Hassan al-Turabi's Religious Discourse on Faith, Renewal, and *Ijtihād*

Gubara Said Hassan and *Jabal M. Buaben*

Abstract

The role of Islamic intellectuals is not confined to elaborating on the religious ideology of Islam. Equally important is their role in setting this religious ideology against other ideologies, sharpening and clarifying their differences, and thereby developing and intensifying one's commitment to Islam as a distinct, divinely based ideology. Islam, as both a religion and an ideology, simultaneously mobilizes and transforms, legitimizes and preserves. It can be an instrument of power, a source and a guarantee of its legitimacy, as well as a tool to be used in the political struggle among social classes. Islam can also present a challenge to authority whenever the religious movement questions the existing social order during times of crisis and raises a rival power, as the current situation in Sudan vividly demonstrates. Throughout his political career, Hassan al-Turabi has resorted to religious symbolism in his public discourse and/or Islamic rhetoric, which could often be inflammatory and heavily reliant upon the Qur'an. This is, in fact, the embodiment of the Islamic quest for an ideal alternative. Our paper focuses on this charismatic and pragmatic religio-political leader of Sudan and the key concepts of his religious discourse: faith (*īmān*), renewal (*tajdīd*), and *ijtihād* (rational, independent, and legal reasoning).

Keywords: Hassan al-Turabi, Islam, discourse, faith (*īmān*), renewal (*tajdīd*), *ijtihād*

Gubara Said Hassan is originally from Sudan and currently teaches "Islamic Governance and International Relations" at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam. He is also an adjunct professor at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada. Jabal M. Buaben, formerly of the School of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, UK, is an associate professor at the Sultan Omar Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

Introduction

Charismatic personalities and leaders have emerged from among the believers in the Judaic, Christian and Islamic faiths during the long histories of these world religious traditions. They have dedicated themselves to interpreting and renewing the religious zealousness and defending the communal identity or ideational affiliation of their followers and supporters.

This paper focuses on Hassan al-Turabi, the charismatic and pragmatic religio-political leader of Sudan and the key concepts of his religious discourse: faith (*īmān*), renewal (*tajdīd*), and *ijtihād* (rational and independent reasoning). Through his vivid textual/written discourse and dramatic political actions, he magnifies the Islamic beliefs and virtues that set his Popular Congress Party (PCP) apart from the animist and Christian Republic of South Sudan and the non-Muslim/believers at large. Al-Turabi has added a new twist to this by adopting a unique style of ideology and political activism that the western academia and media have come to colorfully depict as "Islamic fundamentalism," awakening, renewal, revival, the "Green Peril," Islamism, and radicalism.

First, we seek to indicate that political Islam, as represented by al-Turabi's religious discourse, is the affirmation of religious/Islamic authority as holistic and absolute. It is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah be publicly recognized and legally enforced. It is also, as C. S. Liebman states, "a mode of thought and action that entails the rejection of those surrounding cultural forms and values perceived as non-indigenous (or inauthentic) to the religious tradition. And in order to bolster this rejection, specific key components of the tradition have to be reinvigorated and intensified."[1]

Second, political Islam is not only a political movement that aspires to restructure the existing system(s) on Islamic foundations, but is equally an intellectual one that provides philosophical principles that have evolved into a system of thought. The role of Islamic intellectuals is not confined to elaborating Islam's religious ideology. Equally important is their role in setting such religious ideology against other "positivist" ideologies (e.g., Marxism and Liberalism), sharpening and clarifying differences and thereby developing and intensifying one's commitment to Islam as a distinct, divinely based ideology.

Furthermore, Islam as an ideology simultaneously mobilizes and transforms, legitimizes and preserves. It can be an instrument of power, a source and guarantee of its legitimacy, and a weapon to be used in the political struggle among various social classes. Islam can also serve as a challenge to authority whenever the religious movement questions the existing social order

during times of crisis and raise a rival power, as the current situation in Sudan vividly demonstrates. Ideologues of political Islam also oppose the "prevailing ethos" – whether they define it as sectarian, tribal, secular, modernist, or western – and oppose those with political power who perpetuate it. Moreover, they resort to religious symbolism in their public discourse or/and *Islamic rhetoric*. This discourse, which is inflammatory, inflationary, and heavily reliant upon divine scripture, became the embodiment of the Islamic quest for an ideal alternative.

Third, only a few thinkers have played a pivotal role in forming and then disseminating the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) thought and actions in Sudan and those of their offshoots, the National Islamic Front (NIF) or the currently split National Salvation Revolution. One person stands out as having exerted a lasting influence on the ideological foundations of these organizations' thought on a national scale: Hassan al-Turabi. This paper considers the religious contribution of this intellectual and ideologue par excellence of the former NIF. We confine ourselves to discussing his religious discourse and political activism, but with some objectives in mind: (1) a concise biographical account and how he came to adhere to Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood Movement and eventually become its leader; and (2) the genesis and evolution of this figures ideas, which helped create a counter-ideological movement. A detailed discussion of al-Turabi's thought is in order because he is the actual figurehead and ideologue of the country's Muslim Brotherhood at its highest stage in the NIF.

