

TRANSFORMMING WAHHABISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

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INTRODUCTION

WAHHABISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

The Birth of Wahhabism

The Alliance of Wahhabism

The Shadow of Wahhabism

The Exports of Wahhabism

POST-WAHHABISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

Critical Aspects

Governmental Attitudes

CONCLUSION

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INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located in southwest part of Asia and occupies about four-fifth of the whole Arabian Peninsula with the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba to the west and the Persian Gulf to the east. Saudi Arabia is known as not only the birthplace of the Arab people¹ but also the birthplace of Islam.

Islamic calendar starts in 622, the year of Hijra. Then some invaders successively attacked the peninsula until the Ottoman Empire's occupation in 1517. After the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the peninsula was divided into separated small local tribal groups.

In 1744, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a conservative scholar called for the purification and the reform of Islam. This movement was named as "Wahhabism" after the founder's name and finally swept across the whole peninsula. Wahhab formed an alliance with local tribal leader-al Sauds- around the desert area of Dirayah.² From this 18th Century religious political alliance, modern Saudi Arabia was born. Like most Islamic fundamental movements, the Wahhabis asserted the fusion of state power and religion through the form of government adopted by the Prophet Muhammad's followers during the time of Muslim expansion. Due to this union with the ideology of Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia becomes the nation where religion and politics are deeply related.

The history tells us today that it is difficult to put a line between faith and identity in Saudi Arabia. Since Wahhabism formed the creed upon which the Saudi Arabia was founded, it has to be the first step to study of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia to approach and understand some socio-

1. It is thought that the first Arabs originated from the Arabian Peninsula.

2. Modern day, Riyadh.

religious practices in that country.

WAHHABISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

The Birth of Wahhabism

The origin of modern Islamism can be traced back to the beginning of the Wahhabi movement in the early 18th Century. Wahhabism is from the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who was from the Arabian Peninsula interior. The early life of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab remains somewhat uncertain. By searching the works of historians, some details about him can be traced.

He was born in Uyayna, in Nejd³ in 1703, and studying Islam at an early age, primarily with his father who was a learnt Hanbali scholar. He had completed his formal education in the holy city of Medina then he lived abroad for many years. He was in Basra, Iraq, and in Baghdad where he married to a rich woman whose property he inherited when she died. Almost all sources agree that his reformed idea of Islam was formed while he was living in Basra. His attitude was somewhat polemic, and he took active part in scholarly discussions therefore became famous for his debates with the Islamic scholars in Basra. In 1736, in Iran, he began to teach against the extreme ideas of various exponents of Sufi doctrine. He completely rejected Sufism and emphasized on the obedience to the words of Allah and on the full responsibility of the individual believer.

3. is the central region of the Arabian Peninsula. It is also one of the main regions that make up the modern state of Saudi Arabia and the location of the Saudi capital, Riyadh. Nejd later became the birthplace of the religious and political movement that gave rise to modern Saudi Arabia. The Saudi royal family, the Al Saud, are natives of Nejd.

After returning to his hometown, Uyayna, ibn Abd al-Wahhab wrote the *Kitab at-tawhid* (“Book of Unity”),⁴ which became the main text for Wahhabi doctrines and he also started working as a teacher for Bedouins. The primary doctrine of Wahhabism is *Tawhid*, the uniqueness and unity of God. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was influenced by the writings of scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya⁵ and heavily relied on the Qur’an and the hadith. Thus he could be found in the line of the Hanbali⁶ school of thought.

He called to go back to the ways of early Islam when the literal interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadith was broadly exercised. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s teaching have been described as puritanical and traditional, representing the early teachings of the Islam. He made himself quite clear to reject all innovations (*bid’ah*) in Islamic faith because he considered them to be rebuked and removed, insisting that the original prosperity of Islam could be restored if the Islamic country would return to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Wahhabism, thus never allow for an intermediary between the believer and Allah and considered any practice resembling such practice as polytheism. The decoration of mosques,

4. Some other source: wikipedia suggests that “Book of Unity” was written while he was in Basra.

5. Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (January 22, 1263 - 1328), was a Sunni Islamic scholar born in Harran, located in what is now Turkey, close to the Syrian border. He lived during the troubled times of the Mongol invasions. As a member of the school founded by Ibn Hanbal, he sought the return of Islam to its sources: the Qur’an and the Sunnah. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Taymiyyah

6. Ahmed ibn Hanbal (Arabic: أحمد بن حنبل Ahmad bin Hanbal) (780 - 855 CE, 164 - 241 AH) was an important Muslim scholar and theologian of Persian background. He is considered the founder of the Hanbali school of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence).

