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The Pope and the ʻUlamāʼ: a Study of Religious Institutions and Their Evolving Relationship to Government

Benjamin Newton
University of Mississippi

THE POPE AND THE ʿULAMĀʾ: A STUDY OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT

by
Benjamin Newton

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Approved:

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Advisor: Dr. Steven Schaaf

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Reader: Dr. Graham Pitts

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Reader: Dr. Kenneth Negy

Abstract

How and why have religious institutions changed during historical critical junctures in their relationship with government? The literature on this topic, with notable but limited exceptions (Brown et al. 2024, Koesel 2014, Fox 2008), has tended to focus on one specific institution at a time, even if analyzing its actions within multiple states. Through this project, I focus not on the same institution in different states, but on two major religious establishments in the states in which they are based. I analyze the Roman Catholic Church and the Wahhābi[1] establishment in Italy and Saudi Arabia, respectively, to come to a conclusion regarding the nature of these organizations and their relationship to the state within the last three centuries. It is well-known that religious establishments and institutions frequently change; I argue that the major determinants of their ability and proclivity to change lie in their authority, hierarchy, autonomy, and political environment. Freer, more authoritative, politically-decentralized institutions are better equipped to shape themselves according to their circumstances, while those under the thumb of a government change only as necessary, for survival rather than for prosperity or comfort.

[1]All transliterations are my own, according to the standards of the IJMES transliteration system for Arabic, Persian, and Arabic, which can be found at https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-file-manager/file/57d83390f6ea5a022234b400/TransChart.pdf.

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Introduction

How have religious institutions reacted or changed in response to the actions of the governments under which they operate? Religion is among the most vital and divisive topics in the world. It has been the basis for governments, wars, conquest, peacemaking, marriages, and political revolutions. For this reason, it is important to understand the nature of religions and their institutions, as well as the ways those institutions relate to the world around them. Many religious institutions, especially those of Abrahamic identity, have historically claimed to be unchanging, constant sources of static truth and infallible or preserved doctrine and tradition.

Religious institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church ("Dei Verbum" 1965) and the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchy (*Nicene Creed*) have claimed to be vestiges of that unchanging teaching; the Saʿudi Wahhābi establishment claims to be a group restoring and preserving the faith in its purest form (Crawford 2014). Though never claiming this work to be fully without error, the Wahhābi establishment has always been staunchly fundamentalist and is part of a tradition of not allowing for much liberty in thought, especially through the process of Ijmāʿ[2] (Crawford 2014). These establishments claim themselves to hold still today to the same beliefs of the Apostles or of the Prophet Muhammad on all major doctrinal issues, being preservers of the "true" Christianity or the "true" Islam. However, this idea of these institutions' static nature conflicts with the fact of their historically evolving character: many changes have taken place in each of these institutions and their respective doctrines—especially with regard to politics—throughout the centuries.

[2]The early Islamic practice of consensus in defining acceptable beliefs in the faith.

Religions typically start with the writings of one or a few people who claim to have had a revelation of some new absolute truth or wisdom about the universe. After each faith grows and gains popularity, however, it stops being the pure thing it once was; it is a natural part of religious formation to 1– splinter and 2– turn into one of two types of political entities. Each faith sect is either an authoritative, hierarchical political actor, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Saʿudi Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council (not authoritative over more than Saʿudi Sunni believers, and its former forms were neither centralized nor hierarchical [Al-Rasheed 2002]); or a conceptual framework on which to base a moral and political ideology, such as Protestantism, Buddhism, Taoism, individual ʿulamāʾ councils, and reformed Judaism. This project focuses on the former group. I argue that centralized religious institutions change their beliefs and doctrines under political pressure, though some more than others, and that they change because of 1 – their authority in the faith; 2 – their hierarchical structure; 3 – their political circumstances (centralization, regime type); and 4 – their autonomy. The more these institutions rely on political influence and popular monetary support, the more outside political and social pressure affect them.

This change occurs only as is deemed necessary by the leadership of these institutions. The Law of Inertia applies in more realms of knowledge than physics, though perhaps not as a hard-and-fast law but more as a guiding trend or principle: if religious institutions are given autonomy, power, and even hegemony, they are more likely to remain as they are, unless they have some other incentive to change their narrative. If their power is challenged, however, they become more reactive, making necessary changes to internal structure, the definition of their role in the world, and/or official doctrine on key issues. These institutions, even if they claim to be of

an unchanging nature, must change when their hand is forced or they are threatened with injury or extinction as an official establishment.

Institutional structure is not the only important element, though: the governmental structure under which these institutions operate also plays a significant role in deciding how they evolve. Liberal governance, for instance, is a historic adversary of religious governance (that is, theocracy), taking power away from religious institutions. This means that the institution's power becomes indirect, and it must find new less direct avenues by which to influence the population and draw them to itself. On the other hand, autocratic governments can either work to subjugate or choke religion out , or use it to their advantage. Yet, religious institutions still find a way to survive under such regimes, in many cases (Koesel 2014); even while being used for state legitimacy, some centralized institutions have power in declaring religious truth or corporately interpreting holy texts, as is the case in Saudi Arabia.

Many changes that have taken place in these institutions are concessions after pressure from the state on issues such as entering the global economy. Examples of such changes are Saʿudi economical and technological modernization in the 1960s (Al-Rasheed 2002) and the alliance of the Catholic Church with the Italian Fascist regime (Pollard 2007). These are concessions of necessity and not changes of desire; there is a time to weigh ideals versus reality, and these religious establishments sometimes make tough decisions to retain their place in the state or to gain more power.

My work contributes to literature on historical institutions and their patterns of change. Extant literature on religion-state relations focuses too much on one religion at a time, with a few notable exceptions (Brown et al. 2024, Koesel 2014, Fox 2008). I examine both Christianity and

Islam in two vastly different political situations and regions. This case diversity allows for a broader application of the observed trends to more religiously and politically diverse cases.

Secondly, this paper focuses on the aforementioned factors (see page 4) in the two case studies to build a theory regarding the reasons behind institutional doctrinal change. Lastly, as a comparative analysis, my work shows that institutions sometimes appear unchanging because they are in a fixed or relatively secure position of power. By highlighting the political changes in the Catholic case challenging the Church's influence and the economical changes in the Saʿudi case going against certain traditional Wahhābi values, I bring a unique perspective into the literature regarding when and why such structures shift.

For this project, I have chosen to analyze the Catholic Church's place in Italy and the place of the Wahhābi establishment, now known as the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council, in Saudi Arabia. I have chosen these two specific cases for a variety of reasons. First, the two examined institutions are relatively simple to track through time, as they have existed, if not in their current form, throughout the history of each state. Second, the states are relatively the same age, so there is an equal amount of time to cover in the history of the relationship between each institution and its host state. Third, analyzing these states allows for an examination of institutions in each of the world's two largest faiths and their place within an evolving political context. Finally, this pair of states house institutions of differing ages: the Roman Catholic Church predates the modern Italian state by more than a millennium, while the Wahhābi establishment was part of the First Saʿudi state's basis for governmental legitimation. This variance provides me with more nuance to consider in my analysis of these institutions, and greatly affects the way in which they interact with the state under different political conditions.

These two case studies will be an inductive basis from which more general conclusions can be made in determining when and why religious institutions change, no matter the situation. I will be looking at each case by following along chronologically in the political events of the host state and each institution's reactionary changes. Through each case study, I examine primary sources such as ecumenical councils and papal proclamations (the First and Second Vatican Councils, "Quanta Cura"), state legal documents (*Basic System of Governance*, The Italian Constitution), and relevant joint treaties and agreements (the Lateran Pacts, September Accords), as well as secondary historical accounts (Al-Rasheed 2002, Vassiliev 1998, Duggan 2008, Pollard 1985, Hearder 1983). These documents help clarify the words and intentions of the examined establishments in each historical epoch.

This project begins with a section on theoretical logic and framework along with a review of existing literature as well as how this works contributes to it. Following that, I clarify my research methodology. This leads into both my historical case studies, the first about the Catholic Church in Italy and the second about the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council in Saudi Arabia to gather information on the evolution of those two institutions under the various regimes in their home states. Lastly, I share my theoretical conclusions, synthesizing all I have learned through this project into a set of clear and concise main points and takeaways from these case studies as it pertains to the big picture of broader religion-state relations.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The following case studies will expose the main similarities and differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Wahhābi religious establishment in Italy and Saudi Arabia, respectively. The two have unique and varying histories, but there are certain important points of convergence between the two that point to a greater overall understanding of the nature of the relationship between religious institutions and the states under which they operate. My theory focuses on the place of each institution in the state under which it operates (*autonomy*), the nature of and changes within that state (*political environment*), the structure of the institution (*hierarchy*), and its *authority* in the faith to which it belongs. These are what I hypothesize to be the main factors affecting change in religious institutions.

I focus on these issues because I view them as determinants in the behavior of each institution in a given set of political circumstances. Authority allows an institution power over a certain religious population and makes it more than a mere ideology, but a religio-political actor with sway not only over belief but also over interpretation and political views among its members. Hierarchy, or broader institutional structure, helps to organize how a given institution will be governed, and *where* the power is centralized: each institution can be described in terms usually used to describe government systems.

Some institutions take the form of an oligarchy, with those at the top making the most valuable decisions. Institutions in this group include the Orthodox churches and the Shi'a rite of Islam, as well as any other that values tradition and puts power in the hands of leaders but does

not believe in one supreme leader; that would be better described as a monarchy. The Roman Catholic and Coptic Churches are good examples of such traditions, as is Tibetan Buddhism; they submit to one supreme leader, and the rest of the institutional structure falls under that office. Finally, autonomy is an issue directly related to the power of a given institution within a specific political context. This gives rise to many questions: what power does the state have in what the institution can do or teach? Is the polity structure the other way around, where religion holds power over the government in a direct or indirect fashion? There are many scholars addressing these very issues (Mouline 2014, Crawford 2014, Brown et al. 2024, Gill 1998, Al-Awtaneh 2010), and I will use their research to do my own analysis and synthesis around this complex topic.

