

ISLAMIC CULTURAL VALUES AS TOOL FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

It is not exaggeration of the security challenges or tragic events of Nigerian country in recent times. All efforts put to establish and sustain development that ensure a just and efficient administration have been frustrated by corruption. The evils are prevalent in every facet of our society. The issue is increasingly being championed by public discussion – in media houses or institutions, in gatherings and more especially in academic discussions as demonstrated in several seminars, workshops and in both local and National Conferences. The Islamic Cultural values vis-à-vis its significance on the daily practices of Nigeria people cannot be over emphasized. The author of the paper approached the issue through literature survey about the mode life laid down by Islam. It outlines the important attributes needed in an effective model character and its impact on the lives of Nigerians from the perspective of Islam. Such model characters include equality and tolerance, kindness and generosity as well as honesty etc. the writer of the paper is very sure that if the Islamic model behaviors are adhered to, it will undoubtedly checkmate the challenges of insecurity, corruption and injustice etc. which are now threaten the peaceful nature of Nigerian society.

Key Concepts: Islam, Culture, Value, Governance, Development and Sustainable Development

Introduction

In recent times, Nigeria has been characterized by state of insecurity, tension, political rancor, economic crises and injustice. The situation is further aggravated by the corrupt practices. Apart from all these, there is also manifestation of religious extremism reflected in bigotry and sternness without consideration of time and place. Lemu (1992) accounted her experience in Nigeria some decades back that Lemu (1992) was overwhelmed by the high level of tolerance on the part of Muslims - a tolerance that seem sometimes to stem from simplicity. She further admitted that in the days gone by students/people were taught Islam ranging from the performance of Salah (prayer) and

memorization of Qur'an and others by traditional teachers. Christians on the other hand are sometimes skeptical about the moves and demands of the Muslims. This indicates that they are either not well informed about the motives behind such demands/agitation or unclear about the intention of such moves.

However, recently, things began to change as people (especially youths) get their knowledge of Islam from a variety of sources, some of them are well informed and a host of them are not. Even though, such exposure has some advantages, yet the re-awakening also has its dangerous side. The youth in particular have become confused and often divided through being

exposed to such a variety of information and views from so many different sources. Lemu (1992) submitted that such young Muslims with poor standard of general education and no firm grounding in Islam or general matter can hardly be expected to possess a clear judgment with which to assess what they need or are told about Islam. Consequently, they could easily be led by those who posed to have knowledge, to take up position of extremism or fanaticism and intolerance towards everybody (both believers and non-believers). This to some extent poses threat to proper and effective governance of any nation. It again poses challenge to stability and sustainable development of any given society or nation like ours, Nigeria. In recognition of this deplorable state of the nation, this paper intends to address aspect of Islamic cultural values that should be promoted to serve as veritable tool for good governance. These values include quality and tolerance, kindness and generosity, honesty and truthfulness. Others are modesty and humbleness.

Definition of terms

Islam, being a religion of peace, which requires full submission to the will, commandments and injunctions of Allah (SWT) is a total and unified way of life both religious and secular. Hadi (1995) expressed that it (Islam) is a set of belief and a way of worship, a culture and civilization as well as an interpreted system of worship, a culture and civilization as well as an interpreted system of law. While the term culture on the other hand is, according to Ishaq et al (2007) the way of life of people, their practices, manners, reactions, acts and mode of dressing. Every tribe, community or nation's culture is either derived from their religious belief or geographical influences. However, the word value is defined by Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (New

Edition) as the worthiness of a thing. Therefore, Islamic cultural value in this context refers to those behavioural patterns or actions that are worth doing. That is, actions, characters or way of life based on Islamic principles and ideals.

The term "governance" literally means 'to steer'. It is further explained to mean the act or manner of governing and leadership process. It is made up of decisions that define expectations, grant power or very performances. Meanwhile, the term "sustainable", according to Sam (2007), means something that is viable and can be continued in the long term in the ways that do not harm people but benefit them equally. Development on the other hand refers to the way in which the interaction between the environment, the economy and society progresses and changes. It could happen everywhere and involve every one. Sustainable development in this context refers to such measures or procedures and technicalities that if adapted by the government will ensure societal development and its sustenance in all ramifications - i.e., social, political, economic and religion. Sustainability on the other hand is explained to mean the process that meets the needs of the present generation and which may equally serve as precedence for future generation to meet their own needs.

