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## “I Will Make Thee an Imam to the Nations” Lessons for Nigerian Public Leaders in the Story of Prophet Ibrahim

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# “I WILL MAKE THEE AN IMAM TO THE NATIONS”: LESSONS FOR NIGERIAN PUBLIC LEADERS IN THE STORY OF PROPHET IBRAHIM

AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm\*

**Abstract:** This paper explores the contemporary challenge of bad leaders and public leadership in Nigeria and identifies the characteristics of Prophet Ibrahim as a model for leaders to enhance development in the country. This study is descriptive and qualitative. The country’s aspirations for credible public leadership, Prophetic Leadership Theory, public leadership within the context of spirituality and religion, and the life of Prophet Ibrahim from a Muslim perspective were reviewed to identify a practical approach for Muslim public leadership ethics as a way to promote national development. This article contributes to two main areas of development: Muslim public leadership and various African contexts and cultures. Results show that prophetic public leadership ethics have the necessary attributes to enhance the public leadership quality currently needed in Nigeria. The country’s leaders should focus on ethical and moral virtues, courage, avoiding corruption and corrupt practices, having the spirit of sacrifice and devotion, and being able to communicate sincerely to improve the nation-building process. The prophetic public leadership framework proposed in this study can enhance the emergence of credible public leadership and leaders in Nigeria. The paper emphasises the importance of prophetic public leadership ethics as a basis for choosing a leader and proposes a prophetic public leadership framework as shown by Prophet Ibrahim’s approach to be applied in Nigeria’s public leadership structure as a way of promoting national development.

**Keywords:** *Public leadership; Prophet Ibrahim; Nigeria; nation-building; Prophetic Leadership Theory*

## INTRODUCTION

Public leadership is one of the most traditional phenomena throughout societies. There have been increasing calls for credible public leadership among countries to have a more enduring and sustainable development.<sup>1</sup> However, it is unclear how such calls can be best

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<sup>1</sup> Sewakpo Honore, “An African’s Perspective on Leadership in the Book of Titus,” *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 5, no. 2 (2015); Zakiyyah El’Amin, “The Leadership of Muhammad Prophet of Islam: An Integral Analysis” (PhD diss., Royal Roads University, 2008), <http://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?>

answered. One way forward may be to rethink our conceptualisation of public leadership. This paper addresses this issue from a religious perspective; specifically, from the Muslim perspective. Leader in its ordinary sense refers to a person who leads or commands a group, organisation, nation or country to achieve a set goal. In addition, public leadership has been linked to knowledge, skills and the ability for transformation.<sup>2</sup> The concept of public leadership has also been connected to worldviews or visions of life in terms of beliefs, values and principles.<sup>3</sup> There is no society or country where public leadership is not needed and this is because a society without leaders would lose its direction and purpose.<sup>4</sup> Besides, the nature of public leadership in any given political system is determined by the quality of the leaders in power. This is why it is often said that no country can develop beyond the level of its public leadership.

Society's aspiration for credible public leadership remains limited. Contemporary Nigeria is currently bedevilled with unreliable public leadership.<sup>5</sup> Despite the nation's natural and human resources, it still battles with the crisis of public leadership after many decades of independence.<sup>6</sup> Nigeria has suffered many and different forms of bad public leadership, which have invariably affected the country's nation-building process. Studies on public leadership in Nigeria have identified corruption, unethical behaviour, poor maintenance culture, poor management of resources and lack of required performance skills on the part of public officials to achieve proper policy formulation and implementation.<sup>7</sup> Several studies also show a great need for change in public leadership and that most of the country's leaders and policymakers lack effective public leadership skills for the positions they hold.<sup>8</sup>

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T=JS&PAGE=reference&D=psyc5&NEWS=N&AN=2008-99190-429; Daniel Gberville et al., "Accountability for Sustainable Development and the Challenges of Leadership in Nigeria, 1999-2015," *SAGE Open* 7 no. 4 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017742951>.

<sup>2</sup> David Weller and Sylvia Weller, *The Assistant Principal: Essentials for Effective School Leadership* (Corwin Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Ali Mir, "Leadership in Islam," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.20180>; Robert Campbell, "Leadership Succession in Early Islam: Exploring the Nature and Role of Historical Precedents," *The Leadership Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.05.007>.

<sup>4</sup> Wan-Kamal Mujani et al., "Meaning of Leadership According to Islam," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 8 (2012), <http://www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?eid=2-s2.0-84874510689&partnerID=40&md5=e27bc9ae6ea64146e22757a43242c714>.

<sup>5</sup> Anthonia Ezeugo, "Corrupt Leadership, an Antecedent to Global Epileptic Socio-Economic Growth, Nigerian Example: Dramaturgy and Visions," *American Academic & Scholarly Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3809264>; Ugo Okolie and Mevayerore Igbini, "Leadership Failure and Acute Youth Unemployment in Nigeria," *RUDN Journal of Public Administration* 7, no. 3 (2020).

<sup>6</sup> Bolatito Lanre-Abass, "The Crisis of Leadership in Nigeria and the Imperative of a Virtue Ethics," *Philosophia Africana* 11, no. 2 (2008); Tolu Lawal and Ilepe Johnson, "Governance Crisis and the Crisis of Leadership in Nigeria," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 2, no. 7 (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Gberville et al., "Accountability for Sustainable Development"; Kate Nnabuife, "Defining and Enforcing Ethical Leadership in Nigeria," *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1108/20400701011028149>; Nicholas Omoregbe Olanike Sharon et al., "Good Governance and Leadership: Pathway to Sustainable National Development in Nigeria," *Journal of Public Administration and Governance* 6, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v6i1.9055>.

<sup>8</sup> Nichodemus Ejimabo, "Understanding the Impact of Leadership in Nigeria: Its Reality, Challenges, and Perspectives," *SAGE Open* 3, no. 2 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013490704>; Lawal and Johnson, "Governance Crisis"; Favour Uroko, "Beyond National Religiosity: The Pericope of 1 Kings 3:3-

In Islam, historical experiences are regarded as one of the most important approaches to building a civilisation. This is why several historical references can be found in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. Consequently, it is believed, from the failures and successes of people in the past, one can chart a path toward a bright future. In addition, the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* show the basic principles of public leadership while referring to the prophets.<sup>9</sup> This is because in examining the history of prophets, one can see how they proved their superiority and excellence through success in world history. One such prophet is Prophet Ibrahim, who in Islam is seen as the father of the prophets.

