US in May 1989. It comprised fathers who were becoming increasingly worried about the growing incidence of gang violence and drug-related cases in their society.

In Britain, too, societies were formed to fight vice. One of these societies was The British National Party which was deeply concerned over the spread of the incidence of rape. to the society firmly believed in the scientific studies which found a link between vulgar images in the media and the depraved mindset of rapists. The party was also a strong advocate of restoring the death penalty for rapists.

The legislative and application aspects of the value of the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice

Dr. Ibrahim Al-Humaidan

The call to good and reform is a sublime human value and a common denominator among all religions and cultures. Every culture strives to achieve this noble intention through its religious competent authorities or cultural backgrounds. However, the level of appreciation for this value differs from one society to another and from one culture to another. Because they are conservative and because culture shapes many of the values of life and behavior prevalent in them, Eastern societies seem to surpass Western societies in assigning this priority, placing it always at the forefront of their concerns.

In the Islamic world, and in Saudi Arabia in particular, the call to good and reform is one of the fundamental religious tenets without which Muslims' lives cannot proceed or have any meaning. Thus, people's safety, happiness, development, growth, and contribution to life, cannot be encompassed without realizing this principle

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because it produces a balance between the body and the soul that leads to man's happiness.

Therefore we can see that the political system in Saudi Arabia has charged particular governmental organizations with applying this principle. This represents a perfect integration between the government, which was established according to the tenets of the Islamic religion, and the people who all embrace Islam as a religion.

We do not assume that our Saudi society is a society of angels where no behavioral transgressions or moral violations occur. We are human beings and what applies to others also applies to us especially after the world has witnessed a cultural openness and information revolution that have impacted people's lives and conduct. Our society harbors almost seven million expatriates who belong to more than 130 nationalities. This, no doubt, leads to violations of the values that are prevalent in society. For all that was stated, the Saudi government has established the religious police whose job is to control social movement and interaction in such a way as to safeguard the values of the society and guarantees the balanced adoption of the means of modernization.

We would like to affirm that the principle of enjoining what is right and forbidding all that is wrong is a fundamental Islamic principle that is found and given prominence in a great number of Islamic texts. Muslims, however, do not stop at the literal meaning of the principle itself but go beyond that to its true meanings and implications.

The Islamic vision concerning the principle of enjoining what is right and forbidding all that is wrong does not constitute a complete interference in the affairs, freedoms and particularities of others, but only as much as is necessary

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to preserve rights whether general or personal, just as any other control system in the world strives to do. The practical application of this is no more than preventive and reformative and is based on exhorting, guiding, and forbidding, and aims at only one thing; namely, preserving the five rights guaranteed by Islam. These are religion, life, honor, wealth and lineage. These rights are shared equally by everyone under the umbrella of Islamic rule. Accordingly, no one has the right to force anybody else to follow a particular religion, and no one has the right to violate the rights of others even if they were non-Muslims. Therefore, the positive elements of this system are not confined to Muslims, but apply to everybody within the boundaries of the Muslim state.

Among the obvious facts known to every Muslim is that enjoining doing what is right and forbidding all that is wrong is a responsibility that has to be shouldered by individuals as well as social institutions. This is to be through restrictions and controls discussed at great length by specialized Islamic sources which define the limits, controls, and responsibilities of individuals and also those that are to be shouldered by social institutions.

When the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice was established in Saudi Arabia, the responsibility for realizing that objective was entrusted to it. This responsibility was to become a general system that had its controls and that could not be subject to the interpretations of individuals and their different opinions and estimations. The responsibility, placed on the shoulders of this institution, was limited to one kind or a limited number of responsibilities that would realize this objective. Such responsibilities related usually to the spheres of worship and general morality. This restriction, however, does not mean that the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice should be confined to these two spheres.

Since the concept of enjoining doing what is right and

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forbidding doing all that is wrong is a wide one within the framework of Islamic thought, other institutions in Saudi Arabia were also given different kinds of responsibilities, such as: General Control Department, Anti-Drugs Administration, Investigation and General Prosecution Commission, Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO), General Food and Drug Administration and others. Also, more specific responsibilities were assigned to institutions immediately connected with them, such as commercial fraud, consumer protection and others.

All these authorities cooperate with each other. Therefore, it should come as no surprise if we find that the religious police is sharing in the anti-drugs efforts to such an extent that it becomes the most effective authority cooperating with the specialized authority.

Any fair person realizes that such concepts as are behind the reformatory and control practices, whether found grouped in one body or scattered in several ones, do indeed offer a bright picture of how solid and reliable the Islamic system is in its endeavor to achieve the good of all, and this is what all civilized countries and nations of the world seek to realize.

Therefore the erroneous practices no matter by whom they are committed, or a lack of awareness of how refined this concept is and how important it is to any civil society should not be a reason for distorting its bright image and its important impact in protecting society and elevating it. We affirm that if non-Islamic countries and nations looked at this issue objectively and fairly they will find something that can be useful to their societies which suffer from many types of family break up and moral disintegration as proven by statistics issued in those countries. The architects of the American constitution and the authors of the series of judicial systems in the U.S.A. and modern Europe exploited the many benefits found in Islamic Fikh (Jurisprudence) and its schools and built many of their systems on this.

Religious police: A social reform Institution in Saudi Arabia

Prof. Ibrahim Al-Juwair

Saudi Arabia has its own distinct culture that makes it different from any other country in the Islamic world. It has a Saudi population of over 20 million, all of whom are Muslim. Besides citizens, there are about seven million expatriates of 135 nationalities living and working in Saudi Arabia, enjoying complete equality in duties, rights and jobs. The Kingdom has acquired its unique position among Muslims all over the world by virtue of its being the cradle of Islam and the place from where Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, spread his message. Saudi Arabia is also home to the holy city of Makkah, where the Kaaba, the sacred house of God, is located. The Kaaba is the direction (Kiblah) toward which Muslims everywhere in the world face while performing their prayers five times every day. Muslims go to Makkah to perform their Hajj on a set date every year and perform Umra throughout the year. The Mosque of Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, is

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also located in the Kingdom's western city of Madinah.

Saudi society bases its religion, ideology and daily practices on Islam and belief in Allah. Accordingly, all the affairs of its life are interconnected with the rules of Islam. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that applies the Shariah [law] of Allah and whose constitution is the Holy Qur'an.

Islamic law [Sharia] is the dominant factor in the policies of Saudi Arabia and its political, social and intellectual systems. The Kingdom has, since its establishment, preserved this state of affairs. Therefore, Islam has been the regulator and guide in all the systems associated with growth and development of Saudi Arabia ever since its unification till its present state of affluence and its eminent position in the international community.

In keeping with this approach, the Kingdom has sought since its inception to set up the system of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" as being a duty, depending on people's capability: if some can do it then the others do not have to do it. In the past the reforming scholars did their duty in the "Ihtisab" [The promotion of virtue and prevention of vice] at the individual level. When the Kingdom stabilized under the rule of King Abdulaziz, he appointed some scholars to take charge of the "Hisba" and carry out the activities required by "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" on a larger scale throughout the Kingdom. This reformatory religious institution then grew and opened many branches in the big cities outside the Saudi capital, Riyadh. During the reign of King Faisal, the work of this institution developed qualitatively as it came to focus on all those functions that were related to it

historically – that is, the functions of “Ihtisab” in religious matters particularly those connected with preserving the purity of the Islamic creed, worshiping, dealings, behaviors and morals.

During the reign of King Khalid, a decision was issued establishing the General Presidency of the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. A chairman was appointed for it for the first time and the King granted him the rank of minister. There was a further development during the reign of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd bin Abdulaziz when the institution became an independent organization, directly affiliated to the prime minister – that is, the King. The chairman was appointed by a royal decree.

In view of the great importance the state gives to “Hisbah”, the Basic System of Government in Saudi Arabia (which was announced by Royal decree No. 90-A dated March 2, 1992 mentions explicitly that the state will take over the duty of propagating virtue and preventing vice [or “Hisbah”]. To this effect, article 23 of the System reads: “The state protects the Islamic creed, applies Sharia, and enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong, and undertakes the call to the worship of Allah.”

If the modern-day police force in every country is charged with preserving public security, the religious police in Saudi Arabia have become an important element in the country. They help preserve the identity of Saudi society and are instrumental in field application of the principles of propagation of virtue and prevention of vice. The functions of the CPVPV have been clearly defined. They are to guide people and advice them on performing their

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religious duties as prescribed by Islamic law or Sharia and ensure that they are indeed performed; to forbid all that is reprehensible, ensure that no unlawful acts are committed and no deviant habits or traditions are followed.

The CPVPV can achieve these functions through the following methods:

- 1- Urge people to adhere to the pillars of the true religion, which are: praying, zakat [charity], fasting, and Haj for those who can afford it and are physically fit; to embrace good manners as prescribed by Islam; to invite them to do virtuous deeds enjoined by Sharia such as truthfulness and sincerity, keeping faith, paying their debts, obeying and doing their duties toward their parents; keeping good terms with their blood relations, considering their neighbors' rights, giving charity to the poor and the needy, helping the handicapped and the weak.
- 2- Since prayer is the mainstay of the religion and one of its major Pillars which every true Muslim must abide by, it is imperative that the Committee makes sure that Muslims perform their prayers in the mosques at the times specified by Sharia and urge people to respond quickly to the call to prayer and ascertain that stores are closed.
- 3- Keep a watch on public places, like markets, roads and parks, to prevent the unlawful acts, such as:
 - a- Uncontrolled social interaction between men and women and excessive use of makeup, both of which are forbidden by Islamic law.
 - b- Mimicking the opposite gender.
 - c- Making women targets of foul language and vulgar

gestures by men.

- d- Shouting obscene or indecent words or expressions which hurt other people's feelings.
- e- Disturbing and distracting people praying in mosques by, for instance, playing loud music
- f- Public display by non-Muslims of their beliefs and religious rituals, which clashes with the system that is followed by the majority in the society; or showing disrespect by non-Muslims for the rituals of Islam and its rules.
- g- Exhibiting or selling pictures, books, videos or audio tapes that are inconsistent with acceptable manners or that are incompatible with the Islamic creed.
- h- Displaying lewd pictures, or symbols of non-Islamic religions such as the cross, the star of David or pictures of Buddha and the like in public places.

Such practices conflict with the religion of the society and its system.

- i- Manufacturing, selling, or drinking alcoholic beverages. The duty of unearthing such illicit acts is carried out with the cooperation of the competent security authorities.
- j- Preventing the reasons for committing sinful acts such as adultery, sodomy and gambling or for running vice dens.
- k- Acts of magic, witchcraft and quackery to cheat people.
- l. Tampering with weights and measures in a bid to cheat people.
- m. Keeping a watch on display windows and ladies tailoring shops to make sure that they abide by moral



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rules and are not immodest or violate any sanctity.

Performing the above-mentioned duties by the CPVPV makes society secure and the people in the Kingdom safe. This is because the religious police are vigilant and are always alert in their efforts to ensure Islamic conduct in a way that guarantees safety and happiness to all.

In order to ensure that the religious police in Saudi Arabia can perform their duties in the best possible manner, the Committee's organizational system which was proclaimed by the secretariat general of the Saudi Council of Ministers (article 7) states that the chairman and the members of this institution, as well as the inspectors, investigators, heads of religious sections, supervisors and assistants, should hold the appropriate academic qualifications, enjoy a sound reputation and be of good conduct. They should also be of proven efficiency in this field – all this, to ensure that they mete out fair treatment to Saudi nationals and other residents or visitors, whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

The present chairman of the religious police, Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ghaith, has emphasized that only university graduates will be employed by the committee so as to eliminate any drawbacks or negative aspects the system may have.

Motivated by a keen desire to constantly update the ideas and viewpoints of its employees and the way they deal with people of various nationalities and religions, the CPVPV organizes short-term training courses for its employees.

Between 80 to 90% of CPVPC employees have benefited from these courses. Also within the framework of updating

and modernizing its operations, a Royal Decree has been issued ordering the setting up of a high institute to deal with affairs pertaining to the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice. Affiliated to Um Al-Qura University in holy Makkah, the institute seeks to consolidate the efforts of the religious police by providing them with specialized and highly qualified graduates in this field of Islamic work to increase work efficiency.. Directives are constantly issued to the religious police reminding them of their mission to guide people, advise them to adhere to the religious duties prescribed by Sharia, and ensure that they perform these duties. These directives also remind the religious police that they are not an authority set up to repress people, that they are a part of society and their aim is to reform it and ensure its rules are firmly established based on applying the laws of Allah which enjoin doing right and shunning wrong.

The pioneering role of Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis the Islamic world, and its philosophy of government, which is based on protecting Islam as a creed – a divine law, with a collection of morals – would be reason enough to accept the system of the religious police. The system aims at protecting society, safeguarding it, and ensuring that it remains pure and free of vices. Such noble aims are sought after by all societies which strive to ensure their safety and to spread moral values within them.

This is what makes the religious police force which carries an important social responsibility, an important authority. In our Saudi society, the religious police are entrusted with this responsibility as they are part of the official administration that performs a social role,

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complementary to the functions of other state organs.

It requires a great deal of effort and specialization to perform the duty of preserving virtue and preventing vice. Hence, the individual Mohtasib (the person responsible for propagating virtue and forbidding vice) cannot cope with the tasks alone. Therefore, many organs specializing in different fields have been developed. The complexities of life in the modern age have made this a necessity. Our society was particularly careful to develop the means to apply these divine orders, one of which was to set up the religious police or "The Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV)" which is considered a religious institution, besides being an official administration to enforce what is right and prevent what is wrong.