Points of Convergence

In building this theory, I begin by pointing out what these two cases have in common. The following points explain why the behavior of the two institutions may sometimes mirror that of each other. The fact that the cases converge on these points does not make them any less important to case variance; they merely explain similar changes that occur in different cases under certain circumstances.

Divine Preservation of Truth

The first point of convergence between the Church and the ʿUlamāʾ Council is in their tradition that they as a whole cannot be wrong and that God guides them in truth and keeps them from error in teaching. The Hanbalī tradition of Islam, one of the four main Sunni schools of jurisprudence (shariʿa), has been since its inception a powerful agent of change and uncompromising traditionalism (Crawford 2014). The Hanbalī tradition in general has a history of politicized disenfranchisement and nay-saying for the sake of its own doctrines and interests

(Crawford 2014, Mouline 2014). Certain parts of this tradition, such as the Wahhābi subschool, are considered a vital part of the Salafist movement. Early Wahhābism was centralized under Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's pact with Ibn Saʿud, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb claimed his teachings to be a return to the earliest form of Islam, with the ideas and beliefs of the Prophet and his companions having supposedly been best preserved in the Hanbalī school and revived through the Wahhābi movement.

The Catholic Church claims a similar type of divine protection, that God has spoken through the centuries through His Church and preserved its teaching ("Dei Filius," 1870). According to the Church, those official declarations of the Pope that fall under the first Vatican council's definition of "Ex Cathedra" ("Pastor Aeternus," 1870) are protected from error and become part of the official dogma of the Church. The ideas of Papal infallibility and the infallibility of ecumenical councils are central to Catholic legitimation within the Christian religion, and the legitimation of the Church not only as an authority but also as one that has the power to introduce new official teaching. All this to say, there is a convergence between the two claiming to hold the ultimate preserved truth of the Divine.[3]

Autonomy

In addition to legitimation, there have been points of history in which the autonomy of both institutions have been markedly similar, even if not simultaneously. Prior to the Faisal administration in Saudi Arabia, things were modeled in some form or fashion after the original Saʿudi-Wahhābi pact, in which the religious establishment is given freedom and autonomy and serves as a guide for a faithful monarch. Such was the case for the Catholic Church during the Italian Fascist period: the Church was directly aligned with the fascist state, but retained power over much of culture, including education, and retained autonomy in what it was to teach.

[3]While this is a *claim* to authority, it does not equate to it. See the following section for further clarification.

After the reconfiguration of the ʿUlamāʾ council to be what it is today, the similarities between these two situations grew even more, as the state now had power in choosing members of the council, just as the fascist state during its rule had the power to approve or deny leadership appointments in the Catholic Church. The modern political standing of the Roman Church is more like the old standing of the Wahhābi establishment: the Catholic Church seems to be its own entity, being afforded many individual rights and liberties and no longer subject to any royal decisions as a Church. This is a much greater degree of separation of Church and state, where the Church has itself become a state within a state. The ʿUlamāʾ council, on the other hand, while this has not always been the case, is now an official part and sometimes an instrument of the state in legitimation and centralization of political and religious power (Mouline 2014).

Scholarly literature on the issue of institutional and establishment autonomy is wide. In the fifth chapter of the forthcoming collective volume from Brown, et al., religious establishments and their formation under authoritarian regimes are discussed. The authors point out the social and political power of religious establishments and acknowledge the many roles and shapes they take in different circumstances, as well as their varying relationships to government institutions. The authors' argument is well-supported that religious institutions are able to make their own decisions regarding institutional doctrine and political action, whether or not they are part of the state. Koesel (2014) underscores the idea (Brown et al. 2024) that religious institutions, along with their ideas, are not easily oppressed or quashed, even under strongly secularist authoritarian states. It is commonly noted, "you can't kill an idea." Nor is an ideological *system* easily eradicated; rather, the system often adapts, or has a big enough cultural hold on the population that governments cannot do much in the way of making it vanish

completely. My theory is highly supported by points in each of these authors' arguments on the topic.

There is not only an agreement among *theorists* on these issues; history shows them also to prove true in Saudi Arabia and Italy. During times of relative restriction in each of their respective states, the Vatican and the ʿUlamāʾ Council still somehow maintained their freedom of expression and did not lose their right to conflict ideologically with the state. There were times when the state desired to use these institutions for their own, but they only got so far in taking advantage of them—the institutions could even be made part of the state itself, yet they always retained the right to define their own doctrines (Mouline 2014, Hertog 2010, Al-Atawneh 2009, Pollard 1985, Ceci 2017). I argue, given the history of these institutions, that under higher levels of autonomy, it is easier for institutions to change their doctrine according to necessity, but when disenfranchised—when that autonomy is violated or restricted—they change only according to the wishes of the state. Such is common in true theocracies, which many argue Saudi Arabia is not, at least in practice (Al-Atawneh 2009).

Points of Divergence

Authority

These core values of traditionalism and orthodoxy, as well as their relatively similar experiences with autonomy, are the most important points of convergence in the two cases; it is also important to examine the major differences and divergences between them. First of all, Islam lacks the total centralization of doctrinal authority present in the Roman Church today: though the Hanbalī school has long been intolerant of many ideas outside of its own interpretation of shariʿa (Crawford 2014) and has therefore been a powerful force in shaping the modern Sunni faith, it is not recognized as the one source of new divine revelation, but rather

one of four equals within the larger Sunni tradition. In fact, Islam, and especially Wahhābism, entirely rejects the idea of new doctrine, making the doctrines of the group more static or at least more difficult to change and thereafter to rationalize (pluralistically) the change that has taken place.

The Catholic Church's cultural, religious, and political legacy is one of hegemony. Though it may not hold the formal power it once did (Donovan 2003), it was formative to European society as we know it, and hit the height of its power in the Middle Ages. It claims to be unchanging, but has every right to "redefine" or "clarify" doctrine, making it malleable according to the necessity of the pontiff and other Church leadership. One basic and crucial doctrine of the Church, based on Matthew 16:18b (ESV), "...upon this rock I will build my [C]hurch, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," is that the proclamations and doctrines of the Church are infallible, specifically those in Scripture as well as official publications of Church councils and *Ex Cathedra* Papal declarations. As previously discussed, both institutions have some claim or another to such authority, but the Catholic Church's former political and social hegemony leads Catholic believers to truly believe so, giving the Church true authority over its part of Christendom.

For the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council, though the Wahhābi school claims (as many other fundamentalist groups) that its particular interpretation of theology is pure and unchanging (Crawford 2014, Al-Rasheed 2002), true doctrinal authority is not the reality. Saʿudi national Sunni believers submit to the proclamations of the government, but they have no reason to all be strict Wahhābis; the only infallible text in Islam is the Qur'ān, and the Hadīths follow it in importance. This means that even if a fatwa is given from the council, it does not affect anything

outside of the borders of Saudi Arabia, and Sunni believers would be less willing to accept new doctrinal interpretations from the council than Catholics would from the Vatican.

Based on these two cases, I posit that in cases of higher religious authority, the institution will be prone to doctrinal change according to the necessity of high leadership in preserving the institution's influence, autonomy, and relevance. This means that the institution is free to change doctrine as it sees fit, but it must only do so when necessary and make such changes subtle so as not to directly conflict with its own historical doctrine or arouse suspicion among the laity. In cases of low authority, the institution will not change unless forced by an outside power, namely, the governmental authority to which it submits. Such institutions do not have to worry about keeping attention, money, or support from the public, as they do not hold the same power or influence. There is simply no incentive for these establishments to change without pressure from the outside. They will, of course, still change with time and political pressure, as their popularity is dependent upon the will of their laity and not that of those at the top.

Hierarchy

The second point of divergence between these two traditions is in their structural hierarchy (or lack thereof). Since its inception, the Catholic Church has always recognized the Pope as the one supreme leader of the Church. The Mufti system used to be the norm for Saʿudi Muslims, prior to the governmental and societal changes that took place during the 1960s and 1970s Faisal administration (Al-Rasheed 2002, Mouline 2014). Many Muftis served as unofficial ideological heads of the ʿUlamāʾ council or smaller sections of it and therefore created some ideological hierarchy with their charisma and personality. However, prior to an action by the state during the rule of King Faisal that pulled the religious establishment closer to the state and

imposed a forced hierarchy (Huyette 1985), the organization could be considered more of a "round-table" group.

The strict hierarchy of the Catholic Church centralizes the authority it holds in one place and reduces the number of actors needed to make a decision. This makes decision-making and consensus among leaders simple. This is an institutional form of polarity; the more voices in a conversation, the harder it is to reach a unilateral decision, and vice versa (Græger et al. 2022). This makes it easier to change things within an organization, and I therefore theorize that the more structured and hierarchical a given institution is, the more it will change. The converse would also follow: the less hierarchical an institution, that is, the more actors there are at the top level of authority, the less that institution will be able to effectively make decisions, implement change, or reform internally. This perpetuates fundamentalist and more broadly conservative structures within the organization.

Political Environment

If religious institutions are political actors (Brown et al. 2024), it follows that they not only *act* in the political system, but that the relationship is also *reactive*. As political circumstances change, these institutions must adapt. As will be discussed in the coming chapter on Italy, the Catholic Church has changed drastically under different political circumstances (Pollard 1985, Ceci 2017). The Italian state has not always taken the same shape, and even the unification process when it was first becoming a kingdom forced the Catholic Church into a very difficult position, removing the Pope from political rule in the Papal States (Lang 2008). In Saudi Arabia, while the type of government has not changed much between the three Kingdoms, relatively recent economic and social changes (Hertog 2007, Mouline 2014) have forced the

religious establishment to reconcile their new circumstances with former doctrinal norms of separatism.

