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THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) AS A MODEL FOR PEACE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The development of a nation depends largely on the competence of its leader(s) in properly managing the human and non human resources of the nation of which evidence has confirmed that Nigeria is a failure. Writers are however, not economical in saying the truth regarding the enviable leadership traits of Prophet Muhammad as an elucidation to the recommendation made by Allah in respect of the personality of this great Prophet in Q33:21. This paper examined some of the leadership principles of the Prophet (SAW) with the objective of making a case for adoption of these leadership styles in the bid to revive Nigeria. Historical research method was adopted for the work while data were collected from printed and non printed materials. Electronic materials were also adequately referred to. Findings of the work revealed that the harmonious environment of the Muslim community during the time of the Prophet and beyond was a product of the Prophet's perfect leadership style. It is therefore pertinent for Nigerians to borrow from these precious traits for its revival.

Introduction

To make efforts in recognizing Allah and to acquire the wonderful secret powers are the fountain of actions. Today, as we stumble through our confused and turbulent world, grope in darkness, suffer from uncertainty and depression, we must look for and grasp at the styles and teachings of the world acclaimed successful leader to revive the country and give a lasting solution to a long suffered problem. Nigeria has suffered many setbacks politically, economically and socially all because of the defects in either the leaders or their leadership style. The independence of 1960 was supposed to be a blessing to the citizens but rather, it was like a curse. There was a condemnation of military dictatorship but then, the transition to civilian appears to be worse than the system that precedes it. Both the leaders and the led are engrossed in corruption and the centre could no longer hold because the leaders that are entrusted with the responsibility of putting things in its proper shape lack the desired characteristics to carry the nation to the promised land.

Mankind needs a set of moral principles having universal validity as well as a real personality in which these moral principles are exemplified especially in the aspect of leadership in the quest for a solution to the societal menace. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the person who proclaimed the ethics that bear the stamp of divine authenticity (Q53:3) and is moreover, a model of perfect conduct and character for all mankind (Q33:21). In bodily appearance he lived in this world, but spiritually, he was on a different plane. If leadership is to assume its appropriate definition in Nigeria and if our leaders wish to be up to task, there is no option to adopting the leadership style of a successful leader.

The Concept of Peace in Islam and the Nigerian Scenario

Peace is considered as a concord or harmony or tranquility¹. It is a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or in an area.² These definitions are however, shallow in nature because their concentration is on negative peace which is the absence of direct violence, war and fear of the individual, nation, region and indeed at the international levels. There is a positive peace which is the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace of the individual. In other words, peace is a condition in which there is no social conflict and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs, aspirations and expectations. In Islam, peace is characterised by an absence of not only physical violence, but also of internal ruinations caused by the preponderance of vicious attributes in the spiritual and mental faculties.³ The very first verse of the Qur'an reads 'in the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate'. This verse of compassion and mercy is repeated in not less than 114 places in the Qur'an to show that Islam is not only a religion of peace invites to peace⁴. Islam lays emphasis on peace because all the good things which Islam expects in human life can only be achieved under a peaceful environment. Spiritual upliftment, social welfare, prayer and educational activities can all be acquired when the environment is violence free. It is an established fact that where there is no peace, there will be no development, no progress and no achievement.

Islam teaches peaceful co existence and tolerance. It is only he who is ignorant of its teachings, hostile to its system, or is arrogant enough not to accept clear evidence that will dispute this fact. Peace in Islam is more than a mere desire, it is a principle that is deeply rooted in all the fabrics of Islam⁵. No religious law or social system has ever encouraged the establishment of peace in the same way that Islam has done, for Islam has ordered the practise of this great virtue through respect and self-restraint even at the most testing of times such as *Hajj* (pilgrimage) as expressed in Q2 : 197

Islam respects human dignity and propagates unity and harmony. Albanna asserts that civil life in Islam is aimed towards peace. Nevertheless, Islam deals with reality and as long as there are people that follow their own desires and self-interest, there will always be conflict and war. But if war is for the sake of stopping an aggressor, aiding truth and achieving justice, then it is a virtue since it encourages goodness and prosperity for the people. It is a source of evil, social vices and degradation for mankind when it is used as a tool for the wrong-doer, corruption, transgression and oppression of the weak. Islam came to deal with this reality.⁶ By this stand of this great scholar, it is understood that war in those circumstances is not violence but rather, a means of enforcing peace on earth. Albanna's position is from his understanding of the verse:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits; for Allah loves not transgressors (Q2:190).