Hanbali is one of the four schools of Fiqh or religious law within Sunni Islam (the other three being Hanafi, Maliki and Shafii). It is also a school of aqeedah (creed) in Sunni Islam, also referred to as the Athari (or Textualist) school. The school was started by the students of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal. Hanbali jurisprudence is predominant among Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula, he believes divine text (the Quran and the Sunnah) was the first point of reference for all scholars of jurisprudence.

In spite of the importance of Hanbal's work his school did not enjoy the popularity of the three preceding Sunni schools of law. Hanbal's followers were regarded as reactionary and troublesome on account of their reluctance to give personal opinion on matters of law, their rejection of analogy, their fanatic intolerance of views other than their own, and their exclusion of opponents from power and judicial office. Their unpopularity led to periodic bouts of persecution against them. <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/islam/sunni/hanb.html>

the cults of saints, and even the smoking tobacco were condemned.

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab gained attention through the following actions: first he persuaded ibn Mu'ammar⁷ to destroy a sacred tomb revered by local Sufi Muslims, citing Islamic teachings that forbid grave worship. Secondly, he ordered that an adulteress be stoned to death, a practice that had become uncommon in the area despite having Islamic textual basis. Additionally, he practiced the Islamic concept of *rihla fi talab al-'ilm*,⁸ "traveling the land in order to seek knowledge." The full extent of such travels remains disputed among historians.

The Alliance of Wahhabism

His teaching and doctrines brought some disagreements between scholars then led to controversy which finally expelled him from Uyaynah in 1744. He settled in Ad-Diriyah, and met a leader of a gang of marauders⁹ called Muhammad Ibn Saud, whose main activity was robbing travelers in the desert of Nejd. Since most of those Bedouins were completely unlearned, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab could easily persuade them of his theories. Al-Saud and Wahhab made an agreement which appointed

7. The ruler of Uyaynah, Uthman ibn Mu'ammar, gladly welcomed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab when he returned to his hometown, and even adhered to his doctrines. But many opposed him, and Abd al-Wahhab's preaching was put to a number of severe tests. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-620665/Uthman-ibn-Muammar>

8. The Qur'an places great emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge as a means of knowing God, and about our true selves and the purpose of our lives. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad said in a hadith, "Seek knowledge even unto China!" Muslims took such counsel to heart and created an epistemic revolution starting in the 7th century, often traveling far and wide in pursuit of knowledge, an activity known in Arabic as *rihla fi talab al-'ilm* ("traveling in search of knowledge"). As a consequence, Muslims starting in the eighth century embraced the ancient learning of classical Greece, Persia, India, and the ancient Near East and the world of Islam became pre-eminent in the medieval period in philosophy, the sciences, medicine, belles-lettres, etc. The most famous *rihla* of the Middle-Ages was that of Ibn Battuta, who traveled more than 73,000 miles between 1325 and 1354, from his home in the Maghreb, as far as China and southeast Asia, to Turkey and the skirt of Russia, to sub-Saharan Africa. http://www.thatreligiousstudieswebsite.com/Interviews/Beliefs/asma_afsaruddin_part3.html

9. While "marauder" is most often used in the context of war; there is no clear-cut division between it and "robber", and in many contexts the two can be regarded as synonymous. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marauder>

the former as the “*Amir*”¹⁰, and the latter as the “*Shaykh*”¹¹. The “*Shaykh*” declared to publish “*fatawa*” where non-Wahhabi Muslims were described as idol-worshipper. This gives religious justification for al-Sauds who were no more robbers and robbers and criminals but “*mujahid*”.

Wahhab forged an historic alliance with al-Saud clan and pursued to conquer his opponents. Al-Saud supported the campaign and helped Wahhabi zealots to cleanse the land of “unbelievers”. In 1801, Saudi-Wahhabi warriors crossed into present day Iraq and conquered the Shiite holy city of Karbala, killing over 4,000 people.

After Saudi-Wahhabi conquered Mecca and Medina in the 1920s, they destroyed such “idolatrous” shrines as the Jannat al-Baqi cemetery, where four of the twelve Shiite imams were buried. They believed that grave markers are *bida’a* or objectionable innovation which is against of *Tawhid*.