I argue that the political milieu in which institutions find themselves directly determines their political power, and thereby affects necessary adaptations in structure and doctrine. It is logical that democracy allows for natural institutional popularity and cultural power, which gives these institutions indirect political power among certain groups; under truly democratic regimes, these institutions are free to publish what they wish, and if vocal, act as an influential participant in elections and other democratic proceedings. Under secularist autocratic regimes (not to be confused with *secular* ones), religions often find themselves in need of a large cultural movement or a government coalition to stay afloat, and they are often successful in the matter (Koesel 2014). If the regime is secular, but not secularist, the institution may need to form political alliances, as the Catholic Church did under the fascist regime (Pollard 1985, Lateran Treaty), or may be in a relatively safe position if their authority is not high or if their ideals do not conflict with those of the government in any significant way. Finally, under autocratic or oligarchic theocracy, one institution is given full power, while all others are invariably disenfranchised or even banned outright as a system of belief. Over the history of the two case studies, my project tests and emphasizes institutional reactions to democracies and autocracies of both the secular and religiously affiliated (though not outright theocratic) varieties.

What Affects Case Similarity?

Why do these points of divergence exist, and how do they limit what we can take away from these cases? I argue that they exist largely as a result of the differing natures of these two religions at large: Catholicism has always been highly centralized in power, hierarchy, and teaching, whereas Islam has more of a concretely fixed nature in teaching (at least among certain

sects), given that Muhammad is considered the last of the prophets. Catholic doctrine is more fluid: although it operates around a closed canon of scripture, it allows for certain variance in teaching and doctrine as well as new proclamations of dogma.[4] Islam was centralized and relatively controlled during the time of Muhammad and shortly thereafter during the caliphate age, but even then sects were formed very quickly after the prophet's death (Holt et al. 1977), with great controversy surrounding who should have been his successor. Islam quickly became strongly sectarian, which paved the way for fundamentalist ideological conquest such as that of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb to take place.

Aside from authority, there is the issue of each analyzed institution's on-paper ability to adapt according to its circumstances. For the Roman Church, this has not always been simple, given the many political and social challenges it has faced, but it has always had a way of legitimizing itself in the eyes of believers by holding the power to "clarify" doctrine, as cited above. This makes it much easier for Catholics, both clerics and laity alike, to reconcile within themselves a certain type of ideological pluralism, holding that the Church and its doctrine do not change but rather that it simply must redefine each pre-existing doctrine according to the age in which it finds itself. Wahhābism, on the other hand, being a hardline traditionalist movement, must be entirely consistent in teaching, especially now that its values have been clearly defined and are well-known in the Muslim community. It had the capability to be more flexible in teaching on certain topics in its early days, as Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was building his ideological empire, but it was rather rigid and restricted thereafter until new phenomena in oil state age opened up possibilities for "new" doctrinal application and definition.

[4]In a Catholic context, *dogma* refers to any doctrine on which the Church does not allow for more than one interpretation. If one rejects even one piece of dogma, that person cannot call themselves Catholic.

Another thing affecting the different identities the Church and the council have relative to their host state is their age. The Catholic Church predates the Italian state by approximately 1800 years, whereas the ʿUlamāʾ Council came into informal existence following the death of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in 1792 (Crawford 2014). The former derives its authority from tradition and a large following; the latter derives its authority from the 1744 pact securing its place in the Saʿudi state as a religious guide to the monarchy. The Catholic Church formed independently from Italy and has therefore had a largely varying standing within that state as it evolved; the Council's administrative role in giving fatwas and advising the King has not officially changed at any point. Though both institutions have maintained autonomy and freedom of doctrine during political shifts, there has never been a shift in the balance of direct power between the monarchy and the Council; the monarchy has always been the ultimate authority in the Saʿudi state.

Research Methodology

For the purposes of theory-building in this project, I use a mixed approach to historical methodology: I will do a comparative history of religious institutions in Italy and Saudi Arabia, conducting my research according to the practices and standards of historical institutionalism (Pierson 2004, Hogan 2006). My writing focuses on the tangible doctrinal changes in religious institutions since the middle of the eighteenth century, exposing large changes taking place around critical social and political junctures threatening the institution's sanctity, individual identity, autonomy, and/or importance in society. Some may say that the timeframe I have chosen is a rather broad scope that ultimately hinders the project in depth by not exploring the details of a smaller chunk of institutional history; I argue that I have sacrificed depth pursuant to giving readers a fuller picture of these institutions and their societal evolution.

Regarding doctrinal change in the Catholic Church, the primary data to which I pay closest attention are official publications from the Church and the Italian government (Italian Constitution, Lateran Pacts, Vatican Councils, Bible), as the Church is authoritative and dogmatic, almost governmental in structure, and its historical relationship with the government, as well as its beliefs, can be found in councils, treaties, creeds, confessions, and Papal proclamations. As it pertains to the ʿUlamāʾ Council, on the other hand, I prefer to focus on governmental decisions and legal documents (*Basic System of Governance*, Al-Rasheed 2002, Crawford 2014) broader ideological bases for council decisions, rather than fatwas published by the council which are by nature subjective. As discussed in the previous section, I find that the council does not like change or reformation, except that which formed its basis; this makes it imperative that outside pressures and powers be observed as a basis for any change.

I have conducted this research inductively, forming first a base of knowledge upon which to build my theory rather than taking a deductive approach, working from my assumptions outward. This was a necessary step as I needed to familiarize myself with existing literature on the topic in order to form an educated opinion on the matter. A comparative history of these two institutions within their host states is a fair and reliable data strategy, as the two cases share many similarities, and their differences are key to theory-building. The cases in questions are also ideal for comparison as they allow more than one major religion to be included in analysis, expanding the topical breadth in application of this research project.

Friends in High Places: The Catholic Church in Italy

"...[Y]ou are Peter; and on this rock I will build my [C]hurch, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (ESV, Matt. 16:18). This verse is commonly cited by Catholic believers, leaders, and scholars as the main scriptural basis for the existence and perpetual authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church claims that its head has been Rome since the Apostolic Age, and the Bishop of Rome has always been the Supreme Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on Earth, since the papacy of Saint Simon Peter. Along with scripture, the Church teaches that ecumenical councils and their proclamations, as well as the Pope's *Ex Cathedra* ("from the Chair [of Peter]") proclamations are infallible[5] and dogmatic, divinely protected from the blemish of human error. However, these claims of constancy are simply false—there have been numerous changes in Catholic doctrine, especially that regarding the fate of non-Catholics and the Church's attitudes regarding liberalism.[6] In this chapter, I investigate historical Catholic documents and the various political standings in which the Church found itself at the time of each document's publication.

I argue that the changes in the Catholic Church since the fall of the development of the Italian state have taken place due to its high authority and hierarchy, strengthened during the First Vatican Council, and the fact that it has maintained relative autonomy throughout the centuries. I find that the Church has weathered many points of rapid change in the evolving Italian state with grace and dexterity, and that the changes which have taken place have affected

[5]Since Vatican I.
[6]Compare Second Vatican Council documents, specifically "Unitatis Redintegratio", "Orientalium Ecclesiarum", & "Nostra Aetate", with the proclamations of the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council in "Dei Filius" regarding other sects and religions.

the Church's standing in the state, and in larger politics, but that the Church has retained its global influence and authority in matters of doctrine and thereby the devout Catholic voter bases in democratic countries.

To analyze reasons for the changes in Catholic ecumenism and doctrine in the past few centuries, I examine the historical critical junctures formative to the Church's relationship with the Italian state during the nineteenth century, including shifts in political power and official Church responses as well as smaller and more gradual changes such as the growth of individualism and the move toward social liberalism. Prior to the nineteenth century, throughout the Middle Ages, the territories making up much of modern-day Italy were known as the Papal States, ruled and governed officially by the Catholic Church and headed by the Pope. This temporal rule, however, did not go uninterrupted during that period, and it was not to last. The Papacy's final stint of official governance lasted between 1814 and 1870, during which the Roman Church went through a period of self-evaluation and revival. As the Risorgimento continued and th eKingdom of Italy grew, This set the tone for Italian cultural formation and identity for purposes of strengthened legitimacy and unity (Lang 2008).

The Church in the State-Building Period

However, the Church was all the while inadvertently undermining itself, laying the groundwork for the formation of an entirely new state that was Catholic in identity but not in governance. Unification efforts, known in Italian as the *Risorgimento*, formed in the peninsula, inspired by European modernization and revolution. The Papal States, which had been the official legal jurisdiction of the Catholic Church for a millenium, encompassed what is today northern and central Italy, and these states' sovereignty was completely overthrown during the Risorgimento (Lang 2008). A catalyst for the expansion and nationalization of the Kingdom of

Italy was the life and military work of Napoleon Bonaparte, whose heritage was Italian and who was quickly overtaking much of Europe. French conquest during this time prompted others to start their own movements, and the expansion of the empire into Italy helped to start the process of unification (Beales & Biagini 2002).

Though it did not exist as one united political state for a long while, Italy had existed for a significant period of time before the Kingdom's creation and unification. Italian identity is something which has taken many shapes, extending back more than a thousand years (Hearder 1983), and Neopolitan and Turinian movements led to the nationalization of a new Italian monarchy. After a hard-fought revolution against the Austrian occupiers (Beales & Biagini 2002), a group of militia began to encroach on Papal lands and authority, eventually establishing the Kingdom of Italy, overtaking Rome in 1870 (Duggan 2008). This move relieved the Pope of the onus of power; the Kingdom had attacked and claimed for themselves the geographical center of the Papal States (Perin 2020), and the Pope had this time lost his governing power in a permanent way.

Nearly six years prior to the fall of Rome, Pope Pius IX published an encyclical ("Quanta Cura", 1864) in which he thoroughly condemned many modernist ideas of the age that he deemed dangerous or unchristian. The pontiff saw many in the faith, leaders and laymen alike, ceding to such thinking and falling into liberalism from both a political and a theological standpoint. He also saw the political power of the Church being lost little by little (Lang 2008), and was doing everything in his power to combat it. The tail of the encyclical contains a numbered list of different errors inconsistent with the Church's doctrinal interpretation at the time, in a subsection entitled the Syllabus of Errors. The syllabus lists 80 different beliefs found by the Pontiff to be erroneous, the most notable points of which are the emphasis of the Church's

autonomy and authority and the rejection of political and theological liberalism ("Quanta Cura" [Syllabus of Errors, points 15-18, 77-80]), as well as the "modernist heresy" (Burns 1990). These points, held by many in the Catholic community as proclamations coming from the highest source apart from God Himself, promoted a favorable view of the Papal States and authority, and further supported Church governance.