Prophet Ibrahim is one of the prominent prophets of Allah. He is mentioned in 25 chapters of the Qur'ān. He is a prophet and messenger. He is among the five great messengers (*Ulul Azm*). Hence, one of the great personalities among the great Prophets of Allah. Prophet Ibrahim is a model for leaders. He is regarded as a model for leaders in this study not only because of his strength of faith but also because he was appointed by Allah to be the leader of the people.<sup>10</sup> The Qur'ān says: “And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: I will make thee an Imam to the Nations...”<sup>11</sup>

This article focuses on governance and public leadership. Therefore, this study aims to address the failure of public leadership in Nigeria. In other words, the study, through examination of the country's current situation, assesses the urgent need to address the contemporary challenge of bad leaders and public leadership in Nigeria; identifying the characteristics of Prophet Ibrahim as required by leaders in the country. The article describes how the character and faith of Prophet Ibrahim are central to the issue of public leadership in Nigeria by highlighting his biography. It also analyses the possible connection between the character of Prophet Ibrahim and Nigerian leaders as a way of addressing the country's public leadership problem.

## ISLAMIC PUBLIC LEADERSHIP MODEL

The notion of governance and public leadership within the context of Islam has been explored.<sup>12</sup> Recent developments in the field of governance and public leadership reveal

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14 and Leadership Challenges in Nigeria,” *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.36079/lamintang.jhass-0301.177>; Folashade Daramola and Akaninyene Etuk, “Leadership, Governance and Nation Building in Nigeria,” *Addaiyan Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.36099/ajahss.2.3.2>.

<sup>9</sup> Ishtiaq Qureshi, “Historiography,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. M. M. Sharif (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Ayatullah Subhani, *The Message* (Karachi: Islamic Seminar Publication, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Qur'ān 2:214.

<sup>12</sup> Aliyu Katsina, “Reconstructing the Nature of Principles and Values of Public Administration in Islam,” *Management and Administrative Sciences Review* 4, no. 1 (2015); Catharina Raudvere, “Claiming Heritage, Renewing Authority: Sufi-Orientated Activities in Post-Yugoslav Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4602>; Eugenie Samier, “The Humanist Roots of Islamic Administration and Leadership for Education: Philosophical Foundations for Intercultural and Transcultural Teaching,” in *Teaching Educational Leadership in Muslim Countries*, ed. Eugenie Samier and Eman ElKaleh (Springer, 2019); Eugenie Samier and Eman ElKaleh, “The Ethics of

growing interest in religion and spirituality. Spirituality and its relationship to public leadership is a compelling issue for public administration practitioners. There has been emphasis on the role of value-based leadership capabilities within public administration. Spiritual topics have also emerged in public leadership coaching for professionals involved in public administration.<sup>13</sup> However, there is a need to understand the link between public leadership, governance and spirituality as a way to enhance citizens' sense of community in a society. While the notion of public leadership based on the African mindset has received the focus of researchers,<sup>14</sup> many writers on public administration, public leadership and human development have provided limited insight into how Muslim governance and public leadership can enhance societal growth in the contemporary world.

Connected to Muslim public leadership and governance are wellbeing, commitment and productivity, social responsibility and performance. Undoubtedly, the disciplines of governance and public leadership are associated with linking spirituality to ethics.<sup>15</sup> According to Samier:

...Islamic public administration is different in many respects from these Western models, it is relatively similar to those traditions that embed end values for individual welfare and societal improvement, in particular, those traditional forms like the mandarinat that are grounded in a strong social ethos and service.<sup>16</sup>

That is why Kalantari notes that:

Islamic administration has its roots in an Islamic culture and can provide a viable alternative for both western and nonwestern societies to be considered for possible learning or adaptation. It has many unique features which can be utilized to improve the deficiencies and shortcomings of the present public administration discipline. More importantly, Islamic public administration can be of critical use to developing countries which have predominately Islamic cultures.<sup>17</sup>

In furtherance of this, Hummel, evaluated growing interest in comparative public administration and indigenised forms of government, which recognises the role of culture in different approaches to government. The findings from the work show that the history and

Islamic Leadership: A Cross-Cultural Approach for Public Administration," *Administrative Culture* 14, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Fairholm and Taylor Gronau, "Spiritual Leadership in the Work of Public Administrators," *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 12, no. 4 (2015); Yvette Essounga-Njan et al., "Leadership and Spirituality in Business and Public Administration: A Cross-Cultural Empirical Study Comparing the USA and France," *International Journal of Services and Standards* 8, no. 4 (2013); Peter Pruzan and Kristen Pruzan-Mikkelsen, *Leading with Wisdom* (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Ephraim Ikegbu and Samuel Bassey, "Ahamefula: Discovering Leadership Gaps of the African Being," *Cogito: Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 11 (2019): 75; Lize Booysen, "The Duality in South African Leadership: Afrocentric or Eurocentric," *South African Journal of Labour Relations* 25, no. 3/4 (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Haroon Khan, *Globalization and the Challenges of Public Administration: Governance, Human Resources Management, Leadership, Ethics, e-Governance and Sustainability in the 21st Century* (Springer, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Eugenie Samier, "Islamic Public Administration Tradition: Historical, Theoretical and Practical Dimensions," *Halduskultuur* 18, no. 1 (2017): 67.

<sup>17</sup> Behrooz Kalantari, "In Search of a Public Administration Paradigm: Is There Anything to Be Learned from Islamic Public Administration?" *International Journal of Public Administration* 21, no. 12 (1998): 1850.

core values of Islam need to be considered as they pertain to systems of government that are widely accepted by the people.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the demand for various forms of public administration affairs in traditional political, genuinely religious, patrimonial and charismatic systems has been on the increase in the discourse of public leadership, religion and governance. Therefore, the ethics of Muslim public leadership can be of great help in bridging the gap between Muslims espoused and practiced values by teaching Islamic work ethics and Islamic public leadership in administration. Besides, the Islamic public leadership model is perceived as not allowing a leader to act as they choose nor must they submit to the wishes of any group; they must act only to implement Allah's laws on earth. The Qur'ān (21:73) says, "And We made them leaders guiding men by Our command and We sent inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers, and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us only."<sup>19</sup> This is why several studies, for instance, have attempted to clarify the Muslim perspective on public leadership as compatible in many ways with Western humanistic traditions and liberal democracies, particularly those with a strong multicultural character.<sup>20</sup>