We can say that this institution is considered a means of official social control exercised by the state in Saudi Arabia. Among the functions of social control is to define the scope of acceptable behavior inside society, for each society or group has its own set standards, which the individual has to observe as he fulfils his social role. On the other hand, there are certain types of behavior forbidden by society. The highest aim of social control, which guarantees the continuation of the social order in a stable and sound manner, is to ensure the ever-increasing development of organizations and institutions and their ability to meet the needs of the members of the community and guarantee their safety.

By analyzing the official functions and tasks of the religious police in Saudi society, we find that this institution's applications are modern, more vital to urban

societies than rural, traditional ones. This is due to the fact that in a traditional society the unofficial organs of social control, such as the family, or the official authority, such as the police, are adequate. In such instances the role of the CPVPV becomes limited to preaching and guiding. But when the CPVPV operates in big cities it has to perform a bigger role than just preaching and guiding and acquires the dimensions of a modern security force.

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If we look at the mechanism for the allocation of tasks in the CPVPV and the role of each of its sections we will find that they are determined on the basis of a scientific, volitional, organizational, and executive force being available. Thus, with the help of the scientific force, the CPVPV can know its way, with the volitional force, it will follow and continue to follow its way, with the organizational force, it can obtain the power to go on and reach its destination, and with the executive force, it will reap the fruits of its efforts and achieve the results aimed at. This mechanism covers the functions, qualifications and measures and even the administrative organization upon which model the CPVPV should be formed so that it can perform its functions, achieve the goals for which it was set up and because of which it is considered one of the institutions that exercise control over society. As for the vices which should be prevented by this CPVPV mechanism and its employees, they are according to the definition of Islamic law (all that has been considered obscene and hateful by Islam and was forbidden in both the Holy Qur'an and Prophetic Sunnah). Accordingly, the



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propagation of virtue comes to mean warning people and guiding them to adhere to religious principles and rules. Hence if the religious police was essential in the reign of Omar Ibn el-Khattab, second Caliph of Islam (may God be pleased with him), it is more essential and indispensable in this age in which people have deviated from or abandoned the divine laws of Sharia.

The establishment of this institution is not motivated by a mistrust of the behavior of members of society, but is for ensuring social security and protecting people from those who have deviated from the beliefs and values and standards of society regardless of the extent of such a deviation.

In some contemporary societies, such a security institution is often referred to as a “vice squad”, which is an organization aimed at ensuring the safety of the individual and is found even in non-Muslim societies. In Japan, we even find the police in the streets in small structures which look like kiosks or stalls. Their function is to ensure that the common people are safe. There are also several security cameras placed at commercial centers, companies, banks, airports, railway stations and hospitals to monitor the movements of anyone who comes or leaves or wanders about. These apparatuses were distributed to these organizations in order to control delinquent group behavior and thereby assist in enforcing the law in these commercial, industrial, political and social entities where the human security apparatus may be inadequate.

The Saudi citizens, expatriate workers and visitors have often expressed their complete satisfaction over the safety and security they enjoy in the Kingdom, thanks to the efforts

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of the religious police who act without any discrimination on the basis of race, color or nationality. They have also found that the rights of the citizen and the resident were equally guaranteed under religious texts. These religious texts even specify the punishment to be meted out when a particular right has been violated. This punishment is applied according to precise legal and detailed conditions that cover the rights of both the society and the individual. It makes no difference whether the individual punished is a Saudi or a non-Saudi, a Muslim or non-Muslim because preserving man's dignity regardless of his race, color or religion is one of the fundamental duties of man. Man is the noblest of creatures and his right to freedom and equality is a fundamental, one but when a person has uncontrolled freedom it could tempt him to do evil and to harm others. Therefore, the religious police restrain the individual and society and prevent them from going morally astray. The religious police also preserve virtue by preventing lustful attempts to degrade man's spirit or his body in the name of freedom.

* * *

By propagating virtue and preventing vice, the religious police have achieved three objectives which are of paramount importance to Saudi society and which every advanced society would aim at achieving. They are: continuity, stability and cohesiveness. Moreover, the religious police work within the framework of a unique type of authority. Its authority is derived from the common people, thereby ensuring effective support from the people



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for the state for social control. Hence, the attitude of Saudis and non-Saudi residents and visitors towards this religious institution is a positive one. This is especially so because the public finds that the institution is concerned with religious and social reform. As a specialized authority it performs its duties according to Islamic and disciplinary rules prevalent in society, which many societies often lack, especially in the West.

The functions of the religious police go beyond preaching and guiding to the realization of security and stability, through religious, security and social controls. Hence, the religious police helps ease the load placed on the shoulders of the general police. The religious police are an important means to restrain the negative aspects of development and progress, which industrial and progressive societies often have to pay. . The religious police also help bridge the gap which can result from the financial and moral differences in any dominant culture and which, in turn, can lead to various problems unless they are quickly remedied or handled.

The religious police is, thus, an institution for religious and social reform This institution reflects a collective awareness, on the part of the government as well as the citizens, through which moral values in society are secured.

Impact of the promotion of Virtue and the prevention of vice on Saudi society

- **Introduction**
 - **Firstly: The security impact**
 - **Secondly: The intellectual impact**
 - **Thirdly: The social impact**
-



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Introduction:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies a prominent position among Muslims all over the world. The Kingdom is unique among all the other countries of the world in occupying this position in view of the fact that it is the land of the two holy mosques and the Kiblah (direction where Muslims face during prayers). This unique position has distinguished it throughout the history of Islam due to many considerations including:

- 1- God Almighty's responding to Abraham, the father of the Prophets (peace be upon him), when he prayed to Allah, *"My Lord, make this a City Of Peace, and feed its people with fruits,-- such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day"* so that its people, the pilgrims coming to it for Haj, and those visiting it can pray in safety, security and peace.
- 2- God "so fill[ed] the hearts of some among men with love towards them," that is, made them yearn to visit the holy places, so that the people of Saudi Arabia adopt a friendly and affectionate attitude towards their visitors from among the Muslims of the world who come to visit the Ka'bah and the mosque of Prophet

Mohammed, peace be upon him.

- 3- The stable and unchanging policy followed by the Kingdom, at home and abroad, by adopting Islam as the constitution.
- 4- Making available the means to ensure safety and security and formulate rules and regulations for preventing and tackling crime. The Kingdom calls for proper behavior based on the relationship between man and God and between members of society and appeals to the conscience and their religious sentiments. If the Saudis live in this environment of safety and security, the expatriates of 135 nationalities, living in the Kingdom have also enjoyed this security. They live beside Saudis without suffering any discrimination. In fact, everybody who is on the Kingdom's soil knows well that there are those who watch over them to ensure their safety and take care of their interests.

The duty of the religious police to promote virtue and prevent vice is a kind of physical and moral responsibility towards the Saudi society, benefiting Saudi nationals and expatriates. Being an organization that controls social behavior for the sake of security of the Kingdom, the religious police are in no way mistrusted. On the contrary, they are here to protect the population from those who violate Islamic law or succumb to baser human instincts.

We cannot list all the benefits to society resulting from the work of the religious police. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves to only three of them. These are: the security impact, the intellectual impact and the social impact.

Firstly: The security impact

Major General Dr. Saad Al-Araifi
Dr. Abdul Lateef Al-Ghamdi

If Saudi Arabia is unique in instituting such a social force as the religious police to ensure decent behavior in public, then surely its stereotype image painted by the West cannot be true. The common picture of the Kingdom drawn in the West is that of a country of cruelty and violence. This is surely a distorted image of Saudi Arabia and is in sharp contrast to the nature of the duties of this social institution.

The work ethics of the religious police in Saudi Arabia does not believe in reprimanding and detaining innocents as is rumored or alleged by hostile propaganda. On the contrary, its work ethics are based on three stages of operation:

The first stage: It consists of protective measures to prevent crime and moral deviation and dissolution through several programs and activities, such as lectures and symposia and preaching and providing guidance through the various information media and organizations and urging people to embrace good manners and virtue.

Virtue should be promoted and made attractive while evil should be condemned and depicted as ugly and repulsive. People should be warned against vice because it shows disobedience to Allah and causes hatred among people.

The second stage: It consists of taking measures against crime and moral perversion by obstructing deviant behavior which leads to crime. These measures include keeping a watch on places where people gather such as markets, stores and streets and public places to make sure that no acts that violate Sharia or the moral values and standards of society are being committed.

The third stage: It consists of following all procedures and measures taken to put down crime and moral deviation by arresting transgressors, counseling them, or sentencing him after consulting with the relevant authorities and according to the measures adopted by the religious police.

What many people in Saudi Arabia itself do not realize, whether they be citizens or expatriates, is that more than 95% of the cases handled by the religious police are solved by counseling and subsequent release of the detainee after taking a written declaration from him or her that he would not commit the offence again. This means that the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) is not just a rigid and arbitrary organization of detection on the prowl for violators in order to charge and punish them. This Committee operates according to the basic reason for its existence. Its main job is to make sure that people do not fall into crime. This is done by blocking the way to corruption and propagating moral values in the Saudi street based on the principles

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of promoting what is good and preventing what is wrong.

The religious police exerts strong efforts and carries out many activities in order to constantly promote awareness through many channels like public newspapers, participating in exhibitions throughout the Kingdom, setting up guidance centers whose programs include legal, educational and medical lectures, arranging evenings devoted to poetry, holding cultural contests and recreational programs, encouraging visits by responsible officials of the CPVPV to guide the citizens, and printing and distributing books and theses that call for doing what is right and shunning wrong. Hence, the importance of the religious police lies in the fact that it is a force derived from the public itself, entrusted with the task of protecting society by promoting what is good and preventing wrongdoing.

This will lead to a normal vice-free life and the predominance of moral values in society. Indeed, the religious police have therefore gained a palpable presence in the Saudi street as a controller who prevents incidence violations of the law or the lowering of moral values.

Nevertheless, in spite of the efforts exerted by the religious police to guide the population, some religious and social violations that posed a threat to society have occurred and the religious police played a remarkable part in detecting and dealing with them. 384,344 violations throughout the Kingdom were detected in 2004 through the efforts of the CPVPV) and were handled in the following manner:

- 345,675 violations (which represent 90% of the total number of violations caught) were settled inside the premises of the CPVPV by offering advice to their perpetrators or asking them to sign a written statement

- promising not to commit similar violations in the future.
- 38,669 cases (which represent 10% of the total number of violations committed) and the individuals involved were referred to the competent government authorities to take official and judicial action.

The violations mentioned above varied from violations relating to worship itself, when an individual fails to go to prayers and is found lingering in the street or standing idle before mosques; or when a storeowner is late in closing his store after the call to prayers and does not stop selling during prayers; or when an individual eats, drinks or smokes in public during the month of Ramadan. In the latter case the Ministry of the Interior issues statements before the advent of the holy month of Ramadan urging non Muslims to respect the feelings of Muslims. Violators are warned of severe deterrent measures that may include termination of contract and deportation. This is also in keeping with the work contracts that stipulate that expatriates have to abide by the systems and regulations in force in the Kingdom. Likewise, any Saudi committing the same type of violation and showing openly he is not fasting during the daytime in Ramadan will also be subjected to punitive measures.

There are other types of violations that relate to morals and which are more harmful either to the individual or to society. Such violations include prostitution, homosexuality, attempts to rape children, adultery, harassment of women, and stalking women in other cars. These types of violations also include violations related to public manners, commercial stores, gambling, loitering suspiciously, cases connected with alcoholic beverages

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(their manufacture, possession, sale and use), displaying or selling pornographic pictures, or committing blasphemy and making derogatory references to His Prophet (peace be upon him) or religion and its symbols.

Social studies conducted in the Kingdom have proved that 70% of moral violations were apprehended by the religious police and not by the regular state police. This shows the importance of this type of societal police for enforcing social control to protect society, especially in a vast country like Saudi Arabia where expatriates from more than 135 nationalities work. These expatriates have their own customs, mores, traditions, values, and beliefs which should not overstep the general moral fabric that preserves Muslim Saudi society.

The application of the principle of hisbah [the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice] in Saudi Arabia aims primarily at protecting human beings and exalting their human status regardless of their color, nationality or race; it also aims at forming a society that is safe and which can enjoy safety and security by enforcing legal restraints and achieving absolute justice by giving equal treatment to everybody in the Kingdom.. Therefore, we Saudis, find the fruits of this application clearly in the following:

- A durable security and the prevalence of peace and tranquility all over the Kingdom, which is a blessing felt and cherished by Saudis.
- Stability of society so that its members can devote themselves to work and be more productive undistracted by other issues. So hisbah in Saudi Arabia is applied equally on Muslims and non- Muslims.

Secondly: The intellectual impact

Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Luwaihiq
Prof. Othman Al-Amer

People, by nature, may commit sins. Hence, they have to co-operate with each other to realize what is beneficial and keep away from what is harmful. This can be achieved through a system that protects the interests of the nation from whatever threatens to corrupt it or disrupt its stability. This system is the Islamic principle of promoting what is right and preventing what is wrong.

This principle has expanded its fields of application in Islam so as to become all-inclusive. Chief among these fields is the issue of the nation's sovereignty and its main interests: religion, life, the mind, wealth and honor. These are fundamentals that they be protected and preserved under divine laws. . Although religions and laws are agreed on this, they also clearly agree to give priority to religion since the safety of its religious and intellectual practices are pivotal for achieving the general safety of a nation. There is no nation that does not seek to confront

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any aggression against its identity and its supreme values because identity is the link that connects the individuals in a nation to each other and determines their behavior and relations with others. The world is teeming with religions, religious doctrines and conflicting ideas which, if left to themselves, could become the standard for determining what is right and wrong. They themselves could spur deviations due to rivalry in religious thought.

