

# A Historical Perspective on the Role of Seminary in Instituting Religious Culture in Iranian Society: From Formation to Present

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## Abstract

The seminary institution has long been influential in Iranian society and is recognized as a driving force behind Islamic culture. Consequently, it has played a significant role in the spiritual and ethical life of the community. At certain points in history, the seminary has taken on the banner of the fight against tyranny and colonialism, leaning on a religious culture. The present study aims to examine the historical role of the seminary in institutionalizing religious culture in Iranian society over the last century. The researcher focuses on the seminary before the Islamic Revolution, employing a descriptive-analytical approach and relying on an analysis of historical documents to interpret the collected data. The framework governing this research is derived from a definition of culture that aligns with the study's objectives. The findings indicated that the seminary has not only preserved its intrinsic mission of deepening religious understanding but has also worked to convey and disseminate Islamic teachings within society.

**Keywords:** Historical Perspective, Seminary, Institutionalization, Religious Culture, Iranian Society.

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### Introduction

Undoubtedly, every society possesses its specific culture and ideological values, which have existed for centuries. However, regarding the various reasons such as cultural invasions, the culture of that society may suffer shortcomings, leading to changes in its values.

To redirect society onto its rightful path, mechanisms must be implemented to restore values and reinforce the foundations of the religious system. Hence, society needs institutions capable of reviving values and tracing the historical path of its culture.

Moreover, the most sensitive topic in guiding societies today, especially for institutions that consider their mission to be leadership, is the ability to manage and create a conducive environment for the personal growth and development of community members. Alexis de Tocqueville argues that "For men to become civilized, conditions of solidarity between them must be established and adhered to, so that communities can develop and grow." (De Tocqueville, 1952: 2-118)

There is no doubt that the cohesion of society's members and shared values require common beliefs and convictions for the dynamism and vigor of society to be realized. Therefore, the institutionalization of shared values and beliefs is essential, as understanding these values by the people in any system is a crucial factor for the vitality and dynamism of that system.

Social anomalies often stem from a lack of awareness and understanding of the value components of a society. Thus, the most important tool for reforming a society is drawing the attention of its members to their values.

In this process, it is always essential to pay attention to the actions of the opposing current as well; because enemies are striving to institutionalize counter-beliefs and counter-values. Therefore, it is not possible to stabilize religious beliefs and Islamic values without focusing on the activities of the opposing current. Therefore, if there is negligence regarding the prevailing atmosphere in society, opposing movements may institutionalize values that support the perpetuation of disbelief, which would lead to the degradation of the Islamic community.

Considering the above mentioned, the seminary has played a significant role as a driving force in producing and promoting religious culture over the past century, particularly in the institutionalization and protection of religious culture in society. Consequently, some mechanisms that the seminary has employed to institutionalize the components of Islamic thought for the application of religious culture will be studied. This process is pursued on two levels: soft and hard.

## ۱. Research Background

Researchers and scholars have examined various aspects and angles of the religious seminary, from the evolution of the seminary to the influence and role of religious scholars and seminaries in society, as well as the various ideological-political currents within this institution, including the memoirs of the scholarly warriors of the seminary, all of which can be considered as background for this research.

Among the studies that are thematically related to the present research is "The Role of the Seminary in Cultural Policy-making." In this study, the author defines three concepts: Policy-making, culture, and religious seminaries, and discusses the issue that planning is different from policy-making. It states that the cultural policy of the country primarily rests with the seminaries, after which it addresses the shortcomings of the seminary's role (cf. Mesbah Yazdi, 2011 AD/1390 SH).

Another work titled "The Role of Shia Clergy in the Realm of Religious Culture after the Islamic Revolution" attempts to reflect the cultural actions of the clergy community in the country following the Islamic Revolution (cf. Hasani, 2003 AD/1382 SH).

Another study titled "The Place of Seminars in Cultural Policy-making in the Islamic Republic of Iran" investigates the position of the seminary in cultural policy-making in both the existing and desirable situations. The author concludes that in the existing situation, the seminary influences cultural policy through individuals and graduates, but in the desired situation, the level of influence of the seminary should be enhanced so that it functions as an independent cultural policy-making institution (cf. Jafari, 2011 AD/1390 SH).

Based on the research conducted, it can be stated that there has not been a study addressing the historical role of the seminary in institutionalizing religious culture in Iranian society. Therefore, it can be asserted that the present research is innovative.

## ۲. Conceptual Approach to Institutionalization

The term "Institutionalization" means making someone a member of an organization, society, or culture in order to normalize them (Oxford Dictionary, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 674).

Various opinions have been expressed in explaining the concept of "Institutionalization." Some, like Selznick, refer to it as the "Integration of values at a level higher than the requirements or conditions and the type of work being done." (Selznick, 1984: 17)

His understanding of "Institutionalization" is a process that requires thoughtful planning, intelligent management, and the passage of time for

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values to bear fruit. Others believe that institutionalization involves a set of operations that occur in the form of commitments and manifests as acts and social thought within the framework of a system (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 341).

In other words, society, with all its layers and internal groups, adopts a collection of values and beliefs and becomes convinced that these values lead them to excel.