Eventually in 1932, the present day the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was born as a result of the political and religious alliance of Wahhabism and al-Saud, fulfilling mutual interests. Wahhabi’s doctrine was able to spread into the Islam world because of the nation of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab “saw the absolute need to have his movement linked to state power.”¹² As Wahhabism consolidated as a state ideology, the clerics

10. It is a high title of nobility or office, used in Arabic nations of the Middle East and North Africa, and historically, in some Turkic states. Its meaning “chieftain” or “commander”, is derived from the Arabic root *Amr*, “command”. Originally simply meaning commander or leader; usually in reference to a group of people, it came to be used as a title of governors or rulers, usually in smaller states, and in modern Arabic usually renders the English word “prince.” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emir>

11. It means elder of a tribe, lord, revered wise man, or Islamic scholar. The term literally means a man of old age, and it is used in that sense in Qur’anic Arabic. Later it came to be a title meaning leader, elder, or noble, especially in the Arabian Peninsula, where *shaikh* became a traditional title of a Bedouin tribal leader in recent centuries. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheikh>

12. Gregory Gause, an associate professor of Political Science spoke on the UCLA campus May 25 about Saudi Arabian state ideology.

gained privileged position in the Saudi State but began to lose centrality and exclusive control. While the clerics were very influential in cultural life, the religious ideology of Wahhabism was transformed politically into a state ideology which ordered people to obey their rulers.

In return for approval al-Saud family's authority in political and economic security after the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Wahhabis were given not only the authority over state religious and educational institutions but also the rigid interpretation of *sharia* (Islamic law). They represented very conservative interpretation of the Qur'an with religious police enforcing the strict social laws, including rigid gender separation at work as well as in other public places. Wahhabis also believed that Islam is the only recognized religion and non-Muslims are banned from public worship or evangelizing.

Westerners have been used the terms Islamofascism and theofascism for all forms of radical Islamism, but they are rather fit into Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia today. Their rejection of individual liberties, undervaluing and reduction of women's rights and status.¹³

Wahhabism was largely limited to the Arabian peninsula until the 1960s, when the Saudi gave a refuge to radical members of the Muslim Brotherhood¹⁴ who fled from the persecution of Nasser's in Egypt.

13. Saudi police 'stopped' fire rescue, BBC, 15 March 2002. Wahhabi religious police (mutaween) prevented Saudi schoolgirls from fleeing a burning school because they were not properly veiled, leaving fifteen of the to die inside in 2002, outrage equaled only by the Taliban's reign of terror against women in Afghanistan.

14. is a multi-national Sunni Islamist movement and the world's largest, most influential political Islamist group. The Brotherhood is the largest political opposition organization in many Arab nations, particularly Egypt. Founded by the Sufi schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna in 1928, several linked groups have since formed across many nations of the Muslim world.

The Muslim Brotherhood's brand of Islam and Islamic politics differs from the strict Salafi creed officially held by the state of Saudi Arabia. Despite this, the Brotherhood has been tolerated by the Saudi government, and maintains a presence in the country. Aside from tolerating the Brotherhood organization, and according to Washington Post report, Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef has denounced the Brotherhood, saying it is guilty of "betrayal of pledges and ingratitude" and is "the source of all problems in the Islamic world." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood

The Shadow of Wahhabism

After Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in the mid-1950s, the Saudis needed some kind of partnership against his secular revolutionary policies. Therefore Saudi leaders supplied affluent finance to the Muslim Brotherhood. From that time on wards, the majority of the Brotherhood adopted Wahhabi doctrines and became the main route for propagating Wahhabism.

On top of that, the isolated Wahhabi creed of Saudi state's religious establishment met the Salafi jihadist teaching of Sayyid Qutb,¹⁵ who denounced secular Arab rulers as unbelievers and therefore, lawful targets of holy war, *Jihad*. "It was the synthesis of the twain-Wahhabi social and cultural conservatism and Qutbist political radicalism-that produced the militant variety of Wahhabist political Islam that eventually (produced) al-Qaeda."¹⁶ Al-Qaeda represents Wahhabism in its form-a violent fundamental doctrine that rejects all non-Wahhabi Muslims, especially the spiritual form of Islam which is Shiite Islam. They even consider all other religions are infedel and to be destroyed completely according to the teaching of the Qur'an. Saudi Arabia has been a strong supporter for radical Islamic sects, like Al-Qaeda and Muslim Brotherhood, because of its affluent oil wealth.