## PUBLIC LEADERSHIP WITHIN AFRICAN CONTEXTS AND CULTURES

In addressing the performance and challenges of governance in Africa, Vyas-Doorgapersad, Tshombe and Ababio in their edited book argue the intricacies of the practice of governance from an exclusively African viewpoint. They also use an analytical approach with a strong problem-solution application to bring together a coherent examination of the key challenges and geographical areas including South Africa, the Congo, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Mauritius and Botswana. Colonialism, reform, poverty, the economy, decentralisation, financing, media, political institutions and other topics were covered. In concluding the book, they point out the importance of decentralisation and devolution in gauging the effectiveness of service delivery, as well as an examination of Africa's economic success. A comprehensive description of how local governments operate in Africa is also provided, along with information on the African Peer Review Mechanisms in particular African nations.<sup>21</sup> It has all these characteristics and more, making it a reference for various

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel Hummel, "Public Administration in the Islamic World: Considering the Importance of Religion, its Values and Culture," *Halduskultuur* 19, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>19</sup> Ismail Mamat and Anuar Noor, "A Model of Islamic Leadership Based on Hasan Banna's Writings," *Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>20</sup> Eugenie Samier, "Fairness, Equity and Social Cooperation: A Moderate Islamic Social Justice Leadership Model for Higher Education," in *Assembling and Governing the Higher Education Institution*, ed. Lynette Shultz and Melody Viczko (Springer, 2016); Samier and Elkaleh, "The Ethics of Islamic Leadership"; Samier, "The Humanist Roots"; Anwarul Islam and Rezaul Miajee, "An Islamic Perspective of Leadership," *International Journal of Islamic Business & Management* 1, no. 1 (2017); Ermin Sinanovic, "The Majority Principle and its Application in Decision-Making Processes: An Exploration into Islamic Legal and Political Thought" (Masters diss., International Islamic University Malaysia, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> The African Peer Review Mechanism is a mutually agreed instrument among African Union member states to promote and foster good governance practices. It was established in 2003 as a voluntary self-assessment tool for participating countries to review and assess their governance practices in areas such as democracy

social, economic, political and administrative issues.<sup>22</sup> Ogunbela and John investigate the quest for gender balance in political public leadership in Africa. The study found an insignificant increment in the number of women participating in the African political space. Therefore, more efforts should be made in attracting and keeping African women in the political terrain.<sup>23</sup>

Today, many researchers are convinced that inefficiency in the public sector as a result of public leadership ineptitude has contributed significantly to Nigeria's underdevelopment.<sup>24</sup> That is why many researchers of public leadership in Nigeria often evaluate the relationship between corruption, accountability and transparency in its public service. Also, it is believed the chronic problem of corruption has rubbed off on the accountability and transparency level of the Nigerian public leadership class, so the issue of accountability and transparency leaves much to be desired in the country.<sup>25</sup> Shedrack, Oguntuase and Ikechukwu examine the impact of corruption on Nigeria's development plan. They focus on the issue of development in Nigeria and note corruption and ineffective public leadership among leaders. The study concludes that, if the country is not restructured to address the issues of corruption and bad public leadership, Nigeria will continue to endure a developmental catastrophe.<sup>26</sup> In addition, many of the leaders' lack of vision, narrow thinking, short-sightedness or bickering and self-serving tendencies limit the country's ability to flourish.

It is worth noting there are few among the leaders in the country who have taken up the challenge to inspire and unify the populace rather than dividing it along ethnic, religious or other fundamentalist lines and to prevent national assets and resources from being destroyed, vandalised, privatised or stolen; they would rather address the citizens' fundamental needs and aspirations, especially with regards to their security and peaceful living. This is why there have been calls for every citizen to play their roles to bring about responsible and responsive

and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance and socio-economic development.

<sup>22</sup> Shikha Vyas-Doorgapersad, Lukamba Tshombe and Ernest Ababio, *Public Administration in Africa: Performance and Challenges* (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Gbeminiyi Kazeem Ogunbela and Abayomi John Aluko, "The Quest for Gender Balanced Political Leadership in Africa: A Synchrony Towards Continental Development," *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance* X, no. 10.1 (2019).

<sup>24</sup> Joy Eliogu-Anenih, "Strategic Leadership in Public Sector Administration in Nigeria" (PhD diss., Walden University, 2017); Robert Shenton, *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria* (London: J. Currey, 1986); Chinenye Ocholor, "Failure of Leadership in Nigeria," *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2011); Gunilla Andrae and Björn Beckman, *The Wheat Trap: Bread and Underdevelopment in Nigeria* (Zed Books Ltd., 1985); Ekeoma Iheriohanma, "Socio-Structural Pressures and the Challenges of Survival and Crime Committal in Nigeria," *Journal of Social Sciences* 21, no. 3 (2009); Daniel Chukwurah, Desmond Nnamani and Onyebuchi Nduba, "Governance and Political Leadership in Africa: Focus on Nigeria @ 59," *Governance* 4, no. 3 (2020).

<sup>25</sup> Babalola Oginni Akindele and Solomon Agada, "National Development and Political Corruption in Nigeria: Leadership at Crossroad," *European Journal of Business and Management* 5, no. 9 (2013); Emmanuel Abah and Emeka Nwoba, "Effects of Leadership and Political Corruption on Achieving Sustainable Development: Evidence from Nigeria," *Public Policy and Administration Research* 6, no. 6 (2016); God'stime Igiebor, "Political Corruption in Nigeria: Implications for Economic Development in the Fourth Republic," *Journal of Developing Societies* 35, no. 4 (2019).