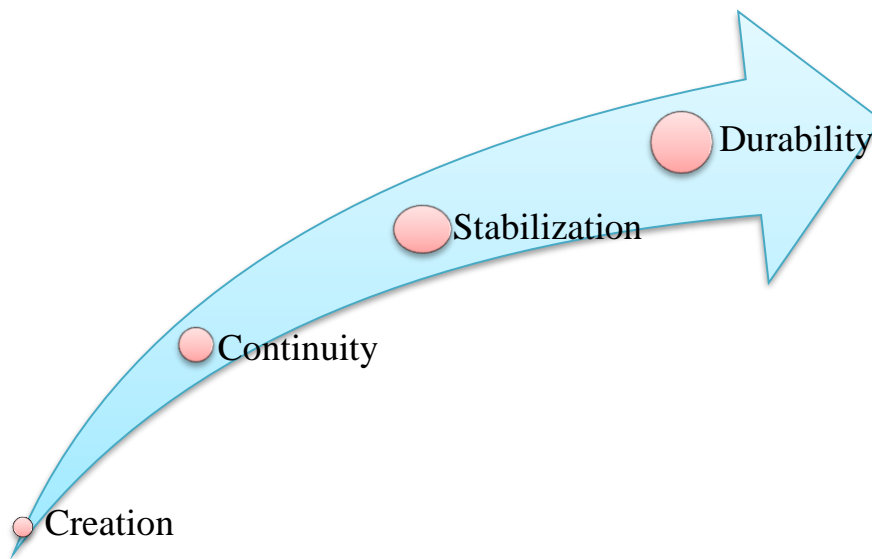
Some researchers also view institutionalization as the repetition and continuity of actions over a specific period, such that a uniform meaning is presented by the implementers; meaning that the agents of institutionalization exhibit the same activities (Berger and Luckmann, 1991: 70). This process not only transforms the members of society but also grants their behavior acceptance based on collective social perspectives.

Given the various approaches in this field, some have articulated a common point of intersection in the understanding of institutionalization among thinkers, stating that this concept is "A social process whereby members of society accept a shared and unified meaning of social reality-such meaning being credible beyond personal perspectives." (Scott, 1987: 496)

According to what scholars in the field of institutionalization have proposed, the common element in all theories is the "Creation, continuity, stabilization, and endurance" of an issue (Vothoughi et al., 2018 AD/1397 SH: 70).

Therefore, institutionalization is characterized as a process. In summary, it can be said that the meaning of institutionalization in this discourse refers to a process that aims to stabilize the normative and faith-based values rooted in Islam, which also have a social origin, within society.

The consequence of this stabilization is the emergence of rational behavior (as the concrete manifestation of an attitude) derived from endorsed and predictable values and norms (as the subjective manifestation of behavior), replacing unpredictable behaviors that contradict the Islamic foundation (Kafi, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 191).



### ۳. Religious Culture

The concept of culture is a term that is at the center of attention in both academic settings and public discussions, where individuals in society have specific interpretations.

In academic circles, researchers have defined the term culture from various perspectives. Some have approached its definition from a cognitive standpoint, others from a sociological perspective, and some from the psychology of individuals, while others have examined it through philosophical, artistic, communication, ethical, and economic lenses. Initially, Taylor defined culture as encompassing knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society (Thompson, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 159).

Some scholars consider culture to include beliefs, values, ethics, and behaviors arising from these three categories; others have referred to customs and traditions as the foundation of culture; while some have viewed culture as the "Factor that gives meaning and direction to human life." (Ebrahimi, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 71)

Allamah Jafari defines culture as the "Quality or appropriate manner for those types of material and spiritual activities of humans that are based on their sound reasoning and elevated emotions in a rational and progressive life." (Jafari, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 77)

In fact, culture is not simply belief and behavior; rather, it is a state and condition that predominates over the insights and social attitudes of society. For this reason, the Supreme Leader likens culture to "the surrounding air." (Statements. Khamenei, 1/1/1393)

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In such a view, religious culture is the prevailing spirit within the entirety of social interactions and perceptions of society, which arises from religious foundations and sources. In other words, the essential ideological and practical needs of society take shape in accordance with religious thought. This understanding of religious culture emphasizes its necessities, and anything contrary to such a culture is excluded from the realm of religious culture (Pourrostami, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 133).

In summary, religion encompasses a set of laws and customs in the spheres of beliefs, ethics, and rulings that are applicable for managing society. On this basis, religious culture is the "State and prevailing spirit guiding the entire range of social interactions and perceptions that, of course, arise from religious sources." Therefore, culture serves as a guiding and constructive force for society to the extent that it is intertwined with religion.

According to the preceding discussion, culture includes a semantic system and levels of thoughts and beliefs, an attitudinal system encompassing ethical issues and tendencies, behavioral rituals, and the level of appearances and symbols. From this perspective, culture encompasses all individual mentalities and actions of members of society. In other words, human thought and intellectual and active advancement within society unfold within the framework of culture. Hence, the mission of culture is to prepare society for the organization of an ideal lifestyle.

### 4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework serves as a beacon lighting the path to achieving the objectives of the research, guiding the researcher towards the goals of the study. So, to present a coherent discussion based on the conceptual approach of the research, the various levels of the topic will be addressed.

Based on the definition governing the conceptual approach to culture, it can be stated that the framework governing the research will be examined in the following dimensions:

- A) Epistemological Dimension: This aspect encompasses the beliefs and prevailing ideas in society;
- B) Ethical Dimension and Attitudinal System: This dimension primarily considers the general tendencies and inclinations of society;
- C) Behavioral Dimension and Social Actions: At this level, the practical conduct of society and the actions of the public in the community are focused on;
- D) Rituals and Symbols Dimension: This refers to the form and appearance that social life takes, which are observable and visible.

Therefore, in a systematic view of culture, four levels can be taken into account, which can be pursued in both software and hardware aspects, with both dimensions complementing each other. In other words, human behavior is a manifestation of human existential reality and nature, and serves as a mirror reflecting the beliefs and values of individuals.

On the other hand, the system of thought and values provides structure to the social actions of individuals. Based on this understanding, the present study seeks to investigate the role of the seminary in the software aspect (insight and inclination) and the hardware aspect (action and symbols) of religious culture in Iranian society. It will study the activities that the seminary has undertaken to institutionalize and elevate social conditions in Iran through the processes of creating, sustaining, stabilizing, and maintaining religious culture.

#### ◦. Software Aspect

##### ◦.1. Historical Process of Religious Leadership in the Seminary

With the intellectual dominance of reformists in society after the Constitutional Revolution, Islamic scholars established the seminary in Qom, effectively creating a hub for religious leadership. For centuries, the seminary has been the custodian of religious guidance in Iranian society, with the propagation of values and stabilization of religious beliefs centering on it.