15. born October 9, 1906 - executed August 29, 1966) was an Egyptian author, Islamist, and the leading intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 60s. He is best known in the Muslim world for his work on what he believed to be the social and political role of Islam, particularly in his books *Social Justice* and *Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq (Milestones)*. His extensive Quranic commentary *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an (In the shades of the Qur'an)* has contributed significantly to modern perceptions of Islamic concepts such as jihad, jahiliyyah, and ummah. In the West he sometimes described as "the man whose ideas would shape Al Qaeda."

Qutb never married, in part because of his steadfast religious convictions. While the urban Egyptian society he lived in was becoming more Westernized, Qutb believed the Quran taught women that 'Men are the managers of women's affairs ...' Qutb lamented to his readers that he was never able to find a woman of sufficient "moral purity and discretion" and had to reconcile himself to bachelorhood. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid_Qutb

16. Mohammed Ayoob, "Political Islam: Image and Reality," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 11, No. 3, Fall 2004.

During the 1970s, Wahhabi's clerics encouraged the spread of extremists' ideology into Saudi universities and mosques, because they worried about invisible invasion of Western culture and spread of corruption which came along with the 1970s oil money. They used this rigid ideology as a barrier against Western culture, and moreover they fortified and applied them to advocate jihad against enemies of "true" Islam outside of the kingdom.

The Exports of Wahhabism

While Saudi people remain the vanguard of Wahhabism, the growth possibility of this ideology lies outside the Kingdom. The Saudi government emphasized on indoctrinating its own citizens with this extremist creed, it has financed the propagation of Wahhabism throughout the world, sweeping away moderate interpretations of Islam all over the Islamic region.

The Saudi government has spent at least \$87 billion propagating Wahhabism abroad during past two decades,¹⁷ and this was possible because of oil dollars. The bulk of this funding goes to the construction and operating expenses of mosques, and other religious institutions that teach Wahhabism. It also supports the training of Imams; propagation on mass media; publication of Wahhabi textbooks and other literatures; donations to renowned international universities. They even have printing presses in Egypt, Syria, and even in the United States to print Wahhabi books.

Nowadays, Wahhabism spreads rapidly especially in the regions of south and southeast Asia where the majority of the world's Muslims live.

17. Alex Alexiev. "Terrorism: Growing Wahhabi Influence in the US", Testimony before the US Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Sub committee on Terrorism, *Technology and Homeland Security*, 26 June 2003.

In Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and southern Thailand, Wahhabis have replaced village imam. In India, there are some efforts to capture the country's Muslim minority as well as the Untouchable Caste. They also target the United States and Europe as well.

POST-WAHHABISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

Critical Aspects

Contrary to what Westerners normally believe Wahhabism is not a traditional old sect in Islamism. Indeed, Wahhabism appeared only 250 years ago under the guidance of a scholar who belongs to Habali school of thought.

However in Saudi Arabia, traditionally it has been a taboo to criticize the religious matters and most Saudis have respect for their spiritual leaders. But a series of deadly fundamentalist attacks in last several years made both government and Saudis doubted about their religious standpoint. Some tangible changes can be noticed, especially among the political-intellectual field, in Saudi Arabia in the last few years.

Firstly, there is a group of people named "islamo-liberals," who are "made up of former Islamists and liberals, Sunnis and Shiites, calling for a democratic change within an Islamic framework through a revision of the official Wahhabi religious doctrine."¹⁸ This group criticized of Wahhabism in its political, social and religious aspects, which is not completely new to Saudis. From time to time, certain doctrinal aspects of Wahab-

¹⁸ Stephane Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New Islamo-liberal Reformist Trend," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2004) .pp.45-65.

bism were under attack not only by prominent ulama from al-Hijaz¹⁹ and al-Hasa regions but also some dissident ulama from the Najd area. These voices were not together but rather isolated ones. However, the critique of Wahhabism today is somewhat different from that of the past.

Secondly, the Shiite critique which has been a continuing process since Ibn Abd al-Wahhabs' time shows basic fundamental differences with Wahhabi doctrine which represents total denial of the Shiite. However the Saudi Shiite reformist intellectuals have been careful not to attack on Wahhabism directly in public.

