

A Cursory Look at Some of the Speeches and Practices of the First Four Rightly Guided *Khalifs* of Islam: Lessons for Nigerian Politicians

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Abstract

Islam is a comprehensive way of life. It is more than being only a religion, because there is no aspect of life, which is vital for human development that Islam did not cover, such as economy, worship, culture and politics. The *Khulafa'urrashidun* (Rightly guided Caliphs) believed in the prophet (SAW) from the beginning of his message and they were his first successors after his demise. The experience they had on the concept of the ideal government of Madinah assisted them to demonstrate practical leadership of the Caliphate and how governance in Islam should be. This is done by actions and speeches they delivered when people elected them. The issue of justice "al-Adalah" to all citizenry is given priority in administering the affairs of the people of their own time as could be seen in the speech of Abubakr. He considered the weak to be strong on the basis of his truth, while the strong to be weak if he is at wrong.

This paper intends to examine some statements of the Caliphs Abubakar, Umar, Uthman and Aliyu may Allah be pleased with them regarding governance. Their demonstration of dedication, selflessness, trust, and so on in administering the society will also be highlighted in the paper for Nigerian politicians to emulate for a better Nigeria. At end, the paper recommends that government has a role to play in ensuring better political leadership in Nigeria by compiling and teaching to the Nigerian Students some political write-ups and speeches of the past Muslims scholars.

Keywords: Speeches, Practice, Khalifs of Islam, Political Leadership, and Nigeria.

Introduction

No sooner after the Prophet death then the election of Abubakar as his successor took place. He was the closest friend and trustworthy companion of the Prophet. After him came Umar, Uthman and Ali may Allah be pleased with them. These immediate successors of the Prophet worked tirelessly in following and maintaining the true path of Islam as the Prophet demonstrated. They are

called the rightly guided because of their good record and success in governance and all other aspects of leadership. But, it is to be understood that their level of success varied from one *Khalif* to the other because of different situation they found themselves. During Abubakar's Caliphate for example there was the problem of apostacy and disunity of the Muslim Ummah. Uthman faced the problem of sedition and other political crises. The last *Khalif* Aliyu, encountered the problem of political turmoil and rebellion. Notwithstanding, he stood for justice and fairness until he was killed. This shows *Khalif* Aliyu was a firm leader that worked with the truth and implemented justice in his leadership as he learnt from the prophet and the first three pious Caliphs of Islam (Abubakar, Umar and Uthman). His exemplary could therefore be emulated by the Nigerian political leaders for obtaining a prosperous nation devoid of all sorts of corruption (Rahim, 2001: 96-101).

All the aforementioned *Khalifs* gave an apparent meaning on how relationship between the ruler and the ruled in Islam should be, so that those to follow will emulate them rightly. They uttered words and practicalised them in respect to leadership that will guide rulers, governors, judges, army commanders, tax collectors and other public officers in the state which undoubtedly helps in the smooth running of the government affairs if utilized properly by the political leaders in the Nigerian context of today (Nadwi, 1976: 15-34).

A cursory looking at the statements of the rightly guided Caliphs is therefore of paramount importance for the demonstration of ideal Islamic government. For this reason the paper examines some of these statements and actions and their impact on the life of contemporary Muslim state which Nigeria is a part. That is to say the speeches and practices of the first four pious *Khalifs* of Islam can not only benefit the Islamic State, they can also benefit the contemporary secular society of Nigeria and all Muslims states if properly applied. The post-election speech of *Khalif* Abubakar served as policy statement which provided guidance to him as newly appointed leader. The statements made by those *Khulaf'urrashiduun* quoted in this paper are in line with some statements in the Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. For example in the Qur'an Allah Said:

And from among you there should be a party
who invite to good and enjoin what is right and
forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be
successful (Qur'an:3:104).

The Prophet when asked by a companion: "What do you see if leaders were appointed and they asked for their rights from us as our leaders but they in turn refused to give us our rights as their subjects?" Then the Prophet said: "Give them their rights and then ask them for your right from Allah for He will certainly make them accountable what they had been entrusted with" (Gwandu, 2005:64). The Nigerian Political leaders should therefore bear in mind that they will be asked about the right of their subjects in the hereafter and they must returned back to them their rights on that day if they denied them here.

The elected leaders are supposed to provide justice to the masses for peace to reign in the community. On the other hand, the followers should not protest against their leaders or cause trouble to them on the fact that justice is not done to them in ruling their affairs. No matter the poor leadership is provided to them they should obey their leaders in as much as they were not commanded to disobey Allah. They should in turn seek their right from Allah if denied by their leaders which is the best way of peaceful living to any society. The Nigerian Political leaders could therefore take lesson from the government of the *Khalifs* of Islam by providing the deserving leadership to the subjects that should comprise justice, fairness and Allah-fearing (Nawawi, Hadith No.28).