<sup>26</sup> Igboke Shedrack, David Oguntuase and Eze Ikechukwu, "Corruption and the Crisis of Political Development in Nigeria," *FUDMA Journal of Politics and International Affairs* 3, no. 6 (2020).

public leadership and good democratic governance, through an electoral process that has integrity.<sup>27</sup> For instance, Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega, a former chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, observed that:

...good leadership recruitment has been the missing anchor in our national development; we must look for it and find it, as soon as possible, before 2023 elections, before it is too late, before the reckless disposition of the band of bad people who dominate and control our political and governance processes runs the country aground, beyond redemption or salvation.<sup>28</sup>

By exploring the relationship between Muslim administration and public leadership, public leadership in African contexts and culture, and the problems of public leadership in Nigeria one begins to understand the importance of character in public leadership, which is also an essential factor in the development of the society as a whole. However, many challenges hinder the effective governance of society, including corruption. That is why there have been recommendations for a God-centric public leadership for leaders to efficiently and effectively perform their duties with ethics and integrity.<sup>29</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several problems are connected to public leadership in contemporary times and writers on the issue of public leadership have identified some of these problems, which include lack of proper communication, absence of accountability, fear of firing, lack of alignment, lack of focus, poor implementation and an institution culture by default.<sup>30</sup> That is why many see the need to evaluate public leadership structures and practices that exploit core competencies while allowing for innovation.<sup>31</sup> In addition, some scholars examine the issues by addressing

<sup>27</sup> Shakirah Adunola, "UNILAG Muslim Alumni Holds Pre-Ramadan Lecture," *The Guardian*, March 25, 2022, <https://guardian.ng/features/friday-worship/unilag-muslim-alumni-holds-pre-ramadan-lecture/>; Umenyilorah Uzodinma, "Electoral Process and Peaceful Transition in Nigeria: The Role of the Theatre," *Journal of Modern Education Review* 5, no. 9 (2015); Shola Omotola, "Elections and Democratic Transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic," *African Affairs* 109, no. 437 (2010); Oluwashina Abebiyi, "Ballots and Bullets: Electoral Violence and Gubernatorial Elections in Oyo State, Nigeria, 2007–2015," *The African Review* 48, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>28</sup> "Leadership Recruitment: Missing Anchor in National Development, by Muiz Banire (SAN)" *Muslim News Nigeria*, March 31, 2022, <https://muslimnews.com.ng/2022/03/31/leadership-recruitment-missing-anchor-in-national-development-by-muiz-banire-san/>.

<sup>29</sup> Abdul-Halim Busari et al., "Exploring Ihsan-Based Leadership among Academic Leaders," (Paper presented at the Qualitative Research Conference, Penang, Malaysia, May 24–26, 2016); Gholamreza Zandi, Mohamed Sulaiman and Nayal Rashed, "Spirituality and Leaders Effectiveness: An Islamic Perspective," *Asian Economic and Financial Review* 5, no. 1 (2015); Mastura Wahab and Tajul Masron, "Towards a Core Islamic Work Value: Evidence from Islamic Legal Texts and the Muftīs' Verification," *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* 11, no. 1 (2020); Azrin Ibrahim, "Accountability (Hisbah) in Islamic Management: The Philosophy and Ethics behind its Implementation," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, no. 8 (2015).

<sup>30</sup> Mark Moses, "The Seven Biggest Problems with Leadership Today," CEO Coaching International, accessed September 30, 2021, <https://ceocoachinginternational.com/problems-with-leadership>.

<sup>31</sup> Kathleen Brown, "Leadership for Social Justice and Equity: Evaluating a Transformative Framework and Andragogy," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 42, no. 5 (2006); Kathleen Brown, "Leadership for Social Justice and Equity: Weaving a Transformative Framework and Pedagogy," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2004); Ekeoma Iheriohanma, "Capacity Building, Leadership



public leadership culture and identity, dictatorship and individual character vis-a-vis leader character approaches.<sup>32</sup> Several researchers have formulated many theories concerning the styles, purposes, roles, characteristics and models of public leadership. These theories include Transformational Leadership, Leader-Member Exchange Theory, Adaptive Leadership, Strengths-based Leadership, Servant Leadership, Prophetic Leadership Theory, Great Man Theory, Skills Theory of Leadership, Situational Leadership Theory, Contingency Theory and Transactional Leadership Theory.<sup>33</sup> Out of these many theories, the Prophetic Leadership Theory appears to be the most relevant model for the study of the life experiences of the prophets and their transcendent leadership qualities.<sup>34</sup>

The Prophetic Leadership Theory is based on trait and social network theory, spirituality and public leadership in Islam. This theory establishes that the complex and non-complex life experiences of prophets are a model for developing character, decision-making processes and managerial skills. In addition, it connects the leader's character, posture, principles and decision-making qualities.<sup>35</sup> This is because, in Islam, the injunctions in the Qur'ān, as well as the life experiences of the prophets, have great importance in the daily living of the Muslim community. Hence, by studying the life of the prophets one finds vital principles that serve as a guide for all. That is why the Qur'ān mentions, "He is the One Who has sent His Messenger with (true) guidance and the religion of truth, making it prevail over all others, even to the dismay of the polytheists."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, for this present study, the Prophetic Leadership Theory provides a basis for exploring possible connections between the character

Question and Drains of Corruption in Africa: A Theoretical Discourse," *Asian Social Science* 7, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>32</sup> Muaz Özcan, "The Bottleneck Metaphor of Leadership Culture: Explaining How Shared Understandings about Leadership Develop and Impede Diversity and Effectiveness of Leadership in Groups," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): 184; Shaun Larcom, Mare Sarr and Tim Willems, "What Shall We Do with the Bad Dictator?," discussion paper no. 682 (University of Oxford Department of Economics, 2014); Gerard Seijts et al., "Character Matters: Character Dimensions' Impact on Leader Performance and Outcomes," *Organizational Dynamics* 44, no. 1 (2015); Sean Hannah and Bruce Avolio, "Leader Character, Ethos, and Virtue: Individual and Collective Considerations," *The Leadership Quarterly* 22, no. 5 (2011).

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Harvard Business School Press, 2020), eBook edition; James Burns, *Leadership* (Harper & Row, 1979), <https://books.google.com.ng/books?id=ptUJAQAAMAAJ>; Fred Dansereau Jr., George Graen, and William Haga, "A Vertical Dyad Linkage Approach to Leadership within Formal Organizations: A Longitudinal Investigation of the Role Making Process," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 13, no. 1 (1975); Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, "What Makes a Great Leadership Team?" Gallup, February 3, 2009, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237026/makes-great-leadership-team.aspx>; Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Paulist Press, 2002); Bert Spector, "Carlyle, Freud, and the Great Man Theory More Fully Considered," *Leadership* 12, no. 2 (2016); Robert Katz, *Skills of an Effective Administrator* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2009); Paul Hersey, Kenneth Blanchard, and Walter Natemeyer, "Situational Leadership, Perception, and the Impact of Power," *Group & Organization Studies* 4, no. 4 (1979); Fred Fiedler, "A Contingency Model of Leadership Effectiveness," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 1, ed. Leonard Berkowitz (Elsevier, 1964); Bernard Bass, Bruce Avolio and Leanne Atwater, "The Transformational and Transactional Leadership of Men and Women," *Applied Psychology* 45, no. 1 (1996): 5–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1996.tb00847.x>.