The Islamic nation, which believes that its religion is the truth and that it is the last of all religions, is the nation most deserving the right to safeguard religion against any vicissitudes that may threaten its course and existence. Such a perfect religion has protected the morals, properties and honor of nations.

The danger of straying from religion and belief has existed since a very long time and the factors that can corrupt belief are still strong in the life of mankind. Whoever follows the history of God's messengers, peace be upon them, will find that they were accused of being liars in many ways and were harmed and ill-treated. This is still noticeable nowadays.

Accordingly, enjoining what is right protects the truth by drawing people towards all aspects of the true religion and forbidding what is wrong. This protects the truth by removing whatever is evil and corrupt. This protection involves many factors:

- 1- Aggression against the truth is a crime in itself. To make mocking remarks about God, the Almighty, or to slander or impugn the prophets, peace be upon them, are acts of aggression against what mankind has unanimously agreed to revere and safeguard. Attacking religious values and rites by deriding them is also a crime against

religion.

- 2- Aggression against the truth is aggression against the entire nation which abides by religion because this religion is its identity and is a unifying factor. It is even an aggression against humanity because it alienates it from the truth and an aggression against and oppression of the soul of the aggressor himself. Islam, therefore, looks at intellectual and religious deviations as the cause of comprehensive harm. This is because the harm done is not confined to those who have committed the acts of deviations and therefore remedying these deviations will benefit not only them but the entire nation.
- 3- Aggression against the truth will lead to discord as acts of hostility towards religion, cause unrest and local conflict. If derogatory remarks about God or slandering His prophets cause unrest and if the state does not take action to prevent it, individuals may take matters into their own hands in order to protect their religion. This could even cause civil disturbances.
- 4- The unjust accusations addressed against the political system and the government are due to the following reasons: No ihtisab [Propagation of virtue and prevention of vice] of those who made slandering or derogatory remarks about religion has been made with the result that some people emerge who want to punish the violators directly without recourse to legal or judicial rules. This gives rise to expressions of grievance inside the society.

Despite the appeals for intellectual dialogue, cultural integrity, peaceful co-existence and interaction between nations and peoples, the success of peoples and countries

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in realizing these targets depends, to a great extent, on the ability of society to boost its intellectual achievements, its heritage of beliefs, its social form and its careful interpretations of the important aspects of history. Ignoring these basic conditions and necessary premises separates us from the force of their impact which reconciles ideas, joins hearts, purifies souls, removes hatred and grudge among individuals and peoples, subdues the demon of revenge, vindicates the spirit of objective and scientific criticism, and puts down the eruption of ignorance and corruption. These may be the most important reasons and motives that have justified the right of every nation to select and enshrine the particular intellectual viewpoint that expresses it and does it justice and to adopt the measures and machinery that ensure the applications of and the adoption of texts deriving from such a viewpoint: *"...Say, 'Bring forth your argument, if ye are telling the truth'"*; *"If one among the Pagans asks thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are men without knowledge"*; *"Say: 'Who gives you sustenance, from the heavens and the earth?' Say: 'It is Allah; and certain it is that either we or ye are on right guidance or in manifest error!'"*; *"Yet there is among men such a one as disputes about Allah, without knowledge, without guidance, and without a Book of Enlightenment."* Although this intellectual right has been recognized and no nation has been denied the right to exercise it, it has, nevertheless, sparked conflicts that have sometimes brought civilization to the very door of madness. As a result, entire pages of history were written with blood and

etched with the sword and lined with the bodies of victims both in the past and the present.

After technology has bridged distances, resulting in a rapid increase in the exchange of cultures, the intellectual mission of nations has become more difficult. It has become a challenge to strike a balance between their intellectual and cultural individualities, stemming from their deep-rooted religious beliefs on one side, and from intermingling, peaceful co-existence, dialogue and interaction with other cultures, on the other.

All nations have developed ways to maintain this balance in line with the requirements of their respective societies. These methods, though may go under different names, strive to build the intellectual capabilities of individuals. This, in turn, results in a positive effect on their spiritual and cultural make-up. One of the most prominent factors and effective indicators that Islam has established in order to promote the level of social adjustment is the principle of promoting what is right and preventing what is wrong with its all-embracing connotations. It is within this context and through this approach that this important principle in Saudi Arabia has received special attention, politically, socially and culturally, through three different kinds of control:

First: A moral control that appeals to the inner conscience and directs the individual through various situations he might encounter. This helps him achieve personal contentment.

Second: A social control that protects rights and safeguards the sacred places and rites through an

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institutionalized system that aims at promoting what is right, mainly by counseling, and guiding people towards social and Islamic principles. This control is undertaken by the Committees for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, represented by the religious police.

Third: This is a political control and is exercised when politicians adopt Islamic law when introducing religious teachings, drawing up new systems or applying the principles of reward and punishment. This type of control is handled by the legislative and judicial authority. Applying the principle of hisbah [enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong] through these three types of control especially the second one mentioned earlier that is represented by the religious police has produced many positive results in Saudi society.

Among the most significant positive results is the achievement of intellectual security whose dimensions and results are embodied in the following:

- 1- In contrast to the erroneous concept of the societal security apparatus being a self-centered, closed-door body, that obstructs latest cultural developments, it is actually one that enables people to lead fulfilling modern lives. To enable this, it has relied on two main factors:
 - a- Taking pride in one's own cultural civilization that assimilates world cultures in a broad sense.
 - b- Opening the door to dialogue with contemporary cultures on a ground that accommodates cultural self respect and rests on a cultural heritage that is based on

a sound doctrinal viewpoint.

With this enlightened approach Saudi society has merited the right to preserve its cultural individuality, and has, at the same time, performed, by opening its doors to the “other,” the historical and civilizational role entrusted to it.

2-The thought emanating from the Islamic creed is not improvised or borrowed and its application to life does not originate from nothing. It is connected to a nation that has a history and has the means to live on. This particular thought, moreover, expresses a nation’s attainments and feelings and represents a final stage in its social interaction. Therefore, directing and developing man’s awareness of his special or exclusive position in human existence – which represents one of the objectives of Sharia – builds up a condition and a feeling of security. This enriches man’s life in his relationship with God and his dealings with himself and other human beings and even with living creatures and with other elements of nature around him. This feeling of personal security and God-inspired dignity leads to a civilized development in the behavior of the Saudi individual which comes to represent a general characteristic that condemns and rejects deviant, extremist behavior. It is possible that the security and safety that is enjoyed and is still being enjoyed by Saudi Arabia was, thanks to God’s grace, one of the results of applying the principle of enjoining doing what is good and forbidding doing what is wrong: “They are those who, if We establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give Zakat, enjoin the right and forbid

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wrong.” Security is one of the pillars and features of establishment in the land.

- 3- Taking part in providing social framing to Islamic thought and culture and establishing the theoretical origins of the concepts related to the protection of the family and young people, preserving Islamic values and making sure they are being observed.
- 4- Participating in fighting extremist, dissolute or suspicious ideas and deviant culture.
- 5- Participating in raising the level of cultural awareness and making serious efforts to preserve a clear Islamic identity especially as manifested in prayer, wearing the veil, and the general character of the Muslim souk.
- 6- Sharing in supervising intellectual and cultural lectures and symposia that eventually contribute to the intellectual life of society and its safeguard against extremism that may lead to terrorism and violence.
- 7- Promoting the awareness of foreign communities working in the Kingdom.
- 8- Solving intellectual problems of a dubious nature that fool some people and treating some individual intellectual deviations.
- 9- Freeing certain concepts from wrong interpretations that limit women’s activities and their participation in everyday life.
- 10- Contributing to and participating in ameliorating and developing the methods of cultural and intellectual behavior in the Saudi society.

Preserving the thought of a nation and protecting its intellectual identity is essential to ensure the sovereignty of countries and societies. In this age which has witnessed

a proliferation of information and a tremendous advance in technology which has influenced thoughts and cultures, such a preservation of thought is a requirement of crucial importance for countries wishing to maintain their identity and cultural entity. Hence we find countries that have ancient cultures such as France, Germany, Japan and China, among others, imposing social restrictions on foreign cultural influences and striving to preserve their own cultures. On the other hand, we find the United States, for example, trying to impose its cultural identity on the rest of the world. For instance, it is propagating, what is referred to as, globalization by means of the American media or initiating political theories that seek to dissolve the various cultures of the world into the melting pot of American culture.

Saudi Arabia is not different from these countries which have ancient cultures. It also strives to protect its thought and culture through its various social institutions. The religious police force is one such institution of civil society whose function is to protect the thought of the Saudi nation from alien ideas. Saudis do not look on this function as a mere requirement of modern civilization and development but as a religious necessity which they have no choice but to try fulfilling.

Thirdly: The social impact

Dr. Noura Al-Saad
Dr. Fat'hiya Al –Qurashi

Saudi Arabia is a country that geographically stretches over a large area of continental size. It occupies about 80% of the Arabian Peninsula and comprises all the geographical features from arid deserts, tall mountains, and deep valleys to agricultural areas and fertile plains. Nevertheless, it enjoys social security and stability noticed by both residents and visitors.

This distinctiveness proves that unifying this country was not only a result of military action, but was a social achievement which showed that the Saudis have high personal efficiency. One of the most important factors that contributed to the social unity of the country was the application of Islamic Sharia to all aspects of Saudi life.

Although the Saudi state is committed to ensuring security for all its citizens and resident expatriates as stated in its political system, the participation of society itself in realizing social safety and security through its civil institutions like the religious police have resulted in

the society watching itself through its standards and social values based on Islam. Such values are widely accepted because they realize the good of the nation.

The assumption by Saudi society through its competent institutions, such as the religious police, of the task of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is a unique feature exclusive to this society. It preserves its identity, protects its social fabric and strengthens its immunity against behavioral deviations which mainly result from opening up to alien cultures. In order to realize this noble purpose, the religious police in Saudi Arabia carry out its social function – as stated before – over three stages which are:

First Stage: This consists of preventive measures against crime and moral deviation. Such measures take the form of lectures, symposia and the use the different media organs for preaching, guiding and urging the public to abide by good manners.

Second Stage: This includes measures for fighting crime and moral deviation by placing obstacles before the emergence of such types of stray behavior. Such measures include keeping a watch on the public markets and stores to make sure that no violation of Sharia or social standards occurs in them.

Third Stage: This stage includes measures to suppress crime and deviation by apprehending every perpetrator and counseling him or meting out punishment, depending on the mode of action prescribed in the CPVPV's statute.

* * *

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What proves that the religious police is considered one of the strongest means of social control in Saudi society is that, in as far as the first stage is concerned, they have, according to an annual report about their activities in 2004, achieved the following:

- Increased by 9 % the number of lectures and symposia it has organized compared to the previous year.
- There was an increase of 100% in the number of books and pamphlets it has printed. The audio tapes it produced also showed an increase of 163% over the previous years.
- In keeping with their role of enlightening the people, they set up 55 guidance centers in various parts of the Kingdom.

As for the accomplishments of the second stage, they will become clear by reviewing the following figures:

- 1- The number of incidents and violations caught by the religious police in Saudi society depends on a number of social and economic variables, such as the size of the population, number of expatriates arriving in the Kingdom, various nationalities of the expatriates, the number of souks, parks and educational organizations. Therefore, CPVPV Riyadh branch is considered to have reported the greatest number of incidents for it represents 38% of the total number of violations reported by all the other branches of the religious police.
- 2- The more the society becomes open to other cultures the more is the need for the activities of the religious police. Thus, for example, the number of violations in the Riyadh region in 1991 was 29,094; whereas in 2004

it reached 146,627. In Makkah region, the number of incidents in 1999 was 13,745, whereas in 2004 it went up to 103,125. And in the Eastern Province the number of violations in 1991 was 2,610, whereas in 2004 it increased to 29,497 violations.

- 3- Seventy seven percent of the incidents caught by the religious police in Saudi Arabia during the 13 years was related to worship violations such as abandoning or neglecting prayer.
- 4- Many of the violations caught by the religious police are settled in their offices through counseling, exhorting, or providing the violator with moral guidance; and by taking an acknowledgment from him that he will not commit such a violation again. Only few of these violations are referred to other governmental authorities. Thus, in the Riyadh area, for example, the number of incidents during 2004 reached 146,627, only 25,743 of which (or 17.5%) were referred to the competent authority whereas 120,884 (or 82.5%) cases were settled inside the offices of the religious police. Another example is from the Eastern Province. The number of incidents in 2004 was almost 29,497 violations, of which only 1,276 incidents (or 4.3%) were referred to the competent authorities. As for the violations that were settled at the religious police stations, they reached 28,221, which represented 95.7% of the total number of violations that took place in the Eastern Province. Through a critical look at these figures it appears that this result applies to various regions in Saudi Arabia, especially the areas of Madinah, Qassim, the Eastern Province, Asir, Tabuk and Hail. These regions are the

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most populated in Saudi Arabia.