The public perception regarding doctrinal doubts and legal deadlocks has also been directed towards the seminary. The seminary has rescued the community's mindset from the quagmire of ambiguities and difficulties through the interpretation of practical laws and the clarification of doctrinal issues. Therefore, the Vilayat-e Faqih from the seminary has been accepted by all in social matters (Hasani, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 213-214).

This leadership has not been limited to doctrinal and legal issues; rather, the role of the seminary as a political and social reference has been evident at all times, and in various movements and uprisings against tyrannical rulers, the seminary has acted as the driving force behind these movements. However, during the era of Reza Shah, there was a particular delicacy in the political actions of the seminary and its scholars. Scholars like Mr.

Haeri adopted a stance that avoided political entanglements and conflicts while looking towards Islamic horizons, aiming to "Ensure that both the complainants are satisfied and the government is pleased." (Razi, 1953 AD/1332 SH: 57)

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This path unfolded to such an extent that even Reza Khan, who was vehemently opposed to the clergy, stated, "Haj Abdolkarim is a very good man."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Haeri, in explaining such behavior, says: "Our efforts today may not yield immediate results, but our mission and responsibility are to ensure that the light of Islam does not go out. Rest assured that one day this light will illuminate the entire world." He expressed that "Today we are sowing seeds so that one day we can harvest the fruits and reap the rewards.

We are preparing the grounds today. We will once again illuminate the hearts with the true light of Islam. We protect the clergy community from the harm of events so that one day this community can enter the battlefield like the army of *Husayn ibn Ali* (AS) and seek victory in martyrdom." (Aghighi Bakhshayeshi, 1980 AD/1359 SH: 125) In the face of criticisms from other scholars regarding his political approach, he referenced the time of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS), stating, "When Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) responded to the complaints of Lady Fatimah (SA) and heard the call to prayer from the minaret proclaiming the oneness of God and the Prophethood of the Messenger, he said: Fatimah, my dear, if you want this voice to continue, you must wait a little." Therefore, Mr. Haeri believed that until the foundations of the seminary were established and solid, no steps could be taken (Jafariyan, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 263-264).

Thus, the seminary acted with a certain degree of gentleness, continually urging scholars and students to be patient and refrain from any form of strife and commotion to advance their goals, knowing that superficial actions could undermine the fabric of the seminary and, consequently, the propagation of Islam in society.

However, this did not mean that the seminary turned a blind eye to the oppressions of the Pahlavi regime; rather, through a division of labor among the scholars, it sought to maintain its position and move towards its aspirations while also managing the political understanding and awareness of the community.

This explains why Ayatollah Modarres firmly opposed Reza Khan, enduring the pains of exile, or why Ayatollah Baqiri rose up against the desecration of the shrine of Lady Masoumeh (SA). Likewise, in the incident of the stripping of clerical garments and mandatory unveiling, scholars such as Haj Agha Hossein Qomi in Mashhad took action. However, Mr. Haeri appeared seemingly indifferent to these issues,

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<sup>1</sup> *Yad Journal*, no. 4, p. 27. Quoted from Muhammad Hossein Masjed Jamei.



focusing instead on the internal construction of the seminary to preserve the institution and Islamic thought in the community away from Reza Khan's policies (Abazari, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 385-388).

For instance, when compulsory military service for clergy was approved by Reza Khan, Haj Agha Noorullah Isfahani called for the clergy to protest in Qom, an action that was fully coordinated with Ayatollah Haeri, yet his name was not publicly mentioned to protect the seminary from the repercussions of that protest (Shakouri, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 271).

Therefore, Islamic scholars during the first Pahlavi era, while seeing their mission as elucidating issues and enhancing the political awareness of society, recognized the necessity to adopt a certain political approach to preserve religious institutions and protect the stance of Islam.

This process during the second Pahlavi era somewhat prepared the ground for the seminary to expand its activities. The presence of Mr. Boroujerdi gave new vigor to the seminary's influence in society, and its scope expanded based on the political-religious concepts of Shia Islam. However, this did not lead to a clear stance on political events; rather, similar to the era of Mr. Haeri, a division of labor took place. Mr. Boroujerdi refrained from entering the nationalization of the oil movement and the coup, as he aimed to preserve the social standing of the seminary, while Mr. Kashani engaged in enlightening public opinion. This situation allowed Mr. Boroujerdi to act as an obstacle to the Islam-eradicating policies of Mohammed Reza Shah. According to Mr. Mahdi Haeri Yazdi, Mr. Boroujerdi's relationship with the court was honorable (Lajavardi, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 44).

During this period, the seminary's efforts in the religious culture of society were effective, leading to a fundamental perspective on Islamic governance, Vilayat-e Faqih, the relationship between religion and politics, and more.

Such behavior gradually laid the groundwork for a social movement, and following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the role of the seminary in expanding religious culture intensified, significantly impacting the religious culture of society.

The increasing inclination of the masses to assist the needy, active participation in disasters and hardships, the interest in mourning gatherings for the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), participation in *I'tikaf* (spiritual retreat), and enthusiasm for the *Arbaeen* pilgrimage reflect the seminary's role in institutionalizing religious culture.

However, insufficient understanding of cultural transformations has resulted in some anomalies such as promiscuity, corruption, vice, and

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bribery, which have plagued the religious community (Piruzmand, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 431-432).

### **۴.۲. Creating the Foundations for Islamic Community Building**

Reflecting on the activities of political actors in society, a process of observable social actions can be seen that can steer the community in a certain direction. Therefore, political actors are influential in advancing the goals of an ideal society and can strive to create the social ideals of the political system. In this regard, the ideas and viewpoints of the active political units within society are noteworthy, as the actions that emerge in society stem from their perspectives.

For a desirable dynamism among political activists to manifest, their outlooks must be developed and enhanced. From this perspective, providing a conceptual foundation will be very effective, as the formation of a desirable social environment arises from conceptual groundwork.

On the other hand, it is evident that the more the seminary engages with social issues, the more the community connects with Islamic foundations, and the more it distances itself from social issues, the greater the schism between society and Islam becomes. This is why Reza Khan sought to eliminate Islam from society by obstructing the social activities of the clergy and scholars.