Some Political Statements of the First Four Rightly Guided *Khalifs* of Islam and their Lessons for Nigerian Politicians

As a matter of fact, the first four *Khalifs* of Islam laid down a solid foundation on the required administration by leaders and followers in a society. They laid emphasis on justice and Allah-fearing as the key elements to the successful leadership which all stakeholders concerned should emulate for the progress of their states.

Some Political Statements of Khalif Abubakr (R.A.) and their Lessons for Nigerian Politicians

Ababakar's speech was considered the one ever made by a *Khalif*. The time he was elected to office, said:

Brothers, now I am elected your leader, although I am no better than any one of you. Help me right if I am right and set me right, even with the sword if I am in the wrong. Trust is a trust. Falsehood is treason. The weak among you shall be strong with me till (Allah willing) his (usurped) right has been vindicated and the strong among you shall be weak with me

till (Allah willing) I have taken what is due from him (for the weak). Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His prophet. If I disobey Him and His prophet, obey me not (Khalid, 1979:89).

What is exciting is that, it was not a mere speech; the *Khalif* translated it to action. He showed to the people that he was a steadfast and upright leader accepting the truth that obedience is only due to a leader when it is not in disagreement with Allah's command and prohibitions (Akhdariy, ND: 4). This statement is a lesson for some of the Nigerian political leaders in the sense that they want to be obeyed by the subjects even though they are not good leaders and they have nothing to present to people as evidence of fulfilling the promise and trust they took before Allah and before the general public. If such leaders want to be praised and obeyed by the subject, they should therefore change to good leaders for a better Nigeria.

Khalif Abubakr treated his subjects equally with fairness and did not see himself as one above other citizens on the basis of his rank. Never he was seen behaving like a monarch or a superior officer unless in matters concerning the dispensation of justice. When he takes an upright decision, he will stand by it unless another decision is discovered in the best interest of Islam and the citizenry. His decision against the apostates when he dispatched Usamah and his troops and in the process of the compilation of the Qur'an can best be cited as examples. According to some of the companions Usamah was too young perhaps incapable to lead the troop of the battle of Yamamah, but Abubakr insisted to fulfill the Prophet wish of appointing Usamah as the commandant in that battle (Rahim, 2001:56). In the same way, the majority of the Sahabah objected the compilation of the Qur'an exercise intended by Abubakr on the fact that the Prophet did not command to do it after him. Abubakr thought that conducting such a work is a good innovation in Islam; he used his power as a leader and conducted it for the benefit of the Muslim *Ummah*. This concept of firmness in any decision that concerns dispensation of Justice for the progress of the nation made by *Khalif* Abubakr if adopted by Nigerian Political leaders it will come up with a good fruit in governing the affairs of Nigerians.

As a leader, he shouldered the responsibility of protecting the weak members within his authority from the stronger ones who may treat them unjustly. To him, the protection should be in accordance to the saying of Allah:

And if Allah did not check one set of people by means of another the earth would indeed be full of mischief (Qur'an: 2:251).

Although some of the Nigerian political leaders deviates from the right path of governing the Nigerian society, but the subjects ought not to abuse them and say a bad word on them. They should remain steadfast in obedience to their leaders so long as the leaders do not disobey Allah or command for His disobedience. The Qur'an was emphatic on this when it says:

O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad) and obey those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah (for its solution in the Qur'an) and His Messenger if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day (Qur'an:4:59).

Obedience to those in authority is equal to obedience to Allah. Abubakr emphasized to the followers to give their helping hands to the leaders who are on the right path, which is the only condition for him to be considered the one to be followed. Therefore, in his speech, he pronounced the qualities of good leadership as well as the characteristics of a good leader and follower in an ideal Islamic government; the government which deserves to be emulated by our Nigerian political leaders for its goodness and prosperity.

Some Political Statements of Khalif Umar (R.A.) and their Lessons for Nigerian Politicians

Umar ibn Khattab was the second pious *Khalif*. In his election speech he said:

O people! You have some rights on me which you can always claim. One of your rights is that if anyone of you comes to me with a claim, he should leave satisfied. Another of your rights is that you can demand that I take nothing unjustly from the revenue of the state. You can also demand that I fortified your frontiers and do not put you into danger. It is also your right if you go to battle I should look after your families as a father would while you are away. O people remain conscious of God, forgive me my faults and help me in my task. Assist me in

enforcing what is good and forbidding what is evil, advise me regarding the obligations that have been imposed upon me by Allah (Encyclopedia of Seerah, 1985:249).

From the above statement it could be understood that in actual sense Umar explained the features of good governance. He, at first defined himself with his subjects. His acquaintance with them was neither an advantage nor a barrier from taking appropriate action against anyone who would commit a wrong and deserved reprimand. But, as a leader he would not use his position to victimize or oppress anyone. All that he desired was justice and fair play for all and sundry. These two things are lacking in governing the affairs of Nigerians and are detriments to the progress of Nigeria. The Nigerian political leaders could emulate them for getting a better nation.