In the years following this encyclical and leading up to the invasion of Rome, during which Papal lands were gradually being lost to unification militia, the Church called a new ecumenical council, the first one to occur since the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. This council, the First Vatican Council or Vatican I, was cut short by the aforementioned sacking of Rome in 1870, but the completed and published documents thereof detail a constitution of Catholic dogma and officially defined the doctrine of Papal infallibility *Ex Cathedra* ("Pastor Aeternus", "Dei Filius"). This was a political move designed to solidify the authority and power of the Papacy, and one that served the Church well even after Rome's fall.

The Risorgimento meant that the Church needed to redefine its role and reaffirm its place in society. As the papacy lost "temporal" (that is, temporary, of this world and not the eternal afterlife) power, Pius IX and the rest of the council pushed to solidify the Church's cultural power. The clarifications given in these documents, as well as the official proclamation of the Pope's infallibility, helped to solidify the authority the Church has over its constituents, as well as rebuking anyone or anything that may have been trying to undermine their autonomy. This shows critical junctures, specifically those that threaten change in the state or religious institution that ultimately dies the Church, provide enough incentive for that institution or establishment to revise its beliefs and values.

The state, however, also being a human-run institution, has its own set of values and routinely reacts according to similar rules. If it feels threatened by that institution or one like it, the state will enact laws protecting itself or to hurt the religious establishment itself. One such example is the Law of Guarantees, an 1871 Italian law and part of a broader group of anti-clerical laws in the new kingdom during the 1870s and 1880s (Beales & Biagini 2002). With this law, the state found a way to rationalize its independence from the Pope and effectively redefined who the Pope was in Italian Roman church relations with Catholic communities.

With this and other anticlerical laws (Hearder 1983), the state and the Church had found a way to peacefully coexist, at least from the perspective of the state. For the Church, on the other hand, these laws were taken as an attack and a restriction. The Pope responded to these state definitions of his power and his role within the state with a new encyclical entitled "Ubi Nos" (1871), in which he detailed the rights and roles of the Papacy and the incompatibility of these roles with the existence and political sovereignty of the Italian Kingdom. This is an example of institutional stubbornness in the face of state change, and came just three years after the *Non Expedit* proclamation (Duggan 2008), telling Catholics not to participate in the elections and other political goings-on in the new Italian Kingdom so as not to legitimize it.

The Fascist period was one of chaos for Italy and its relationship with the Church, but was integral in defining the relationship that still exists between the two today (Ferrari 1995). After the Kingdom of Italy had overtaken the city of Rome for itself, the papacy did not bow so easily, but rather resisted for a time, at least ideologically, in that it did not formally recognize the political and legal status of the Kingdom. This is evidenced in Popes' insistence on a lack of political participation and action among Catholics in Europe from Pius IX through Pius XI, a preference continually ignored and directly disobeyed by many European Catholics at the time

(Pollard 2007, Perin 2020). Despite the Vatican's clear teaching and policy regarding the new kingdom, certain Catholics regarded the state of politics in Italy as needing Catholic intervention and influence in order that these values might be protected in Italian law and culture. The Italian People's Party was formed in 1919 by a coalition of Catholic believers in such a body, and the Vatican, though unwilling that this should be organized in the first place, was forced to accept this reality until the rise of the Italian Fascist regime (Donovan 2003), during which this party fell apart, split across lines of support for the coming dictatorship.

The Church Under Fascism

Under the Prime Ministry of Benito Mussolini, the church saw its opportunity to secure its place in Italian culture and to secure the safety of the Catholic residents of that country under that government. It was at this time that the church signed the Lateran Pacts (also known as the Lateran Treaty), a triad of documents outlining an agreement between the Catholic Church and the newly fascist state. In the treaty, the Church put forth a statement of support for religious freedom for it and its constituents, and began to enjoy its freedom as a politically autonomous entity, the newly formed Vatican City (Pollard 1985, Thomas 2005, Lateran Pacts). The state also paid reparations, to the tune of what is today about two billion U.S. dollars, to the Church in exchange for all the lands lost in unification and the destruction of one historical basilica. In return, the Church relinquished some of its own internal autonomy in staffing its parishes and dioceses (see Lateran Pacts, Concordat, articles XIX-XXII), and each appointed church leader, especially a bishop, was expected to take a solemn vow of allegiance to the Italian fascist regime.

In her book *The Vatican and Mussolini's Italy*, Lucia Ceci describes the nature of the aforementioned documents and what they meant for the relationship between the Church and Mussolini's Fascist style of governance; though the Church could "recognize the crimes of the

regime, and clearly… spell them out" (Ceci 2017), why did the Catholic community in Italy fall prey to Fascist rhetoric? The answer: the Church was making the best of a bad situation, but in so doing, it was officially endorsing the Fascist regime and making an alliance with it. This happened for a few reasons, chief of which is that the Church, anti-communist in all its dealings (Gryzmala-Busse 2016) and anti-liberal in its political ideology, saw the regime as a way to limit certain negative effects of social and religious modernization.

Following the ratification of the Lateran Pacts in 1929, the September Accords of 1931 were an agreement between the state and the Church regarding Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action, AC), a Catholic activist group operating even further than Italy's borders; this movement was active throughout the world, but especially active in South America (Gill 1998). The agreement stipulated that the activity of AC would be uninterrupted and unimpeded by Italian authorities, so long as members would abstain from political activism and campaigning. This group's activity had been one of the final points of political contention between the Church and its patron state, and was now solved. It would seem the Church had put itself in a rather comfortable position, despite the new restrictions placed on it; it was not bound by the state in any way other than in selecting clergy, and had been given powers of education, as well as autonomy in many ways, allowing for the creation of the Vatican City and for the continued power of the Church in defining doctrine.

Post-War Partisan Politics

During the government's restructuring period, a significant number of Catholic Action members coaligned to form the Italian Christian Democratic Party (CDP), a political movement and revival of the Italian People's Party by Catholics adapting to the liberality of the new state (Webb 1958, Donovan 2003). This movement was at first met with much Church pushback, as

its stance had long been one of outright distaste toward liberal political leanings and governance. The two terms, “Christian” and “democracy”, were seemingly incompatible and in fact oxymoronic when placed together. However, the Church again needed to secure its own place under the new regime, especially given the rise of communist and broader Marxist movements in newly democratic Western Europe (Grzymala-Busse 2016, Webb 1958).

The CDP only had a chance to flourish once a new Italian constitution was written up, and this document took quite a bit of time to be ratified in Italy (Pollard 2011, Webb 1958). The new Italian constitution redefines the on-paper relationship between Church and state, and the implementation of this new plan for political and ideological cooperation is foggy and inconsistent but generally growing over time. As has been mentioned, certain structures and other parts of the agreement between the Vatican and the formerly Fascist state were not to be entirely abolished, but the nature of the relationship between the two changed significantly. The Church started this period with much remaining political power, which it exercised through its influence on the Catholic majority of Italian society. Over a period of thirty to forty years, however, secularization started to overcome the country, and things explicitly against Catholic doctrine were signed into law, such as the legality of abortion and divorce (Duggan 2008). This showed the limits of the Church’s power and the foretold “negative” effects of liberalism on society (that is, those effects ousting Catholic morality, against which the Church has staunchly stood).

One immediate change in the Church’s place in society under the new republican constitution of Italy was that of religious freedom’s introduction to the country: while the fascist state had certainly not been a theocracy, the Church had been in an official and enforced position above the Italian people, and there was not much room at that time for individual thought and

belief. The newfound liberal values of the mid-twentieth century were big steps for Italy, but at the same time, the state continued to show the Catholic Church favoritism in its dealings with religious institutions (Ferrari 1995); there was a difference between what was written on paper (Constitution, Art. VII-VIII, XIX) and what was put into practice for the Italian people.

The Catholic Church, eventually realizing the benefits of a political coalition in this new political system, eventually supported, if implicitly, the Christian Democratic Party, and it rose in popularity among Italians to beat out even socialist and communist movements, the other two major political parties of the time. The CDP kept Catholicism and Catholic morality supreme for a short time in Italy. The party remained in power for a long while following the war, relying on the Vatican for support even until the 1990s (Donovan 2003). It was at that time that Italian society hit a critical point, and the reality was made clear to the Church that it had lost its previously vast influence.

The Church in the Post-War Period

The relative comfort of the Church during the Fascist period, however strategically built, was not to last. The fall of the fascist state in 1943 brought about a new age, and post-WWII Europe quickly became a vestige of liberalism and cross-national unity. For the Church, this new era, though certainly a less restrictive one, would bring its own challenges. As individualism grew under new liberal regimes, the Church's began to decline. Additionally, it was taken out of the former position it had on a national level during the rule of Mussolini. For this reason, and because of the vast social and political changes taking place not only in Europe but also worldwide (Gill 1998), including Italy's move to join the European Union, the Church chose to hold an ecumenical council, the goal of which was to define its place in this modern world. The council, the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II, took place over a period of three years and

produced sixteen documents, each one focused either on an issue of doctrine, tradition, magisterium, or Catholic morals; on an issue of Church identity in the modern world; or on reform to take place in certain practices.

Some of the most important changes that took place during Vatican II are contained within *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Unitatis Redintegratio, Orientalium Ecclesiarum,* and *Dignitatis Humanae*, council publications concerning liturgical revival and reform, changes in Church doctrine regarding the salvation of non-Catholics, and the Church's response to modern liberal values, respectively. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* outlines modernization in the liturgy, including a move to offering the mass in the mother tongue of parishioners rather than in Latin only. *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, while they uphold a call to all other Christian churches and traditions to submit to Rome, changed the formerly hardline stance and interpretation of "Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus."[7] The Catholic view of Protestantism and other Christian rites changed in this way to include them as misguided brethren, rather than heretics. *Dignitatis Humanae* recognized the positives of all major religions, as well as the dignity of each person to discover truth for himself. While the Church did not waver on what it believed the ultimate truth to be, this was certainly a significant pivot from Pius IX's teachings in the *Syllabus of Errors*, especially points 15-18 on world religions: the Church now viewed those religions as valuable and respectable, though errant. In addition to these, *Gravissimum Educationis*, while not a source of change during this period, is a very important document in Vatican II and is partially the Church's response to having lost its homogeneity over Italian educational curricula. This document calls on Catholics to place education high on their list of values.