Undoubtedly, one of the fields in which religious scholars engaged was the groundwork for Islamic socialization; thus, there was a need for the country's legal mechanisms to be aligned with Islam. In this context, the seminary aimed to enlighten society about the role of the state in Islamic culture and the Sharia analysis of issues on one hand, and on the other hand, encouraged scholars and students to enter judicial positions and legislative bodies.

This policy was even implemented during the reign of Reza Shah. Martyr Modarres encouraged capable individuals to enter the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education. He insisted, stating, "If you fall short, the unqualified will take your place, the judicial system will descend into chaos, and the country will face insecurity. When a country has no security and comfort, nothing exists in that country." (Homayoun Misbah, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 38)

The institution of the seminary based on a divine worldview and free from any narratives of racial, linguistic, sectarian, or occupational dependency, disseminated components of belief and ethics. Since these components were transcendent of time and space, as well as class and gender, they fostered a sense of convergence and solidarity among members of the community while moderating individual interests and

promoting desirable social actions, thereby facilitating the process of Islamic community building.

In fact, the seminary, in alignment with the reform of the community's political thought processes and liberating them from divergence, not only created a platform for presenting their ideas but also committed to establishing a new intellectual framework based on Islamic political thought.

This was intended for political activists to recognize the misunderstandings and misconceptions created by politicians, remedy them, and exhibit behavior aimed at the community's advancement. The result of this effort was the emergence of a social movement based on Islamic thought for liberation from colonialism and tyranny in the form of the Islamic Revolution.

After the revolution, the seminary actively engaged with the government as a thinking institution to clarify the theoretical and epistemological foundations of the political system. In the path of development, it analyzed and critiqued Western development, preventing destructive factors from affecting the Islamic community and elucidating the foundations for local development. On the other hand, the seminary sought to preserve and elevate religious culture by critiquing the invading culture and its influencing factors within the Islamic community.

#### ۳.۳. Cultivating Human Resources in Line with Islamic Society

There is a close relationship between the Islamic community and the development of revolutionary human resources, meaning that the extent to which ideal Islamic individuals thrive in society reflects the quality of that society. For this purpose, it is essential to socialize desirable Islamic norms and values so that a qualified generation can be formed to establish a dynamic community.

The formation of such a situation enhances the social capacity to turn threats into opportunities and to counter identity threats, while also infusing a kind of wisdom into society. When looking at contemporary Iranian history through this lens, one can see the efforts of seminary scholars who regarded the cultivation of human resources as a duty in various fields.

The clergy, through their presence in various cities across Iran and the establishment of an extensive communication network, disseminated the main lines of Islamic thought throughout the country. By expanding education on religious issues, they played their role in awakening the masses and cultivating human resources (Alaviyan, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 253-260).

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Although the Pahlavi regime confronted the clergy severely, "In any case, the clergy, following the Imams (AS), fought against all forms of pressure and tyranny, and promoted divine laws by any means possible until their last breath." (Hosseinian, 2003: 182-183)

The clergy created religious organizations such as the "Islamic Propagation Association" to eliminate doubts and superstitions from the minds of the youth and dedicated themselves to the promotion and dissemination of Islam (Piruzmand, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 350-352).

#### **•, ٤. The Solidarity of Religion and Politics**

Among the subjects that have long been the focus of thinkers is the relationship between religion and politics. In Iran, the separation of religion from politics was strongly propagated by the Western-oriented intellectual movement after the Constitutional Revolution, and the Pahlavi regime based its governance on this separation. This led to a belief among some Islamists in the separation of politics from religion (Khomeini, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 20, 114).

Although seminary graduates engaged in political actions based on religious propositions and were always keen to highlight religion in political matters and the laws governing society, the isolation of politics from religion continued until the time of Imam's struggles. He re-established the foundations of politics, demonstrating that the depth of political actions lies within Islamic thought and religious propositions.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the political system, there remained groups who emphasized, based on the ideology dominating their thoughts and behaviors, the non-interference of religion in politics, or at least a minimal presence of religion in politics, often with differing rhetoric.

Therefore, Imam Khomeini and the scholars of Islam emphasized that all the pillars of the Islamic Republic should be based on religion, and the strategies of the political system at various domestic and international levels should be rooted in Islamic thinking. They endeavored to create a charter for this purpose. They believed that Islamic jurisprudence is the true and complete theory for managing human beings and society from cradle to grave (Khomeini, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 21, 289).

Thus, it is capable of providing solutions for all political, economic, cultural, military, and social issues in the world and takes on the responsibility of guiding both Islamic and non-Islamic global societies. For example, in the economic sphere, seminary scholars have presented works such as "Eqtisadna," "Islam and Ownership," and "Islamic Economics," along with theories regarding the economic mechanisms in the Islamic society.

**۴.۴. Efforts for Unity and Social Cohesion**

Among the divine commandments and gifts, as well as the outcome of human reason, is the decree for the unity of society and social cohesion, which seems essential for the survival of the community. In the contemporary world, unity and social cohesion among different social strata have gained even greater importance.

Despite the intertwining cultural and political functions of a society that make meeting needs interdependent, a shared destiny and fate has emerged for communities within the global system. This fate and these common bonds can be realized when they are based on a specific ideology, shaped by a set of ideals and thoughts, and manifested in behavior that arises from them, achieving what the Quran describes as a single Ummah (in the form of one nation) (Shariati, 1978 AD/1357 SH: ۷۴): " And indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so fear Me." (al-Mu'minun/52)

With this perspective, the seminary consistently relied on social forces during historical events and occasions and actively sought to highlight Islamic power by pursuing the participation and unity of the Iranian people, encouraging solidarity in various issues. The seminary has always advanced social cohesion as a counter to tyranny and colonialism. For instance, in events such as the unveiling of women, the nationalization of the oil industry, and the events of the Islamic Revolution, a form of social cohesion among the members of society can be observed.