In another report he said:

Allah Has associated you with me and me with you. He kept me alive after my two companions: the Prophet and Abubakr. If people act kindly, I too will be kind to them; and if they do wrong, I will certainly punish them (Encyclopedia of Seerah, 1985:249).

Here Umar showed to the ideal rulers that a leader should be the police chief as well as the chief judge. Whoever contradicts the rule by feeling that he is indispensable stand as enemy of the state and would be dealt with accordingly. Even if the executive leader is to be found guilty, he must be summoned before the law and be punished as well. The Nigerian Political leaders should amend that law which prevents the executive leaders to be presented before the law if they are summoned. This may lead to oppression and usurping rights of the Nigerian citizens.

In another report Umar Said:

I want to say few things to you, and (I hope) you will agree with me. The Arab nation is like a bridled camel, which follows its leader. It is therefore the duty of the leader to lead it carefully. I swear by the Lord of the Ka'abah that I will lead them on the right way (Encyclopedia of Seerah, 1985:249).

The leader based on the above statement should be just. However, for someone to be just, he needs to be tough and stern when required and be lenient where leniency is needed. A leader needs to understand the nature of his subjects. Equally, he should be capable of diagnosing the ills of the community so that he can address them from the root. Some of the ills of Nigerians nowadays include poverty and ill security. The Nigerian Political leaders should therefore provide citizens with security and job opportunities before imposing any law on them, otherwise political crises may keep on prevailing in Nigeria.

The leader should frankly state his priorities and try to achieve them as stated by Umar on the day of his inception to office. This means that his concern should be for all, irrespective of tribal, geographical or religious considerations. More so, promises of the leader should be fulfilled in order to gain respect and obedience of the subjects. In general, it is the duty of the leader to lead the subjects to the right path as stated above. For example the seven point agenda stated by President Umaru Musa Yar'aduwa administration in Nigeria was a good idea; however none of them was achieved. The Nigerian Political leaders should therefore be stating their priorities and make effort to achieve them.

The Islamic system of administration laid down by Umar (R.A.), signifies that it is not possible for a leader to look after his subjects single-handedly. For this reason he can appoint assistants who can help him to run the affairs of the society and show them what is expected of them. He needs governors for effective administration and close supervision as well as ministers and special advisers to deal with political and judicial issues. That was the reason for Umar statements when he appointed people to positions of authority. He said:

Listen, verily I am not sending you as rulers and potentates; on the other hand, I am sending you as the leaders of guidance so that men may follow you. Render unto the Muslims their rights; beat them not, lest you humiliate them; praise them not, lest you make them indiscipline. Do not shut your doors against them, lest the strong among them devour the weak ones (Husain, 1970:40).

The above statement means that policies should be allowed for continuity if they are means to serve the entire subjects and that leadership is expected to change from one hand to another and leadership should be based on principles.

That was why Abubakr as the first *Khalif* introduced principles in the art of governance. He hardly accepted anything new however good it might be if there is no text in the Qur'an or Hadith. This is done by Umar as following the footsteps of Abubakr. But, in addition, he introduced policies considering the state affairs and came up with the idea of public treasury and public Service Commission which greatly assisted in the smooth running of the public affairs in the state. The Nigerian Political leaders should take lesson from the above statement of *Khalif* Umar. If a leader comes up with a good policy, it should keep on by his predecessor for sustainable national development.

The Political Statements of Khalif Uthman (R.A.) and their Lessons for Nigerian Politicians

When coming to power, Uthman (R.A.) realizing the peaceful as well successful nature of the state instructed his governors and all stakeholders to continue with the policies of his predecessor, Umar. Thus he said:

Maintain your administrative policy on the lines you followed during the *caliphate* of Umar and do not make any change in anything. If you find any difficulty in any matter, refer it to me. I will put it before the people and then send you the reply. Abstain from any kind of alteration (in your administration) for I will accept only those suggestions which Umar used to accept (Encyclopedia of Seerah 1985:252).

In actual sense, Umar's policies adopted by Uthman helped in maintaining administrative success in the first six years of his administration. From the view of *Khalifa* Uthman, no change of principles in government is due unless there is societal change and the new change is most appropriate for peace, tranquility and progress of the society to prevail. This means that the new policy should be motivated by the interest of the general public and should be better than the one preceding it. In short, the changes must not be motivated by personal interest of the leader. All these points are reflected in Uthman's speech when directed his governors and judges. It has also shown that his change of governors and other administrative offices were as a result of public complaints and for peaceful co' existence (Rahim, 2001:89). The Nigerian Political leaders should avoid making unnecessary changes in government offices and principles unless they found the new change is better than the old one for

the progress of Nigeria. New appointments and policies should also not be bias and selfish interest of any Political leader, because it can lead to national disunity and political turmoil in Nigeria.