A Concise Life History

Al-Turabi was born in Kassala, eastern Sudan, on February 1, 1932, to a family with a long established tradition of Islamic learning and Sufism, a heritage that he has said was critical to his *intellectual* growth. Judith Miller quotes him as saying: "My grandfather was a famous scholar. He worked for public life and welfare and struggled against the government of those days. Turabi's grandfather was imprisoned for seven days for opposing the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium."[2]

The young al-Turabi also inherited other specific qualities: a passion for law, a love of travel, and an intimate knowledge of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah, and Arabic language and literature in particular. He received his elementary education in Kordofan, western Sudan, and spent his intermediate school years in Wad Medani, central Sudan. He also attended the higher secondary school in Hantoub, near Wad Medani. These three schools were English-

speaking, secular, and run by the British. In an interview with Miller, al-Turabi acknowledged that he had the advantage of a double source of education: traditional religious and modern secular learning.[3] This dual education and training, along with an excellent knowledge of English and later French and German, would eventually serve him well, for unlike many other leading Islamic ideologues, al-Turabi is comfortable addressing both western and non-western *audiences*. Despite graduating from Gordon Memorial College (now the University of Khartoum) in 1955 with a law degree, he declined to practice on the ground that there was no room for independent thought in legal practice. He "was of the view that the lawyer is literally forced to argue on behalf of the client because of the payment of legal fees."[4]

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood founded a chapter in the Sudan in 1949, after which some Hantoub secondary school students became members. According to Hassan Mekki, the movement's principal historian, al-Sa'im Muhammed Ibrahim, a former teacher at Wad Madeni intermediate school, who had gone to Cairo for further study, played a significant role in the branch's foundation. He visited that secondary school in 1949 to see some of his former students and friends, most prominent among whom were Babikir Karrar and Muhammed Yousuf Muhammed. He informed them about the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Anti-Communist League of Sudanese Students and suggested they set up a branch there. However,

> When the Hantoub group went to Gordon Memorial College the following year, they were shocked to find it completely controlled by communists. Faced with this situation, Karrar suggested to Muhammed Yousuf that they revive the idea conveyed to them earlier by Al Sa'im. A group of six people came together to draft a constitution for the movement which was called *Harakat al-Tahrīr al-Islāmī* (the Islamic Liberation Movement). It was a counter-movement which used Islam as a point of departure.[5]

Al-Turabi was not among the founding fathers. In fact, he only became became active in Islamic student politics in 1954, when the Eid Congress was convened. Those present included al-Turabi and passed resolutions that would give the mainstream Islamist movement its shape. First, it was decided to officially adopt the name al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (the Muslim Brothers) in order to represent the triumph of those who identified strongly with the parent movement in Egypt and who took pride in its history and accomplishments.

The idea of an Islamic constitution as a means to influence Sudanese politics and society was adopted. After it became clear by late 1955 that independence was coming, the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood hastened to form

the Islamic Front for the Constitution (IFC) in December 1955. The IFC "produced a 'model constitution', which envisaged a parliamentary system with regional devolution in a unitary state. It also paid great attention to economic organization, reflecting the socialist phase of the movement. It called for land reform, public ownership of mineral resources and nationalization of banks, in addition to specifically to Islamic reforms such as the prohibition of interest on loans."[6] However, despite the fiery campaign for an Islamic constitution, the movement remained on the margins of national politics and society. But their success in putting the document on the political agenda and forcing all of the traditional sectarian political parties to consider it did not translate into practical results. Furthermore, internal splits within the IFC's ranks eventually led to its failure and collapse.

After the IFC's demise, al-Turabi went to Britain to continue his post-graduate studies at the University of London. He earned his MA in law in 1957, a year after General Ibrahim Abboud's military coup, and went on to Paris in 1959, where he obtained his PhD from the Sorbonne in 1964. Al-Turabi returned to Khartoum in the summer of 1964 to teach at the University of Khartoum's Faculty of Law. His higher education enhanced his social status and made him a superstar within the MB's ranks, which were socially and politically marginalized, as well as intensely faction-ridden, when he arrived on the scene of Sudanese politics. Since his political inclination was *political pragmatism* from the outset, he argued that the Muslim Brothers should oppose Abboud's military government because its goals were in no way close to those of Islam and because its reign was based on "tyranny, oppression and espionage" and on the denial of *shūrā* (consultation).

In addition, al-Turabi opined that "the activities of the military negatively affected the image of Islam and the general social morality."[7] He proceeded to outline a strategy that would bring the unpopular military regime to its knees by calling for a broad, unified coalition that included the principal sectarian and traditional political parties as well as the southern political groups with whom the regime was waging a bloody civil war. Al-Turabi defended peaceful opposition and resistance that would include mass strikes, street demonstrations, petitions, and internal and external anti-regime propaganda.

These early attitudes reflect his inclination to acquire political expertise whenever and wherever the MB could, even if it meant violating the Brothers' strict dogma and abandoning its tight-knit elitist approach to organization, recruitment, and indoctrination. Al-Turabi's entrance into national politics can thus be attributed to Abboud's downfall, triggered by the 1964 October Revolution. Although he managed to gain a "high profile" during the revolution,

he was shocked by the breadth and ferocity of the popular opposition. His significant role in the mass mobilization campaign to bring the military regime to an end and restore liberal democracy made him well-known throughout the country.