**۴.۵. Defense of the Sanctity of Religion and Confrontation with Social Deviations**

Every society is based on a collection of beliefs and teachings that organize the behavioral and ethical frameworks of its members. In societies where religion does not play a decisive role in the establishment of the political system-that is, where there is a form of ideological gap between the governing management system and the masses-there arises a potential for the exploitation of religious knowledge by officials and their agents to achieve their objectives.

This situation not only jeopardizes social security but also provides a basis for undermining the mental peace and fundamental understanding of individuals. In such circumstances, protecting the religious beliefs of the people becomes essential. Within the activities of the seminary, it is evident that part of its mission and that of the scholars has been to safeguard religion and confront such issues. "There is no doubt that the seminaries and committed scholars, throughout the history of Islam and Shiism, have been the most important stronghold of Islam against attacks, distortions, and deviations. Great Islamic scholars have

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dedicated their lives to promoting the divine issues of lawful and unlawful without alteration." (Khomeini, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 21, 274)

Although the emergence of deviant thoughts began during the Qajar era, these ideas were increasingly reproduced and reconstructed during the oppressive and turbulent periods of Reza Khan and then Mohammad Reza Shah.

The Cambridge history describes the situation of various religions, sects, and denominations as follows: "The status and authority of the scholars had clearly diminished, and religious minorities had gained more importance and better opportunities for economic progress, a result of Reza Shah's government movements toward equal treatment of all citizens. The result of this policy was an improvement in the situation of most Armenian Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, who gained access to a large number of new jobs and professions." (Mokhber Dezfouli, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 41-42)

One of the most significant deviant ideas promoted during the Pahlavi regime, based on British policy in Iran, was antiquarianism. Under this ideology, the Pahlavi regime emphasized Zoroastrianism and fueled racial prejudices in Iran by highlighting Cyrus the Great. The actions of scholars and the seminary throughout the Pahlavi era were always aimed at countering this kind of thinking.

For instance, Martyr Motahhari focused on explaining the "Mutual Services of Islam and Iran" and stated: "The truth is that the claim of a separation between bloodlines and races is nothing more than a superstition. The Semitic race (Arabs) and the Aryan race (Iranians), and so forth, only existed separately and independently in the past; however, now there has been so much mixing and blending that no trace of independent races remains." He further considered the Zoroastrian propaganda as merely a calculated political activity by the agents of colonialism to counter Islam (Motahhari, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 57).

Another deviation that was promoted in society was the issue of Baha'ism. "Reza Shah had good relations with the Baha'is; so much so that Asadollah Sani'i, a prominent Baha'i, was appointed as a special aide to the crown prince." (Fardoust, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 1, 374)

Certainly, the support for Baha'ism intensified during Mohammad Reza Shah's era, where individuals such as Hoveyda became Prime Minister for many years, and economic, cultural, political, and even military matters fell under their control.

Alongside support for Baha'ism, dissenters and anti-Islamic movements were also backed by the Pahlavi regime. The emphasis on movements like Sheikism, Babism, Sufism, and others, as well as the promotion of figures such as Sayyid Hasan Taqizadeh, Dolatabadi,

Shariati Sanglaji, Hokmizadeh, Ahmad Kasravi, and others, and the establishment of anti-religious institutions like the Army of Religion and Army of Knowledge, as well as initiatives such as state and provincial associations, were aimed at diminishing and transforming concepts like waiting (for the Mahdi), return, intercession, and Islamic rituals. In other words, a movement for "Pure Religion" was in progress (Cultural Institute of Ghadr-e Vilayat, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 93-98).

On the other hand, the political activities of liberal and Marxist factions in Iranian society led to deviations in the social sphere; just as today, eclectic ideas and misunderstandings have entered society to diminish the influence of Islamic political thought.

The seminary and Islamic scholars regarded their most important mission as countering attacks and deviations to establish the security of social and religious culture. Imam Khomeini emphasized: "We must strive to realize the practical jurisprudence of Islam without paying attention to the scheming West and the aggressing East, and independent of the prevailing diplomacy in the world." (Khomeini, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 21, 292)

This was essential for standing firm against deviations. In contrast to Baha'ism, some concerned individuals turned towards establishing the Hojratieh Society.<sup>¶</sup> In response to secular movements and Westernized intellectuals, a group of scholars rose up and faced criticism from scholars from the very beginning of this ideological spectrum. In the past century, Mr. Haeri quietly and gently engaged in political activities and founded a seminary to serve as a foundation for anti-religious movements.

Hajj Agha Hossein Qomi migrated to Iran to address the dismal cultural situation, which frightened the intellectual movement;<sup>¶</sup> they quickly began writing books such as "The Secrets of a Thousand Years" and "Shi'ism: by individuals like Hokmizadeh and Kasravi, which were strongly promoted by figures like Asadollah Kharaqani and Shariati Sanglaji. This was met with responses from scholars like Ayatollah Mohammad Khalisizadeh, who authored the book "Kashf al-Istetar," and the publication "Islam Ritual" under the supervision of Mr. Hajj Siraj Ansari and Shaykh Abbas Ali Islami, among others."

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<sup>¶</sup> Although the activists of this association later went astray and found themselves at odds with the political system of the Islamic Republic, it began its activities during its formation in the face of the Pahlavi Baha'i propaganda.

<sup>¶</sup> Even Mr. Kasravi states, "In these few years, the greatest step taken towards strengthening the reaction has been the arrival of Mr. Qomi." (Kasravi, What Will Be the Fate of Iran?, p. 14)

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Ultimately, in response to these attacks, Imam Khomeini wrote the book "Kashf Asrar." Such activities by the graduates of the seminary were efforts to revive the strength of religious circles and restore the power of religion in the social sphere. To prove this point, one can refer to Mr. Kashani's letter to then-Prime Minister Foroughi on October 12, 1941 (Mehr 20, 1320), in which he pointed out the schemes and conspiracies that Reza Shah employed to destroy the seminary system and distance society from the influence of seminary scholars. Additionally, Ayatollah Qomi sent a letter to then-Prime Minister Agha Soheyli requesting the repeal of the unveiling (Kashf-e Hijab) law, the return of religious endowments and schools, and the teaching of religious sciences and adherence to religious practices in educational programs, all of which were approved (Jafari et al., 1992 AD/1371 SH: 425).