An examination of Islamic concept of peace reveals that it is closer to that of positive peace and traverses between two core values in Islam namely; that of compassion and justice. Both of these ethical precepts are employed several times in the Qur'an

Nigeria, there is no gain saying that citizens are not only denied the negative peace, the positive peace which should emanate from the actualisation of the negative peace is no longer there. Nigeria is considered to be mired with violence and inequality and the females suffer the consequence more. Injustice has increased the threat and danger of crime and violence in Nigeria. Quality education is very expensive to get, getting admission into federal universities becomes the beginning of a battle while passing through the school is the battle field. Crime and violence in Nigeria is strongly attached to social injustice.⁷ Where else do we expect justice when the National Judiciary Council (NJC) which is the Judiciary highest administrative body, unfairly treated a chief judge of the Court of Appeal dancing to the tune of the executive body of the federation.⁸ The elder statesman and a former Chairman, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other-Related Offences Commission, (ICPC), Justice Mustapha Akanbi presented the current situation of the country thus;

Today, as never before, the level of criminal activities in our country is on the ascendancy. Bare-faced looting of

public treasury, fuel subsidy and pension scams, money laundering, economic crimes of all sorts, oil bunkering, kidnapping, cold-blooded murder and massacre as well as grand and petty corruption are now common occurrences. They are committed with recklessness and impunity.

The result is that our nation, which should have been the pride of the black race, has been reduced to a pariah nation and in a state of utter helplessness. The security of life and property can no longer be guaranteed. We are on the precipice of the predicted failed state...

The most unfortunate development is that this heinous crime is being condoned by those who wield political power and authority. Or how else does one explain the cases of some former governors who have been charged to court for corruption and or looting of the public treasury, shamelessly still sitting in the hallowed hall of the National Assembly taking part in debates and discussions in the course of the proceedings of the house. And what tenable reason can be given for a man who had admitted taking bribe money on the pretext that he intended to use it as exhibit, continue to participate in the debates in the house while a criminal case of corruption is pending against him in court...

The end result is that the nation begins to drift and slide dangerously down the slippery road of economic ruination. In the process, there is a general desecration of societal and normative values, low level performance in both socio-economic and technological developments and ultimately a petrifying decadence, the stench of which often puts off or prevent other nations, with a record of transparency and probity from wanting to interact or do business with a corrupt nation...⁹

The submission of this statesman is that the jeopardy in the economic, political, social and educational system of our country, Nigeria, is a consequence of injustice being perpetrated by both the leaders and the led. He agreed that peace can be achieved only if the leaders and the led redress themselves. The insurgence in the north of Nigeria and the abduction in the south could be a reaction to oppression and injustice and until justice is returned, peace and security may not be guaranteed in all these regions.

Muhammad: An Acknowledged Model

It was the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his empyreal teachings that made the non-Muslims bear testimony to his greatness. Bernard Shaw said regarding the personality of this Great Prophet:

He must be called the Savior of humanity, I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness. I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today.¹⁰

Equally, Michael. H. Hart, an American Mathematician, Historian and an Astronomer, ranked Prophet Muhammad first in the list of the top 100 men which he quoted in his world-famous book "The Hundred". He justified his ranking thus:

My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels. Of humble origins, Muhammad founded and promulgated one of the world's great religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. Today, thirteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and pervasive...Muhammad, (unlike Jesus) was a secular as well as a religious leader. In fact, as the driving force behind the Arab conquests, he may well rank as the most influential political leader of all time.¹¹

Comments made by these non-Muslims are nothing but a testimony to the words of Allah in respect of His messenger:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

In God's messenger you have indeed a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope and awe to God and the Last Day, and remembers God unceasingly. (33: 21)

This verse was interpreted to mean an elevation of the Prophet (SAW) to the rank of the most superior role model on earth¹². He is seen not only as a spiritual leader but equally as an excellent political administrator that led the entire Muslim world to a shore of glory during and after his life. To benefit maximally from his leadership style, it is of great importance to look at some of his leadership principles.