Following this revolution, al-Turabi was appointed dean of the university's Faculty of Law and selected as the MB's secretary general. From Miller's observation, his expertise in public oration and excellent inter-personal relations enabled al-Turabi to reach out a large section of the Brothers, much to the concern of the elites and older militants. To the older generation al-Turabi's ideas about "democracy, the role of women in society, and independent judiciary were matters of great worry."[8]

As al-Turabi's hegemony over the Brotherhood expanded and his star rose, he formed the Islamic Charter Front (ICF; Jabhat al-Mithaq al-Islami) to campaign for the adoption of an Islamic constitution and to continue the fight against their historical rivals: the communists. The MB's conspiratorial actions and the traditional sectarian political parties' actions against the communists raised serious controversy and questions about the depth of their ideological commitment to liberal democracy. According to Peter Nyot Kok

> More damaging to their liberal democratic credentials … was their prominent role in mobilizing the Assembly to defy the High Court, which had ruled in favour of the unseated Communist members by declaring the constitutional amendments (for banning the SCP-Sudanese Communist Party) unconstitutional.[9]

Such in-fighting resulted in "parliamentary paralysis" and "loss of confidence" in liberal democracy. Disenchantment, deteriorating economic conditions, and an escalating bloody civil war set the stage for the yet another military coup on May 25, 1969, under the command of Colonel Ja'far Numeiri. On the eve of this coup, the Islamic majority of the Legislative Assembly had agreed to implement an Islamic constitution. The coup by Numeiri and his communist allies in the armed forces convinced many Brothers, including their charismatic leader, that the path to their aspired-for *Islamic state* could best be achieved by collaborating with the military. Al-Turabi, therefore, changed his October Revolution commitment to liberal democracy and advocated cooperation with Numeiri's dictatorial regime once it became clear that Numeiri had replaced his communist ideology with an Islamic one in 1977, following the National Reconciliation deal.

One direct consequence of this deal was that Numeiri promoted many top Brothers, including al-Turabi, to high governmental posts. "Politically the

Brothers achieved just what Turabi had sought, namely their emergence as a well-organized and well-funded political force, which could no longer be ignored"[10] and marginalized. This collaboration also enabled them to gradually infiltrate the armed forces, police, and security and intelligence departments of the state, a significant factor in the military coup of June 30, 1989, master-minded by the Brotherhood.

However, al-Turabi came to see that his *pragmatic strategy* of collaboration was not without its risks. As corruption increased, momentum in the military regime and Numeiri's policies proved unable to resolve Sudan's deteriorating economic conditions and social ills, al-Turabi and the MB shared the blame. Ironically, his political standing and credibility were inadvertently saved at the last moment by Numeiri's himself. Suspecting that al-Turabi and the MB could not be trusted, in 1985 he had al-Turabi arrested and imprisoned. Shortly thereafter, Numeiri's regime was overthrown by another bloodless military coup led by Siwar al-Dahab, his minister of defence, who was determined to restore democracy and end the devastating civil war. After al-Turabi and his brother-in-law al-Sadiq al-Mahdi were released from the notorious Cober prison, he was able to claim that he also had suffered greatly under Numeiri's dictatorship.

The following pages will, first, present a concise critical assessment of Sudan's third democratic experience (1986-89) and see how its abysmal failure provoked al-Turabi's own coup on June 30, 1989. They will then survey his religious discourse along with its key concepts and essential attributes.

Sudan's Third Democratic Experience:
A Critical Assessment

With Numeiri's military dictatorship brought to an end, the victorious Sudanese people transformed, in Chinua Achebe's words, "their world with theories and slogans into a new heaven and a new earth of brotherhood, affluence, justice, peace and freedom."[11] Popular euphoria was high and expectations were great and widespread – at least a democratically elected government and those politicians would not repeat the grave mistakes of the past.

Sudan's historical political experience should have taught the politicians that they had no alternative but to work diligently as a national team to avert further the unholy trinity of political chaos, economic decay and social decline. However, and in betrayal of all great hopes, Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi and his newly established Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) partners immediately transformed their historical mutual mistrust and scepticism into a

power-struggle to gratify personal ambitions. Party politics in the aftermath of the April 1985 uprising were antagonistic in the extreme. The political arena witnessed sectarian battles between the traditional Umma and DUP parties, intra-party factional battles, and yet more infighting among the communists, the Muslim Brothers, and their splinter group the National Islamic Front (NIF). Al-Turabi, the NIF's leader, had already considered joining the government during the Umma-DUP wrangle in May 1987, but was unable to obtain any support from his own party. Younger Islamic militants felt that there was more to gain in political opposition than in associating with an ineffectual, increasingly discredited, sectarian, and rivalry-ridden coalition government.

John Garang de Mapior, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), soon criticized the Transitional Military Council (TMC), which was formed directly after the April 1985 uprising, as the continuation of Numeiri's rule. The TMC lost the sympathy of the political forces, especially the professional associations and trade unions. The clash over the Shari'ah had a negative impact on the peace negotiations to resolve the country's bloody civil war; in fact, it engendered more uncertainty and frustration and dealt a heavy blow to Sudan's faltering economy. This situation led to narrow personal aspirations and attachment to sectarian groups instead of to the national cause."[12] The end result was paralysis.