The entirety of these activities indicates the efforts of the seminary to expand religious culture in society and revive the power of religion in the social sphere.

#### ۳.۷. Expansion of Ethical Components

It is evident that the value system of society is rooted in its beliefs and semantic framework, and the seminary is recognized as the driving force behind the dissemination and promotion of religious beliefs and values.

The establishment of the Qom seminary coincided with the end of World War I and its consequences, including famine and hoarding. Undoubtedly, when a society experiences chaos or faces issues such as famine, ethical components among the masses tend to decline.

In that era, the scholars of the seminary made efforts to encourage merchants and traders to assist the poor, urging market vendors and landowners to be compassionate and accommodating towards the needy, and to refrain from hoarding, cheating, and accumulating wealth. Throughout history, during both economic crises and other circumstances, Islamic scholars have always been concerned about the well-being of the needy (Herzoddin, 1984 AD/1405 AH: 3, 253).

In this regard, Mr. Haeri held many sessions for the merchants, providing them with sermons and urging them to be patient and tolerant with the needy while clarifying the boundaries of *Halal* and *Haram* (Kharrazi, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 352).

In fact, efforts were made to replace violence, plunder, and violation of others' property with faith, spirituality, and resilience against hunger in the famine-stricken situation of Iran. The seminary's commitment to promoting ethical components has always been significant throughout historical processes, with its peak influence observable during the Sacred Defense and the maximum sacrifice of society. After the Islamic



Revolution, the establishment of charitable organizations and the creation of Jihadist groups exemplified the institutionalization of ethical components within society.

#### ٦. Hardware Aspect

After the Constitutional Revolution, the seminary experienced a period of confusion and fragmentation. The political disappointment arising from the changes of the Constitutional Revolution on one hand, and the assassinations of prominent scholars of the seminary on the other, caused disruptions in the social management of the seminary during that era. At this time, Ayatollah Haeri Yazdi revitalized the Fayzieh seminary, centralizing the activities of the clergy in various fields. The seminary was perceived as a base for countering deviations and the secularization resulting from the Constitutional Revolution.

The establishment of the Fayzieh seminary led a large number of those interested in religious sciences to flock to this center, transforming Qom into the religious hub of Iran. Although Reza Shah's struggles imposed restrictions on the students, the chaos among the clergy following the Constitutional Revolution somewhat came to an end,<sup>§</sup> prompting religious politicians and clerics - who had become isolated after the execution of Ayatollah Nouri and the assassination of Mr. Behbahani - to converge towards the Fayzieh seminary.<sup>°</sup>

During the Pahlavi era, the seminaries focused on intellectual and cultural activities rooted in Islamic thought, striving to present a cultural framework independent of the political system among the people as an alternative model. This significant groundwork was facilitated through the Fayzieh seminary. Although the policies of the Reza Khan era were aimed at countering the clergy - to the extent that students would flee to the deserts of Qom before dawn and return to schools late at night - despite all the strict measures, the seminary found itself in a situation described by Michael Fisher as "Attack and Defense." (Forati, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 81-82) This involved defending a culture that was being eradicated while concurrently attacking what was trying to replace it. Ultimately, this resilience bore fruit, allowing the seminary to strengthen its internal framework while cultivating a more global perspective on cultural production. This was achieved under the authority of Ayatollah

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<sup>§</sup> Although its effects remained for a long time.

<sup>°</sup> Among the people who can be mentioned are Hajj Jafarholi Jalivand Rezai (Saham al-Dawla), Hajj Mahdi Mazandarani, Shaykh Mohammad Sultan al-Wa'ezin, and Hajj Rushdieh (Nikoboresh, A study and political performance of Ayatollah Hajj Shaykh Abdul Karim Ha'eri Yazdi, p. 52.).

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Boroujerdi, and as the number of students increased, the conditions for scholarly growth and education in Qom were established. Furthermore, the seminary was able to establish connections with Shia communities abroad and send representatives to European countries<sup>۱</sup> and even America to disseminate Islamic culture, demonstrating the dynamism of the seminary (Lajvardi, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 28).

Alongside these activities, steps were taken to engage with scholars of the Islamic world, leading to the establishment of the Dar al-Taqrīb (House of Approximation). This alignment was significantly effective in addressing the challenges facing the Islamic world; the establishment of various publications, the dissemination and translation of religious texts all reflected the strengthening and restoration of the status of religion in society after a period of severe damage. In fact, the connection between the people and the seminary, which had been weakened over the years by the propaganda of enlightened thinkers, was reestablished. Therefore, it is necessary to examine some of the most important tools that the seminary employed in this path.

#### **۳.۱. Utilization of Mosques, Minbars, and Religious Gatherings**

One of the tools for disseminating religious culture throughout history has been mosques. The clergy established direct communication through mosques to institutionalize components of religious culture. Although the Pahlavi regime removed many communication tools from the control of the clergy and imposed extensive restrictions on their activities, the connection between the people and the clergy continued through mosques and religious gatherings. "The religious movement, through mosques, was the only suitable and secure organizational platform that the rural population and the impoverished could understand to fight against the regime." (Stemple, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 68)

In the first Pahlavi regime, plans were implemented to establish institutions for preaching and public speaking, endowments, examinations for students, etc., to allow religious thought to pass through the Pahlavi regime and effectively disseminate Islamic ideas aligned with the intellectual desires of the Pahlavi government. However, the activities of the scholars of the seminary for the dissemination and promotion of the foundations of Islamic culture were organized around the mosque, which became a base for religious education and a means for mass participation in various events (Alaviyan, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 260-261).

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<sup>۱</sup>Cf. Islam School Journal, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 65-69.