Prophet Muhammad Propagating, Practising and Dispensing Peace

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is a perfect leader that deserves emulation, not only his words but more importantly his actions. He was a perfect example for people in all walks of life. There are number of verses in the Qur'an that reveal the mercy through which Prophet Muhammad was able to make peace with his people. Allah says

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

It is by some mercy from Allah that you have been gentle with them. Had you been rough and hard of heart they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon them, ask for forgiveness for them, and consult them. Then when you have resolved, put your trust in Allah. Allah loves those who trust Him. (3:159)

This verse is referring to people who were around the Prophet and could have left him if not for the qualities he possessed. The people who were physically close to the Prophet (SAW) are technically known as his "Companions." The verse first highlights the mercy and gentleness with which the Prophet treated his Companions. The Prophet's mercy for the believers in general is mentioned in Qur'an 9:128 and his mercy to the entire mankind in Q 21:107.

The Prophet's beautiful qualities look even more impressive as the verse tells more about the different contexts in which he has to exercise them, as it proceeds to command him to "pardon them" and "ask for forgiveness for them." Clearly, the Prophet was required to show his mercy and gentleness even in situations when his Companions were involved in some kind of wrongdoing and misbehavior that required forgiveness from God and pardoning by the Prophet (SAW). The verse then commands the Prophet to consult with the Companions about decisions he needed to make. These were not decisions about the basics of faith, which are determined by God as revealed in the Qur'an, but about short-term and long-term issues of the Muslim community and the management of the relationships with other communities which affects his leadership role in the society¹³.

Allah commands His Prophet to consult with his Companions for the attainment of two objectives. First, to seek various views so he can be best informed about the available options which, if not through consultation, he would not be privileged to know. Second, to get buy-in from them for whatever decision he intends to make so that peace may radiate in the society. This is a genuine consultative process that involves the Companions as participants and the Prophet (SAW) as the ultimate decision maker. The directive to run a consultative government by Allah as contained in Q3:159 contributed in no little amount to the success of the Prophet (SAW). One well-known example of his consultative approach was set in the Battle of the Trench (*Ghazwat al-Khandaq*) when the Prophet discussed with his Companions their defensive options against an army that was 3-4 times their size. Salmān Al-Fārisī suggested digging a trench around Madinah that would neutralize the horse- and camel-mounted troops of the enemy. The Prophet agreed to the plan which ultimately proved completely successful.¹⁴

Muhammad was equally found of dispensing peace through mercy and gentleness. He possessed the strength of combining authority and power with mercy and gentleness. This combination is difficult to achieve. Those who are merciful and gentle may fail to become leaders, lacking firmness and decision making skills. On the other hand, those who are in leadership positions find it very difficult to behave with mercy and kindness as they exercise their power and authority. One day, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was going somewhere at noon and it was too hot in the desert when He (S.A.W) saw an old woman carrying her luggage on her head. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) helped her and took the luggage from the woman and carried it for her. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) asked the woman that where she was going and why? She said that I am leaving this town as I have heard that a magician named Muhammad (S.A.W) is in town. As Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was

very patient and kind, He (S.A.W) didn't say a word and kept listening. The old lady kept complaining that why she was leaving the town. In short the basic reason of her to leave the town was her misconception about Muhammad (S.A.W), who was walking beside her and she didn't knew it.