Plagued by paralyzing sectarian infighting and rivalry, a-Mahdi was forced to dissolve his second cabinet in late 1987. To broaden the democratic regime's governmental base, he opened a prolonged dialogue with the NIF. In May 1988 he reached an agreement with the DUP and the Turabi-led NIF in a third coalition, dubbed the "Government of National Reconciliation." In reality, however, this coalition was so volatile, due to the antagonisms among the Umma Party, the DUP, and the NIF, that it eventually became politically unmanageable. Al-Turabi was, in fact, using his presence in the government to continue the historical pressure for reintroducing and reapplying the Shari'ah and forming the Islamic society and state that he wanted. While pressing his Islamic agenda, he also placed his Muslim Brothers in key positions throughout the government that he vowed to uphold. Meanwhile, the faltering economy cried out for immediate relief.

The economic problem was the second major failure that bedevilled the third Sudanese democratic experience. "Decades of economic mismanagement and corruption had left the Sudan with an economy in chaos."[13] The national infrastructure had fallen into disrepair, public services ranged from indifferent to non-existent, and, worst of all, millions of displaced and impoverished inhabitants were living outside the modern sector with no amenities

whatsoever. The public sector, potentially the most significant contributor to Sudan's output, was hobbled by governmental neglect and mismanagement. Petroleum potential went untapped due to the ongoing bloody civil war, and unemployment forced up to 1.6 million skilled workers and professionals to migrate to the oil-rich Gulf States and Libya.

Great scope existed for improving agriculture, which already furnished a livelihood for 80% of the population, 40% of the gross national product (GNP), and 90% of export earnings. However, large government-dominated agricultural schemes were mired in bureaucracy and poor infrastructure. Productivity and export earnings actually declined, a blow to government revenues and the economy as a whole. Many Sudanese hoped that the new democratic experience, along with management and policy reforms, would improve efficiency and attract foreign investment. However, as G. Norman Anderson states,

> nature presented obstacles. Against optimism stood the latest setback to Sudanese agriculture: drought and famine in 1984-85. … Since Sudan lacked few of the biblical plagues – drought, locusts, rats and epidemics such as encephalitis and typhus – the new democracy seemed likely to be bedevilled by natural disasters.[14]

Even worse, two more serious economic problems confronted the coalition government: the foreign debt crisis and Sudan's relations with its creditors. The national debt was insurmountable, for the country could not pay back more than a fraction of its debt that had "grown progressively from $3 billion in 1978 to about $9 billion in 1986. Further, the sharp fall of industrial and agricultural output and the pressure of huge numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries had aggravated the situation. Regime change was not the panacea."[15] This enormous debt problem forced the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) to intervene in the country's financial management. The IMF and some western creditors demanded severe belt-tightening measures as a condition for additional aid.

On top of all of this, Sudan was burdened by rampant corruption. The state's economic failures had forced a few officials to resort to corrupt methods to supplement their incomes. Looking at the situation by examining three major types of economic corruption stemming primarily from hold on public office, El Wathiq Kameir and Ibrahim Kursany observed:

> In the present historical and political circumstances, the state has become the principal entree through which aspiring segments of the petty-bourgeoisie have been able to transform themselves into property-owning individuals.[16]

The state's inability to stabilize the chaotic political arena and control the economic disarray and corruption was accompanied by its failure to find a peaceful resolution to the civil war, which had the potential to shatter Sudan's third democratic experience. The logical response was for the armed forces, this time supported by al-Turabi's Islamic discourse and ideology, to impose the alternative of an "Islamic state." The following section will survey this discourse, as manifested in its key concepts: faith, renewal, and *ijtihād*.

In The Beginning Is Faith (Īmān)

An appraisal of the core concepts and practices of any specific religious ideology should be focused on general premises. Given that al-Turabi questions the principles and standards of classical and modern secular doctrines, he endeavors to provide particular arguments about Islam's factuality and validity through time and space. The remainder of this paper is divided into sections that represent his religio-political and ideological discourse: faith and its impact on human life, and then renewal and *ijtihād*, respectively.

Al-Turabi builds his religious discourse on a specific conception of faith. To him, "faith in Islam should be at the core of all that a Muslim does. This is because faith has remained constant since the first *sharī'ah* revelation."[17] The core of Islam revolves around the axiom of faith, which constitutes the bedrock for all aspects of life: social, economic, political, psychological, as well as personal and everything else. For him, the significance of the concept of faith, as distinguished from other secular dogmas, should be seen in the light of

> the materialistic and intellectual hegemony that trivializes transcendental religious facts and suppresses will in the faithful human soul. This results, first, in a human being's despair with respect to his/her life in the Hereafter and on this earth and, secondly, the alienation of religion and the domestication or habituation by the human to various spiritual, intellectual and materialistic approaches. Third, factors of oblivion and old-age have penetrated the true fundamentals of religion, leading to the disappearance of its meaning and the alteration of manifestations which became an accumulation of inherited traditions and conceptions. Domestic innovation (*bid'ah*), itself dominated by domestic impressions and affected by historical circumstances became the order of the day.[18]

Furthermore, the importance of faith can be seen in the Muslims' need for a comprehensive interpretation of existence, one that brings closer the nature of the great truths of divinity, monotheism (*tawḥīd*), the cosmos, life, and humanity. Faith channels to the human being the knowledge of one's position

and purpose in the universe so that he/she may aquire knowledge of his/her proper role as God's vicegerent on Earth. Such knowledge helps one to define one's appropriate socio-economic and political approach to life. Consequently, the political system that governs human life becomes, as regards its sources, validity, and correctness, dependent upon the comprehensive interpretation of faith, as well as its values and impact upon human life, in this world and the Hereafter.