- 5- Such offenses committed by Saudis and non-Saudis, would have been more if the religious police in Saudi Arabia had a sufficient number of field employees proportionate to the size of the geographical area of the Kingdom and the density of its population (25 million Saudis and non-Saudis). The CPVPV suffers from a shortage of field staff. In 2003, for example, it had only 3,431 field employees. This number is inadequate to meet the needs of the religious police and its numerous centers in the Kingdom which amount to 461. This shortage will be found especially acute if we realize that field work continues for the whole day, that is, it goes on for 24 hours. Consequently, with the expansion of cities and the rapid proliferation of markets, parks and public places where people gather, the religious police received complaints from Saudis and non-Saudis because of its perceived failure to perform the duties, the limited number of its employees and its inability to adequately cover all the areas of its activities.

These are statistics which have been officially published and distributed among some governmental authorities. But what has not been published or stated in the annual reports issued by the religious police is much more. As for the details of these figures and the scenario of social violations detected by the religious police, they may contain such oddities that render its presence in the society indispensable to control social interactions and stamp out aberrant behavior. If governments strive to curb aberrant behavior, as it constitutes a threat to the individual, the community and society, then the Saudi government

should also have its own approach to control this kind of behavior, an approach which is derived from Islam which is the religion of the country and the creed of its society.

In Islam, a particular behavior is considered aberrant if it transgresses against what is permitted by religion and customs and falls under the types of behavior that are considered reprehensible and therefore forbidden.

Following this concept and its religious essence, the religious police institution was set up to be one of the means of social control. Accordingly, among the functions of this organization is to contribute towards preventing the aberrant or liberated personality through religious education, guiding the individual to acquire commendable qualities and manners, and placing obstacles that will hinder criminal tendencies which are manifested in the behavior of some members of the society or some expatriates.

Religious Police, Wahhabism and Allegations of Fundamentalist Islam

- **Introduction: Back to religion in Western societies**
- **The ‘distorted’ Wahhabism in the West and its links to the religious police in Saudi Arabia**

Introduction: Back to religion in Western societies

Abdul Aziz Al-Dawood

First of all, we have to recognize that Western societies, particularly the American, had witnessed during the second half of the twentieth century, a religious revival or awakening. This phenomenon, which passed a series of developments, reached its peak in the new millennium.

The reason for this religious awakening is the major technological boom in the West. This has left many individuals resorting to the materialistic side of life and their view of the globe around them. This, in turn, has produced a spiritual vacuum and chaos in values. The materialistic inclination has caused a kind of disturbance to human instinct. This instinct often searches for an answer to the reason for its existence and turns to religion as a prime cause for rescue of psychological anxiety and instinct disturbance. Because of all this, religious groups emerged and organizations that call for going back to the values of Christianity prevailed in American society during the first half of the twentieth century, started to work hard.

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A political cause enhanced this spiritual one. It was during the Cold War, when American politicians raised the slogan: “God fights the Satan.” This slogan means that the Cold War is a Christian war represented by the West against infidelity represented by the Communist camp. Former US President Ronald Reagan was one of the heroes of this religious battle, which enhanced the emergence of the fundamentalist Christian group, Born-again Christians. This group has infiltrated in the Republican Party and affected its outlook and dealings with the US domestic and foreign policies.

Whoever reads about the development of the religious awakening in the American society and examines the influential personalities behind this awakening, will realize that the angelical fundamentalist current is working hard to have the American society adhere to the philosophy of this group on the one hand and fight other religions opposing this philosophy on the other hand. Whoever examines the activities of, for example, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Franklin Graham and Jerry Vines, who are Anglican Baptists and see their relation with the White House and their influence on the US domestic and foreign policy, will realize the tremendous influence of this group in American society. This influence can be clearly seen in the return of this society to Anglican fundamentalism and in many cases the alliance with Zionism and in fueling enmity of Western organizations and public opinion against other religions particularly Islam.

We are not concerned in this discourse to highlight all the influential forces in American society who were born out of a religious awakening that cannot be ignored. We are not concerned either to name the religious media force supported by the church and people’s donations and the large number of



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religious institutes and universities in the US. We are not in a position also to highlight the Zionist influence on the American media and the religious dimension in its discourse particularly in the aftermath of 911/ or go through the efforts of the US presidents who supported the far right wing, particularly the Republican Party presidents like the incumbent George W. Bush.

We are not concerned of all what we have mentioned as the Americans know of this more than we do.

What we would like to state here is that religion has become, in the life of the Americans, an important factor that cannot be ignored. If the American people, politicians, scholars and media men see that going back to religion is one of their rights, what is not their right, for sure, is the attempt to export this “awakening” to other societies. What is not their right too is to fight other religions, impose their religious vision on other people of the world and have the American fundamentalist Anglican fuel the enmity of the Western governments and public opinion against countries opposing this vision.

This movement has portrayed Islam as akin to Communism and exploits the attack of September 11 and the “war on terror” to slander the image of Islam and Muslims with a religious motivation that is not unknown to many in the West itself. Islam and Saudi Arabia have been at the center of this suspicious religious onslaught. The speeches of priests and politicians and media reports have shown clear signs of hostilities where what they call Wahhabism was described as a fundamentalist version of Islam in Saudi Arabia.

This “Wahhabism” has shared the biggest part of false information about the reality of Islam and its application in Saudi Arabia. It is this information that we would like to clarify in this discourse and explain its link with the work of the religious police.

The ‘distorted’ Wahabbism in the West and its links to religious police in Saudi Arabia

Abdul Aziz Al-Dawood

It is worse to describe something in opposite to its nature and evaluate it in a way contradicting its reality. This is what has been the case for the reformatory call of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab. This call has spread in the Arabian Peninsula, benefited the Muslim world and has had positive impacts on peace and security in the region and other places.

Wahhabism was established on the principles of religious and moral reform. The fruit of this was that, with the support of the Saudi political authority, peace was established in the Arabian Peninsula where fighting was otherwise common. The Wahhabi call has been a major development in Saudi Arabia as it has succeeded in bringing together warring tribes to form a civilized community abiding by the rule of law.

But it seems that the Western cultural heritage and media are not reflecting the reality of this reform mission. To the

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contrary it is one of the issues that have been defamed on the basis of wrong information about the reality of this call. The information is derived from the orientalist's defamed legacy of Islam's modern history in the Arabian Peninsula or from the media that exerts no effort in searching the truth. Today, Wahabbism, in the view of the West, particularly the US, is unfairly linked to extremism.

This can be seen clearly in the media campaign launched by the political and media establishments in the aftermath of 9/11. This campaign has been trying to link the teachings of Wahhabism with terrorism. Wahhabism is one of the issues that have recently received increased attention and become associated with terrorism. It is also an issue about which there have been contradictory visions and positions. As Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Zuniadi states in *Saudis and Terror: Cross-Cultural Views*, interest in Wahhabism did not start with the September 11 events and its repercussions. Wahhabism has been the center of interest to the entire world since its rise in the eighteenth century. People, whether Muslims or Orientalists, were divided over Wahhabism, and each group had its own particular attitude towards it. The problem does not lie in such a divergence of opinions and attitudes; for such a divergence is a universal practice of human life vis-à-vis all kinds of human phenomena. The problem, however, lies in the basis on which attitudes are built. A defect in the approach may result in inaccurate judgment and may affect the attitude towards it.

It is strange that Wahhabism is subjected to contradicting attributes, including its connections to violence and terrorism. In the past decades, during the revolutionary

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expansion of communism, Wahhabism was discredited as an ideology which prescribed submission on the part of the people to their rulers; and surrender on the part of the rulers to imperialistic forces. This situation was taken primarily from the extremist ancestors. It represents an anti-revolutionary situation and calls for tolerance of oppression and injustice.

Then the case changed completely to the opposite. Presently, Wahhabism has become synonymous with terrorism. Its religious teachings are alleged to be inciting severance of relations with others. The implementation of this ideology requires that its adherents should seek to translate it into reality. The dream of a Wahhabi state moves forward, as “Daniel Pipes” says, “to replace our constitution with the Quran.” To change America into a Muslim country by force!

Where is the truth? Is Wahhabism inalienably characterized by terrorism to the extent that “to be a Wahhabi means you are automatically a terrorist?” Or have some developments that occurred during the past few years, during which terrorist violence has shifted from the exhausted radical communism to Wahhabism? Or, is there some confusion resulting from the situation Wahhabism found itself in after September 11. A group accused of hijacking US airplanes are said to be Wahhabis. Also Al-Qa’eda is being linked to Wahhabism. As a result, Wahhabism has been accused of terrorism. Such an accusation has offered a favorable opportunity to those who benefit from destroying Wahhabism, and who lost no time in hurling accusations against it.

Some agitating writings about Wahhabism are mere

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judgments that are not based on any logical or documented materials. They are mere slogans, like:

“Wahhabi Islam was the major pillar for waves of armed extremism resulting in brutal acts in the Middle East.” – Dor Gold.

“Wahhabis continue to encourage institutionalized oppression of women and to reject modernity, secularism and democracy as antithetical to Islam.” – John Kyle.

“Wahhabism is responsible for the emergence of bin Laden and Al-Qaeda.” – Arnaud de Borchgrave.

Some people while trying to label Wahhabism and link it to terrorism, cite some activities to say that Wahhabism is supporting terrorism. Of these activities they mention the printing of Islamic books, hiring Islamic propagators in the West, building mosques and Islamic schools, printing and distributing copies of the Qur’an, launching Islamic internet sites, establishing chairs in some U.S. and Western universities with Saudi support and establishing Islamic charity organizations and societies. Examples from inside Saudi Arabia are stated to indicate the “extremism and terrorism” practiced by Wahhabism. Of these examples are prohibiting women from driving; stipulating separate family sections in restaurants placing a ban on travel for woman unless accompanied by a lawful escort; banning the mention of Israel in school textbooks and forcing people to pray five times a day. Last, but not the least, Al-Qa’eda – Osama bin Laden and the Saudis accused of hijacking US airplanes, and bombers in Saudi Arabia, all belong to Wahhabism.

No doubt describing such activities as terrorism is surprising. The Wahhabi activities mentioned above as

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indications of terrorism make us pose a question about terrorism itself, the comprehensive definition of terrorism; many forces that benefit from keeping its definition fluid, avoid defining terrorism.. Rather, the query involves the concept of terrorism that is condemned by the world today. What perhaps gives those images a unified meaning, as asserted by Dr. Al-Zunaidi, is that terrorism is a “non-rightful assault against people and property through terrorizing, murdering or destruction.” Is there any kind of terrorism in such activities? If the obvious answer is ‘no’, does the problem lie in those who view religion only as a motive for hatred, bloody conflicts and disputes with others and attribute their vision to Islam? Though Westerners have changed their dark vision towards religion and the printing and distribution of the Bible are no longer considered acts of terrorism, the printing and distribution of the Qura’n is still considered a terrorist activity.

Or, is there a wider objective underpinned by a deep-rooted conviction that the Wahhabi activities for the sake of spreading Islam are a source of threat to the interests of certain groups or forces who managed to exaggerate the activities of Wahhabism?

If we move to the literature that links Wahhabism with the religious police in Saudi Arabia, we will notice that these writings are biased. We are not going to analyze the contents of the Western sources in this respect. What we would like to confirm is that the role of Wahhabism as a social institution is to have Muslims return back to the pure teachings of Islam, that is the holy Quran and the Sunnah (sayings and deeds) of Prophet Mohammed and have Muslims apply true Islam in their faith, moral, values

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and dealings with others.

From the instructions of this call emanate the tasks of the religious police in Saudi Arabia. Thus the religious police implement these instructions which have significant social and psychological impact on citizens and expatriates, be they Muslims or non-Muslims.

After all what has been said, is it logical that the relations between Wahhabism and the religious police have to be the subject of slander? The only party that benefits from this is the extremist religious groups in the West. These groups want to conceal the truth from the public opinion in order to promote their political theories and religious views and impose themselves on societies and people. This is to lead to the assimilation of other cultures whose values and beliefs run contrary to the values and beliefs of the Western civilization that claims plurality and tolerance.

It seems that the intention to defame Islam in Saudi Arabia and link it to “strict Wahhabism” and its links to religious establishments, has taken a dangerous turn with the advent of the new millennium .The political and media organizations in the West have focused intensely on this issue. For example, the US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report 2003, has harshly ridiculed “the strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam enforced by the Saudi government. The report states, “Muslims who do not adhere to the officially sanctioned Salafi (commonly called ‘Wahhabi’) tradition can face severe repercussions at the hands of the Mutawwa’in (religious police).” On December 9, 2003, The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) published an article on its website about Wahhabism. It says, “Wahhabism

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is an austere and closed school of thought promulgated by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab ... It compels its followers strictly to observe Islamic rituals, such as the five prayers, under pain of flogging, and for the enforcement of public morals to a degree unprecedented in the history of Islam... Where[as] Wahhabism sows hatred and rancor even among Muslims. The most conspicuous foot soldiers of Wahhabism are the moral police known as Mutawi'un, who roam in the streets like riot police and force people to perform rituals or adhere to Wahhabism's code of decency in dressing and other mannerisms."

What the American print media published about Wahhabism and the religious police, is not less critical than what is released by political organizations and strategic study centers. The *Time* weekly magazine, for example, published on September 15, 2003 a special report on the legacy of 9/11/. The magazine's cover story is under the heading: "The Saudis: Whose Side Are They On In The War On Terror?" One of the articles was under the title: "Wahhabism: Toxic Faith?" In this article, the magazine reported that Wahhabism is a "new religion" spread in the Arabian Peninsula and that the new creed is harsh, its penalties were barbaric and had no place for free will or human rights. It added that the Saudi state who applied the instructions of this creed had "in 1926 introduced the muttawa, religious police who enforce prayers five times a day, monitor citizens' cell-phone text messages and arrest women for failing to cover themselves completely with the black abaya robe."

