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PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP IN ISLAM: A GUIDE FOR CONDUCT BY NIGERIAN PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS

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Abstract

The quest for compliance by the do's and don'ts of the government is a major challenge of most African countries. This is because one of the most essential elements that guarantee followership is lacking in this part of globe. Indeed, it is not gainsaying that most of the African countries particularly Nigeria fail to transcend nadir in the development and maintain its status quo despite the fact that it is well endowed with enviable human and natural resources. Thus, Nigerians suffer economically and politically in the hands of non-humane leaders who marred the administration. In other words, embezzlement of public funds and corruption in all its ramifications became the order of the day. Albeit a myriad number of elections had been conducted to choose sacrosanct leaders; yet, reverse is the case in Nigeria. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to x-ray the principles of leadership as depicted in 'Islām with a view to highlighting the role that religion can play in realizing the fervency. Through the use of analytical and critical methods, the paper concluded that disdain that has eaten deeply as a result of undermining the rights of followership can only be lessened or corrected if Islamic principles of leadership are espoused.

Keywords: Leadership. Governance, Islam, Office holders

Introduction

Despite fifty five years of nationhood, the major challenge confronting the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria is credible leadership. Consequently, some political pundits have submitted that the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria has continued to pose leadership tussle to the country. This explains why Esu argues:

The British colonial masters deliberately divided the country into regions and drew the political map of Nigeria to make the emergence of a nationally acceptable leader difficult¹

The above submission, in our view, is not an underlying challenge that should be capable of creating problem of acceptable leadership. This could be vindicated with the fact that Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) and all rightly guided caliphs, who demonstrated high excellent leadership, lived in the community that was more complex. Yet, they were reckoned with by all and sundry. Though many practitioners in private and public sectors have identified exemplary leadership as the critical aspect of human endeavor, yet, glancing through principles of leadership laid down by Islam simplify the process.

It is noted that the position of leadership is very intense. This is because religion and mundane activities will be in chaos, commotion and confusion if worthwhile leadership is lacking. In the same vein, no nation can achieve meaningful development socially, economically and politically without the input of effective leadership. Thus, this paper adopts a programmatic approach in dwelling into principles of leadership with a view of tasking leaders to emulate the styles embraced by religious pathfinders who ruled the world and left indelible mark in the minds of their followers.

Concept of Leadership

The leadership, which is seen as the cornerstone for the accomplishment of the desired goals in every organization, retards the progress of many countries in which it is lacking. This retrogression, that seems to result from where good leadership is desolated, gives a clear picture that many people do not digest the meaning of leadership, in spite of the variety of the denotations of leadership provided by scholars.

According to Graing, leadership is defined as a social influence process in which leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals². In views of Robert, leadership involves a complex interaction among the leader, the followers and the situation.³ More so, Poulin affirms that leadership is about how a person works with others. In other words, leadership has to do with collaboration in executing tasks or responsibilities.⁴

Based on the foregoing discussion, the scope of leadership has been confined to mundane activities, which enables some leaders to mar the

administration of the governed. Contrary to this, Islam sees leadership as a trust that must be dispensed with all sense of religiosity. Therefore, a distinct meaning is given to it. According to Muhammad As-Sayyid Al-Wakil, a leader (*al - 'Imām*) is a person who governs people and emulated by them in their religious and worldly affairs.⁵ This definition provides a locus for understanding the leadership in the realm of Islam as earlier discussed by Al-Māwardī when he submitted:

الإمامة موضوعة لخلافة النبوة موضوعة لحراسة الدين والدنيا وهي نظام واجب بالإجماع يقيمه أي- هذا النظام بعضهم على العقل وذلك لأنه لولاه لكان الناس فوضى

Leadership is established (as proxy) for Prophet's caliphate, founded to safeguard religion and life. It is a compulsory institution as upheld by consensus of scholars. It is instituted by some of them based on intellect. Without it, human being would be in chaos.⁶

It could be inferred from the above submission that the scope of the term leadership extends beyond political terrain as it covers religious affairs. Therefore, any attempt to separate religion from political leadership poses a threat of success and prosperity to such governance. Clearly, leadership is the ability to set goals for society or organization with a view of protecting their materialistic rights and their religion.