His argument is grounded in the specific verses: "Whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery. But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is life narrowed down and We shall raise him up blind in the day of Judgement" (Q. 20:123-24 and Q. 2:38-39) and "faith in God should be reflected in practical attitudes and in behaviour with the whole of creation."[19] Here, al-Turabi defines faith in terms of concepts and principles as well as, and more significantly, in terms of behavior and culture. He thus concludes that the religion of a group, a people, and a nation is not merely a result of their belief, but rather a manifestation of their behavior and culture. Thus,

> when an individual's faith is perfect and his devotion to God is sincere, the spirit of religion will penetrate his whole life and organize all his actions themselves, made possible by divinely predestined circumstances. Faith will, first, incarnate itself into the political field as God's rulership (*ḥākimīyyah*), as a rejection of the rule of tyranny and aberration, as God-fearing (*taqwā*) with respect to the handling of authority and allegiance and as strife (*jihād*) in the path of God against the forces of evil. Second, faith will manifest itself in economic forms as a confession of God's ownership and man's inheritance of wealth, as directing life towards the objective of devotion and restraining one from self-indulgence, and as the establishment of economic relations upon the basis of God-fearing and obedience. Third, faith will also have itself manifested in science as a unification of both narrated and rational sciences for the sake of more knowledge about God, and for using such knowledge in the extension of worship and devotion to God. Faith is thus present in all the walks of human life.[20]

One basic characteristic of faith is that it offers humanity a comprehensive and complete interpretation of existence, creation, humanity's relations with and the worship of God, the objective of this existence: "And I (Allah) created not the jinns and humans except they should worship Me (alone)" (Q. 51:56). However, people do not realize the objective of existence by worship alone, but also by achieving unity in all aspects of life. Al-Turabi rejects the separation of politics from religion and the division of life's spheres into economics,

society, politics, or any other aspect. This rejection follows from his belief in the existence of a strong relation between the nature of a social order and the nature of the metaphysical or doctrinal concept of faith.

More importantly, since the social order itself is derived from the metaphysical concept, any compartmentalization of human life into "public" and "private" prevents a precise understanding of humanity and the universe. What indicates Islam's superiority in particular, according to al-Turabi, is its totality, its unification of theory and practice or faith and action, and the inevitability of death, reward and punishment in the Hereafter. His argument is based on "Whoever works righteousness, man or women, has faith, verily to him We will give a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions" (Q. 16:96) and "By the time. Verily, man is in loss, except those who believe (in Islamic montheism) and do righteous good deeds, and recommend one another to the truth, and recommend one another to patience" (Q. 103:1-3).

Thus, "faith, if sincere, means right conduct. When these confirm each other, Allah's grace transforms our lives. Instead of being troubled and worried, we have peace and contentment, instead of being assailed at every turn by false alarms and the assaults of evil, we enjoy calm and attain purity. The transformation is visible in this life itself, but the reward in terms of the Hereafter will be far beyond our deserts."[21] Al-Turabi completes his argument by declaring God's punishment of those who reject faith and hypocrites: "Allah has promised the hypocrites, men and women and the rejecters of faith, the Fire of Hell: therein shall they dwell. Sufficient it is for them: for them is the curse of Allah and an enduring punishment" (Q. 9:68).

Thus Islam is distinctive in that it entails action: the Muslim aspiration for the establishment of a true Muslim society. Ultimately, it seems that the value and effects of faith for al-Turabi are social, economic, and political. This conclusion can be demonstrated by the example he gives: The first community of Muslims was created by having faith in God as One. The effects of faith were not only transcendental but also resulted in the creation of an Islamic ummah that managed

> to transform sectarianism, tribal fanaticism and political fragmentation into unity and a comprehensive central government and poverty into hoarded wealth and an extensive regional base that helped to establish a sublime economic renaissance. It also transformed subjugation into superiority, freedom and political leadership whose stage was the great world, and cultural parasitism into a sublime civilization that enriched the world for long centuries, and changed illiteracy into scientific knowledge that illuminated Europe's

Dark Ages. We should attribute this entire rapid and great renaissance to the factors of faith which aroused the first Islamic community and mobilized its energies into an immense campaign in which they interacted with their existing conditions only to construct that superior social, political, economic, civilizational and scientific glory.[22]

Accordingly, faith is not an inactive or moribund concept that lives in the realm of human consciousness, satisfied with existing either theoretically or in the spiritual realm. It is, above all, a dynamic (although unarticulated) design to construct a reality in which faith and action (*'amal*) are preserved. Faith can thus be comprehended first, as a motivating force in an individual's life to create a faithful group or a "personal impulse" and, second, as a design for constructing an Islamic alternative in which faith necessitates its own fulfilment in an Islamic state.

In other words, faith's value and impact can be appreciated and actualized only in an *Islamic state*, the existence of which becomes essential for those individuals and groups trying to establish Islamic values and objectives. Without such a state Islam cannot survive in its perfect *political form*, which requires *political activism* and the motivation to achieve its spiritual and materialistic functions, among them prayer, alms-giving, fasting, and pilgrimage. One of Islam's most significant aspects is its engagement of the human mind, soul, conscience, and body.