<sup>34</sup> Nik Muhammad, "Prophetic Leadership Model: Conceptualizing a Prophet's Leadership Behaviour, Leader-Follower Mutuality and Altruism to Decision Making Quality," *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 93–106.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Qur'ān 9:33, 61:9.

of Prophet Ibrahim and Nigerian leaders as a way of addressing the public leadership problem in the country as well as highlighting important qualities found in the Muslim concept of public leadership.

## HISTORY OF PROPHET IBRAHIM

As earlier mentioned, the story of Prophet Ibrahim is mentioned in several chapters of the Qur'ān. More specifically, he is mentioned 69 times in the Qur'ān, in 25 *surahs* (chapters) and 63 verses. Ibrahim in the Qur'ān is usually associated with poignant stories that are replete with lessons for all. For example, the stories of breaking the idols and casting them into a huge fire; remaining barren until old age; hosting three angels who had come to give him the good tidings of the birth of a child; taking his wife and child to the desert land of Arabia and leaving them there with no water supply; establishing the sanctuary at Makkah and the pilgrimage there; attempting to sacrifice his son and the resurrection of four birds that he had been instructed to dismember and put on different mountain tops.<sup>37</sup> All are stories of deep insight justifying Prophet Ibrahim's elevated rank and honourable position. He is identified as a role model, exemplar and not an idolater.<sup>38</sup> Prophet Ibrahim is recognised as the "founding father" of the true religion, which was revived by Prophet Muhammad. Hence, Islam is described as the "Religion of Ibrahim."<sup>39</sup> There are several accounts relating to his character, resoluteness, fatherly role, pure nature and public leadership.

### *His Character, Ethical and Moral Values*

Prophet Ibrahim is described as belonging to the Ur in ancient Iraq and living about 5,000 years ago.<sup>40</sup> Muslim exegetes noted different opinions regarding his birthplace.<sup>41</sup> According to At-Tabariy, some mention his birthplace as Sus, which Muslim geographers believe is somewhere in Khuzistan but may be connected to the ancient Iranian city of Susa. While other Muslim writers state he was born near Kaskar or in Haran but later moved with his father to Babylon. His father, Āzar, was an idol maker but Tabari notes Prophet Ibrahim's father was Terah.<sup>42</sup> Prophet Ibrahim was totally against his people worshipping idols rather than Allah. This made them persecute him. Regarding his people's polytheistic tendencies, Prophet Ibrahim states:

<sup>37</sup> Scott Noegel and Brannon Wheeler, *The A to Z of Prophets in Islam and Judaism*, vol. 176 (Scarecrow Press, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Qur'ān 16:120.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'ān 2:130-140, 3:65-68, 4:125, 16:120-124.

<sup>40</sup> Masudul Hasan, *History of Islam* (Srinagar: Alfa Offset, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Wahbah Az-Zuhayliy, *At-Tafsir Al-Munir Fil 'Aqeedah Wash-Shariah Wal-Manhaj* [The Illuminating Interpretation on Creed, Islamic Law, and Methodology] (Damascus: Darul-Fikr al-Mu'asr, 1997), <http://www.shamela.ws>; Fakhr-al-Din Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir Aw Mafatih Al-Ghayb* [The Great Interpretation or Keys to the Unknown] (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Bahiyya al-Misriyya, 1964), <http://www.altafsir.com>; Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Beirut: Darul-Fikriyyah, 1938).

<sup>42</sup> Muhammad At-Tabariy, *Tarikh Ar-Rusul Wal-Muluk* [The History of the Prophets and Kings] (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1906), <http://www.alwarraq.com>.

Behold, he said to his father: “O my father! why worship that which heareth not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing? O my father! to me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee: so follow me: I will guide thee to a way that is even and straight. O my father! serve not Satan: for Satan is a rebel against (Allah) Most Gracious. O my father! I fear lest a Penalty afflict thee from (Allah) Most Gracious, so that thou become to Satan a friend.” (The father) replied: “Dost thou hate my gods, O Abraham? If thou forbear not, I will indeed stone thee: Now get away from me for a good long while!” Abraham said: “Peace be on thee: I will pray to my Lord for thy forgiveness: for He is to me Most Gracious. And I will turn away from you (all) and from those whom ye invoke besides Allah: I will call on my Lord: perhaps, by my prayer to my Lord, I shall be not unblest.”<sup>43</sup>

One of the rulers at that time, Namrood, instructed that Prophet Ibrahim be arrested and burnt alive but the fire could not burn Prophet Ibrahim. The Qur’ān relates this incidence as, “**They said, ‘Burn him and protect your gods, If ye do (anything at all)!’ We said, ‘O Fire! be thou cool, and (a means of) safety for Abraham!’ Then they sought a stratagem against him, but We made them the ones that lost most!**”<sup>44</sup>

Asad appears to take a contrary view that there is nowhere in the Qur’ān where it is stated that Abraham was bodily thrown into the fire and miraculously kept alive in it. Rather, what the Qur’ān refers to in the above verses, which can also be seen in other verses (e.g., 29:24 and 37:97), is an allegorical allusion to the fire of persecution that Abraham had to suffer and which, by dint of its intensity, was to become in his later life a source of spiritual strength and inner peace (*salam*).<sup>45</sup>

His experience with his people led him to migrate to Palestine. The Qur’ān mentions many details about his birth and youth, especially his attempts to convince his father as well as his people of the error in worshipping idols as quoted in the earlier verses. He alongside his son Ismail later built the Ka’aba in Makkah and instituted the pilgrimage to the place.<sup>46</sup> He was said to have died around the age of 173 and was buried in Hebron, a few miles from Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> Part of the virtues and exceptionalities of Ibrahim was his description as Khalil (beloved friend of Allah), which even Prophet Muhammad cherished. Also, it should be noted that Prophet Muhammad, despite his loftiness in Islam, prayed that Allah should bless him as He blessed Prophet Ibrahim.