Some Political Statements of Khalif Aliyu (R.A.) and their Lessons for Nigerian Politicians

Like his predecessors, Ali gave many speeches and sent letters to his governors concerning their obligations as leaders. In his post election speech he said:

O people! No one has any right on me except you have elected me to the office of the *Khalif*. You came to my home yesterday perplexed and confused. But I was not willing to accept the office of the *Khalif*. However, you insisted that I must become your *Khalif* and rule over your destinies (Ibrahim, 2000:70).

Although *Khalif* Ali was not willing to accept the office, but since he has accepted it he would rule no matter how difficult but according to the dictates of the *Shari'ah*. In his letter sent to one of his governors, he outlines the characteristics and functions of the type of leadership he wanted all the governors to provide. A leader should be model to his followers in Allah-fearing and all relevant qualities of good leadership laid down by the Prophet Muhammad may Allah grant him peace and blessings. The Nigerian Political leaders could adopt such qualities of *Khalif* Ali's administration as self-discipline, just to the subjects, merciful, observable to any relevant means in their management and loving to the subjects, good decision making that can best benefit majority of the citizens materially and spiritually for the betterment of Nigeria.

Among the teachings of the aforementioned statement of the *Khalif* deserve to emulate by the Nigerian Political leaders are that all classes of the society should discharge their duties accordingly. The needy, the destitute and disable people in Nigeria are the most deserving of the leaders' attention. They should be treated with kindness, mercy and consideration and they should have a unit headed by the most pious person.

In a nutshell, the political statements of *Khalif* Ali are a reflection of public responsibility. It contains all that is due to the public by any administrator. It provides basic and necessary directions for a just leadership as taught in the Qur'an and Sunnah and exemplified by the great four pious *Khalifs*. If these

are to be emulated by the Nigerian Political Leaders, there is no way Nigeria can not be number one nation in terms of progress of the country.

Recommendation

For Nigeria to be progressive, there are some policies of the pious Caliphs recommended to be adopted by the Political leaders as follows:

- There should be provision of security and comfort for all which must be one of the priorities for Nigerian Political Leaders.
- Leaders should be Allah-Fearing and look after their subjects properly and be kind and just to all of them.
- Leaders should not usurp the right of their subjects. They should incorporate them to the system by seeking the advice from learned and pious men among them and other men of wisdom and experience.
- The State Funds should be spent on construction and ameliorating peoples suffering.
- The administration should be entrusted to men of experience and good character who have good planning and wise policy for the betterment of the general public.
- Appointment to offices should be made on good qualities and qualifications and the intention should include helping the common man not for selfish reason.
- The Political Leader should familiarize himself with the work of each state department. He should not sit down to only read reports presented to him by his subordinates.
- The leader should also be continuously present before his people and pay attention to all especially the poor and the needy.
- The political write-ups and speeches of the past Muslims scholars and leaders should be compiled and taught to the Nigerian students for the benefit of the administrators in particular and the entire community of Nigeria at large.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that Islam encompasses all aspects of human life which politics is a part. It provides those principles which contain teachings that will guide any form of government. From the statements of the *Khalifs* mentioned in this paper it is clear that people will know all they need to know about politics and public administration by studying from the past. It is unlike the assumption of some people that nothing could be learnt about politics in Islam because they assume Islam to be a religion which only deals with rituals. Never true this statement is because the Qur'an describes Islam as all encompassing religion: "We have not neglected anything in the book" (Qur'an: 6:38). Therefore, there is need for this misconception to be corrected.

Unfortunately, all the aforementioned statements of the first four rightly guided Caliphs of Islam are mostly abused by the Nigerian Political Leaders. Nigerian Politics has changed to money-influenced politics, Political hypocrisy, politics with bitterness and hatred, election malpractice and many other corrupt practices in governance.

The knowledge of politics from Islamic Legal Council Perspectives and all other policies-related Islamic literatures should be given priority in teaching and learning spheres in Islamic Studies at our schools due to its significance for leaders and administrators of private and public offices. The political writings and speeches of the past Muslims scholars and leaders should be compiled and taught for the benefit of the entire community. If such works are collected, should as well be translated into different languages for wider circulation.

The political leaders in Nigeria can take lessons from these statements because they can solve all problems of Nigerian politics. Nepotism, corruption and favoritism which have become a threat to Nigerians can be minimized and respect for the subjects and ensuring of their rights and privileges by the leaders can be restored if the leaders work with these political statements of the first four rightly guided *Khalifs* of Islam. No wonder the Prophet Muhammad may Allah grant him peace and blessings said: "I enjoined for you my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided *Khalifs*" (Nawawi, Hadith 28).

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