The need for Values in Good Governance

There is a great need in Nigeria today to have new order that would enable us to establish a just and permanent peace without tyranny or rancor. That is a kind of order which recognizes the differences and distinctions in religious, cultural, social and economic values of the peoples of Nigeria as legitimate and would offer freedom. In his introductory note to a book titled 'Towards an Islamic Theory of International relation',

Ismail (1994) opined that such order would establish a federal or confederate government with the executive and police machinery necessarily for implementation. In fact, the kind of new order required will be the one that will give Nigeria a new face which would be backed by law, places justice within reach of all tiers of government, institutions, organizations, communities and individuals. Although the injustice manifested in government institutions are sometimes viewed as human factor, yet the system sometimes contributes to this menace, for instance, the issue of election in Nigeria. The Nigerian electoral law allows the judiciary to swear into the office whoever is declared as winner by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) irrespective of whether the electorates are satisfied with the outcome of election or not, or whether the winner is accused to have rigged the election. Thus, it in certain cases, leads to social crises or insecurity. The system should have allowed the clarification of things before swearing in the winner. Also, the activities of Human Right Activists who in most cases struggle vehemently defending people accused to have committed one form of criminal act in the name of human right further contribute to the injustice manifested in government institutions. These are system that allow or encourage individuals manipulate law to satisfy their selfish needs. This indeed is a challenge to the governance and sustainable development of a nation.

Islam considers a religious society as a basic weapon or framework for stability. The fact is that Islam is founded on the repudiation of tribalism and nationalism for it regards ethnocentrism, whether based on racial, territorial, linguistic or cultural peculiar, as evil and unbecoming of humans created equally by God and endowed by Him with

His spirit. Again, Islam ensures liberty so much that unless one is born in captivity or to captive parents; human beings are all born free and remain so as long as they live. Therefore, Nigerians must be free to enter, reside and to leave anywhere within the country. But in case of anyone not willing to abide by the law of the land or the laws governing (i.e. peculiar laws) of a particular area such person or group of persons must be called to order.

Furthermore, Islam condemns any act of injustice. Therefore, the leaders must ensure fair play and equity in their dealing with everybody for Islam considers every individual as a member of family of God. Hence a leader is a vicegerency of God (Khalifa) on earth to execute such stipulated laws enshrined by Him.

Contemporary Challenges of Good Governance in Nigeria

It is obvious that contemporarily, Nigeria is faced with the problems of unrest, intolerance, avenge or revenge and chaos. The entire country today is characterized by bombing of institutions or places of worship, Banditry, killing of innocent people, attacks, and kidnapping of individuals. People especially non-Muslims have been labeling false accusation at Muslims and Islam as to the application of human rights and peace-making of being the perpetrators of evils. Abubakar (2005) opined that the deviancy of a few must not becloud national judgment to conclude in favour of writing off a whole system or an entire people. Overzealous commitment and self aggrandizement are characteristics of bad ambassadors for communities or social order. Aisha (1992) asserted that it is wrong to pursue people minor sins while ignoring the major ones which compromise the essential character of Islam as a unique religion. Such practices like infringement of rights, corruption and

manipulation of election results, etc. are still rampant in our society, often in Islamic or social disguise. These practices are far more worthy of struggling against than differences in matter of personal choice or ordinary human weaknesses. Hassan (2004) noted that the Islamic principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil is the best evidence as to the cooperative spirit that Islam preaches with a view of promoting goodness and suppressing evil. Obama (2009) testifies to this as he was reported saying Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spirit and equally provides us places of peaceful contemplation. Throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality.

The Relevance of Islamic Cultural Values in Ensuring Good Governance and Sustainable Development

Islam advocates organizations and identifying responsibilities and opposes unrest and disorder in everything i, e. in every aspect of human life. Thus observed Al-Qaradawi (1998), we found the prophet (SAW) ordered us to arrange the rows in prayer and that the most knowledgeable one leads us therein. Therefore, if the following Islamic values are adapted, applied and pursued vigorously, it will ensure good governance and the desired sustainable development. In fact, these values need to be adhered to strictly for the peace and stability of our nation. Such values include equality and tolerance, kindness and generosity, honesty and truthfulness, justice and forgiveness and modesty and humbleness.