After furnishing the basic foundations and principles of life, it frees the mind to pursue both the religious and natural sciences, undertake the *renewal* of religious thought along with *rational and independent reasoning*, and inquire into society and the universe. Furthermore, al-Turabi views Islam's ultimate function as realizing monotheism, which entails worshipping God as One God and eradicating polytheism (*shirk*). This eradication is essential in the fundamental quest for humanity's liberation (*taḥrīr*), the renewal of religious though, Muslim freedom and unity, consultation, democracy, the emancipation of women from the shackles of obscurant traditionalism, and the adoption and utilization of arts to propagate the Islamic message worldwide.

Tajdīd *and* Ijtihād

In his written and oral discourse, al-Turabi does not present himself as an ardent advocate of Islam's revival or as a fundamentalist in the sense of a literal reading of the Qur'an and Sunnah. On the contrary, he primarily depicts himself as an exponent of Islamic renewal and independent reasoning. He does not conceal his dissatisfaction with the classical currents of Islamic jurispru-

dence and the prevailing methodological statements and intellectual mechanisms. For him, "this does not mean that modern and contemporary Islamic thinkers have offered nothing in the context of social, political and economic transformations in our present life. On the contrary, they succeeded in defending Islam, the refutation of all fabricated allegations against it and the restoration of trust in it as a comprehensive method of life that depicts its directions and organizes its branches."[23] The contemporary Islamic movement is required to call for the renewal of Islamic culture and the "opening" of *the gates of ijtihād* to create harmony in Muslim life as well as to reconcile with religious orientations and requirements.

The pursuit of an Islamic civilizational project according to a comprehensive fundamentalist vision of renewal and *ijtihād* is also required. Al-Turabi justifies this by maintaining that

> the actual practice of *ijtihād* is mainly restricted to the re-reading of classical scholars' discourse, the reproduction of their fatwas, and the balancing of their *ijtihādāt* (reasoning) to reach reconciliation between Islam's texts and rules and the prevailing intellectual systems. Furthermore, the handling of the fundamentalist methodology is still governed by hesitant individualistic initiatives and limited sectional orientations. As a result, Islamic thought did not accomplish what can be called a fundamentalist methodological renaissance.[24]

Third, it must generate an awareness of what directs the Muslim intellect and formulates its production while thinking about how to handle contemporary socioeconomic and political issues and their temporal and spatial adaptation. Al-Turabi writes that many factors can help generate this awareness, such as "the accumulation of Islamic writings and publications, the growth of consciousness of the challenges confronting the Islamic movement, the increase in the Muslims' scientific and empirical knowledge through their interaction with the renewing cultural and civilizational conditions at both the domestic and international levels."[25]

Al-Turabi's *Qaḍāya al-Tajdīd: Naḥwa Manhaj Uṣūlī* (*Issues of Renewal: Towards a Fundamentalist Methodology*)' and *Tajdīd al-Fikr al-Islāmī* (*Renewal of Islamic Thought*) are but one step toward a fundamentalist renewal of Islamic thought, the adoption of *ijtihād*, and keeping its gates open. *Tawḥīd*, as a comprehensive vision of existence and life, represents the cornerstone of his socioeconomic and political discourse. By basing his main Islamic call upon it, he aspires to review the Islamic fundamentalist legacy, transcend the jurisprudential schools' internal problems of legal and intellectual rigidity and

stagnation, and to formulate a comprehensive theory of religiosity. He defines this latter term as a firm process of connection through which one strives to unify one's thoughts and actions and Islam's absolute religious ideals. In other words, religiosity is what an individual believer acquires by adapting his/her life according to Islam's imperatives and orientations. It takes hold of one's life and thus becomes the substance of its dimensions and location.

Since religion, as a divine discourse to humanity, is connected with temporal and spatial frameworks, it must experience some sort of cosmic conditioning or a circle of life and death. Here al-Turabi uses the analogy between living organisms (e.g., plants and animals) and religion. As a living organism experiences the stages of birth, youth, old age, and death, so does religion pass through the phases of renaissance, decay, rigidity, inaction, degeneration, and demise. But religion, being a relationship with the Eternal, Absolute, and Constant (God), is based on immutable and infallible fundamentals. Consequently, "it is based on returning this transforming circumstantial affair to the axiom of permanent and constant truth (*ḥaqq*) and temporal action to the infinite objective."[26] Within this relationship between the eternal and the evolutionary, or the absolute and the relative, a concept of religious history is established either through prophets and successive messengers prior to Prophet Muhammad or through consecutive generations of the ummah.