For example, during the unveiling campaign, the Goharshad Mosque became a hub for public participation and the consolidation of people's activities. Likewise, during the struggles of the Islamic Revolution, mosques were the focal point of attention. Imam Khomeini stated about the role of mosques: "It was these mosques that made the victory (of the Islamic Revolution) possible for the nation." (Khomeini, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 13, 15)

Undoubtedly, the clergy's ability to educate, train, and create public mobilization led mosques to take on a central role. According to SAVAK documents, the clergy established a spiritual connection with the people through sermons and speeches on various occasions, organizing weekly meetings, holding ceremonies for Ramadan and Muharram, and leading congregational prayers. As a result, clerics formed an extensive communication network across Iran through mosques: "Mosques remained the main factor for mobilizing merchants and shopkeepers." (Stemple, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 69)

Through this, they laid the groundwork for any fundamental transformation through cultural development, as happened during the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, the seminary, as an institution, utilized mosques to promote Islamic laws and teachings, guiding the masses toward becoming active participants in the Islamic society by clarifying Islam's views on governance and political order.

#### ۶.۲. Establishment of Publications and Press

The beginning of the 14th century in Iran saw intellectuals and authoritarian figures unite to launch a widespread attack on religious thought. Consequently, the seminary used every possible tool to defend religion and revitalize Islamic thought within society.

Thus, the publications that emerged during the Pahlavi regime started their activities from such a philosophy. Among the publications that began operating during Reza Khan's reign was "Islam Newspaper," managed by Mohsen Faqih Shirazi, which aimed to provide a reasoned response to inquiries regarding religious issues. This publication became so significant that Ayatollah Sayyid Abolhasan Isfahani authorized the allocation of the Imam's share to support the newspaper (Sadr Hashemi, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 1, 243).

By the 1320s, several other publications had also been established, although the literature used in them was weak; the discussions mainly focused on the compatibility of science and religion, the dominance of modernism, and articulating Islam in line with contemporary ideas. Another influential publication in disseminating the truths of Islam and religious culture in Iranian society was the "A'in Islam," where scholars such as Mirza Khalil Kamarei, Muhammad Baqir Kamarei, Hajj Seraj

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Ansari, Sayyid Mahmoud Taleghani, and many others engaged with topics such as women and the hijab issue, confronting Westernization and Baha'ism, the inseparability of religion and politics, and more. The leaders of this publication believed that the improper education during the Reza Khan era had created societal problems, and to liberate the community, the negative effects of that regime needed to be dissolved.

Therefore, its mission was seen as the revival of Islam and the Islamic movement.<sup>Y</sup> Numerous publications began operating in the 1320s that were primarily concerned with the promotion of religious thought. Examples include "al-Hadi," "New Generation," "Great Mosque," "Happiness Message," and others that were influenced by the seminary and were entirely inspired in their intellectual framework by the seminary itself.

With the leadership of Ayatollah Boroujerdi, a significant transformation occurred in this regard; for the first time, the magazine "Hekmat" was launched, which featured articles by figures such as Mr. Makarem Shirazi, Martyr Motahhari, and others. Although the management of this publication was not in the hands of the clergy, it aligned with the objectives of the seminary and the clergy.

Another publication worth mentioning is "Islam School," which operated under the supervision of the religious authorities of the Qom seminary, founded by individuals such as Mr. Makarem Shirazi, Mousavi Ardebili, Moussa Sadr, Hossein Noori, Jafar Sobhani, and others. The prevailing intellectual environment of this magazine was carefully aligned with the cautious stance of Ayatollah Boroujerdi and subsequently Ayatollah Shariatmadari; it strictly criticized only the moral state of society. However, it also indirectly addressed cultural issues related to politics, which significantly influenced the reinforcement of the beliefs and religious culture of the people.

This also provided a foundation for strengthening the political and social activities of the younger generation of seminarians, such as Mohammad Javad Bahonar, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Mohammad Baqer Mahdavi, who later initiated the publication of "Shiism School."

During this period, various other publications were also released, such as "Jafari's Yearbook of Education," "The Great Mosque Magazine," "Shia Thoughts," "World of Knowledge," and others, which created political and social transformations in society and facilitated the emergence of a political-religious action. In fact, these activities

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<sup>Y</sup>A'in Islam Journal, vol. 6, no. 12.

manifested as a cultural movement in the country and were considered a precursor to a political movement. The content of publications such as "Bi'that" and "Revenge" which were published in (1963 AD/1343 SH) reflected and conveyed the revolutionary thoughts and ideas of that era (Khosroshahi, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 17-19).

From this period onward, seminary publications began to address issues with a clear and revolutionary perspective, significantly impacting the formation of revolutionary culture.

After the Islamic Revolution, the seminary's publications underwent extensive qualitative and quantitative improvements, and the seminary engaged in disseminating religious culture on various topics. They produced unique publications addressing issues related to children, women, youth, and different segments of society. In addition, concerning cultural, political, economic, social, and other subjects, the seminary published materials based on religious literature; and with the establishment of the Islamic government, the seminary undoubtedly took on the task of responding to criticisms and inquiries raised against the Islamic system.

After the revolution, the seminary magazines reflected topics such as the guidelines and letters of mystics and the companions of the spiritual path from notable figures like Mulla Ali Noori, Akhound Shaykh Mahdi Bahari Hamadani, Hajj Mirza Javad Maleki Tabrizi, Shaykh Mojtaba Qazwini, Khurasani, and Fa'id Kashani, which were rich in religious knowledge. On the other hand, they included critiques of the cultural policies of the seminary concerning the desirability of actions within society, as well as assessments of the scientific structure of the seminary regarding the efficacy of the principles and jurisprudence of the seminary in the global arena. Alongside these issues, the magazines examined the thoughts of the leaders of the Islamic Revolution, the role of the clergy in the last century, and political matters (Jalali, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 444-445).

All of these played a significant role in promoting religious culture in society. In addition to these activities, the seminary utilized audio and visual media, offering various programs for disseminating religious literature through the media.