These are only three examples of a big dossier we have about what was published about Wahhabism and



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the religious police in Saudi Arabia. We are citing these reports to give a sampling to the Western reader of what is released by his media, political organizations supported by Western governments and research and study centers in the West.

We conclude with two questions, answers to which we will leave to the Western reader himself:

- Do these misleading media reports give credence to the oft repeated slogans of democracy and calls for tolerance and peace in the West? It is the West that has often been calling on other governments to follow their example or be forced to adopt it.

- Who is the victim of these false reports about other people and their cultures? Is it not the Western citizen himself who has been unable to fathom the truth unless he seeks to visit other societies and find the truth?

We are sure that what we read in the Western media is only intended to defame our religion and religious establishments, including the religious police. It is smoke emanating from a fire that was ignited by those who do not want any good for Islam and the West alike.

The Situation of Christians in Saudi Arabia

- **The attitude to non-Islamic shrines in Saudi Arabia**
 - **The attitude towards non-Muslim behavior in Saudi Arabia**
-

The attitude to non-Islamic shrines in Saudi Arabia

Prof. Mohammed Al-Bishr

The West, whether individuals, political or media organizations, knows that Saudi Arabia is a country whose religion is Islam and whose citizens are all Muslims and that its land is home to the Muslim holy places including the Kaa'ba which is the kiblah (the direction towards which Muslim turn to pray) of all Muslims five times a day when they perform their prayers. It is also the land where Muslims come from all over the world to perform Haj and visit the Sacred Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. Accordingly, it is a Muslim country through the identity of its people. It is therefore only logical that the teachings of Sharia (Islamic law) should prevail and be applied to society.

This religious particularity did not impede the presence of more than seven million foreigners living in the country, some of whom are non-Muslims. Many of them are Christians, which is the closest religion to Islam. When these Christians come to Saudi Arabia for work or a visit they maintain their religious beliefs and nobody, government or individuals, asks them to change

their beliefs as a condition for staying in Saudi Arabia. The condition, however, is that they should refrain from practicing their religious rituals openly in a society which is unanimously Muslim and in a land that has to remain exclusively Muslim and belonging to Muslims alone. This distinctiveness is not subject to reinterpretation or reconsideration because it is obligatory and based on Islamic texts.

Accordingly, it is only reasonable or logical that the non-Muslim resident in Saudi Arabia should not object to this rule or allow himself to hurt the feelings of more than a billion Muslims who believe in the sanctity of their holy places for the sake of a handful of individuals who are neither citizens nor Muslims.

Moreover, these few non-Muslim individuals who work in Saudi Arabia do not stay in the country permanently. They came with contracts that run for a limited period of time after which they have to go back to their respective countries. By signing these contracts these expatriates have agreed to abide by the conditions of residence in Saudi Arabia among which are preserving the peace and security of the society and not attempting to violate the laws or systems that belong to it. This, of course, entails that they should absolutely refrain from displaying or declaring their religious beliefs in a way that clashes with the religion of Saudi Arabia; they should not do so, even with the pretext of exercising their religious freedom. This religious freedom is a topic much discussed by the Western media or the reports of political institutions or International Human Rights Organizations; however, freedom, anywhere, is no longer freedom when it threatens other peoples' freedoms.

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The religious police in Saudi Arabia is a social reformatory institution concerned with determining the limits of acceptable and non-acceptable religious behavior in the light of the teachings of Islam, and through the authority given to it by the state. Therefore, one of its most important functions is to protect the worshipping patterns of Muslims in their country which is the cradle of Islam, the point from which its message spreads to other places and the kiblah of its followers.

The unjust media and political campaigns have fabricated or exaggerated certain incidents committed by some individuals who violated the agreement made between the Saudi society and whoever comes to the Kingdom to work, visit or for tourism. These campaigns should have taken into consideration the feelings of more than a billion Muslims living in many countries among whom are several millions in the U.S.A. itself who look at Saudi Arabia with reverence and esteem as being a country that has its own religious particularity that is cherished in their hearts and feelings. This particularity has to be preserved even by non-Muslims as long as it does not cause them any harm or deprive them of any of their rights. The Muslims never objected when the Vatican, the Papal Capital, refused to have a mosque built in it, and this out of respect for the particularity of this city sacred to Christians whose religion is the closest to Islam. Furthermore, Muslims in Saudi Arabia or other countries of the world, did not object either to positive non-Islamic laws when they were applied on them in non Islamic countries, when they were tried by non-Islamic courts and when they could not perform their prayers except during the rest hours assigned to them by their employers.

The third paragraph of article eighteen in the International Covenant on the Civil and Political Rights of Man states that man's freedom to demonstrate his religion and beliefs can be subjected only to the restrictions prescribed by the law. These restrictions are necessary to safeguard general security and the system, as well the rights of others and their fundamental freedoms. There is no doubt that the rights of Muslims in any part of the world and their fundamental freedom within the sanctuary of their geographical boundaries are among the major restrictions that non-Muslims should submit to when demonstrating their religion.

Finally, protecting the legitimate sanctity of the Arab Peninsula which was set forth in the texts of Islam and preventing any public demonstration of a religion other than Islam are an obligatory duty and responsibility incumbent upon the Saudi government. Any request to permit such a public demonstration of a non-Islamic religion either on the part of Western media or Western political institutions or by international human rights organizations means a request to violate the general principles of national constitutions. As for Saudi Arabia, which is the country that occupies the largest part of the Arabian Peninsula, such a request, no matter from what source it originates, represents a violation of an important principle of the Islamic creed which is a divine law and not a man-made one that can be modified or suspended. No authority has therefore the power to alter or change it. This issue involves, at the same time, the general system in force in Saudi Arabia as well as its national security, both of which are based on Islamic law.

The attitude towards non-Muslim behavior in Saudi Arabia

Dr. Omayma Al-Jalahema

If the system of Saudi Arabia and its laws are based on divine Islamic law or Shariah, this does not mean at all that every comer in the Kingdom has to embrace Islam because Islam itself has instructed Muslims not to force anyone to become Muslim. This instruction, however, does not mean that non-Muslims can openly declare and practice their religion in a society all the members of which are Muslim. Non-Muslims can keep their religion but have to show respect for the teachings of Islam which control every aspect of the life in the society in which they live.

Accordingly, the arguments put forward by Western sources about the issue of religious freedom in Saudi Arabia conflict with the laws and systems in force in Saudi Arabia and are considered a flagrant interference in its national sovereignty. If a non-Muslim practices a behavior that clashes with Islamic behavior in a society where everybody is Muslim, then he has committed an act of aggression against the religion of the state and its

people and has insulted it and expressed his opposition to it. Such a behavior constitutes a threat to the nation and can undermine its system and dismantle its structure. As is laid down in its basic system, the Saudi state cannot accept a declaration of abandoning or straying from the Islamic creed in the name of freedom of religion and belief even if this comes from one individual but looks upon it as an act of rebellion against the system of the state and a call to break away from it.

This does not imply that the religious freedom of non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia should be suppressed. It only means that the religion of the nation and its people should be respected and that, at the same time, the religious rights of expatriates during their temporary stay in the Kingdom for work are maintained. Such rights have been sanctioned by Islam and have therefore also been sanctioned by Saudi systems and laws. Among these rights are:

- 1- Their right to freedom of belief: Islam does not force non-Muslims to be converted to it; on the contrary, it allows them complete freedom to keep their religion. Even if non-Muslims are called to Islam, the choice remains theirs whether to do so or not after they are given a covenant which provides them with assurances as to their religion, possessions and honor. They thus enjoy the covenant of God and His Prophet and are therefore called by Islam “The Covenanted People” [that is, free non-Muslims who enjoy Muslim protection.]
- 2- Their social right: Islam has permitted non-Muslims to carry on their social life in accordance with their religion, in matters of marriage, divorce and so on.
- 3- Not punishing them for practicing what is sanctioned by their religion like drinking alcohol and eating pork



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- which are prohibited by divine Islamic law or Shariah.
- 4- Their right to justice: An example of the perfect care with which non-Muslims are treated can be found in the equal justice they receive with Muslims when they have recourse to Shariah or divine Muslim law. Thus, if a Muslim steals money from a covenanted non-Muslim (that is, a non-Muslim enjoying Muslim protection), he is punished for theft, and so on. This moral value of justice was mentioned by many Western thinkers and historians, such as the British historian H.G. Wells who talked about the importance of justice in the teachings of Islam: “Islam has established in the world great traditions for dealing justly and has blown into people the spirit of charity and tolerance. It is also humane and practicable. It has thus created a human community among which there is less of the cruelty and social injustice that floods the world than among any other community that preceded it.”
 - 5- Their right to preserve their lives, possessions and honor: Islam preserves for man during his lifetime his fundamental rights which are indispensable to him. Such rights are the rights to live, to be safe, to own, and to preserve his honor and sanity. As such, he is on equal footing with the Muslim in having these rights preserved for him. Such rights are inalienable and cannot be abrogated except for a lawful reason.
 - 6- Their right to kind treatment. This is an Islamic precept found in the Qur’an and stated by Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him. This precept consists in showing righteousness towards non-Muslims, which means to be kind and gentle with them and to treat them in a proper manner.



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These are only some of the rights of non-Muslims in Islamic society, which prompts us to invite Westerners to draw a quick comparison between these rights and the hardships that a Muslim faces in Western countries, especially after the events of 9/11 and America declaring war on Islam in the name of fighting terrorism and activating what is known as “the Law of Religious Persecution”. We invite Westerners, especially Americans, to take a look at the texts of the constitutions approved by the Congress, relating to the freedom of religious worship and not to use religion, color or race as a determining factor when accusing others or when dealing with them. They can compare what these constitutions state with what is really going on in the U.S., such as the odious racial and religious discrimination by police officers and security organizations against Muslims, and the cases of religious persecution of Muslims with the excuse of protecting American security and stamping out the sources of terrorism, cases which were recorded by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI).

Violence in the practices of the religious police as portrayed by Western sources

- **Introduction**
- **Leniency and kindness in the behavior and dealings of Muslims.**
- **Violence in the practices of the religious police as portrayed by Western sources.**
- **An Invitation for Seeing the Reality**



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Introduction:

The political institutions, the media and the human rights organizations in the West have talked a great deal about the “violent” practices of the religious police in Saudi Arabia”. They have focused on individual cases, a few incidents, and isolated cases of violence making them a pivotal issue in their dealing with this religious institution and its work. Many Western reports highlighted these cases to such an extent that people in the West imagined that this religious institution seeks only to reform people by violent means, to lead them to virtue by cruel methods and to bring them back to moral values by forceful and harsh measures. This would be the extent of the charges if we chose to think well of these sources and to understand that they agree with us that the aim of this religious institution is to reform society and restore it to the values of virtue and good deeds.

However, establishing this distorted stereotypical picture of the religious police, and describing it as being violent and cruel, while keeping silent about its benevolent objectives and self-evident achievements, is nothing but glaring injustice on the part of the media. This is a deliberate obscuring of facts and falsification of reality.



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Therefore, we are not surprised when a Westerner comes to our country carrying with him a distorted picture of the religious police. However, he soon discovers the truth about this religious institution and ends up revering it and appreciating the work it does to safeguard both the citizen and the expatriate against acts of evil and protect them from vice.

In this section, we will discuss this issue, but before we do so we will show those who do not know the truth about Islam, how important are leniency and kindness in our religion. These two values represent the method by which the religious police operates in Saudi Arabia and are the bases of its activities.

Leniency and kindness in the behavior and dealings of Muslims

Prof. Hamad Al-Ammar

It is important that the non-Muslim should know some Islamic points while trying to understand the work of the religious police in Saudi Arabia. This religious institution works according to an official system that is directed by the religion of the society which it seeks to reform. Some of the salient features of its working methods are leniency and kindness. These features characterize the method adopted by those who call for virtue and doing good in every society. In Islam, the Holy Qur'an, which is the most important source for Muslims, has prescribed them. God Almighty commanded Moses and Aaron to be gentle in their call to the Pharaoh, who was telling his people, "I am your supreme god" and was causing corruption in the land by killing the men and keeping the women alive. God Who, nevertheless, commanded Moses and Aaron to "Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds; but speak to him mildly; Perchance he may take warning or fear (Allah)."

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If Moses and Aaron – peace be upon them – who were most beloved by God were commanded to be mild when dealing with the Pharaoh who was most hateful to God, then it is only reasonable to expect that others should follow the same wise and friendly policy and call people to do good, using kindness and leniency because people break away from whoever is harsh and cruel. Therefore, God Almighty, also says about His prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, *“It is part of the Mercy of Allah, that thou dost deal Gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from thee.”* Muslim scholars say that as per this Qur’anic injunction those who enjoin doing good and following the path of virtue and forbid doing wrong and following the path of vice should cling to high standards of morality and adopt a wise, lenient and kind way when dealing with people.

The Sunnah (traditions) of Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, which is the second main source in Islam, contains many episodes that illustrate leniency and kindness. These episodes have had a great impact on the behavior of Muslims and the way they deal with each other and with others. They are lessons from which those who take up the job of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong learn, but they are not known to many non-Muslims. One of these episodes is about a young man who came to Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, and said:

“O Allah’s Prophet, give me permission to commit adultery.”

Thereon people came to him and upbraided him. The Prophet said:

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“Come nearer.”