According to Muhammad Mahmoud, al-Turabi

> draws the traditional sharp distinction between the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (*Sunnah*) on the one hand (as two permanent, reliable sources that are not subject to the mutability of history and that constitute the essence of the divine plan for the guidance of man) and (*fiqh*), on the other hand, which is a human response to the problems arising within a specific historical context.[27]

Consequently, the adaptation of expressive religious configurations in the face of historical sociopolitical and materialistic development is imperative to religion's continuity and unity through time and space. Intellectual needs, contemporary challenges, intensified materialistic realities, the complexity and overlapping of human relations and complications, and the diversity of sociopolitical problems put more pressure on those who are shouldering the process of religious renewal and *ijtihād* to renew their intellectual methods, develop their expressive styles and their intellectual methods. Al-Turabi, as Muhammad Mahmoud confirms,

> recognizes that the classical science of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (the foundations of jurisprudence) was largely influenced by Greek formal logic and was such a

highly formalized and abstract activity that it soon divorced itself from its social environment, thus failing to produce a living and adaptable *fiqh*. He also recognizes that Muslims are nowadays under the cultural hegemony of modern Western culture, with what he describes as its "logical positivist, relativist and empirical methodologies," a circumstance that is bound to affect them.[28]

Furthermore, al-Turabi confirms that the independent judgments of the classical Muslim ulema and jurists cannot effectively deal with the contemporary world's challenges and afflictions because they practiced *ijtihād* in a specific sociocultural environment and tried to solve its problems within the context of a specific temporal and spatial reality. Thus their methods and *ijtihād* were largely defined and constrained by that reality and that environment. For him,

> since religiosity or religiousness, as both theory and practice, is a renovating human *kasb* (acquired knowledge), a fundamentalist jurist (*faqīh*) should strive for the renewal of his scientific methods and tools, development of his artistic and technical styles and approaches, deepening of his concepts of ijtihād parallel to the growth of his practical experience and expansion of his scientific culture.[29]

His criticism of classical Islamic jurisprudence is based on his preference for an all-embracing legal scope and his call for a unifying fundamentalist methodology that absorbs the divine textual narrative (written discourse) and rationale, feeds upon the methods of natural and social sciences, and utilizes them to generate a new religious/Islamic jurisprudence that can be adapted to public life. His criticism and call obliges researchers to further investigate the impulses that underlie his perspective.

Al-Turabi has summarized his motives as

> first, Muslims' awareness of their conditions as compared with those of the world and their present reality as related to their glorious past and religious ideals. Second, Muslims' dislike and rejection of their present backward conditions and the desire to improve them. Third, the shock of western civilization and hegemony, introduced to them through imperialistic raids and efficient means of communication, exposing their political, economic and cultural weakness. Finally, the discovery by Muslims of their glorious past through historical studies and the revival of that legacy, making them frightened by their present weakness, decay and retreat. By recalling their former superiority and dignity, Muslims are forced to meditate over their present materialistic, spiritual and cultural reality, to compare it with their religious ideal and, hence, to aspire for renaissance and glory.[30]

In addition, long periods of what al-Turabi calls "religious oblivion and negligence" have transformed Islam into a mere heritage and made it irrelevant, debilitated its unifying belief, and created a dogmatic vacuum that induced Muslims to adopt western materialistic secular philosophies and doctrines that reject and trivialize religion. Consequently, a conflict appeared between Islam as a religion of monotheism and polytheism (*shirk*), which separates the mundane from the divine, concentrates largely on the materialistic aspects of the cosmos, and indulges in the love of earthy vanities. Islam confronts all three varieties of polytheism: ritualistic, political and economic.

The influence of the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb, the "spiritual father and ideologue" of that country's radical Islamic groups, is apparent in al-Turabi's tendency to adopt a dualistic vision of the world and humanity. In this respect, he depicts global ideological conflicts as between "an Islam that requires allegiance to God and applies its comprehensive Shari'ah and God-fearing concepts and an ignorance (*jāhilīyah*) that dominates through authority, makes sexual lust an adornment, and reigns through vehement racial bigotry."[31] He also anathematizes existing Muslim governments and demands acceptance of the Shari'ah as a precondition for their political legitimacy and authority. In other words, since the present Muslim governments are ignorant (*jāhilī*) and "entitled" to govern either through inheritance or force, they cannot require obedience from Muslims. He also charges them of being illegitimate due to their irreligiosity.[32] Al-Turabi insists not only on subjecting existing Muslim governments to enforce Islamic law, but also on basing their legitimacy on adherence to this law. Although legitimacy is dependent upon the people's choice, its continuation hinges upon following and applying Islam's laws of Islam, from which the people's duty to obey the ruler stems.

Al-Turabi's acceptance of the Shari 'ah, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah as the Islamic state's underpinnings is thus an attempt to distinguish between jurisprudence as the human understanding of the Shari'ah and the Shari'ah as God's eternal and unchangeable law, because jurisprudence always undermines any "irreligious/un-Islamic" political authority. It is, therefore, a methodological device that allows him to discount the teachings of classical scholars and jurists who resisted change and those of their contemporary counterparts whom he considers subordinate to whoever is in power. Nonetheless, al-Turabi refuses to make any changes in Islamic jurisprudence that deal with matters of worship and rituals on the grounds that humanity's relation to its Creator is immutable. That part of Islamic jurisprudence that deals with social organization and development, however, should not depend on a simplistic understanding of Islamic traditions because people's material and social needs are

always in flux. His acknowledgment of the need for sociopolitical development clearly reveals his views on establishing a new Muslim society unencumbered by the past. This is just one of his revolutionary teachings that sets him apart from both classical and modern authority and teachings, as well as the present governments and conditions.

Another significant Qutbian feature is al-Turabi's commitment to the elitist "vanguard" formula, whereby an Islamic vanguard organizes itself with the expressed intention of Islamizing the rest of society (and, of course, ultimately the rest of humanity). All means are open to this vanguard, including jihad, to achieve a comprehensive Islamic reformation and create an *alternative Islamic state* based on the principles of the Shari'ah, consultation, and a new political jurisprudence.