### ***Resoluteness and Courage***

One of the characteristics of Prophet Ibrahim is his resoluteness even at the expense of his life. His resoluteness is a good example for leaders to follow when they deal with their followers, especially when making decisions that will benefit the masses rather than a few friends and associates. In carrying out his assignment as the prophet of Allah, Ibrahim was uncompromising in distinguishing between idolatry and the worship of only one God.

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<sup>43</sup> Qur’ān 19:42-48.

<sup>44</sup> Qur’ān 21:68-70.

<sup>45</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran* (Bristol: The Book Foundation, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Noegel and Wheeler, *The A to Z of Prophets*.

<sup>47</sup> Hasan, *History of Islam*.

Ibrahim began his mission with the person he believed was closest to him, i.e., his father, who was an idol carver and staunch idol worshipper. Despite his efforts to convince his father to do the right thing, the more his father refused. Rather, Āzar became angry with Ibrahim and threatened to deal with him. Because of his uncompromising belief and sincerity of purpose, a similar message was directed to his people. He made them understand that it was pointless and absurd to worship images that could not benefit them and further emphasises the highly personal, intellectual quality of Ibrahim's progressive realisation of God's almightiness and uniqueness.<sup>48</sup> Evidence for this can be found where the Qur'ān states:

“Behold!” he said to his father and his people, “What are these images, to which ye are (so assiduously) devoted?” They said, “We found our fathers worshipping them.” He said, “Indeed ye have been in manifest error – ye and your fathers.” They said, “Have you brought us the Truth, or are you one of those who jest?” He said, “Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He Who created them (from nothing): and I am a witness to this (Truth).<sup>49</sup>

The same chapter mentions further, (Abraham) said, “Do ye then worship, besides Allah, things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm? Fie upon you, and upon the things that ye worship besides Allah! Have ye no sense?”<sup>50</sup>

Despite the efforts of Ibrahim, his people did not yield. This made Ibrahim more determined to look for another means of making his people understand their actions. He planned to destroy the idols and the opportunity to do that came one day when all the people were away from the town for an occasion. He pretended he was ill and was allowed to stay behind. Before their return, he had broken all the idols except one, which was the biggest, and hung the instrument used as a way of indicating that it did it.

When they returned and found all their idols destroyed, they were shocked and suspected Ibrahim. He asked them to direct all their questions to the big idol and through that, he showed them the futility of their worshipping, besides God, what cannot even speak nor help itself. This made the people resolve to deal with him by burning him alive; however, he was protected from their harm. Thus, with determination and zeal, Ibrahim triumphed over his people.

Prophet Ibrahim's resoluteness to pass the truthful message no matter the position or status of the person at the receiving end of the message can also be seen when he showed a tyrant king, Namrood, through wisdom his faith in one living God. His resoluteness spurred him to speak about the power and might of Allah to the king without minding the consequences. Concerning this, the Qur'ān states:

Hast thou not Turned thy vision to one who disputed with Abraham About his Lord, because Allah had granted him power? Abraham said: “My Lord is He Who Giveth life and death.” He said: “I give life and death”. Said Abraham: “But it is Allah that causeth the sun to rise from the east: Do thou then cause him to rise from the West.” Thus was he

<sup>48</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Quran*.

<sup>49</sup> Qur'ān 21:52-56.

<sup>50</sup> Qur'ān 21:66-67.

confounded who (in arrogance) rejected faith. Nor doth Allah Give guidance to a people unjust.<sup>51</sup>

In examining the life of Prophet Ibrahim, it became clear that the threat of being killed or punished did not stop him from holding onto his worldview. It is even more instructive that, in maintaining his views, he was a minority among the people he considered family and ‘countrymen.’ Leaders should be courageous and encourage such in society by rewarding courageous members with acceptance and taking to their words to avoid perdition.

### ***Fatherly Role, Avoiding Corruption and Corrupt Practices***

Prophet Ibrahim is a model to fathers. The fatherly role of Prophet Ibrahim is contained in “This was the advice of Abraham—as well as Jacob—to his children, [saying], ‘Indeed, Allah has chosen for you this faith; so do not die except in [a state of full] submission,’”<sup>52</sup> where he trained his two children to be faithful to God, even after his demise. Another lesson here is that as a father he speaks with his children. In addition, he consults them in affairs, especially those that affect them. For example, Qur’ān 37 verse 102 mentions that:

Then when the boy reached the age to work with him, Abraham said, “O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you. So tell me what you think.” He replied, “O my dear father! Do as you are commanded. Allah willing, you will find me steadfast.”<sup>53</sup>

The Qur’ān also notes how he worked with his son when it states “And [remember] when Abraham raised the foundation of the House with Ishmael, [both praying] “Our Lord! Accept [this] from us. You are indeed the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”<sup>54</sup> All these show his fatherly role. That is why another part of the Qur’ān says God made Ibrahim “an Imam to the Nations” and father to Muslims, and further mentions him praying for his offspring.<sup>55</sup> His prayer for his progeny and seeking Allah’s assistance and guidance over them is a clear indication of his fatherly role. The Qur’ān states:

And (remember) when Abraham said: “My Lord, make this city secure and distance me and my children from worshipping the idols”<sup>56</sup>

“Our Lord! Verily I have settled (a part) of my offspring in a valley without cultivation near Your Sacred House, in order, Our Lord! that they may establish prayer; therefore, make the hearts of some people yearn towards them, and provide them with fruits so that they may be grateful.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Qur’ān 2:258.

<sup>52</sup> Qur’ān 2:132.

<sup>53</sup> Qur’ān 37:102.

<sup>54</sup> Qur’ān 2:127.

<sup>55</sup> Qur’ān 2:124.

<sup>56</sup> Qur’ān 14:35.

<sup>57</sup> Qur’ān 14:37.

“My Lord! Make me a performer of the prayer, and of my offspring (too): Our Lord! and accept my petition.”<sup>58</sup>

From the above verses, Prophet Ibrahim’s leadership qualities are obvious through what this study regards as fatherly care. For instance, in the verses one sees his concerns in his prayers for his offspring in security, remaining distant from worshipping idols, winning the hearts of people towards them, and provisions for them and all the faithful. All these go to show what leaders’ concerns should be for their people or those who follow them.