Underscoring the necessity of designating a person to man the affairs of populace and discarding disunity which could lead to chaos and foils unity from not being coordinated, the Qur'an warns:

وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

...And do not dispute (with one another), lest you loose courage and your strength. Surely, Allah is with those who are *As-Sabirin* (the patient ones) Q8:46

In addition, selecting a leader to rule over others and coordinate them is held with high esteem by Prophet Muhammad, who was an embodiment of Qur'an directives. He appointed many companions to occupy leadership position in order to inculcate discipline and instill Islamic teachings in them. For instance, he appointed Ja'far bn abī Tālib as the leader of team of the first migrants to Abyssinia. In another occasion, he set out the pre-eminent position in which leadership is held, through an instruction. He was reported to have said in the *ḥadīth* of Abū Hurayrah:

إذا خرج ثلاثة في سفر فليؤمرا أحدهم

Let three people set out for journey appoint a leader among them⁷

Commenting on the above *hadīth*, Ibn Taimiyyah remarked:

فأوجب صلى الله عليه وسلم تأمير الواحد في الاجتماع القليل العارض في السفر
تنبيهاً على سائر أنواع الاجتماع

The Prophet (S.A.W) made assigning leadership mandatory upon a few people embarking on journey in order to draw attention to other types of convention⁸

Elucidating the teachings of the *hadīth* in a very simple term, Ibn Taymiyyah asserted that the general message to be decoded by all is the obligation of taking leadership position as a religion and a means of creating direct communion with Allah. He declared

فأوجب اتخاذ الإمارة دين وقربة يتقرب بها الى الله فإن التقرب إليه فيها بطاعته وطاعة رسوله
من أفضل القربات

It is compulsory to regard leadership as a religion and a means of moving closer to Allah. Indeed, establishing communion with Allah in it by conforming to Him and obeying His Messenger is one of the best ways of moving closer to Allah⁹

Furthermore, the Prophet (S.A.W) also accentuated the fact that leaders would give account for the position occupied by him. Also, it can serve as a source of misfortune whenever it is abused. Prophet Abu Dharr warned, when he declared:

إنها أمانة وإنها يوم القيامة خزي وندامة إلا من أخذها بحقها وأدى عليه فيها

Verily, it is a trust and it is humiliation and remorse on the Day of Judgment except for who accorded its right to it and discharged his responsibility accordingly.¹⁰

Similarly, Ibn Uthaymīn postulated that it is not lawful for a man who does not possess the qualities of a leader to fill it even when people want him. Also, a capable person that is phobic or fearful of dispensation of justice should set aside leadership position.¹¹ Justifying this opinion, he reiterated that justice is the bedrock of good society and Allah demands it from a monogamous man before plunging into polygamous.

As a result of this, Islam regards selecting non-eligible leader as one of the symptoms of approach of the last hour. This is pointed out in an *hadith* related by Abu Hurayrah:

إذا ضيعت الأمانة فانتظر الساعة قيل يا رسول الله وما أضاعتها؟ قال إذا وسد الأمر إلى غير أهله فانتظر الساعة

Realizing the implication of the above *Hadīth*, Islamic scholars concur that a capable personality is expected to fill any vacant position of leadership. In this regard, 'Umar bn Khattāb used to say:

فالواجب في كل ولاية الأصلح بحسبها فإذا عين رجلان أحدهما أعظم أمانة والأخر أعظم قوة قدم أنفعها لتلك الولاية

The most befitting candidate for every leadership position is the most competent. If two people are selected and one of them is more trustworthy and the other is more energetic, the most useful candidate in that position will be given preference¹²

Prerequisites of Leadership

Islamic scholars have expressed divergent views about the conditions that a prospective leader must fulfill before being chosen. This is so, because, a leader in Islam is tasked with the responsibilities of protecting religious and worldly affairs. They all therefore assented on the following conditions¹³:

Knowledge (*Al 'Ilm*).

Justice (*Al 'Adālah*).

Valiance (*Al-Kifāyah*).

Physical and mental fitness etc.

The above stipulated conditions has been further expatiated by Shaykh Al-Khidri in a concise statement when he said:

Whosoever wants to occupy this exalted position must embody four conditions that include: Knowledge; this is the basis for the execution of the provisions of Allah and ignorant cannot implement it; justice; this is an essential element that must be put up by a leader and it must be dispensed by him. Valiance ; meaning that a leader must be courageous in discharging the role vested upon him especially in safeguarding religious and worldly affairs from being tampered with ;Physical and mental fitness signifies that he must be free from anything that can affect his logic reasoning¹⁴

It is interesting to note that a condition that generated intense debate among scholars, as held by al-Khaṭīb, is that a leader must originate from the tribe of Quraish¹⁵. This position is buttressed with following *ḥa ḥdit* الأئمة من قريش 'Leaders are from Quraish'¹⁶