Thirdly, Saudi liberals, such as the writer and political analyst Turki al-Hamad, who had continuously denounced the social matters of Wahhabism-the religious police or the ban on women's driving were appeared to be one of the mainline of for post-Wahhabism. They represent more polemic attitude after 9/11, naming Wahhabists as their enemy.

Fourthly, a group of young fearless intellectuals²⁰ who constantly write about an explicit and suspicious link between Wahhabi doctrine and the *jihad* violence in the country for several years has denounced the extreme of the Wahhabi doctrine.

Fifthly, some Islamic scholars have raised a question, since the mid-1990s about the influence of salafism to Wahhabism. Contrary to Wahhabis, Hassan al-Maliki, the most prominent among these, argues that the doctrinal rigidity of Wahhabism is not from pure salafism but rather modification of it, copying Ibn Abd al-Wahhab or Ibn Taymiyya's theology. They criticize Wahhabism is only imitation of pure salafism and ask them to return to genuine one.

19. Hijaz is adhere to a more moderate interpretation of Islam than does the Wahhabi sect that arose in Nejd.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hejaz>

20. Mansur al Nuqaidan and Mishari al zayidi being the two best known.

Lastly, a group of people from inside of Wahhabism, who might be called as “a Wahhabi critique of Wahhabism,” insists that there are internal plurality of the genuine Wahhabism since it developed over 250 years. They propose to revise Wahhabism within the tradition.

Governmental Attitudes

On top of all these current critics about Wahhabism, the most noticeable changes can be found in the Saudi government which already started to take preliminary steps towards not yet political reform but social and religious ones. The organization in June 2003 of the first national dialogue conference, with thirty ulama from all the confessional groups present on the Saudi territory-Wahhabi and non-Wahhabi Sunnis, Sufis, Israeli and Twelve Shiites-was an obvious move in this direction.²¹

From this conference, the Saudi government announced a set of “recommendations,” and some of them were quite defy to the Wahhabi doctrine. Of which the first point is to admit the confessional and intellectual diversity of the nation which is opposite view of traditional Wahhabi exclusivism. The second point is to criticizes one of Wahhabis doctrines of *sadd al-dhara*,²² “the blocking of the means” which used to support to ban women driving in Saudi Arabia.

21. Stephane Lacroix, “Post-Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia?” *Islam Review* 15 (Spring 2005), p.17.

22. Muslim's aim is to please Allah and they would know the commands of Allah and his prophet through 1. the Qur'an, 2. the Sunna, or the Qur'an in Action; 3. *Ijma'* (consensus); 4. *Qiyas* (analogy); 5. the 'Amal of the People of Madina; 6. the Opinion of a Companion; 7. *Istihsan*; 8. *al-Masalih al-mursala*; 9. *Sadd al-dhara'i*; 10. 'Urf (custom).

Sadd al-dhara' means, literally, “blocking the means”, i.e. to undesirable ends, in other words, forbidding what is likely to lead to the *haram*. This is thus an extension of the general principle that what leads to the *haram* is *haram*, just as what leads to the obligatory is obligatory, and what leads to the permitted is permitted. The important consideration with regard to *sadd al-dhara'i* is thus the result of the action, and whether it leads to benefit or harm. In other words, actions that could lead to committing sins must be prohibited. <http://www.muhammad.com/docstorage/dutton.htm>

Furthermore, government-owned press recently permitted to write religious criticism in a newspaper by the islamo-liberals which show an obvious official support for them to criticize on Wahhabism openly. On top of that, there have been some improvements on two crucial socio-religious issues: the status of women who have now better economic role in the society and are given more chances to participate in the national issues; and the status of the Shiites who are given much freedom on their religious practices.

Through these new and revolutionary attitudes from the government, one may read that there are some awakenings of the necessity for a revision of Wahhabism among the ruling elites in the nation.

CONCLUSION

Islamic tradition states that a prophet was sent to teach people truths about God, morals, ways to success in this world, the life afterwards, and the result of sinfulness and disobeying God. The Qur'an never speaks about the role of a prophet as a political leader or a head of state.

However, Islamists have rather different interpretations. They believe establishing an Islamic state is the ultimate goal for the prophetic mission. For them, building an Islamic state is crucial and mandatory task to propagate Islam to the world. They teach that *al-Islam din wa dawla*, "Islam is both religion and government" but this expression is never found in neither the Qur'an, the hadith, or in any other authoritative Islamic sources.