Equality and Tolerance

Islam addressed mankind saying:

O mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and make you into a nation and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that believer who has At-Taqua (God fearing/consciousness). [Q49: 13]

Allah (SWT) further enjoins humanity thus;

And give to the kinsman his due and the Miskin (needy) and the way farer. But spend not wastefully (your wealth) in the manner of spendthrifts. [Q17: 26].

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witness. And let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just that is nearer to piety. And fear of Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted. [Q5:8]

The above verses of the Glorious Quran explain that our superiority in the sight of Allah is based on the degree of Allah piety and conscience one possesses and virtuousness as well. Therefore, there should be equal treatment in every aspect of human and economic resources. In addition, Islam condemns gender discrimination. It granted that women chastity must be respected and protected under all circumstances whether she is in her community or not, state or not and even at war. The prophet (SAW) said.

No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a white man have any superiority over black man

or the black man has superiority over a white man. You are all the children of Adam and Adam was created from clay (Bukhari Vol. 001, No.619).

Likewise, if due to our national differences or weakness like tribalism, regionalism, social or other factors, conflicts or misunderstanding erupts among the members of the society like ours (Nigeria) the only and best way to tackle the matter is to resort to consensus way of making peace, and people should be made to understand the role and importance of Tolerance. Ethnic chauvinism and other acts that advocate tribal or racial discrimination are forward at by Islam. Instead, tolerance and patriotism in all spheres of life, doing good and shun evil is what Islam preached. The Prophet (SAW) said.

He is not of us who proclaims the cause of tribal partisanship and he is not of us one who fights in the cause of tribal partnership (Tirmidhi, No.5002).

Kindness and Generosity

Kindness and generosity constitute Islamic values and the characteristics of true Muslims. These values discourage the believers from being stingy as miserliness results from selfishness and darkness of the heart. The believers are required to demonstrate their hospitality and generosity through righteous deeds like payment of Zakat, gifts and charity. The noble Qur'an states;

Man was created impatient, irritable (discontented) when evil touched him. And niggardly when good touches him. Expect those

who are devoted to Salat (prayers). Those who remain constant in their prayers and those in whose wealth there is a recognized right for the beggar who asks and for the unlucky who has lost his property and wealth, (and his means of living has been straitened) [Q70: 19-25].

The prophet (SAW) was reported to have said. Allah is generous and likes generosity. Also, He likes nobility of character. While He hates bad character. (Muslim, Vol.8, No.539). In a nutshell, man (especially the believer) is required to give without considering it to be a favor and without harrying rather as a responsibility expected of him to discharge and for the sake of Allah. In summary, the prophet (SAW) said. Charity never makes money (wealth) less. (Muslim, Vol 8, No 539).

Honesty and Truthfulness

Islam enjoins honesty and truthfulness upon all its adherents. It should be abided by both in apparent and conceal actions, and in our saying and righteousness leads to paradise (i.e. lying and deceit) leads to perversity, and perversity leads to Hell. Allah (the Exalted) ordered us to follow and praise those who are true as He says.

O you who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are true (in words and deeds) [Quran 9: 119]

And he who brings the truth and he who confirms (and supports) it such are the men who do right [Quran 39: 33].

It is a well-known fact that truthfulness and honesty have many advantages or goods

fruits that the people can get. They bring and ensure and increase welfare of the people, and prevent cheat, deceit and counterfeit or delude by any means. In fact, for any government to sustain her development there must be sincerity and truthfulness. Indeed, as part of these things that ensure and promote good governance and suitable development is good leadership. And a good leader must be transparent in the execution of affairs. This is achieved through honest and truthfulness.

Justice and Forgiveness

These are valuable principle or rights in Islam. They constitute the Islamic cultural values which if puts into practice will bring about stability and fair play in the governance. The Glorious Quran has laid down the basic foundation to achieve these valuable rights so that they should be inculcated in our socio-cultural values.

The Quran enjoins man saying;

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witness, and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just. That is nearer to piety and fear Allah. Verily Allah is well acquainted with what you do [Q5.8].