Broader changes in Italian political structures after WWII featured a transition out of an era of monarchy and fascism into its current political structure in 1946, fundamentally and

[7]Latin for "outside the Church [there is] no salvation"

permanently changing the nature of its relationship with the Church. One thing that never completely vanished until the secularization period, however, was the Church's influence on Italian culture and the Italian population. The Vatican City also never lost its autonomy within the new Italian state, and the Roman Church therefore retained a good amount of political power, though the government was now officially in the hands of the people.

Religion in a Supranational State

In the late twentieth century, the state underwent some more major legal changes to reflect its new more socially liberal leanings, likely as a result of its new alliance with the European Union that began in 1958. The state became much more liberal regarding divorce, education, abortion, stem-cell technology and same-sex marriage, a side of these issues against which the Catholic church stands staunchly even to this day (Grzymala-Busse 2016). For this reason, the Catholic Church was measured as having been low in impact in the state's modernization process: though the majority of Italy's population was in agreement with the Catholic Church, legislation was out of their hands, so any influence the Church had at that time was rather indirect through its influence on public opinion and its coalition with the aforementioned ruling political party. The Church's legal influence has remained as such until today, and Italian society has largely moved away from the faith as a steadfast basis for morals (Donovan 2003).

The role of the Catholic Church in politics has varied widely through time, and its role today is an active but indirect one, as it pushes for populist and globalist social values throughout the world, having lost its official political power in Italy but retaining its influence in the world today (Bailey & Driessen 2016, Pavolini et al. 2021). The changes that have taken place in the past thirty years have confirmed the fact that Church teaching changes as often as the weather;

while the Church used to work strongly against populist values, today it promotes them. The Church today promotes open immigration policies and increased subsidized social assistance (Pavolini et al. 2021), likely because it used to be the major responsible party for said assistance throughout the West, but has since been pushed out of the role. The Church is also more actively world-facing today than it was in the past: since the ministry of St. Theresa, the Church has shifted its focus from being based on its ubiquity in the West to a more inclusive and actively evangelical and charitable ministry model. This is certainly positive change, but it is change nonetheless, and still ultimately serves the Church's political and social interests.

Vatican I and II, as well as Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* and the various agreements drawn up between the Church and the Italian fascist regime, reveal how the nature of the Church and its doctrines and dogmas have evolved over time to fit each historical epoch, changing with the times rather than changing surrounding culture and society as a whole. This shows that religion is in many cases something that changes with time, and religious institutions, like any others, act frequently in their own interests. It seems that the Church, though it claims to be fixed in eternal truth and infallible dogma, has frequently changed its doctrinal interpretations and attitudes, especially as regards its place in the international system and the style of governance that it believes best serves the general needs and interests of the Catholic laity.

The Roman Catholic Church's historical relationship to Italian politics and the evolving and reactionary nature of that relationship show the Church operating in a similar way to other political systems and organizations, acting in its own interests and the interests of its clergy and laity. This is an important point regarding the Church, especially as it claims itself to be the unchanging font of heavenly wisdom, holding to Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium; one of these is neglected by the Church or, if not neglected, falls in and of itself as a logically consistent

source. In light of all this, for scholars to treat the Church as a static being is irresponsible and unhelpful. The relationship between the Church and the state surrounding it is the same in nature, if not in deed, as that between a religiously affiliated political group or party such as Hezbollah and the Lebanese state, mutually reactive and ever-evolving.

All the King's Men: a Case Study of the Saʿudi Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council

The Saʿudi state is a political and religious enigma in the fields of political science, history, and anthropology. Its origins and development are something to behold, and its historical placement of itself as a pure and unstained state (Al-Rasheed 2002, Mouline 2014) is a legacy that, while it does not always hold true, precedes it at any time during conversation. The stewardship of the Hijaz region, the traditional social and religious values, and the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council have been historical reasons for the preservation of this state's reputation.

In stark contrast with the previous case study of the Catholic Church in Italy, Saudi Arabia has not had one constant centralized and authoritative religious institution acting on its own. In fact, the sheer nature of post-Caliphate Islam has never been truly centralized on any scale larger than a national one; clerics of Islam have worked together and individually in defining shariʿa and general Muslim morality, but there is no way to make their fatwas and proclamations universally accepted within the Muslim community except through governmental enforcement. In Saudi Arabia, however, the government has always been strongly intertwined with religion, and this evolved in a crucial way in the 1971 instatement of the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council as an official state body.

In this chapter, I argue that the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council, as well as other historical forms of the Wahhābi religious establishment, have been an important part of Saʿudi society, in shaping national religious identity and social norms. However, the circumstances under which said establishment finds itself changes the way it interacts with the state. I justify my argument by

examining the history of the Saʿudi state and the evolving role of the Wahhābi establishment therein, focusing on changes in the political environment, autonomy, and institutional structure to explain changes in their doctrine. The council's place in the state has fluctuated over the years, as has its ideology and the strength of the legal enforcement and application thereof. I analyze critical junctures in the relationship between the council and the Kingdom as openings for needed modernization and change for purposes of national and institutional preservation.

Furthermore, I conclude that the Wahhābi establishment is by nature cemented in autonomy, though its current state of government centralization certainly limits its power and influence. I also posit that the establishment's historical non-hierarchical structure allowed for checks and balances between members but also created a political structure wherein change and progress are impeded due to strict conservatism among certain sectaries, but due to recent imposition of hierarchy, the situation has changed. The authority of the institution in Islam is tangible in Saudi Arabia, but this authority not extending further than its own state makes its interests simpler than other institutions, and it therefore has little incentive to change on its own. Finally, having moved from an independent institution to become an official part and protectorate of the state (Al-Rasheed 2002, Vassiliev 1998, Huyette 1985, Bligh 1985), the institution has sacrificed some legitimacy in conflicting with monarchical decisions and decrees, and even before then, it had no political authority to check the monarchy on legal decisions and eventually had to let certain issues go, such as international economic participation (Bunzel 2023).

Saudi Arabia has long been held as the central area of importance to the Islamic faith. Millions of Muslim believers make pilgrimages (Ḥajj) to the state annually in order to fulfill one of the five pillars of their faith and show veneration to champions of their religion such as

Ibrahim (Abraham) and Adam. The historical governance within Saudi's borders has been Islamic, but the road to the modern conception of this state is a long and winding one. This chapter will serve to flesh out the history of governance since the formation of the first Saʿudi state and expose the nature of the evolving relationship between that state and Islamic religious institutions.

Religion in The First Saʿudi State (Emirate of Dirʿiyah)

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy. The Saʿudi state's history begins in the mid-18th century, with the political and religious alliance of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdul Wahhāb, a Najdi sheikh, and Muḥammad ibn Saʿud, a regional ruler in Dirʿiyah, a city just north of modern-day Riyadh. In 1744, the two made a pact with one another to work together in building what was to be the First Saʿudi State. This pact was established to accomplish two goals. First, ʿAbdul Wahhāb desired jihād and the reestablishment of what he interpreted to be traditional Muslim values and teachings (a fundamentalist iconoclastic ideological system now called Wahhābism) in the land (Al-Rasheed 2002, Crawford 2014); second, ibn Saʿud desired political power and domination, and through that, the unification of Arabia.

The two promised each other that the desires of the other would be fulfilled and that they would unite Arabia under a new Islamic regime. ʿAbdul Wahhāb was the ideological leader, convincing people of his ways, and Ibn Saʿud acted as a sort of enforcer, fighting where the message was not accepted and raiding where the peace was not kept. They founded what is now known in history as the First Saʿudi State or the Emirate of Dirʿiyah (Al-Rasheed 2002, Vassiliev 1998), which started as ʿAbdul Wahhāb as the official religious leader and ibn Saʿud as self-proclaimed king along with small coalition of a few associate countrymen, but grew through their conquest of more land into a strong movement and powerful conquering force. Part of the

pact was that ʿAbdul Wahhāb and his family (known today as Āl al-Sheikh) would always remain in religious power and would support the Saʿuds in their rule (Al-Rasheed 2002). As shall be discussed, however, this part of the pact did not always hold up.

Before going into the complexities and nuances of the development of this first Saʿudi state, it is important to highlight key pieces of background information as to why ʿAbdul Wahhāb made this pact with Ibn Saʿud and what his motivation was in calling for jihad in the land. ʿAbdul Wahhāb, like many prominent religious reformers, read and studied holy texts and tradition for a significant time before beginning his ideological movement, being brought up in a religious family and having as a father a prominent Mufti in the central Saʿudi Najd region (Crawford 2014). He read and was largely influenced by the works of such Islamic scholars as Ibn Taymiyyah, from whom he took his idea of tawḥīd[8] and of religious political ideology (Kechichian 1986).

The Sheikh's (ʿAbdul Wahhāb's) legacy in Saʿudi governance lasts even until today, making analysis of his leanings important for understanding the Wahhābi establishment throughout Saʿudi history. Wahhāb's conception of tawḥīd set him apart from other Muslim teachers and scholars in that he revered nobody and nothing else other than God himself, and according to his family's sect of the Hanbalī Islamic tradition, he was not at all accommodating to others and their views on such issues. For this reason and because Najdi culture was heterogenous and decentralized at the time (Crawford 2014), the scholar looked around him and saw many things that were in desperate need of reform. His countrymen, as they had in the time of Ibn Taymiyyah, had no true central religious governing body, and were venerating and making pilgrimages to historic gravesites and other human-honoring sites (Crawford 2014). According to

[8]Literally translated as "unification," this Arabic word is used in religious contexts to refer to the oneness and singular nature of God.