Whereupon the youth drew nearer to the Prophet and sat. The Prophet said:

“Would you like your mother to commit adultery?”

The youth answered:

“No. I swear by God. May God make me your ransom.”

The Prophet then said:

“And people don’t like it for their mothers to commit adultery.

“Would you like your daughter to do so?”

The young man answered:

“No, Allah’s Prophet. I swear by God. May God make me your ransom.”

The Prophet then said:

“And people don’t like it for their daughters.

“Would you like your sister to do so?”

The young man answered:

“No, Allah’s Prophet. I swear by God. May God make me your ransom.”

The Prophet then said:

“And people don’t like their sisters to do so

“Would you like your paternal aunt to do so?”

The young man answered:

“No, Allah’s Prophet. I swear by God. May God make me your ransom.”

The Prophet then said:

“And people don’t like it for their paternal aunts.

“Would you like it for your maternal aunt?”

The young man answered:

“No, Allah’s Prophet. I swear by God. May God make me your ransom.”

The Prophet then said:

“And people don’t like it for their maternal aunts.”

The Prophet then placed his hand on the young man’s chest and said, “O God, may You forgive his sin, purify his heart, and strengthen his modesty.” From that day onwards the young man never thought of committing adultery.

Such a lesson in leniency and kindness bore fruit in this case, because adultery became the most hateful thing to this young man who just before was very desirous of committing it. There are other lessons and situations similar to this one from which we Muslims benefit in calling people to do good and leading them away from sources of evil and corruption. Such calls and efforts to lead them to the path of virtue are noble ones enjoined by Islam and groups all over the world that call for reform and doing good. There is no doubt that the members of the religious police who are officially responsible for the movement of reforming society in Saudi Arabia and keeping it morally cleansed are the people who apply this leniency and kindness in their approach the most.

Violence in the practices of the religious police as portrayed by Western sources.

Samar Fatany

Because Saudi Arabia is the only Muslim and Arab country that possesses an independent official organization which is concerned with monitoring general social behavior and which has a religious character derived from the religious principle upon which it is based and which it calls for, its religious institutions have been targeted by reports released by the Western media even before 9/11 and what is termed the “war on terrorism.”

However, these attacks by the media have now reached dangerous heights against these religious institutions especially the religious police. These attacks have attributed to this organization facts that are alien to its character and have consolidated the negative stereotypical image about it that has become settled in the minds of Westerners before the notorious events of September 11.

Among the most common allegations were that this organization carries out its functions in society in a harsh way, that it uses violence, cruelty and extremism in

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enforcing its instructions and methods. Some research institutes in the West even object to the laws issued by the Saudi government in cooperation with the religious police to impose disciplinary punishments on those who violate the social system and who molest women in public souks (markets) and girls outside schools. Thus the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) has published a report about the punishment meted out to such young people who cause social and moral disturbances by having them whipped. This institute published a detailed report on January 19, 2004, discussing this disciplinary flogging inflicted on these violators. The report was worded in a way that demonstrated blatant interference even in the way Saudi Arabia chooses its machinery to safeguard the security and morals of its citizens and the expatriates residing on its land.

Some of the reports published by international organizations went even far beyond this in their misinterpretation of the nature of the work performed by the religious police in Saudi Arabia. An example of this was what was stated in a United Nations press release which was dated May 8, 2002, under the title "Conclusions and recommendations of the committee against Torture: Saudi" which contained a clear misreading of the facts. The members of the committee responsible for the report queried, "How many cases of whipping, torturing, and cutting of limbs, occurred last year, and did such punishments result in any death?." Such a query betrays much ignorance of the nature of the work carried out by the religious police. In the first place, the religious police is an institution that monitors those who violate the religious and social system of the society and complements the work of other security institutions such as the general police in having these violators apprehended. Secondly, it is an authority that never imposes

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any punishment on the violators of the system. Thirdly, using such terms as “torturing” cannot be applied to an organization that depends on kindness and leniency in its modus operandi. Therefore, such reports mislead both government and public opinion in the West about the religious police in Saudi Arabia and produce adverse effects not only among cultures but also on the official diplomatic level especially if they emanate from important and influential international organizations such as the United Nations.

Max Singer’s writings about the Religious Police constitute a blatant interference in countries sovereignty. He wrote an article in *The New York Sun* newspaper on April 26, 2003 under the heading: “Liberate the Eastern Province from Saudi Arabia. The writer claims “Propagators of Wahhabism have established a religious police force that walks the streets in the Eastern Province armed with whips to flog women wearing short dresses.” Such statements would lead Western public opinion to assume that the only responsibility of the men of the religious police is to flog young people and beat every woman who wears a short dress. This, however, is very far from the truth.

Such fallacious declarations, and there are many others like them, which were circulated by the media and human right organizations in the West, were multiplying at the very same time that these channels were obscuring the truth about what was going on in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Westerners were wrongly informed by the misleading reports which gave them a slanted look at our causes, disregarding several other positive aspects.

The kind of violence attributed by the media, political and humanitarian organizations to the religious police in Saudi Arabia contradicts the purpose for which this institution was originally

set up and the method it follows in performing its tasks. We can cite here a number of facts that can bear out this reality:

- 1- We mentioned earlier that the call to Islam is based primarily on leniency and kindness which are prescribed by religion and dictated by reason. As for religion, this refers to the words of God Almighty: *“Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.”* And as far as reason is concerned, we find that man will not respond to the invitation of the caller – no matter what the nature of his call is – unless his call is made with kindness, leniency and grace. Thus we will realize the nature of the work performed by the religious police if we remember that it is based on a religious prescription and a logical necessity. The first article of the first paragraph of the religious police statute states that the role of this body is “to urge people to adhere to the pillars of their true religion by performing prayers, giving Zakat or charity, fasting and performing Haj; and to embrace good manners. Also, to ask them to follow the path of morality and virtue, to fulfill their engagements and render back their trusts to those to whom they are due, to show righteousness towards their parents and maintain relationships with their kith and kin, to be regardful of the rights of their neighbors, to give charity to the poor and needy, and to help the weak and the aged.” The purpose of all this is obviously to reform society and not to punish it. How can it then be conceived that the religious police would resort to violent means when their objective is to reform.
- 2- The work of the religious police is carried out according to particular standards and controls. It does

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not go beyond detecting the violation to imposing the punishment on the violator, because the religious police is an institution that is entrusted with controlling and keeping a watch the general environment in accordance with the moral values that prevail in society and within the scope of the authority granted to it by the state. Therefore, there are other punitive institutions that work in co-ordination with the religious police.

Thus if the religious police fail to settle a case inside their premises by using leniency, kindness, and moral advice, they will refer it to the competent government authorities so that they will apply the appropriate punishment to the violator. The statistics contained in the annual report on the activities of the religious police for the year 2004 indicate that they had apprehended 384,344 religious and moral violations and that 345,675 of these violations (that is, 90%) were settled inside the religious police stations by means of exhortation and guidance and were not referred to the competent authorities. Such statistics underscore the fact the religious police organization seeks hard to preserve morals and decent conduct and that it uses guidance and advice as a means to achieve its purpose which is to reform society and not to punish it.

3- The objectives of the religious police in Saudi Arabia are not limited to trying to prevent corruption and vice by catching violators or to trying to detect as many violations as possible, but to take preventive measures against crime before they are committed. These measures include giving guidance and advice, showing the danger inherent in certain types of improper behavior in the society, and stamping out whatever can have a detrimental impact on the values of the nation and the good conduct of its

citizens. In applying these measures the religious police use wisdom and gentle preaching. Such measures are implemented through various activities such as:

- Setting up of guidance centers to explain the principle and importance of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. These centers are numerous and help members of the society to occupy their free time in a useful manner.
 - Advising through lectures or delivering short exhorting speeches on social occasions; or holding, participating in, or coordinating symposia: these lectures, speeches, and symposia are to take place either in public locations such as souks, parks, or in other places where people gather, or in governmental premises such as prisons or hospitals
 - Arranging inspection and guidance visits by the religious police to its subsidiary centers to deliver lectures and speeches that help them to perform their tasks in the best possible manner.
 - Printing and distributing books and guidance books written by Muslim scholars discussing matters related to the work of the religious police.
 - Publishing articles in the local press about the programs and activities of the religious police.
- 4- It is fair to admit that there are individual mistakes committed by the religious police while performing their duties, but these mistakes are limited and do not go beyond being isolated cases. Such mistakes, however, are expected to occur in any civil institution that deals with the public; they even occur in the strictest of intelligence and military organizations which have wider experience and higher skill than civil organizations and are also better trained and more careful about making mistakes.

An Invitation for Seeing the Reality

Dr. Ibrahim Al-Humaidan

Here we offer an invitation for seeing the reality and looking at its dimensions in full without any kind of incompleteness, curtailment or selectiveness.

We firmly believe that the religious police are actuated by the desire to do good and strengthen the moral values which call for doing good. Yes, it is possible that some men of the religious police may have been unduly harsh and their acts may have amounted to cruelty. Such excessive zeal may make themselves violators of the law in as far as the procedures and rules governing correction and apprehension are concerned. These excesses, however, are exceptions to the general rule and not the rule itself. But can we say the same about the police officers in any system and in any country? In a country like the U.S.A., for example, which has police systems that are extremely complicated, overlapping and highly specialized, violations by police officers do occur. Such violations are, at times, so cruel and harmful that they come to represent a stark aggression against the rights of the individual. The same thing happens in some countries that claim to be champions of human rights.

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Perhaps many Westerners may recall the details of a number of these violations which were committed by their police and which kept public opinion busy for long periods of time. Those violations were severely criticized and denounced by the media which tried to attribute them to individuals that do not belong to the police force. These violations also encouraged the American movie industry to portray them and turn them into rich material to be made the subject of many very successful movies. It also exposed many wrongs, and even corruption, in the way many police sectors perform their duties.

We are not going here to cite more examples, for people in the West know more about this matter than we do. But we would like to say that the religious police are not much different from the military and the civil police in that their members are prone to commit similar mistakes and violations. It would be illogical if we assumed that all people employed in the police sectors are unlikely to commit mistakes and that they all apply the system or the law in the same manner. Therefore, it is possible, even natural, that mistakes and violations on the part of some members of the religious police should occur while performing their tasks, but they are few and isolated cases. If such mistakes and violations can only be expected to occur even in the oldest military and intelligence organizations, then why should the religious police be picked up for criticism? No doubt, the probability of committing violations and mistakes remains real. We cannot ignore or deny this fact, just as no military organization anywhere in the world can claim that no mistakes or violations have ever been committed by any of its members. On the contrary, the mistakes made by the

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members of the religious police are much fewer because the pivot of their work is to guide, direct and advise prior to resorting to punishment. Add to this, the important fact that divine laws are more merciful towards and regardful of humanity and more mindful of man's dignity and self-respect and more careful, in general, in maintaining the rights of society.

Although we have to admit that there are individual mistakes committed by some members of the religious police, just as is the case with any other police or military organizations, we still have to view these mistakes fairly and honestly so as to see them in their true perspective. This, however, is not what some major Western media and some human rights organizations do. They persist in fabricating such mistakes or exaggerating them and make them look as if they are the general feature of everyone engaged in the work of the religious police. They also describe it as a force of violence, cruelty and extremism, a description which is both erroneous and exaggerated. This is attested to by every impartial human being who has had the opportunity to closely observe the functioning of the religious police.

Painting this erroneous picture is indeed an act of injustice and a falsification of facts. This issue deserves to be investigated so that the causes that led to these isolated incidents are ascertained and can be made public.

In order to form a true picture of the religious police we have to know a number of things, among which are:

- 1- The basis of the method of operation adopted by the religious police is to prevent the occurrence of the violation, its recurrence or the straying away from the

system, through giving advice, guidance, orientation and warning. Hence the word is the means used by the religious police to perform their tasks and not the stick or any other means of scaring or intimidation.

- 2- Working for the religious police is an official government job and aims at ensuring the security of society according to religious commands which represent the law that should therefore be observed. It goes without saying that there is no place for violence or extremism in such a humane and service-oriented work.
- 3-The religious police are, in their origin, religious individuals who have studied Sharia sciences and are neither military nor militarily trained. They were selected for the job after they obtained the prescribed qualifications and passed the required interview. Therefore, the probability of their resorting to violence and cruelty is very remote and they, on their part, are not qualified for it.
- 4- The social and humanitarian role play a dominant part in the work of the religious police and has precedence over the policy of deterrence or punishment, because the objective of the religious police is to protect man from wrongdoings and to protect others from being harmed by his actions.
- 5- The individual who has strayed from the system or violated the law is a violator in the eyes of the police officers, too. It may so happen that the violator and the police officer will clash owing to personal reasons that lie outside the scope of the law and the issue of the violation itself. Often, personal enmities between some police officers and the circles of organized crime

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in Europe and America are brought to light.

- 6- Awareness of the law and its interpretation and application may differ from one person to another. This is exactly what happens among the religious police owing to the differences in their degree of awareness, level of their education, their upbringing and other individual differences. It is possible that violence or severity and excessive zeal for protecting the system may have their roots in their subconscious or they may be due to some flaws in their education especially when the issue becomes one of abuse of authority.
- 7- Many Western media organs that generalize the individual errors of the religious police to the whole organization are not acquainted with the traditions and customs of religious societies or with domestic laws, which create large areas of misunderstanding and consequently for transmitting a disfigured, incomplete or distorted picture of the situation.
- 8- There is no doubt that many Westerners are not familiar with the teachings of Islam and are not aware that these teachings preserve man's dignity, like Christianity. This lack of knowledge makes many of those who are hostile to Islam or differ with it for political reasons to present an erroneous picture of Islam, a picture intended to repel people and antagonize the West towards Muslims by describing them as violent and harsh, targeting their religious police organization in particular.