As a result of his significance as a patriarch, Ibrahim is sometimes given the title Father of the Prophets. He plays a prominent role as an example of faith in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, the Qur’ān repeatedly describes Prophet Ibrahim as a man who believes in One True God and was a righteous example for all to follow. That is why it states, “Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian, but he was true in Faith and bowed his will to Allah (which is Islam), and he joined not gods with Allah”<sup>59</sup>

### ***Leadership, Spirit of Sacrifice and Devotion***

Prophet Ibrahim is an important leader in Islam, especially because he is a patriarch of the faithful. He is described as *ummattan* (i.e., a comprehensive leader) because he combined within himself all virtues.<sup>60</sup> He is also regarded as an ancestor through whom many other prophets came, including Musa, Isa and Muhammad. Hence, Prophet Ibrahim has been described as the father of prophets because he was chosen as the leader of men. The Qur’ān, for instance, lists some of the great figures to have emerged through Prophet Ibrahim:

That was the reasoning about Us, which We gave to Abraham (to use) against his people: We raise whom We will, degree after degree: for thy Lord is full of wisdom and knowledge. We gave him Isaac and Jacob: all (three) guided: and before him, We guided Noah, and among his progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron: thus do We reward those who do good: And Zakariya and John, and Jesus and Elias: all in the ranks of the righteous: And Isma’il and Elisha, and Jonas, and Lot: and to all We gave favour above the nations: (To them) and to their fathers, and progeny and brethren: We chose them, and we guided them to a straight way. This is the guidance of Allah: He giveth that guidance to whom He pleaseth, of His worshippers. If they were to join other gods with Him, all that they did would be vain for them. These were the men to whom We gave the Book, and authority, and prophethood: if these (their descendants) reject them, Behold! We shall entrust their charge to a new people who reject them not. Those were the (prophets) who received Allah's guidance: Copy the guidance they received; Say: “No reward for this do I ask of you: This is no less than a message for the nations.”<sup>61</sup>

Asad, in his commentary on the verses above, notes the expression “by degrees” may be taken to mean “by many degrees,” signifying the great spiritual dignity to which this forerunner (i.e., Prophet Ibrahim) of a long line of prophets was ultimately raised. Asad

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<sup>58</sup> Qur’ān 14:40.

<sup>59</sup> Qur’ān 3:67.

<sup>60</sup> Qur’ān 16:120.

<sup>61</sup> Qur’ān 6:83-90.

further observes that, although Lot was not a “descendant” of Abraham since he was his brother’s son, his name is included in the list for two reasons: first, because he followed Abraham from his earliest youth as a son follows his father, and, second, because in ancient Arabian usage a paternal uncle is often described as “father” and, conversely, a nephew as “son.”

Moreover, Ibrahim’s narrative in the Qur’ān indirectly refers to his role as one of the great patriarchs. The Qur’ān says God made Ibrahim an imam to the nations and father to Muslims, and his narrative records him praying for his offspring. When Allah tells Ibrahim, He will make him an imam for the people, he responds “...and of my offspring (to make leaders).”<sup>62</sup> This shows his level of awareness of his public leadership role to future generations; therefore, extending the blessing on him to his progeny. Allah made him an imam, a leader for the people, and his focus was continuing this legacy for his descendants and the *umma* (community) as a whole. Moreover, Prophet Ibrahim worshipped Allah by serving humanity. He knew the value of cultivating leadership and made *du’a* (supplication) to Allah to help him in his efforts. This has inspired others to continue a good example, which can also be seen in his fulfilling his duty to his family. However, the Qur’ān makes it clear that Abraham’s exalted status was not something that would automatically confer a comparable status on his physical descendants and certainly not on the sinners among them.<sup>63</sup>

In Islam, Prophet Ibrahim is regarded as not just as a leader of a group or nation but a leader of people. He was selected by Allah to carry out the mission of leading the people to worship Allah only and be Muslims (one who submits). One of the reasons for this is that he was able to fulfil the commandments and overcome the various trials placed before him through his life. The Qur’ān says, “recall the time when His Lord put Abraham to the test by giving him some orders and he carried them out.”<sup>64</sup> He was able to achieve because of his unwavering faith in God; hence, was promised by God to be a leader to all the world’s nations.

The Qur’ān praises Prophet Ibrahim as a model, exemplar and obedient servant of God. He was an example for all because of his complete surrender to God and before the fragmentation of the Divine Reality into religions with differences in form.<sup>65</sup> Due to the leadership qualities imbued by Ibrahim at *Eid al-Adha* (festival of sacrifice) is celebrated with the slaughtering of domestic animals, which is done in part to remember his bravery during his trial of the attempted sacrifice of his son. In addition, Muslims perform the pilgrimage to the Ka’bah in Makkah, which Prophet Ibrahim had set up and reformed. He said this after preparing the House of the Ka’bah with his son Ismail:

Lord, make us your obedient servants, and raise from our seed people who will submit to Your will, and show us our way of worship, and forgive us our sins. You alone are the Forgiving, the Merciful. Lord! Raise among them a prophet from them who will read to

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<sup>62</sup> Qur’ān 2:124.

<sup>63</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Quran*..

<sup>64</sup> Qur’ān 2:124.

<sup>65</sup> Muhammad Naga, *The Story of Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) in Islam* (Scribl, 2017), eBook edition.

them Your revelation, and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them. You alone are the Mighty, the Wise.<sup>66</sup>

He was the leader of the righteous in his time. Among his achievements are his efforts at cleansing the world of idolatry at the time. He made frantic efforts to spiritually purify the world by physically sanctifying the house of worship and establishing the rites of Ḥajj (pilgrimage), which are still followed today. Because of his role as a leader and deep insight, he was able to further ask God to bless and keep all his descendants on the right path. He was a man who succeeded as a leader, who led people to the straight path and who cared for others, as the Qur'ān says, "Lord! make this place a city of peace and provide it with all kinds of wealth such of its people as belief in Allah and the Last Day."<sup>67</sup> That is why, in the canonical prayer, every day Muslims mention Ibrahim when they ask God to bless Muhammad's family as He blessed Ibrahim's family.

### ***Righteous, Guided Servant and Sincere Communication***

In Islam, associating a partnership with Allah is regarded as an action against the world's natural order. However, humans have a strong tendency to go against the natural order of things and become infected with 'unnatural' habits that drive them into going against God's will on earth. This is what is termed 'going astray.' Prophet Ibrahim was a righteous servant whose natural tendency was to believe in his Lord, the Highest.