In the light of the above subject matter Abu-'ala-Maududi (1976) submitted that it is evidently clear and from the above Quran quotation that believers have to be just not only with ordinary human beings but even with their enemies. He further observed that the justice to which Islam invites people especially the believers, is not limited only to the citizens of their own country, or the people of their own tribe, nation or race or

the Muslim community as a whole but it is meant for all the human being of the world.

Similarly, Islam enjoins her followers to always imbibe the culture of forgiveness. The Glorious Qur'an stipulates:

Whether you (Mankind) disclose (by good words of thanks) a good deed (done to you in the form of a favour by someone) or conceal it, or pardon an evil, - verily Allah is Ever oft-Pardoning. All- Powerful. (Q4:149).

...But if you pardon (them) and overlook, and forgive (their faults), then verily Allah is oft-forgiving, Most merciful (Qur'an 64:14).

Therefore, Muslims cannot be unjust to any one and must learn to forgive whenever they are offended. Their permanent habit and character should be such that no man should ever fear injustice from their hands and they should treat everybody with justice and fairness (Abu'Ala Maududi, 1976). This is because in any administration where the leaders or governors are harsh with their people, or found of revenging or even keep malice with those who have offended or wronged him will likely experience low level of understanding or cooperation from the people which usually do have negative effect on good governance and sustainable development.

Modesty and Humbleness

Modesty and humbleness constitute one of the valuable characteristics of Islam which bring about peace and stability in the governance. This is true because they prevent arrogance and thuggery. In fact, they form part of the best and ideal

characteristics expected of every believer. Every Muslim is enjoined to be modest, humble and shun arrogance. The Muslim must be modest and humble because the Prophet (SAW) said:

Charity never make money (wealth) less, and whenever Allah forgives anyone, he raises his dignity. And if anyone is humble to Allah, Allah will raise him (Muslim).

The Prophet (SAW) further states:

It is Allah's decision that anything that is arrogant in this world will be decreased by Allah (Bukhari; Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 23 98, vol. 3, P.86).

This therefore makes it categorically clear that we should not look down upon anybody because of his status, tribe or race or colour. Rather we should be humble, modest, respect each other, accept and accommodate one another. Above all, we should be helpers of each other and brothers' keeper. As already pointed out, modesty and humbleness contribute to good governance and sustainable development. In a society where there are humble and modest people, calmness and carefulness are envisaged and that cultivate in people the habit of good thinking on how to sustain the development already attained and even improve on it. Above all, it makes the leaders do what is worth doing.

Recommendations

In recognition of the significance of the above Islamic values, the writer is optimistic that if they are adopted and pursued with every sense of sincerity, they will ensure

social stability and bring about the desired good governance as well as sustainable development. As a result, the following recommendations are made to fast track the achievement of the desired goals.

- The virtuous characteristics be inculcated and developed in our youths through training and education. Parents should exhibit these values in their daily lives for their wards and children to emulate.
- Government should as a matter of importance, give moral education due attention, because it is lack of morality, sincerity, truthfulness, modesty, equity and fair play etc. that all sorts of atrocities, immoralities and chaos which are manifested in our society (country) today.
- There should be mass awareness campaign on the significance of the use of these values in our daily transaction.
- The leaders should be conscious of God and discharge their responsibilities diligently
- Finally, we should be security conscious and put our trust in God and get our differences resolved amicably. Above all, Muslims must acknowledge and ensure their genuine commitment to Islam-not through slogans or atrocities but by practical adherence to the Sunnah (Practice) of the Prophet both in private and the conduct of public affairs.

Conclusions

Naturally, Islam has brought man back to the practice of moderation. Rights were restored to the people if it were lawfully theirs (Muft, n.d). the kind of society (i.e

socio-economic and political) order Islam wants to confer upon every person by virtue of birth and humanity is the ultimate right and honour, the capacity to think/reflect, and a feeling of sense of belonging. Abul-Hamid (1994) contended that Islam regards censorship and spiritual guardianship in matters of religion and law as an affront to the person and to humanity and compromise of the divine design for creation. The cause of the weaker was seriously tackled, the value of the dignity of man was revived and no compromise was allowed. The possible avenues of corruption and debasement were checked.

On a general note, Islam condemns in to evil characteristics like injustice, envy, cheating, hypocrisy, conceit/arrogance, feebleness and laziness. These behaviours indeed impact on the governance negatively and stagnate the development already attained.

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