#### **۶.۳. Establishment of Religious Institutions and Organizations**

During the reign of Reza Khan, many seminaries were shut down, and there was a severe crackdown on civil and religious institutions. In other words, the process of cultural and political transformations occurred to the detriment of religion and aimed at reducing the influence of the seminary. With the overthrow of Reza Shah, the space for religious activities opened up. Therefore, the seminary focused on revitalizing its

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religious infrastructure and institutions (Karamipour, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 33).

One of the first institutions established was the "Islamic Propagation Society," founded by a non-cleric. This period still bore the scars of the Reza Khan era on the seminary, and as such, it lacked the capacity to organize an institution; however, it supported the society that religious individuals had founded.

This society viewed its mission as promoting Islam, spreading monotheism, teaching Islamic ethics in Iran and other countries, purifying religion from superstitions, and enlightening the youth about the truths of religion, etc. (Mozaffari, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 63-64)

Another institution is the "Union of Muslims," founded by Hajj Siraj Ansari, with individuals like Mr. Taleghani collaborating with the union. This union defended the traditional foundations of religion with a rationalistic and enlightened perspective, while also holding an anti-innovation and anti-superstition stance.

Hajj Siraj believed that religious laws should be used as a charter for building individuals and societies. A prominent activity of this union was its stance on the Palestinian issue, and its most significant action was the formation of an assembly of prominent scholars and the general public in support of Palestine (Karamipour, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 107-109).

Among the efforts of the union to disseminate religious culture was the inclusion of the book "Religion Pillar" concerning prayer in the curricula of students. In this regard, the support of Ayatollah Boroujerdi significantly contributed to the success of this initiative (Jafarian, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 76-77). Another organization is the "Society for Islamic Education," founded by Shaykh Abbas Ali Islami.

This institution set its mission as promoting Shia thought and educating children and youth in Islamic etiquette. To organize the cultural situation of society, the institution undertook the construction of Islamic schools (Haddad Adel, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 9, 369-372).

In these schools, attention was given to students regarding the Quran and the sayings of the Ahl al-Bayt. The activities of Mr. Islami were approved by Mr. Boroujerdi and Mr. Hakim, and also received praise from Imam Khomeini (Khomeini, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 1, 152).

One of the cultural institutions in Qom was the "Institute for the Right Path and Principles of Religion," which was established by young seminary students. The concern of this institute was to counter Christian propaganda in Iran in the same manner it was being promoted; that is, by

proving the truth of Islam.<sup>^</sup>After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, this institute shifted its activities to confront the Marxists.

Another institution founded by the youth of the seminary was the "Haqqani School." This school focused on transforming the curriculum of the seminary while also engaging in cultural and political activities in society. The Haqqani School was recognized as the most important revolutionary base of the seminary (Sha'banzadeh, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 97-127).

In addition to these institutions, other entities were also established by seminary affiliates, which initially received support from scholars and religious authorities but later failed to meet the expectations of the seminary in their activities. One of these institutions is the "Islamic Propagation Center," founded by Mr. Shariatmadari. Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, Moussa Sadr, and Mr. Sadr Balaghi praised this effort; however, with the onset of the Islamic Revolution and the lack of attention from the Islamic Propagation Center to current events, as well as the failure to meet the expectations of scholars, criticisms towards the center began (Davani, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 445-455).

From the 1340s until the Islamic Revolution, various other institutions were active, such as "Resalat School," "Dar al-Zahra," "Maktab Tawhid," "Ayatollah Golpaygani School," and others, which made significant contributions to educating the new generation of Iranian society and teaching them the foundations of Islam. After the Islamic Revolution, many scientific centers, including various schools and institutions under the supervision of the seminary, commenced activities, in addition to the fact that institutions previously under the regime were placed at the seminary's disposal for the dissemination of religious culture.

### Conclusion

The behavior of religious scholars as the driving force of the seminary in the past century indicates that they have sought to institutionalize beliefs, norms, and behaviors stemming from Islamic thought in society. Over time, they have strongly insisted on society's adherence to Islam and the political-social culture presented by the Impeccable Imams (AS) as pathways to the dynamism, growth, and greatness of the community;

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<sup>^</sup>Cf. Imam's Companions According to SAVAK Documents 34 - Martyr Hojjatol Islam Gholamhossein Haqqani, pp. 43-44.

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as the absence of norms in the political society leads to disorder and chaos in the political system.

The institutionalization of fundamental Islamic values in society, which manifests as religious culture, is rooted in the fundamental transformation of beliefs, values, and orientations. Therefore, the seminary has made efforts to create a collective spirit based on self-belief and Islamic rationality in the process of building an Islamic society, alongside inner transformation (internal change) of individuals.

There is no doubt that when religious values are institutionalized within society, its members will rise to establish justice. "So that people may maintain justice," just as this process began during the era of Mr. Haeri and came to fruition with the victory of the Islamic Revolution. This process represents the software aspect of the seminary, which has been applied in various periods according to the requirements of time and place in society.

Thus, it must be acknowledged that given that the political system of Iran is at the helm of religious culture, the seminary, as a producer of the software of this culture, strives to expand justice in society and actively seeks social justice; because if justice vanishes from society, and the community becomes devoid of religious spirit, and the foundations of society diverge from the basis of justice and monotheistic thought, the tyranny will dominate the community, and religious values will be marginalized. Consequently, the political and cultural functions of society will be constructed based on non-religious thought. In the present age, where religious thought faces significant doubts, the seminary has continued its historical mission by guarding religious beliefs, entering various arenas, and dispelling the dust of doubt and ambiguity from the truths.

Therefore, throughout history, the seminary has proactively engaged in revitalizing the Islamic elements embedded in the historical mindset of Iranian society and solidifying and preserving them, alongside the dynamism of clerical behavior.

In the hardware aspect, the seminary has relied on mosques and pulpits, publications, and revolutionary institutions to propagate religious culture in another sphere. Thus, it has sought to institutionalize religious culture by utilizing both software and hardware resources. The result has been the predominance of Islamic thought as the dominant discourse in the political and social relations of the Islamic system in Iran.



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