In reference to the above *Hadīth*, Abdullah bn 'Umar, the author of *Al-'Imāmatul-'Udhma* stated that the wisdom behind the divine privilege bestowed upon Quraysh, as indicated in the *ḥadīth*, is that it is the most virtuous of all tribes in the Arabia peninsula. Yet, other people can occupy some leadership positions as demonstrated by the Prophet¹⁷. This, as pointed out by Ibn Khalidin, does not signify that Islam discriminates among people but a divine decision. Therefore, the *ḥadith* is limited to caliph¹⁸. The question that is thirsty of answer here is that do Nigerians consider the above conditions before electing their leaders? The answer is capital NO. Therefore, any leader who lacks knowledge about the administration of people, playing politics with justice and summoning not courage in dispensing justice cannot achieve any meaningful breakthrough as we are witnessing it in Nigeria

Manifestations of an Exemplary Leadership in Islam

Islam, which is believed by Muslims, as a religion promulgated by Prophet Muhammad, calls upon humanity to stay away from vicious and illicit acts that aim at promoting disintegration, proliferation and disunity. One of the elements used by the custodians of the faith in winning the hearts of all and sundry is an exemplary leadership that guarantees the rights of the followers.

Indeed, the Qur'an injunctions that warn against cruelty particularly in administering populace were not undermined. In the other words, the spirit of utilizing the teachings of Qur'an in stabilizing their society was seen as a mandate that must be fulfilled. Therefore, these are some of instances of excellent leadership discharged by Prophet Muhammad and the rightly guided caliphs.

Dispensation of justice: Justice, which is defined by Al-Jawzī as a state of staying away from suspicion and execution of what is lawful,¹⁹ was upheld strictly by the Prophet and the rightly guided caliphs. They did not only execute the laws against themselves, their families and their subjects without giving preference to one over the others on the basis of closeness, wealth, and position but saw it as a duty owing to Allah. A typical example can be

deduced from the Prophet's reaction to the intercession sought from him as a result of a woman from the tribe of Makhzūm who committed theft. The Prophet stood up and declared:

Verily, those before you were destroyed because when the noble among them stole, they pardon him and when the feeble among them stole, they took law against him. I swear by Allah, if it were to be Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad that stole, I would amputate her hand.²⁰

The Prophet did not only take up law against those who breached the rule, he also allowed people to avenge if he mistakenly harmed them. More so, the companions who underwent spiritual and soul courses under the tutelage of the Prophet also imbibed the culture of equitability in the administration of just. Unlike mismanagement of NNPC funds and other revenue agencies that characterize Nigerian system for many years, Umar bn Khattab, the second caliph, considered expending any amount which the law did not authorize illegal. Explaining the consequence to the public, he was reported to have pronounced:

لا يحل لي من مال الله إلا حلتان : حلة للشتاء وحلة للصيف وقوت كرجل من قريش ليس بأغناهم ثم أنا من المسلمين

Nothing is lawful for me in this trust of God (treasury) except a pair of cloth for the summer and a pair of cloth for the winter as well as a subsistence enough for an average man of the Quraysh for my family, after that, I am just for the Muslims²¹

It is paramount to note here that the two excerpts emanated from Prophet Muhammad and one of the members of his coterie submitted that justice is like the steering of an administration that wishes to succeed. The rule of law that implies no one is above the law and governmental decisions must be made only by applying known and legal principles, was adopted throughout their epoch.

In fact, it is written in Madinah charter that the document will not protect anyone who is unjust or commit crime²². Therefore, all are equal and no distinction can be entertained from the members of the society (from the lowest to the highest). The question here is that is Nigerian constitution taken cognizance of the rule of law? The answer is yes but some of Nigerian Lawyers interpreted the law to suit their whims and caprices as this could be deduced from Nigerian President who warned Nigerian lawyers against

sacrificing the integrity of the nation for covering the misdeeds of their clients.²³

The Shūrah (consultation): one of the distinct principles or mechanisms which Islam attached great importance to from its onset is consultation in the selection of the heads and in the governance of the followers. This represents Qur'ān stance where it declares Q3:159 وشاورهم في الأمر

Commenting on the above verse, As-Shawkani submitted:

واجب على الولاة مشاورة العلماء فيما لا يعلمون وفيما أشكل عليهم من أمور الدنيا
ومشاورة وجوه الجيش فيما يتعلق بالحرب ووجوه الناس فيما يتعلق بالمصالح
ووجوه الكتاب والقال والوزراء فيما يتعلق بمصالح العباد وعمارته

It is incumbent upon leaders to consult scholars in what they do not understand or clear about in the matters of life, to consult warriors in the aspects of war, to consult learned people in the aspect of public interest, to consult workers and ministers on the welfarism of the states and her structure²⁴

Relating to the above opinion is the postulation of Ibn 'Atiyyah that suggested impeachment of a leader who sees no goodness in the consultation. He held:

لا خلاف في وجوب عزل من لا يستشير أهل العلم والدين

There is no discord on the obligation of dismissal (of a leader) that does not consult the people of knowledge and religion.²⁵

All this shows that leader that is devoid of consultation cannot accomplish success. It must however be stated here that the secular nature of Nigeria as proclaimed by the people creates enormous challenges for political leaders. Showing an opinion that seems to be Islamic attracts a severe criticism. Reference to this is the idea of banking system that gives no room for interest which was castigated by a vast number of Christians, despite the copious benefits that can be gained from it.