ʿAbdul Wahhāb's strict interpretation of the Qur'anic ethic of the regulative principle of worship, these people were committing *shirk*, or idolatry, as well as *bid'a*, innovation and within the religion, otherwise known as heresy. ʿAbdul Wahhāb saw what was happening to the people under which he was raised and desired for it something higher and better. Here began his aspirations to become the chief religious leader of the Najd, which led him to work with Ibn Saʿud beginning in 1744.

Figure 1. The Emirate of Dirʿiyah and its evolution until the height of its reign. © 2023 Abdur-Rahman Abdul-Moneim

Over the course of about a century, under the direction of the Saʿuds with the assistance and qadi[9]-like presence (Kechichian 1986) of Ibn ʿAbdul Wahhāb, the Kingdom grew outward from Dirʿiyah and overtook most of the geographical peninsular lands, taking land and resources under their control either by choice of the people or by forceful raiding. The role of Wahhāb and his ideals was by no means a small part of what was going on; his ideals provided a great basis for political legitimacy, appealing to different groups of people for different reasons. For those

[9]An Islamic judge, who gives judgements based on shariʿa and gives orders for fatwas to be carried out.

living in oases, sedentary Saʿudi communities, tawḥīd was something that set ʿAbdul Wahhāb apart from other ʿulamāʾ of his day (Al-Rasheed 2002); this applied also to tribal communities in the Najd, the central region of the Arabian peninsula. However, more appealing to the latter group was the focus on fiqh,[10] something the regional ʿulamāʾ, and thereby the people, had a rather vested scholarly and societal interest in. It is seen here that the basis of Saʿudi government is formed by the religious leanings and interpretation of one man, combined with the personal power aspirations of another as well as a population with a desire for religious reform which was therefore susceptible to new ideologies promising traditional beliefs and values.

There is a direct link between the men that founded the first Saʿudi emirate and the men we find ruling the country today: a similar line of succession continued in the second Saʿudi state, and continues still now in the third, legitimizing the current kings' rule as a result of the religious government and political domination of their forefathers, as well as the original pact between ʿAbdul Wahhāb and ibn Saʿud. Not only do the kings derive their legitimacy from history, but the ʿulamāʾ do, as well; since the first state, religious scholars have worked alongside, yet separately from, the government (at least until Faisal's rule, and certainly not without notable hiccups and speed bumps along the way). These ʿulamāʾ derive their legitimacy from two sources, those being 1) a strict holding to ʿAbdul Wahhāb's original central ideas of tawḥīd and state-centralized fiqh and 2) a familial connection (Al-Atawneh 2010) linking them to ʿAbdul Wahhāb himself, which keeps them covered by the terms of the Saʿudi-Wahhābi pact.

Though the shape of the ʿulamāʾ has frequently changed, as well as its official role in the state, its internal practices have not. Council members today issue fatwas just as they always have; the thing that has changed most of all is that the monarchy has officially named itself supreme in governmental decisions, and the council is merely serving more as a high advisory

[10]The Arabic Term for Islamic jurisprudence.

committee today. However, as previously discussed, there have been moments in Saʿudi history with which the Wahhābi establishment has needed to adapt its ideology in order to preserve its place and preserve the monarchy's legitimacy, such as the opening of the country to the international oil trade. The reason the council allowed for that is that the council today enjoys a comfortable place, and those men who sit on the council have great incentive as religious leaders to preserve the state in which they live, lest they fall from power and influence. These men are sincerely following their religious beliefs, and can best serve the umma from the place in which they are currently situated. In the first state, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdul Wahhāb was the head of the Saʿudi religious order until his death in 1792. As stated in the pact, his son took his place, just as Ibn Saʿud's son took over rule of the Kingdom following his death.

The First Saʿudi State plateaued near the size that it is today. Due to continued raiding in occupied areas and a resulting lack of popularity among its own citizens, that state fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1818, followed by the destruction of Dirʿiyah in 1819. The Ottomans attacked because Saʿudi forces had overtaken the Ḥijāz, the western region of Saudi Arabia in which Mecca and Medīnah are located. With these cities being so holy in the Islamic faith, and with the Ottoman Empire seeking to be a revival of the earlier caliphates (Lambton 1981), that state needed political control of the aforementioned region in order for its claim to power to be legitimate. It is interesting to note here that one Islamic empire, in pursuit of reestablishing the caliphate and legitimizing their own rule, overtook another, though the two claimed to have the same religious basis for their governance. The Ottomans and Saʿuds had vastly different ideologies and rationalizations for their religious legitimation, but the motivations for the two empires in fighting for control of the Ḥijāz were the same: first, each desired control of the region for direct national access to and control over the holiest land in the faith; second, along

with political control over the region came the power to impose zakat and other taxes within the region, especially taxes on those making Ḥajj.

The Second Saʿudi State

Figure 2. The Second Saʿudi State at its peak. © 2010 Ameen Mohammed.

Six years after Dirʿiyah's sacking, a descendant of Ibn Saʿud, Turki bin ʿAbdullah Al-Saʿud, re-established a Saʿudi state, this time centering it in Riyadh, now the capital of Saudi Arabia and a city just south of the aforementioned original capital. Like his ancestors, Turki bin ʿAbdullah Al-Saʿud devoted his life to defending his family's legacy by retaking the land lost to the Ottomans. Turki overtook many Najdi provinces, but was generally unsuccessful in bringing the state back to its former glory, thanks to a more liberal philosophy regarding religious governance, to which the Wahhābi establishment was greatly opposed (Kechichian 1986), family dissent (conniving brothers and cousins), and the hegemony of the Rashidi tribe in the provinces surrounding the new Saʿudi kingdom (Al-Rasheed 2002). It would be fruitful to the discussion at hand to examine the Wahhābi malcontent with Turki's new political philosophy.

Since its founding, Wahhābism has always placed a large emphasis on worshiping and supplicating the whole self to Allah, and Him alone. In the years since the pact, the school had adopted the doctrine of al-Walāʾ wa-l-Barāʾ (literally, "loyalty and enmity"), the idea that Muslims should have loyalty to Allah and His people, and should separate themselves from all those things, people, and ideas that are not from Him. Turki bin ʿAbdullah had adopted a new philosophy in his revival of the state: he believed that oppressing the population was not the correct course of action, but rather that unification under Islam along with interaction with the outside unbelieving world was a better national plan (Wagemakers 2012, Crawford 2014). The Wahhābis, under the Mufti (head ʿālim [singular of ʿulamāʾ]) of the time, greatly opposed this position, asserting that it was the will of God and the business of His followers to live by His principles and teachings and also to apply them in every facet of life (Wagemakers 2012); this included not associating with unbelievers (kuffār). This disagreement shows that those religious leaders following ʿAbdul Wahhāb were truly seeking pure, if misguided, Islamic service and worship and not their own private interests.

The state enjoyed peace for a time, but Turki was assassinated at the hands of his own family, leaving his son Faisal to reign in his place. Faisal bin Turki, much like Faisal bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz in the 20th century, brought the Kingdom into a period of relative prosperity and success, and his son ʿAbd al-Raḥmān after him (Al-Rasheed 2002). Rashidi forces, spurred on by those dissenting family members and strengthened by a Saʿudi civil war, again effectively ended Saʿudi Rule, sustained only in the survival of the family line itself. King ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and his son, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, were exiled to Kuwait.

The Third Saʿudi State (Emirate-Turned-Kingdom)

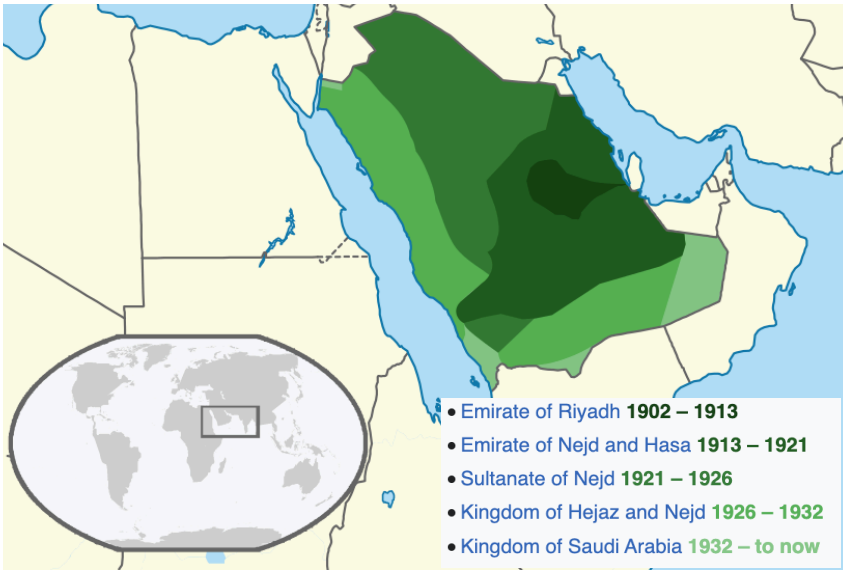

Figure 3. The growth of the Third Saʿudi State into the Kingdom as we now know it. © 2021 David First.

After a very short time in exile, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (better known today as Ibn Saʿud) returned to Riyadh with a small Kuwaiti militia and reclaimed the city in a surprise attack. The city was one of the southernmost points under Rashidi control at the time establishing the Emirate of Riyadh, which would become the Third Saʿudi State. Small but significant victories were won, one by one, each fighting tribe (i.e. the Saʿuds and the Rāshidis) supported militarily, if indirectly, by the United Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire. This support became direct and tangible leading up to the First World War (Al-Rasheed 2002), when each imperial force signed a contract with its beneficiary tribe, limiting the power that tribe had for self-actualization of governance but at the same time allowing it to develop without a significant threat.