While walking with the Holy Prophet (peace be upon Him), that old woman noticed that this young man have a brightness on his smiling and humble face. And she also noticed that His sweat is perfumed. She was very impressed. When they reached the destination, Muhammad (S.A.W) put down the bag and was about to leave when the old woman said, "O, kind person! At least tell me your name!". Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) replied, "I am the person because of whom you left the town." The old lady was amazed to listen to that and said that such a kind, helping and true person can never be wrong and therefore she also accepted Islam.¹⁵

One of the major causes of bridge of peace in any society is injustice and favourism. The law of our country is only for those that are not alliance of the authority. Even with the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC). Criminals are not given fair hearing as lamented by Justice Akanbi. Prophet Muhammad (SAW)'s treatment of the Jews as equal citizens under the law was unrivalled despite their different religious beliefs.¹⁶ In spite of Muslim reservations of the sincerity of Madinah's Jews, the Prophet (SAW) continued to have dealings with them until he breathed his last. This is evidenced by the report that one day the corpse of a Jew was carried by him. He stood up and the companions stood up with him and later informed him that the corpse was that of a Jew and he commented "is he not also a human".¹⁷

Supremacy of the law and universally applying justice in governance was foremost amongst the concerns of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). A young woman from one of the most distinguished and noblest Muslim families committed a theft during the time of the Prophet (SAW). She was found to be guilty and the verdict was announced. Immediately some people tried to intervene, hoping that the Prophet, well-known for his magnanimity and love of forgiveness, would grant pardon in this case. Not at all! In fact he was angry that he had been approached in this way, and reminded people of how earlier generations had been ruined because crimes committed by people of influence and position went unpunished, while the weak and humble were punished. He then made a remarkable statement which came to be accepted as a firm principle of Islam: *"Indeed – by God, if Fatima, daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, her hand would be amputated."* This statement put an end to interference in legal verdicts.¹⁸ The fact that Prophet Muhammad

(SAW) prioritized peaceful justice, even at the expense of conflict, in all circumstances is showcased by his astounding magnanimity in extremely adverse situations. Revenge was never an option considered by the Prophet (SAW). Returning to Makkah from the snubbing, taunting and physically harming visit of Ta'if, the Prophet (SAW) graciously rejected the offers from the angel Gabriel and the angel in charge of mountains to cause destruction unto the city, preferring to pray that may Allah honour their progeny with faith in Him.¹⁹

It will be important to conclude this section by sitting the comments of two scholars regarding the attitude of the Prophet (SAW) at the treaty of Al Hudaibiyyah which is a demonstration per excellence, of the Prophet's love and propagation for peace. The Prophet (SAW), just to allow peace to reign, agreed to sign a treaty with the non-believing Quraysh that there should be free entry into paganism and restricted entry into Islam²⁰. Commenting on this action of the Prophet, S.H.A writes

The attitude of peace and amicableness displayed by the Apostle on this occasion, which also demonstrated his exemplary patience and moderation, did not fail to impress the tribes which joined their faith to Islam. They were led to hold a high opinion of Islam and to love and revere it, which, by itself, created a wholesome atmosphere for its rapid expansion without any conscious effort on the part of the Prophet or the Muslims.²¹

William Watt equally attributes the love for peace to the prophet in his action. He writes:

The first provision was that the two parties were to abandon hostilities against one another for ten years. This expressed Muhammad's peaceful intentions towards the Meccans, and gave them a respite from the desperate struggle against his growing power.²²

Recommendations

The success of the revival of our great nation depends largely on the commitment of the leaders at the federal, state and local level as well as the commitment of the led. This commitment is not enough until when mistake in the choice of the person to be emulated is not made. It is in view of these that this paper recommends that Muslims especially should engage widely in the reading of Islamic literatures especially those that have to do with the life and teachings of the Prophet (SAW) and those of the rightly guided Caliphs.

It is equally pertinent that the teaching of religion should be intensified in various institutions of learning. The teaching of the life history of the Prophet and the rightly guided Caliphs should be given an adequate attention in the school curriculum especially at the primary and the secondary school level. This will help to inculcate the right character in the mind of the incoming generation. It is necessary for our leaders to abide by the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This will however be possible if the scholars can take up their responsibility of educating the masses in general and the leaders in particular on the need to internalise the lessons derived from the teachings of this model leader.

Conclusion

Having identified the relevance of peace to societal growth and development, it is the submission of this paper that spiritual leaders and Islamic scholars have a vital role to play in making Nigeria harmonious for living. It is hoped that adequate education of the people about the life and living of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the rightly guided Caliphs will bring a change to the unpleasant situation of the country.

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