In reaction to the prominence of consultation in Islam, the Prophet (S.A.W) recommended the choosing of good advisory team which would be exhorting him in doing good deeds. Confirming the practical aspect of consultation of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), 'Abū Hurayrah, one of the companions of the Prophet, asserted:

ما رأيت أحدا أكثر مشاورة لأصحابه من رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم

I have never seen anybody that holds strictly to consultations of his companions than the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.)²⁶

Thus, he used to seek advice from his companions about various matters, to conform their hearts and so they actually implement the decision they reach. For example, he asked the companions if they should fortify themselves in Al-Madinah or go out to meet the enemy in the battle of Uhud, and a vast number of them subscribed to go out to meet the enemy and they did. The statement credited to 'Umar bn Khaṭṭāb and his action testify to it. He was reported to have said:

لا خير فيكم إن لم تقولوها ولا خير فينا إن لم نسمعها

There is no boon in you if you say it not and there is no good in you if we don't pay attention²⁷

Concerning waging war against the apostates during the reign of Abubakar, the second caliph, the caliph took advice from other companions and 'Umar's response was that Abubakar should not and advised him to be lenient and unite people instead. However, Abubakar did not take the suggestion because of its devastating effects. He then stated:

والله لو منعوني عقالا كانوا يؤذونه لرسول الله (ص) لقاتلتهم على منعه

I swear by Allah if they hindered me a rope they used to give the Prophet (S.A.W), I would wage war against them on it²⁸

After the intense argument between them, 'Umar later assented with Abubakar, saying:

فوالله ما هو إلا أن رأيت شرح الله صدر أبي بكر للقتال فعرفت انه الحق

I swear by Allah, I later realized that Allah opened the heart of Abubakar in waging war (against apostates) and I know that he is on the right track²⁹

It is apt to mention here that taking advice is not compulsory. Yet, consultation constitutes one of the salient features of a good leader.

Welfarism: One of the most lacking ingredients that expose masses to suffering in Nigeria is the issue of welfarism. The concept which refers to the assistance or financial aid granted to the poor, the unemployed e.t.c. is

not enjoyed by down trodden masses but also concentrate on well-to do citizens. Though the government makes provision for it in their budget but the absence of leaders that consider it as an obligation that must be accounted for, turn down the institution. The Prophet, who was not only spiritual leader but a political leader, cautioned leaders from it when he said:

من ولاه الله شيئا من أمر المسلمين فاحتجب دون حاجتهم
وخلتهم وفقّرهم احتجب الله دون حاجته وخلته وفقّره

Whosoever is chosen by Allah to man the affair of Muslim and fail to attend to their want, complaint and need, Allah would not fulfill his want, complaint and need.³⁰

Taking cognizance of the violation of the above principle that enjoins leaders to take care of the followers, Abubakr did not allow any of his officers to behave in an irregular manner. He used to warn them whenever he found any officer amiss. For example, he wrote to Khālid bn Walīd: "you are enjoying and the blood of Muslims is flowing nearby your tent"³¹

It is noted that Abubakr has given dirham as a stipend to each adult in Madinah and increase it whenever income increased.³² Unlike Nigeria leaders who do not care about the welfarism of the people, 'Umar bn khattāb used to sit in the *masjid* in order to listen to the complaint of the people and cater for their needs. In an occasion, he was going round one night and saw a woman with children, crying due to hunger at the outskirts of the city. He brought some flour and butter from *Baytu-l- māl* and prepared meals for the children.³³

The great ordeal which many Nigerians had witnessed on the issue of welfarism cannot be over emphasized. The disable persons, the old and the poor who were held with high esteem during the epoch of the Prophet and four rightly guided caliphs are deprived of their rights in Nigeria. The consequence of which is prevalence of theft and other vicious acts.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the principles of leadership as portrayed in Islam. Its uniqueness which lies on the consideration of leadership as a trust accounted for its prosperity in the era of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) and the rightly guided caliphs. The adoption of principles that include dispensation of justice to all and sundry, consultation of the led and giving optimum regard to the welfarism of the followers distinguished it from the

system of political office holders in Nigeria. It is therefore our submission in this paper that the virus of corruption which has become endemic as a result of undermining the rights of followership can only be lessened or corrected if Islamic principles of leadership are embraced.

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