Conclusion

The contemporary Islamist religious discourse, including that of al-Turabi, represents the culmination of the accumulated Qur'an and Sunnah dating back to the Prophet. Thus its substance and legitimation are consciously based on the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the Qur'anic texts, Prophetic traditions, and historical episodes. Contemporary Islamic movements, groups, networks, and even parties, including al-Turabi's Popular Congress Party, seek to justify their existence and mission by using divine and prophetic texts, as well as divinely ordained obligations and historical precedents, as referential frameworks. Consequently, the burden of society lies heavily on the Islamist ideologues, as they strive to reconstruct the past in the present crisis setting, in order to shape the future. Furthermore, these ideologues bring their intellectual roots to the militant orientations in both classical and modern Islamic thought and movements. These orientations represent significant examples for present-day radical Islamists, both due to their radical religio-ideological discourses and the violent revolutionary methods they use to impose a their much-desired alternative: an Islamic state.

In this respect, al-Turabi's thought and political career helped create a viable Islamist discourse on faith, renewal, and *ijtihād*. This discourse proved to be a powerful competitor not only to all sorts of secular discourses (e.g., communism and liberalism) in modern Sudan and the Muslim world, but also to the traditional religious discourses as well. Furthermore, his contribution to the debate on Islam's revival, as well as the renewal of its thought and encouragement of rational and independent reasoning, should be understood as that of the religiously minded and motivated middle-class elites. This class is laboring

under the impact of westernization; western-dominated globalization; and a deep-seated socioeconomic, political, and cultural crises at home. In other words, this particular discourse is related to the crisis-ridden cultural system from which it has evolved and the diverse political structures in which it has occurred. Al-Turabi, along with most contemporary Muslim scholars, considers Islam as a comprehensive divine system that provides an alternative to present-day *jāhilī* Muslim societies and a method of restructuring or remaking the whole world. By resorting to the divine and prophetic, such Islamist ideologues as al-Turabi also seek to rediscover and reinterpret the Qur'an and Sunnah and forge an Islamic alternative in the light of a Muslim reality bedevilled by disturbing social, economic, political, and ideational crises.

Finally, al-Turabi inspired his disciples with convictions based on the Qur'an and Sunnah and gave them their characteristics as well as their program of action. His magnetic personality has attracted an ever-swelling stream of adherents of various socioeconomic and political backgrounds – and it still does. Al-Turabi will personally direct his Islamic movement's programs and policies and struggle to keep the reins of power in his hands until he dies. His Islamist discourse, in which religion has become intricately interwoven with politics, has also demonstrated the Islamists' pragmatism, lust for political power, and ultimate aspiration: the establishment of an Islamic utopia or state.

Endnotes

1. Emmanuel Sivan and Menchaen Friedman, eds., *Religious Radicalism and Politics in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), 1.
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3. Ibid., 185.
4. Ibid.
5. Abdelwahab El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution: Islam and Power in the Sudan* (London: Grey Seal Books, 1991), 45-49.
6. Ibid., 57.
7. Ibid., 58.
8. Miller, *Spokesmen*, 189.
9. Peter Nyot Kok, "Kurzbiographien," *Orient* 33 (1992): 186.
10. Warburg R. Gabriel, "Turabi of the Sudan: Soft-Spoken Revolutionary," *Middle Eastern Lectures* 1 (1995): 90.
11. Cited in Mansour Khalid, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Elite in Sudan's Political Development* (London: Kegan Paul, 1995), 225. Also see

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13. Ibid., 58.
14. G. Norman Anderson, *Sudan in Crisis: The Failure of Democracy* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 1999), 38-39.
15. See Peter Woodward, "Sudan after Nimeiri," *Third World Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (October 1985): 970.
16. El Wathiq Kameir and Ibrahim Kursany, *Corruption as the Fifth Factor of Production in the Sudan* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1985), 13.
17. Hassan al-Turabi, *Al-Īmān: Athāru fī Ḥayāt al-Insān* (*Faith: Its Impact on Human Life*), 2d ed. (Khartoum: Manshurat al-'Asr al-Hadith, 1984), 6. Translations are ours.
18. Ibid., 6.
19. Ibid., 10.
20. Ibid.
21. *The Holy Quran, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Madinah: King Fahad Holy Quran Printing Complex, 1410 AH), 762-63.
22. Al-Turabi, *Al-Īmān*, 11.
23. Hassan al-Turabi, *Qaḍāyā al-Tajdīd: Naḥwa Manhaj Uṣūlī* (*Issues of Renewal: Towards a Fundamentalist Methodology*) (Khartoum: Institute of Research and Social Studies, 1990), 7. Translations are ours.
24. Ibid., 8.
25. Ibid., 9.
26. Ibid., 12.
27. Muhammad Mahmoud, "The Discourse of the Ikhwan (Muslim Brothers) of Sudan and Secularism," in *Questioning the Secular State*, ed. David Westlund (London: Hurst and Company, 1995), 175-76.
28. Ibid., 174.
29. Al-Turabi, *Qaḍāyā*, 18.
30. Ibid., 29-30.
31. Ibid., 31.
32. Hassan Al-Turabi, *Tajdīd al-Fikr al-Islāmī* (*The Renewal of Islamic Thought*) (Khartoum: Iman Press, 1980), 9. Translations are ours.