These are only segments of an overall picture about the religious police in our society that the Western media chooses not to reveal to public opinion in their societies. These are also the facts which were not available to



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Westerners and which were deliberately made so to them until they came to take only a partial look at things – a view that sees only errors committed by some individuals working for the religious police. Such errors are rare but it is natural that they should be committed by some members of an institution that belongs to civil society, considering the fact that such an institution deals with a multi-level public that entertains a great variety of opinions. However, what makes appalls us is the attributing of these individual errors to the whole apparatus of the religious police and describing it as an institution of violence, harshness and extremism. Such individual errors are eagerly seized upon by the media and human rights organizations and greatly exaggerated so that Westerners come to view the men of the religious police as nasty people carrying on their tasks under the threat of weapons and sticks. This is the unfairness that we have been talking about and the falsification of facts we have been discussing. What we are trying to reveal is the true story, as against the distorted picture.

Women and the Religious Police

- **Introduction**
- **The importance of the veil to the Muslim woman**
- **Woman in Saudi Arabia**
- **Obliging non-Muslim women in Saudi Arabia to abide by rules of modesty and decency**



The Religious Police in Saudi Arabia

Introduction:

All societies of the world have three major common objectives – namely, continuity, stability and unity. In order to realize these three objectives, laws were enacted and rules were decreed. All these laws and rules derive their tenets from the culture of society through which they decide what are acceptable and are more likely to achieve these objectives. Hence, the wide discrepancies we notice between the various laws and the different means, discrepancies which are due to the cultural particularity of each society.

In Saudi culture, we notice that these three objectives are connected with the particularity of Saudi society which derives from the application of Islamic law (Sharia) to all aspects of life, including the social aspect. The foundation of the Saudi state was associated with a commitment to the teachings of Islam. This state, relied for the legitimacy of its establishment, on applying these teachings which gained acceptance from every part of the country. Such teachings are characterized by consistency and flexibility, which helped achieve stability and social fabric.

Max Weber in his “Social Action” theory refers to religion’s capability to guide various and numerous aspects

of human conduct because it shapes the way individuals become aware of the world and the meanings and objectives that direct their behaviors. So, Islam represents to the Saudi people the core of the “Value Agreement” which is the basis of their outlook on life and the factor that controls their behavior.

However, this reality is either still unknown to the West or there are some Westerners who do not want to recognize it or even try to understand it.

To them, the Saudi woman cannot be a woman unless she conforms to their criteria and is not fully feminine unless she fits their standards. She is not equal to man unless judged to be so by the norms of their culture. This attitude demonstrates a deficient way of thinking and a limited capacity of understanding. It is also derogatory towards other cultures which do not agree with the values of their culture, especially in the social field.

As a result of this lack of understanding, the Saudi woman and the veil have been severely criticized by political institutions and human rights organizations in the West. This criticism, which was frequently offensive, intensified after the events of September 11 and the repercussions of war on terrorism which, in many instances, included war on other cultures particularly the culture of the Islamic world.

Whether one knows the truth or not about women in Saudi society, we will try to explain to the Western mind the reality about women, who have become the focus of attention whenever Saudi society is discussed. It is a reality we are satisfied with. We believe others should also accept it as a cultural reality that, as in the case of other



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cultures, imposes its own conduct. Such acceptance hinges upon there being a sincere wish to establish peaceful coexistence among cultures and to respect human values and their complementary role in realizing happiness for man in every society. But if the aim is to impose one type of culture on others it would result in a cultural conflict, which could reach dangerous proportions.

The importance of the veil to the Muslim woman

Lubna Al-Tahlawi

To a woman in Saudi Arabia, the veil represents an Islamic value that is related to her social life. It is neither a heritage, tradition, nor a social custom that can be altered or developed. It is the duty of Muslim woman imposed by God when meeting with foreign men. The West has to know that abandoning the veil means that a woman is displaying her charms and acting contrary to virtuous behavior. We Muslims consider this act as a kind of conduct that is forbidden by our Sharia law, on one side, and as an unacceptable social behavior, on the other. It is unacceptable because, with this kind of behavior, a woman has overstepped the limits of her personal freedom and invaded the freedom of others by exciting and disturbing them. The main reason for obliging a woman to wear a veil is to enable her to maintain her dignity and protect her from man's baser instincts. It is well known that woman's physical features are attractive to man; therefore men are more attracted towards women's looks than women on seeing men.

In keeping with such a natural difference between the two

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sexes, Islam ordered women to wear a veil when exposed to public life and to conceal her feminine attractions. A woman's face is certainly her most attractive feature and the one that attracts men the most. In any society, if a man was told he could see any part of the body of the woman he intends to marry except her face, he would refuse her hand in marriage. But he would certainly agree to marriage even he would be able to see only her face rather than the rest of her body. This shows how central a woman's face is to man.

What is really astonishing is to see this preventive method to safeguard woman and maintain her dignity, the subject of discussion and argument in Western societies. This happens despite the fact that they know well that the veil has Islamic value and has been accepted and respected in Saudi society. What interest will it serve now to unveil the Saudi woman, some of whom have obtained the highest academic degrees and worked in civil society in Saudi Arabia without the need to show her face? She did not have to show her face in order to obtain her rights.

In the past, the allegations made by the West and others focused on there being a close connection between the veil and the spread of illiteracy among Saudi women. They claimed that women wearing a veil cannot study or learn. Then came the social facts to disprove these allegations. We now see Saudi women wearing veils and studying at every level and in every stage of education. They thus draw a unique Saudi experience that completely discredits the idea of tying the veil to illiteracy.

It would be wise for reasonable people in the West to agree with us on the importance of preserving this

tradition, in which the Saudi woman has proved her ability to combine her commitment to the Islamic veil as well as her readiness to perform her duties and responsibilities towards society. We, in Saudi Arabia, are fortunate enough to have government institutions keeping a watch on general social behavior with a view to maintaining this experience and protecting it.

Among the most important of these reform institutions is the religious police which represents, in our viewpoint, an integrated mechanism, a practice of public awareness and an application of society's common values. This institution can, as such, reinforce the elements that help achieve social cohesion and unity and do not weaken our interaction with contemporary developments and ideas. In fact, it directs this interaction in a positive way so as to avoid social crises which are usually connected with the process of modernization and civilization.

Through our experience with women in our society, we can say that if Western societies suffered from many social and moral problems out of so-called women's liberation movements, and had even to revert to segregated classrooms for boys and girls, with oft-repeated media warnings against degradation of moral values, we in Saudi Arabia are still benefiting from the virtues contained in this call to wear the veil that came with Islam. If women's veil had any value in Western culture, sensible people would not hesitate to call women to wear it to safeguard their wives, daughters, sisters and mothers and to spare them the moral tragedies that the West knows about more than we do.

Woman in Saudi Arabia

Hidaya Darweesh

Many reports released by human rights organizations and carried by the media, discuss the relationship between the religious police and women in Saudi Arabia. This issue is another proof of ignorance about the culture of Saudi Arabia or of the deliberate distortion of facts by a biased media.

Through our reading of both what was written in these reports and what was said by the Western media, particularly in the US, about the position of the Saudi woman, we have become convinced that the West has some preconceived judgments about it. These judgments are the outcome of false, greatly exaggerated propaganda. This is especially the case when the issues related to the education, position and upbringing of Saudi women are placed under the scanner of Western principles and thoughts. Our question is: Where are neutrality and credibility? We ask this question because we have certain convictions about their media, which have been implanted into our minds over many decades. These convictions are to the effect that their judgments and viewpoints do not stem from a

void, but are the result of serious and objective studies and an academic quest undertaken in a neutral spirit. But where is this neutrality when such accusations and falsehoods are hurled against the Saudi woman? Where is neutrality when they classify the realities about the Saudi woman – who is an academician, physician, administrator and businesswoman, whose presence is most effective at the local, Arab and international levels; in the media and in the nursing fields; and as an economy expert whose presence is strongly felt in the fields of banking, finance and business; as a woman of letters, as a novelist and as a poet?

These parties belittle the life of the Saudi woman, her achievements and successes under their pet title of “The Suffering of the Saudi Woman.” Whoever coined this title and used it as a theme for his writings, did not see the reality – that of the Saudi woman clinging on to her religious values, and, at the same time, playing a meaningful role in society.

Those who tried to intrude in the individuality of the Saudi woman by constantly talking about her “suffering” did not bother to take the trouble to read the reports prepared by some organizations affiliated to the United Nations (such as the United Nations Development Program) which cited figures and data showing the achievements of Saudi women in the field of development. A researcher, who is interested and is motivated by a true intention to discover the truth, can find much more information elsewhere than what is included in so-called international reports or in what the Western media has written.

The Saudi government has ratified the United

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Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been approved by the United Nations General Assembly by resolution No. 18034 dated December 18, 1989 in New York. The ratification of this convention by Saudi Arabia was made in accordance with Islamic teachings and the values prevalent in Saudi society.

If we tackle the legal position of women in the Kingdom, we can say that there are sets of rules that ensure women's rights. First and most important are the legal texts in the Holy Qur'an and in the pure Sunnah of the Prophet which exhort equality and non-discrimination. On the organizational level, the basic system of government promulgated by Royal Decree No. 90-A dated March 2, 1992 comprised a number of articles that guarantee human rights in general, the most important of which is the right to equality which, on the whole, is applicable to women. This right to equality is contained in article (8) of this system which states, "The government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on justice, consultation, and equality according to Islamic Sharia." Also article (26) of the same system states that "the state protects human rights according to Islamic Sharia."

Thus, these two articles stress the necessity of safeguarding human rights in the Kingdom and endorsing the principle of equality among all citizens, without discriminating between man and woman. Women can thus receive salaries and wages that are equal to men's as well as equal retirement rights.

Other articles in the system also guaranteed many more rights to citizens – such as the right to education,

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work, obtaining social security in cases of emergency, sickness, disability and old age; and the rights to medical treatment, security, privacy, and personal ownership. Thus article 30 of the country's constitution states that "the state is committed to ensure general education to all and to fight illiteracy, without discrimination between men and women." Also article 31 of the constitution states that the right to general good health is ensured to every citizen: "The state cares for general health and ensuring medical care for every citizen."

In the international arena, Saudi Arabia remains committed to safeguarding human rights in the light of Islamic Sharia. Thus, it signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was issued by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948, and which established the principle of equality and non-discrimination among people on the basis of color or race. The Kingdom then signed the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. This convention was ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nations by its Resolution No. 18034 dated December 19, 1989, in New York as mentioned earlier.

We can then say that the signing of this agreement by the Kingdom can be considered a qualitative move in as far as the rights of women are concerned. This is because, although Islam guaranteed such rights 14 centuries ago, much more than what has been granted to women by various systems and charters, joining this agreement helps to emphasize the Kingdom's total commitment to international rules and principles that were accepted and

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ratified by the international organization. It was especially appropriate that Saudi Arabia should do that in view of the fact that the Kingdom is a founding member of the United Nations as its representative took part among others from 50 other countries in writing its charter at a conference held in San Francisco from June 25-26, 1945. The Kingdom signed the charter on that date and has ever since been an active participant in helping this international organization realize its objectives. The participation of Saudi women in economic and social life is expected to increase in future, while at the same time maintaining her commitment to Islamic Sharia on which the Saudi society is based.

Saudi women hold many important positions in many corporations, organizations and various government sectors. Many jobs have also become a female domain. Because of the constant support and encouragement that women receive and the opportunities provided to them, they have met with great success, even outside their country. The Saudi government has, on its part, buttressed this balanced progress made by women. Thus in June 2004, the cabinet issued several decisions pertaining to women following studies aimed at seeking ways to increase their work opportunities. Some of these decisions are as follows:

- 1- The governmental authorities that issue permits for economic activities should, each in their own sphere of specialization, receive women's applications to obtain such permits and issue them the permits required according to the legal rules and regulations.
- 2- All governmental authorities that render services to women should set up units and sections for women

according to the needs and nature of the work they perform within a period not to exceed one year from the date this decision was issued.

- 3- The council of the Saudi chambers of commerce and industry has to form a committee of experienced and efficient women to coordinate with the concerned authorities to encourage establishments in the private sector to find work for Saudi women, without opening the door to foreign women workforce, and to facilitate their training and education. The government authorities, each in their own spheres of specialization, should contribute their share toward realizing this objective.
- 4- The Human Resources Development Fund should give special attention to training and getting jobs for Saudi women and should make this a part of its plans and programs.
- 5- The Ministry of Labor has to coordinate with the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Social Affairs to take the necessary measures to put into effect the approach of “work from a distance” as a new field through which women can work and to carry out the “productive family programs” and ensure the availability of funds to make them succeed.
- 6- The Ministry of Labor has, in collaboration with the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Social Affairs, to lay down an integrated national plan for Saudi women workforce that would specify the real needs for women working in the different specializations. Such a plan has to be completed within a year from issuing this decision.

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- 7- Work in the stores that sell female requirements should be confined to Saudi women and the Ministry of Labor should set a time schedule to carry this out and follow up on it.
- 8- The Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Council of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry should study the issue of maternity leaves for working women and look into the possibility of extending their duration so as to grant women an added incentive and privilege, but in a way that will not be prejudicial to their opportunities of getting hired.