After time and more warring between the two tribes, as well as the rise of the Idrisi tribe, the Saʿuds moved into the Hijaz region (Al-Rasheed 2002, Vassiliev 1998), fighting long and hard. The Third Saʿudi State gained control of the cities of Mecca and Medina, a crucial move for international legitimacy, and its first official leader was yet again a direct descendant of Ibn Saʿud, King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Al-Saʿud, who moved out from Riyadh much in the same fashion as his forebears, in what he viewed as a holy war for his faith's holy land, an Islamic crusade of

sorts. At the same time as Saʿud's reconquest, the Ottoman Empire began to crumble from the outside in. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz conquered the rest of modern-day Saudi Arabia (as depicted in the map) over the course of 22 years and solidified his rule over the new Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, setting its constitution even at that time as the Qur'ān and Sunna (traditions of the prophet Muḥammad). The Saʿuds are still the ruling family in Saudi Arabia today, and pass down rule in the family firstly in a lateral fashion down a line of brothers during one generation, then according to which son is deemed by the remaining father the most faithful and fit for the role (Basic System of Governance [BSG] 1992, Article 5).

The Ikhwan Revolt

Before the new state was fully formed and before its power was fully realized, the Ikhwan, the group of Wahhābi soldiers who fought alongside Ibn Saʿud in his efforts of conquest, stopped being a tool of legitimacy and military strength; rather, they became a militant force in their own right. The Ikhwan wanted to keep pushing outward form where they were, acting as an army of God, spreading Wahhābi values wherever they went. Their benefactor, however, had a complex relationship with Britain that demarcated clearly to him where his conquest was to stop. When Wahhābi principles of jihad met with an unwilling king, the militia revolted in 1927 (Al-Rasheed 2002). This is one of the first pieces of Wahhābi pushback associated with the third state and was quashed two years later, thanks to Najdi soldiers and British military aid (Al-Rasheed 2002). The Ikhwan were pacified, but this ideological fundamentalism and idealism expands into more contemporary forms of Wahhābi governance today, and the disparity between the ideal and the reality still form the basis of many state-Wahhābi conflicts.

Oil

Almost ten years after the revolt, Ibn Saʿud opened the country to Westerners exploring the land for oil. The problem with this was that Wahhābi purists believed that non-Muslims (and many non-Wahhābi Muslims, for that matter) were infidels, and no business should be done with them. It was completely unexpected for the Saʿudi Kingdom to be doing any business with the outside world (Al-Rasheed 2002). Despite Wahhābi anger, however, the state continued, a demonstration of Saʿudi Third-State governmental supremacy over those claiming to sit in the seat of ʿAbdul Wahhāb. The establishment today has nothing to say regarding the state's standing in the international system, a marked ideological change.

To avoid more chaos, however, Ibn Saʿud quickly had to justify and reconcile his actions (Al-Rasheed 2002). If business was not to be done with the outside, what did that mean for those searching for oil? More importantly, what would that mean for the economic destiny of the Najdi ruler, and that of this economically isolated and ideologically sequestered state? Again, the Wahhābi population of the state and their idealism caused problems between the religious establishment (in whatever form it took at that time) and the state, forcing Ibn Saʿud into the difficult position of balancing the economic well-being of his Kingdom against theological purity and consistency, which, in turn, legitimized his rule.

Those in search of oil reserves eventually found them, and the Saʿudi government, namely the king himself, took advantage of the black gold, turning it into one of the most successful rentier states in the modern age (Hertog 2007, Al-Rasheed 2002). ARAMCO was founded, and the Saʿudi state entered the international economic system in a big way. This came alongside much growth in Saʿudi governmental bureaucracy (Herzog 2010). All of this development started to make Saudi Arabia look more like the "modern" western conception of a

state, something contradicting previous Wahhābi fatwas on the issue (Bunzel 2023) which called for the state's remainder in traditional governance and in isolation from unbelieving nations.

Faisal and Modernization

After the death of Ibn Saʿud and ten years of rule by his son Saʿud, another of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's sons, Faisal, took his place on the throne. Faisal was a great but divisive political leader in Saudi Arabia and affected much change in the state as he saw fit in the modern era. Oil production and exportation rose steadily during his reign (Al-Rasheed 2002), and Saʿudi Arabic experienced great technological and infrastructural advancement, as well as ambitious restructuring and social and educational reform (Vassiliev 1998) as a result of his policies and allocation of the national budget. The accomplishments most pertinent to this project include the beginning of the Saʿudi Ṣaḥwa movement and the creation of the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council (Mouline 2014), an institutionalized and politically centralized version of the broader historical Wahhābi establishment.

The Ṣaḥwa Movement

Through the rule of Kings Saʿud and Faisal, the Saʿudi public slowly rose to political criticism against certain social and political trends in their home country, until the movement became more mainstream. This became known as the Saʿudi Ṣaḥwa, meaning "awakening" in Arabic. The movement was a movement by the Saʿudi people to return to the original principles of Wahhābi traditionalism in every aspect of life (Lacroix & Holoch 2011). The government, while imposing many rule changes and introducing her people to new kinds of technology, desired to address or resolve the issues brought up by the people and so communicated more changes that would take place. This process of reform and reawakening was very gradual, and one of the main things that set off the beginning of this whole process was everything happening

with Gamāl ʿAbdul Nāṣer and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Much like the events of the 2011 Arab Spring, the political environment of these different states changed at similar times, and the Muslim Brotherhood's activity in one country (namely Egypt) greatly affected that happening in other countries (Lacroix & Holoch 2011), inspiring change directly via fellow group members in other states and indirectly via initiating conversations among other national and transnational groups. The Ṣaḥwa movement continued into the 1980s.

The Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council

Another of the biggest changes that took place under King Faisal bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, and part of his response to the Ṣaḥwa movement, was the 1972 creation of the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council, also known as the Board of Senior ʿUlamāʾ, or the Council of Senior Scholars. Though initiated by his brother and predecessor, and greatly developed by Ibn Ibrahim (Mouline 2014), the finalization of the council's instatement was Faisal's way of breathing new life into the 1744 pact and what it was supposed to represent. Whether his intentions were pure or merely purposeful manipulation, he gave a new name to the Wahhābi leadership and brought it into the state. Though the pact stood between ʿAbdul Wahhāb and Muhammad Ibn Saʿud upon the hope that members of his tribe, Āl al-Sheikh, would always sit in the seat of the king's advisory council, only a small percentage of the council was comprised of members of ʿAbdul Wahhāb's tribe (Bligh 1985).

This new identity helped Faisal by allowing him to impose a new hierarchy and to divide the power of the Wahhābi establishment (Bligh 1985), and allowed him to do so covertly, leaving the council with their autonomy technically intact but depriving them of the power and influence they once truly may have had. King Faisal formally defined the role of the Grand Mufti, someone who has before been considered a leader in Wahhābi circles but was never officially

raised above any of the others in ideological power. Once the council was made part of the Saʿudi state, however, the Grand Mufti took on a true leadership role with his new title: he would serve as the head of the council. The council's autonomy intact, hierarchy up, and historical religious authority in Saudi Arabia would make it seem ripe to make some doctrinal changes, if the reader subscribes to my theory. However, as mentioned before, this autonomy issue was two-sided: yes, the council was given the right to issue fatwas according to their tradition, without approval of the King. On the other hand, though, being part of the state and being molded by the state made the council's new form and practices state-formed, and the fundamentalist nature of the council under any circumstances prevents anything remotely resembling religious innovation. These factors prohibit the type of results that might be expected.

The Saʿudi Oil Embargo

As mentioned before, the Kingdom continued to grow in importance as an oil exporter and distributor, until it had nearly hegemonic power in the industry. This is what made the 1973 Oil Embargo so serious: the Saʿudi Government stopped all oil exports to the United States, tried everything in its power to increase the price of oil to Western countries, and decreased overall production by ten percent (Al-Rasheed 2002). This embargo was in response to Western aid being given to the state of Israel; Saudi Arabia found itself at a political crossroads, and felt pressure from other Arab states to use this resource as a tool. The Saʿudi state experienced a great surge in power after this trade hiatus and was able to keep oil prices generally high in order to more than *double* its GDP over the course of one year (Al-Rasheed 2002).

The Siege on Al-Masjid Al-Ḥarām

In 1979, four years after the assassination of King Faisal, something that was likely related to some of his modernization efforts (Vassiliev 1998), a group of militants overtook

Al-Masjid Al-Ḥarām in Mecca. The group called themselves the "Ikhwān," likening themselves to the Wahhābi militia that worked alongside Ibn Saʿud in conquering the peninsula. The group was relatively small but vocal, somewhere between 200 and 500 people, and it was comprised of salafists against a regime they saw as corrupt and idolatrous (Al-Rasheed 2002). Though the group was not genetically related to ʿAbdul Wahhāb, they bore what they viewed as his ideology, and believed that their job was to keep Saudi Arabia theologically and pragmatically pure. The movement failed, however, and this part of the Ṣaḥwa movement was laid to rest; the throne would stay in the hands of Āl Saʿud.

The Gulf War

Under King Fahd in the 1990s, the Gulf War broke out in Iraq. The Saʿudi government's first inclination was to side with the U.S. to help liberate Kuwait (Al-Rasheed 2002), and they allowed many U.S. troops to station themselves in northern Saudi Arabia prior to Operations Desert Shield and Storm. However, this proved a very unpopular decision, especially among the ʿUlamāʾ and other fundamentalist groups. Fatwas were given, letters were sent (Al-Rasheed 2002), and public opinion shifted quickly from a simple question of who the true enemy was to whether one was a secularist or an Islamist when it came to such issues. The war was a divisive topic, and many held that Saddam Hussein was the lesser of two evils (Al-Rasheed). Much reform was called for, and some was even ratified (Vassiliev 1998). This war showed the remaining power of Wahhābi ideology at the time.