There have been ongoing critics and debates about Wahhabi's interpretation and practice of the Qur'an in socio-religions, and political

fields in Saudi Arabia. Tarek Heggy, liberal Egyptian scholar spoke on a lecture tour in Washington D. C. in late June or 2004, “The time has come for the Saudi government to part ways with Wahhabism and to realize that the alliance between the House of Saud and the Wahhabi dynasty if responsible for the spread of obscurantism, dogmatism, and fanaticism, poisoning minds with radical ideas opposed to humanity”. In addition to Heggy, increasing number of reform-minded Muslims speak out against the impact of Saudi Wahhabism these days.

The future of Saudi Arabia will be different from what it is today because of all the current critics and doctrinal oppression on Saudi-Wahhabism from inside and outside Muslim world. Furthermore the world becomes more and more open to each other and shares vast amount of information together which will prevent Saudi Arabia from deceiving their citizen. Saudi government will face the end to use this rigid, doctrinaire version as a barrier and soon realize their people cannot be veiled any more from the truth.

The Saudi government already faced some potential issues: 1) The Shiite minority in the southern and eastern area was suffered enough from the persecution by the Wahhabis clerics. 2) The young people of Saudi are eager to live in a modern society where they could have much more freedom in every aspect of their lives. 3) Some citizens-especially women-are forging ahead. Samar al Mogren, for example, is the local news editor of Al Watan newspaper said, “It’s my right as a woman to live my life as humanly as possible in my country and to fulfill my ambitions and my dreams without having to leave.”

History tells us that without any exception, ideological fascism never last long even though its beginning seems so prosperous. That “will pass away like a wild flower, (soon) for the sun rises with scorching heat and

withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed” (James 1:10-11).

● **Key Words :** Post- Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn Abd Al- Wahhab, Hanbali ,
Al- Saud family , Ibn Taymiyya

ABSTRACT

사우디 아라비아 내에서 변화를 시작한 와하비즘

김정년

이 논문의 전반부는 사우디 아라비아의 와하비즘에 대한 연구로 어떻게 와하비즘이 시작되었으며 또한 어떻게 사우디 아라비아의 건국 이념이 되었는지에 대해 연구한다. 건국 이념이 된 와하비즘은 사우디 아라비아 내의 여러 분야에 깊이 영향을 끼치고 있으며 시간이 흐름에 따라 사우디 아라비아는 와하비즘을 다른 이슬람 국가들로 확장시키고 이를 바탕으로 이슬람 포교에 힘을 집중하고 있다. 후반부에서는 건국이념이었던 와하비즘이 변화하면서 사회 곳곳에서 충돌하게 되는 현상을 조명함으로 새로운 개념으로 떠오르고 있는 “후 와하비즘 (Post-Wahhabism)”에 대해 연구하고 있다.

와하비즘은 수니 이슬람의 정화 운동으로 18세기 아라비아 반도에서 살았던 무함마드 빈 압둘 와합이라는 이슬람 학자에 의해 시작되었다. 이 운동은 순수하게 종교적인 것으로 이슬람교의 창시자인 무함마드의 7세기 가르침으로 돌아가자는 내용을 담고 시작되었다. 이러한 와하비즘은 훗날 알 사우드 가와의 연합을 통해 1932년 오늘날의 사우디 아라비아를 탄생케 하는 정신적 지주 역할을 감당하게 된다.

알 사우드가와의 연합으로 정치적인 세력과 연합하게 된 와하비즘은 시작될 당시의 순수한 종교적 정화 운동에서 점점 멀어지면서 권력의 시녀로 변질되는 경향을 보이게 되었다. 사우디 아라비아의 정권은 이 와하비즘의 가르침을 극단적으로 해석함으로 서구 문화를 반대하는 입장을 취했고 나아가서는 이슬람 급진주의자들-알케이다, 무슬림 형제단-을 옹호하고 지원하게 되었다.

최근에 이르러 이러한 와하비즘의 가르침은 사우디 아라비아내의 지식인층과 종교 지도자들 사이에서 이슬람의 경전인 꾸란의 해석과 적용에 있어 옳지 않을 뿐 아니라 너무 극단적인 입장을 취한다는 목소리를 내기 시작하면서 사회 전반에서 “후 와하비즘(Post Wahhabism)”이란 용어가 조심스럽게 회자되기 시작했다.

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