OBITUARIES

Taha Jabir al-Alwani (1935 - 2016)

Dr Taha Jabir al-Alwani, an outstanding scholar, thinker and teacher, passed away at the age of 81 on 4 March 2016. He was born in Iraq in 1935 and received his primary and secondary education in his native land. His undergraduate degree was obtained in 1959 from the College of Shari’ah and Law at al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. From the same university he would later earn his MA (in 1968) and PhD in usul al-fiqh (in 1973).

After his undergraduate studies, Dr al-Alwani taught at the Military Academy of Iraq, based in Baghdad, and served as a lecturer for six years at the College of Islamic Studies. While in Baghdad, he studied under some prominent scholars, including Sheikh Amjad al-Zahawi, Sheikh Qasim al-Qaysi (the Grand Mufti of Iraq), Sheikh Mohammad Fu’ad al-Alroosi, Sheikh Abdul ’Aziz Salem al-Samerai, and Sheikh Mohammed al-Qazilchi. However, he had to leave Iraq in 1969 due to political reasons, after which he returned to al-Azhar.

Upon obtaining his PhD, Dr al-Alwani taught at the Imam Muhammad ibn Sa’ud University, Riyadh, for 10 years. In 1983, he decided to immigrate to the United States, where he settled in Northern Virginia, remaining there until the end of his life. While there, he became President of Cordoba University in Ashburn, Virginia, where he also held the Imam al-Shafi'i Chair in Islamic Legal Theory at The Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences. Additionally, Dr al-Awani was also the founding chairman of the Fiqh Council of North America and co-founder and former president of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), one of the US’s most significant centres of Islamic Studies.

Dr al-Alwani was a noted advocate of ijtihad, which he advanced without departing from Islamic tradition and methodologies. In his Islamisation of Knowledge, for example, he reviewed the standard rulings on apostasy based on the classical teachings of Imam Abu Hanifah. He was also an expert in the relatively new field of fiqh al-aqalliyyat, which deals with the jurisprudence of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim majority countries. His other publications include: Islamic Thought: An Approach to Reform, Source Methodology in Islamic Jurisprudence, The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam, and The Qur’an and the Sunnah: The Time Space Factor. Dr Alwani left behind three children, Dr Zainab Alwani, Dr Ruqaya Alwani and Ahmed Alwani.
On behalf of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia and myself, it is with great sorrow that we see the loss of such a great thinker and scholar. Inna li’Allahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un. He made immense contributions to Islamic scholarship and to our understanding of the many new issues facing the Ummah. For this reason, and also for his kindness of character and personality, his memory will no doubt live with us long after his sad departure.

We offer our condolences to his family and friends and offer prayers: May Allah s.w.t shower him with blessings and grant him a handsome reward for his lifetime of noble efforts.

Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali’s personal note on the late Dr Alwani. This was uploaded on IAIS website as of 5 March 2016.

Hasan al-Turabi: Sudan’s Political Visionary (1932 - 2016)

Tawfique al-Mubarak

Hasan Abdullah al-Turabi, with a white turban on his head and a wide smile on his face, scholastic in speech and humorous in word, was for many years one of the most influential figures in Sudanese politics.

Born on 1 February 1932, in Kassala State, Northern Sudan, his father was a well-known Sufi sheikh and religious scholar. It was from him that al-Turabi received his early Islamic education, before going on to earn a law degree from the Gordon Memorial College (now the University of Khartoum) in the early 1950s. Subsequently, he went on to King’s College, London, where he studied for higher degrees in law, before moving on to Paris to complete his PhD in constitutional law at the Sorbonne.

Al-Turabi began his academic career with a teaching position at the University of Khartoum’s School of Law. In October 1964, he became an active and vocal participant in the protests against the then President, Ibrahim Abboud. This marked the beginning of his lively participation in Sudanese politics; from this point on, he began to play a significant role in Sudanese political life, his political thought finding full expression in his many writings, including his seminal book al-Siyasah wal-Hukm (Politics and Governance).

Al-Turabi consistently and ardently advocated the implementation of Islamic Law in the Sudan. After 1964, however, when President Abu Ja’far (Gaafar) al-Nimeiry assumed power through a military coup, these views became unpopular and al-Turabi was imprisoned for six years, before then being exiled to Libya for another three. During these turbulent years, however, al-Turabi’s relationship