The Basic System of Governance

Holy texts within a religion are all subject to a multitude of interpretations in the absence of a central religious government or other body. The Saʿudi Royalty and the Council of Senior Scholars (Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council) claim in some ways to be this authority in the Saʿudi State;

such has been the case in an official capacity since the reign of King Faisal in the mid-twentieth century, a time of major Saʿudi governmental restructuring (Hertog 2007, Kechichian 1986). This claim to authority inherently assumes that the Saʿudi government's interpretation of Islamic texts is sufficient for full governance and clarification of authority and regulation; this has proven to be a false assertion. Though the Islamic Sunnah (and the Wahhābi interpretation thereof) serves as the "constitution" of the Kingdom, it would be beneficial to examine Saudi Arabia's 1992 (Gregorian; 1412 Hijri) secondary governing document, the *Basic System of Governance* (An-Niẓām Al-Asāsī Lil-Ḥukm). The document was adopted under the rule of King Fahd Al-Saʿud, during one of a few periods of governmental reform under his leadership. It is important to note that this document is not the Saʿudi Constitution (Article 1); the state legitimizes its rule in its history as the birthplace and epicenter of Islam, claiming Islam to be its moral and legal guide in all things, and therefore sets the Qur'an and Sunna as its official constitution. The Kingdom even operates on the Hijri Calendar (Article 2), despite an increasingly globalized international system, the majority of which uses the Gregorian calendar.

This government frequently changes its regulations and enforced standards according to the King's wishes (Articles 5, 44). In its mention of the population in Saudi Arabia and its role, the *BSG* discusses issues such as the Saʿudi family unit (Article 9-10, 27), the individual (Articles 16, 27, 35, 43), and education (Article 13). In each of these sections, Islam is still the central topic of conversation, believed to be the paradigm of human morality and the absolute truth by which all will be judged. In this way, the Saʿudi government limits religious liberty within its borders, specifically as it relates to its national population. The state has unified its citizens around the Islamic faith, and uses it today as a tool of legitimacy and cultural homogeneity.

Islamic unification has always been a large part of the goal of the Saʿudi state in governance, rooted in the fact that the first Saʿudi state, and by extension the legacy of the Saʿudi family, has strong connections with the ideology of Wahhab (Commins 2009, Alsaif 2013), who desired a return to traditionalism and a restoration of his view of the prophet Muḥammad's Islam. Part of this traditionalism is a general insistence on Sunni belief and tradition within the state. Sectarian allegiance is something that seems to form part of national identity in many nation states in the region, with Sunni being the popular denomination in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states like Saudi Arabia and Qatar and Shia being the prominent sect in states such as Iran and Iraq.

The Wahhābi Establishment Today

Saudi Arabia's monarchy works even today in its unification of the population toward undermining Shiʿa and other ideologies, those considered extreme or against Saʿudi principles. Shiʿa oppression by the Sunni Saʿudi government is a well-documented issue, one examined by Saʿudi nationals (Al-Hassan 2002) and external scholars and non-profit organizations alike. In 2002, Shiʿi believers were discriminated against from a legal and social standpoint, not even allowed to work in fields such as religious education (Al-Hassan 2002). In the name of silencing extremism in the state, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Sulman (MBS) has recently been cited as having carried out legal actions of aggression toward Shiʿa imams and their constituents.

In addition to the monarchy, the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council today holds much public sway and political power of both a direct and an indirect nature. However, the monarchy has recently worked to lessen or undermine this authority for its own purposes. MBS, for example, after expanding the monarchy's power, has pledged even greater progress in secularization than has been made in Saudi Arabia before (*Al Jazeera* 2017). On the issue of sectarian disputes, it should

come as no surprise that the two entities are commonly on the same side, even if for different reasons. Wahhābi thought necessitates exclusivity, and the monarchy needs religious unity among its population to support and legitimize itself in the long run. Wahhābism has also historically necessitated rule by religion and religious order, and it is for this reason that the Saʿudi State has remained a semi-theocracy until today (Al-Atawneh 2009); the religious establishment hold significant power over state legitimacy and the legitimacy of the state's decisions, and the monarchy, supposedly Wahhābi in and of itself, must bow to this to a certain extent to maintain its own identity, especially that of an absolute autocracy with the power to punish those out of line with its ideology. The state's reliance on the religious establishment in this case, along with the various moments of strife that have occurred in that relationship and its propensity to want to limit its autonomy and individual influence as much as possible is something unique (Brown et al. 2024).

Overarching Points

The Saʿudi State's history and legitimacy relies entirely upon rule by divine right and the pact made between ʿAbdul Wahhāb and Ibn Saʿud regarding the leadership and development of the Kingdom. Without religion, this state is truly nothing. Even with the move toward a more secularized style of governance in the modern age, Saudi Arabia remains a vestige of Islamic fundamentalism and religious fanaticism. The Wahhābi religious establishment in the Kingdom, today the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council, has always had a lathe influence on the politics and decisions of the Kingdom, but since its official adjoining to the state under King Faisal in the mid-20th century, its role has changed vastly. Though it still frequently contradicts the will of the monarchy in its rulings and fatwas, the monarchy has seized some governmental power over it, making it a distinct type of religious institution separate from any other. The Catholic Church has

much autonomy, and what it says and does in the modern age does not necessarily affect its relationship with the Italian state as much as it used to; this institution has achieved something remarkable in its autonomy and global religious power. As for the ʿUlamāʾ Council, its freedoms allow for any fatwas that are in alignment with Wahhābi theology and doctrine, but it very rarely, if at all, makes decisions based on its own interests. It has not always made a friend of the monarchy, but the monarchy has never truly had any power to stop it.

Conclusion

In this project, I have found that religious institutions, no matter their origin or the faith to which they belong, have many common determinants of change. Through my two historical case studies, I have observed that the political circumstances, autonomy, authority, and hierarchy of a given religious institution can be used to predict changes in doctrine and ideology. I find that an autonomous, authoritative, hierarchical institution separate from the state and operating under a liberal government is the most likely institution to change of its own accord. Its authority and hierarchy allow it to make unilateral decisions and convince believers of pluralistic ideas, and its autonomy and placement within a liberal context removes it from influence by a threatened government.

In examining the historical Wahhābi establishment in Saudi Arabia, I found that the personalist fundamentalist roots of the movement have irrevocably intertwined the Saʿudi State and Wahhābi leadership and principles. The 1744 pact is the basis of Saʿudi monarchical legitimation (Al-Rasheed 2002). I also found that the establishment retains its autonomy (in this case, its freedom to give fatwās as it wills without repercussions, and thereby to influence the monarchy) on the basis of that same pact: if the ʿulamāʾ can no longer advise or reprove the king on matters of sharīʿa, the king has broken the promise made by his distant ancestor (Al-Rasheed 2002) and is no longer legitimate. The creation of the Grand ʿUlamāʾ Council was a strategic move by the monarchy to limit the scope of the establishment's power without outright usurping its rights, a change in the institution's centralization that also changed its hierarchical structure to

include one Grand Mufti, one with the power to veto decisions of the rest of the council, therefore making the institution more easily influenced.

The Catholic Church was quite a different case, and much of this difference has to do with the Church's much longer-stretching historical claim to authority, an appeal to being the One True Church founded by Christ (ESV, Matt. 16:18; Nicene Creed; "Dei Verbum" 1965). Its political rule in the Medieval Period and vast cultural and moral influence over a large portion of global citizens makes it a force to be reckoned with. As for its autonomy, the Church has worked throughout the development of the Italian state to maintain its own sovereignty, and has succeeded in that endeavor throughout the past three centuries. The Church has at times been centralized in a political way, especially in its role as the leading force in education under the Lateran Pacts, which ended up helping it maintain a level of cultural influence unparalleled by other institutions in such a situation. The changes that have taken place have been strategic, at times out of a need for survival, as under the Italian Fascist regime, and at other times as an adjustment to broader culture to maintain relevance, as in Vatican II.

My work contributed to the literature firstly in its scope; though some have done cross-faith studies before (Brown et al. 2024, Koesel 2014, Fox 2008), works structured in such a way are generally limited, and certainly do not examine all specific facets that I do. Some focus on theory-building as it pertains to Christianity, whether one specific sect or institution (Burns 1990, Ceci 2017, Gill 1998) or the faith as a whole. Others focus on that in relation to Islam or another faith (Huyette 1985, Mouline 2014). This paper pulls more than one faith in and allows for a broader application of findings.

My second contribution to scholarly literature is a synthesis of factors. I have outlined four factors to be tested in relation to each case. Many scholars hone in on one aspect of this

theory (Brown et al. 2024, Koesel 2014, Ceci 2017) or another (Burns 1990, Grzymala-Busse 2016), but putting them all together and examining not how these factors work together in influencing institutional evolution is something unique about my study. Additionally, a focus on internal institutional authority is a rarity in the literature, and this is a factor that deserves more attention.

My third and final contribution to the literature with this project is my focus not only on the freedom and autonomy of the institution to remain static, but also on the many incentives that drive institutional change, even in a state of freedom. Some scholars have focused on the autonomy of the institution as something making them less malleable and usable by authoritarian regimes (Brown et al. 2024) or how churches earn and exercise power over culture or government (Grzymala-Busse 2016), but I focus on reasons religious leaders and institutions willingly change doctrine and ideology even in such cases as the supposedly static and unchanging Catholic Church. This perspective allows for the aforementioned broader scope of factors.

No theory is perfect, nor can mine be expected to hold up in one hundred percent of cases. Future work should synthesize my cases along with a broader swath of religious institutions under different regime types. My work is also very historically based, and some may want to take a more quantitative approach to testing this theory. Qualitatively speaking, historians and political scientists who continue building upon this theory should take a closer look at institutional changes within a set political context over a smaller period of time, so that a more in-depth analysis of that particular factor can be made.

With this project, I have attempted to contribute valuable historical analysis to the literature in pursuit of a clearer answer as to why religious institutions behave the way that they

do. Many devout believers in either of the faiths examined in this study consider the truth of their holy texts and tradition to be the axis around which their life turns. Such believers reject the thought of teaching changing or new doctrines being introduced, and this allows for pluralism and a new way of viewing the religion. This allows these institutions to change and act (though carefully) according to their interests, as any other human institution does. The interactions between religious establishments and the governments under which they operate sometimes define the very nature of those institutions, at times allowing them a chance to adapt and other times forcing change upon them from outside.

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