With the help of such facilities, Saudi women were able to find a foothold in the job market and a high percentage of women have now found employment. A working Saudi woman gets the same salary as that of her male counterpart, while in the US and Europe a working woman gets half the salary of her colleague of the same post. Abdul Rahman Al-Jeraisy, the secretary general of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry underlined in a statement to the Riyadh-based *Al-Jezirah* Arabic newspaper on February 15, 2005 that women's savings in the Saudi banks constitute 70% of the total savings. The reason for this was that a Saudi woman has the freedom to deal with her salary and her investments. A man, whether he is a husband or father is the one responsible for the woman's expenses. However, there are certain constants and principles that the Saudi woman is careful to adhere to and accentuate while holding her job. These are:

- 1- Should not mix with men at work. Communication with superiors or subordinates should be done by phone or

computer or other means that would enable women to establish contact quickly and effectively

- 2- The working Saudi woman enjoys equal rights with men in pay and rights. She thus receives the same monthly salary as men do. At the same time, even if she gets the same salary, she is, nevertheless, not responsible for supporting her family, because family expenditure in the Saudi social culture – which emanates from its Islamic creed – is man's duty, for man is responsible for spending on the family and for shouldering all financial obligations. Such a division of roles makes the woman usually spend her salary on luxuries, which makes her feel completely satisfied with the pay she receives in exchange for her work. A study conducted to measure job satisfaction, particularly regarding salaries, among Saudi males and females who head academic sections at the Saudi higher education institutes, revealed a high level of job satisfaction among females compared to their male counterparts.

Saudi society believes in natural differences between the two sexes, for not everything that man can do, woman can do, and vice versa. Therefore, the Saudi woman was given the chance to work in those fields that suit her nature and instincts. Taking these differences into consideration does not imply a lessening of women's value but, on the contrary, it indicates a deep respect for women. Women in Saudi society do not take hard jobs that require physical effort. They usually take jobs that require accuracy and patience such as teaching, clerical, administrative, health and social service jobs. This agrees with the studies made on women working in the American army where women were unable to



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perform hard, physical chores for which they were trained, such as changing airplane tires and working in the sphere of storing ammunition.

Moreover, working in departments and administrations that pertain to women exclusively enabled women to attain the highest job positions without any competition from men. Such positions include chairperson of girls' departments, manager of a women's bank branch, principal of girls' schools and dean of girls' colleges.

These facts show that Saudi women do not suffer the ordeals cited by information sources in the West and repeated by them in all their reports on the position of Saudi women and their rights.

Obliging non-Muslim women in Saudi Arabia to abide by rules of modesty and decency

Dr. Mariam Al-Tamimi

It is well known that women are the focus of men's desires because God Almighty has provided the two sexes with sexual instincts which have become innate to all human beings. Islamic Sharia, however, has addressed this side of man's and woman's nature and issued restrictions and controls by which their desires can be fulfilled and through which they can avert corruption and enjoy a happy life.

Undoubtedly, one of the major factors that can spoil the happiness of the two sexes is the straying of man or woman from the right path and trying to satisfy those instincts through all kinds of frivolous behavior which puts modesty to shame, such as some women exposing their personal charms or not wearing a veil and other manifestations of indecency which drive human societies to a life of bestiality or even to an abnormal way of life. Violence, kidnapping and rape which occur in societies of the world are nothing but a reflection of this kind of

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moral deviation. Since Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country which has been established according to Islamic rules and principles and has been implementing them to all aspects of its political, social and educational life, applying the teachings of Islam and pursuing the principle of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong becomes one of its most salient features.

Overexposing parts of the body and unveiling affect the morals of the two sexes; for the man who is unrestrained by religion or reason, is at the mercy of his lust which drives him towards women and no indecent woman who exposes a great part of her charms will be safe from his assaults. Therefore, it was necessary to institute the system of the religious police which derives from the texts of Sharia and which forbids Muslim and non-Muslim women to expose their charms. This was made for many considerations, the most important among which are:

First: Safeguarding Islamic society from moral deviation, exposing female charms is one of its causes.

Secondly: Preventing man from moral deviation and protecting Muslim and non-Muslim women from the lewdness of dissolute men.

Thirdly: Keeping sexual instincts under control and preventing them from going astray.

In the third item of the first article in the first chapter of the executive regulations of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice which were promulgated by Royal Decree No. M-37 dated September 6, 1980, we find the following statement: “Monitoring Public Souks (markets), roads, parks and other public

places to prevent the occurrence of the following illegal acts:

- 1- Women mixing with men and indecent exposure, both of which are forbidden by Islamic law.
- 2- Imitating the acts and appearance of one sex by the other.
- 3- Subjecting women to verbal or physical abuse by men.”

These three items offer the best protection for women in particular and society in general. Intermingling of men and women often leads to forbidden relationships between them. One of the main reasons for the failure of marital life is the mingling of men and women which leads to an illicit relationship.

When one of the two sexes tries to be like the other, it will have a negative effect on woman’s dignity and self respect. Thus, if a man tries to be like a woman, he will be invading her distinctiveness and annulling her gender; and if a woman tries to be like a man, this will lead her to abandon her true nature and lose her femininity. That is why such an act is forbidden. When men assault women verbally or physically, this is because the women themselves may have exposed their charms or abandoned the veil and by doing so have become prey to perverted men. Therefore, forbidding indecent dressing and unveiling is to protect women and safeguard their chastity.

Foreign residents and visitors to the Kingdom are also required by the rules and conventions to abide by this principle and not to violate it. Thus, Royal Decree No. 18588- was issued on October 23, 1979 and stated that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to notify all foreign

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embassies that this country had its own customs and traditions, derived from the true religion of Islam and that every new-comer to the Kingdom had to conform to them.

It is a norm that every country in the world respects the systems and laws of the host country and it is not violating the general inclination of its people. Moreover, obliging non-Muslim women to cover up and wear modest clothing is for their own protection against rape or molestation. The reality on the ground and official statistics prove that the number of assaults on women goes up the more they display their charms and abandon the veil, while this number decreases or even disappears the more they dress decently and use the veil.

All people have in common a sense of dignity, identity and self-esteem and everyone should be respectable and dignified at all times and in all places.

We all ask, why, when God Almighty created the birds, the cattle, the domestic and wild animals, He gave them what covered their bodies. So He covered the bodies of birds with feathers, of sheep with wool, of goats and camels with hair, of cats rabbits and such like with fur. He could very well have made them adapt without giving them what covers their bodies. In this there is much wisdom; for God the Great and Almighty, is beautiful and loves beauty, and no doubt 'clothing' these animals and birds makes them look beautiful. If we asked a sane person which is more beautiful: a bird that has its feathers plucked or a bird with its feathers on?, he would answer immediately and without the slightest hesitation that the bird covered with feathers is the more beautiful. The same thing applies to animals:

if a cat or a rabbit were shorn of its fur, there is no doubt it would look pitiable and embarrassing. Glory to Allah Who has created everything in the best possible shape!

When God the Great and Almighty created man, He created him to be the reasonable, sagacious, inventive and creative being that builds and strives to do good; therefore, He did not cover his body with fur and feathers, but left him free to cover himself with whatever he liked. Whoever is endowed with a sound innate nature and has a rational sensible mind will wear modest clothes that cover his body properly. But whoever has a corrupted innate nature and a mind that has strayed will be lax about his clothes. He may even deteriorate further and begin to argue with and reprimand those he sees wearing decent clothes and inviting others to decency and morality.

Accordingly, based on what we have said, we can conclude that modesty is something innate that has been implanted into man and that all religions have called for because it is one of the virtues.

In our country, Saudi Arabia, this human exchange also takes place and foreign women come to us to work and contribute to growth and development and they dress modestly.

Somebody may ask: Why is the non-Muslim woman obliged in our country to dress modestly? We answer him as follows:

- 1- When a non-Muslim woman comes to our country and sees the general character of society, she respects it and tries to get close to it and become attuned to it because what she sees is a system that society has got used to and followed. She therefore tends to respect that system



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and the law of the land. What is worth mentioning is that those who come to us to work, whether they are coming from the East or the West, are known to respect the system and the law, just as they also respect the value of time, working hours and systems. They even surpassed us Muslims. That is why they occupy an eminent position: because they are people who master what they do and respect discipline and order.

It is known about Non-Muslim tourists who come to visit Islamic countries that when they wish to see the inside of a mosque and its architecture, they do what Muslims do. They do not enter the mosque with their shoes on, but take them off because they see the Muslims doing that so they respect their ways and apply them when going into the mosque without there being a policeman at the door or anybody else to ask them to do that. This proves that non-Muslims have a fine taste, know how to conduct themselves, and possess a great deal of tact. That is why non-Muslims are known to respect and appreciate the system of the country to which they go. This is also the case with us in Saudi Arabia: non-Muslim women respect the system and the laws in force in society; so they dress modestly in keeping with the social conventions and out of respect for them.

- 2- When a non-Muslim woman comes to Saudi Arabia and sees the general trend of society, she finds herself wearing modest clothes. This is a natural thing because man is sociable by nature and hates to be an outsider in society. If man is at variance with his environment, he will make himself the target of people's looks and their

remarks. He will then feel estranged and worried. But when he is in tune with the society to which he came, he will feel safe and psychologically comfortable especially if such attunement is called for by virtue, and modest clothing is indeed a virtue and recognized as such by any perceptive individual.

- 3- There is a difference between dressing modestly and wearing the veil. The non-Muslim woman is not obliged to wear a veil or cover her face, but she chooses to dress modestly because she sees how women in the society dress and because modesty is found in every sensible human being. All societies have already known those women that wear long clothes and put a hat or a handkerchief on their heads. Humanity has indeed experienced modesty in dressing, but some contemporary societies have been slack in enforcing it and therefore have suffered from a few moral and sex-related problems.
- 4- A country that ensures that all women, Muslim and non-Muslim, adhere to modesty in their dressing must be a virtuous and a healthy land that wishes good to all mankind.

If we ask sensible and wise people which they prefer: decent clothes that cover a great part of the body or indecent clothes that expose a great part of it; prompted by their innate natures, they will surely answer that they prefer the decent clothes.

If we ask them again which they respect more: the woman wearing decent clothes or the semi-naked woman, they will definitely say that they prefer the woman wearing modest clothes.

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A country that propagates one of the virtues of humanity should be given full support as it seeks to implement the principle of spreading virtue through dressing decently. The world should not succumb to the whims of the investigator and fault-finder, which is what we have noticed in the reports released by political organizations and the media in the West. For example, in its issue dated May 11, 2002, *USA Today* published many falsehoods about the Saudi woman. This paper interfered in the particularity of the Saudi woman which she chose for herself and alleged that the religious police meddle with her life at school, in the souks (public markets) and when she travels. The paper was judging the relationship between women and the religious police by the standards of Western culture which it sought to impose on the Saudi society.

Susan Sachs, correspondent for *The New York Times*, wrote on December 5, 2000 stories about the adventures of some Saudi youth who rebelled against the moral standards of society. She said that those youth defied the men of the religious police and molested women in the largest public markets in Riyadh. In her stories, Sachs glorified these young people and said they were practicing some sort of liberalism which the religious police always try to suppress in the markets. This newspaper, which enjoys a wide circulation in the U.S, also condemned in its issue of January 22, 2004, the position of the grand Mufti and chairman of the Senior Ulema (Muslim Scholars) Commission in Saudi Arabia towards what happened at the Jeddah Economic Forum where women were unveiled and mingled with men. The newspaper described the Mufti's position as a "disaster" and as a confrontation between a



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religious institution and women liberation movement in Saudi Arabia.

Whoever reads these media reports in the West would, at first sight, imagine that Saudi society is composed of many different religions, various cultures and several races – all of which are facing something called “Islam”. This undoubtedly contradicts the truth and opposes reality. Western public opinion should know that what is communicated by its political organizations and media about the religious police in Saudi Arabia is the brainchild of a single employee who serves particular policies. Whoever comes to Saudi Arabia and sees the position of women and how they live will remember that what he has learnt about them through those sources was a distortion of facts and a falsification of the truth. This opinion has not been put forth by us Saudis, but we have heard it expressed by all sensible and fair people who have visited our country recently, especially Western women who came to Saudi Arabia as media correspondents and became closely familiar with the position of the Saudi woman. We are not going to repeat their commendations, but would like to lay stress on an important fact: The way Western media portrays Saudi society and the Saudi woman contradicts in a radical manner the truth and reality about them as experienced in our country.

Conclusion

At the end of this book, we would like to say to the peoples in the West and to those having other cultures, that we in Saudi Arabia may not attain the perfection of the Islamic vision and that in the process of applying it there are many errors committed by individuals and institutions. We also admit that such errors contributed to the formation of the mental image that the West has about the religious police. However, there is no way we can abolish a basic fundamental of our religion as a result of individual or even collective errors because the defect is not in the vision itself or in the principle itself but in the way it is applied, just as we cannot judge Islam through the practices of a few Muslims, or the American, British, or French constitutions through the violations committed by some individuals either deliberately or through ignorance of the ways they should be applied.

What we would like to say is that the religious police in Saudi Arabia is an application of the principle of enjoining doing what is right and forbidding what is wrong which is considered one of the basic fundamentals in the life of the Saudis. They have accepted this basic fundamental



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and been satisfied with it. They now consider it one of the most important characteristics of their society and culture. This principle represents for the Saudis a social and moral system that ensures for the society, in accordance with the Islamic vision of life, what many of the punitive and punishment systems that are prevalent in other societies cannot ensure.