He was against idol worship or any other things besides Allah from an early age. That was why he was unwilling to accept the actions of his people as the natural order of things. Even his father, whom he regarded highly and was very kind towards, was not spared his reproach. Hence, out of faith, he did not only utter a contemptuous word against his people but also severed his relationship with them, including his father. The Qur'ān says, "Lo! Abraham said to his father Āzar: Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error."<sup>68</sup> Ibrahim was, from his youth, inclined to use his senses and thoughts to do the right thing always and made several attempts to save his family and people. The Qur'ān also says:

So also did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might have certitude. When the night covered him over, he saw a star: he said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said "I love not those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set. He said: "Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray." When he saw the sun rising (in splendor,) he said: "This is my Lord; This is the greatest (of all)." But when the sun set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah. For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partner to Allah."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Qur'ān 2:128-131.

<sup>67</sup> Qur'ān 2:126.

<sup>68</sup> Qur'ān 6:74.

<sup>69</sup> Qur'ān 6:75-79.



The above verses show the guided and righteous nature of Prophet Ibrahim, who is against mere blind following and does not oppose logic and strong proofs that support his beliefs. The story of the star, moon and sun gives us Ibrahim's spiritual leadership model and how he led people to recognition of the truth. Leaders in Nigeria can take this as a template to lead people to what is right instead of leading them astray. His people also attempted to make him see reason in their unholy practice when they disputed with him:

His people disputed with him. He said: "(Come) ye to dispute with me, about Allah, When He (Himself) hath guided me? I fear not (the beings) ye associate with Allah: Unless my Lord willeth, (nothing can happen), my Lord comprehendeth in His knowledge all things. Will ye not (yourselves) be admonished? "How should I fear (the beings) ye associate with Allah, when ye fear not to give partners to Allah without any warrant having been given to you? Which of (us) two parties hath more right to security? (tell me) if ye know. "It is those who believe and mix not their beliefs with wrong that are (truly) in security, for they are on (right) guidance." That was Our argument which We gave to Abraham (to use) against his people. We raise whom We will, degree after degree: For thy Lord is full of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>70</sup>

According to Asad, the description of Ibrahim's reasoning as God's argument implies it was divinely inspired and is, therefore, valid for followers of the Qur'an as well. In addition, Prophet Ibrahim's gradual grasp of the truth is symbolised by his intuitive progress from adoration of celestial bodies – stars, moon and sun – to full realisation of God's transcendental, all-embracing existence. Furthermore, on the issue of the argument with his people, which Allah guided him to respond to them with wisdom and sound judgement, that encounter was further explained by Abdullah Ali:

The story of Abraham is highly instructive for all men in quest for truth. If enlightenment go so far as to take a man beyond his ancestral worship, people will come to dispute with him. They will frighten him with the dire consequences of his dissent. What does he care? He has found the truth. He is free from superstitious fears, for has he not found the true God, without Whose Will nothing can happen? On the contrary he knows that it is the godless who have just grounds for fear. And he offers admonition to them, and arguments that should bring them the clearness of truth instead of the vagueness and mystery of superstition, -the security of Faith instead of the haunting fear of those who have no clear guidance.<sup>71</sup>

The above quote shows that the lessons embedded in the encounter are beyond the worship of one true God alone; rather, one can also deduce important lessons for those in positions of public leadership and pursuit of what is right and just while administering the people. There is always the challenge of making followers see the need to do the correct thing at times, which at first may be difficult, especially convincing them of the need to make changes from a bad habit to which they are accustomed. However, the leader must not be deterred from making the people see the truth and the need to make the required change(s).

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<sup>70</sup> Qur'an 6:80-83

<sup>71</sup> Abdullah Ali, *The Holy Qur-an: English Translaton of the Meanings and Commentary* (Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA., 1989), 362.

The righteous and guided character of Prophet Ibrahim makes him an excellent example for leaders. This can also be seen in the kinds of tests he experienced during his old age almost without an heir. When he left his people and their way of life for the guidance of Allah and to the right path, he had complete trust in Allah, for his prayer for an heir was later granted with the birth of a righteous boy who listened to his father and received guidance from him. This shows Prophet Ibrahim is a model to be followed by righteous leaders, patient people and doers of good.<sup>72</sup> Such is the account of Prophet Ibrahim in the Qur'ān and scholars' comments on him.

## PROPHET IBRAHIM, ETHICS AND NIGERIAN PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

Nigerian leaders since independence in 1960 have vestiges of colonialism rooted in the divide-and-rule legacy of the British, which made postcolonial Nigeria witness paradoxical authority through a mix of democratic and military dictatorships. This has led to issues of civil rights and social justice and clamping down on human rights struggles. Furthermore, peace and security have been in abeyance due to bad public leadership that fails to use the advantage of the socio-cultural and ethnic diversities of the Nigerian people. Nigerian leaders, it appears, are unwilling to change the status quo. To avert this ugly trend, Nigerian leaders should, without hesitation, embrace the leadership principles of Prophet Ibrahim.

This paper explored Islam's outlook towards public leadership with a focus on the Nigerian polity. One of the dimensions presented is the prophetic leadership quality of Prophet Ibrahim. Nigeria's challenges with credible public leaders betray the holistic approach of Islam through the sterling example of Prophet Ibrahim. The Qur'ān's statement that Prophet Ibrahim was appointed by Allah to be a leader of the people is a clear indication of the nature of leadership and the power associated with it is based on the revelation from Allah and the example left by this prophet. Consistent with Muhammad,<sup>73</sup> Fazeli et al.,<sup>74</sup> and Harmaini et al.,<sup>75</sup> this study indicates Prophet Ibrahim had many leadership qualities that made him liked, loved and respected. The story about him in the Qur'ān explains why he is an excellent leader. Consistent with the Qur'ānic statement that, "...I will make thee an Imam to the Nations..."<sup>76</sup> Islam focuses more on character, particularly for various types of leadership in the community. The qualities identified above form what can be termed Prophet Ibrahim's leadership model, which includes ethical and moral values, courage, avoiding corruption and corrupt practices, a spirit of sacrifice and devotion, and sincere communication. Despite these qualities, it should be stated that prophets in Islam were men

<sup>72</sup> Ahmed Raba, *Major Personalities in the Quran* (A. S. Noordeen, 2001), <https://books.google.com.my/books?id=42T7AAAACAAJ>.

<sup>73</sup> Muhammad, "Prophetic Leadership Model."

<sup>74</sup> Hamidreza Fazeli et al., "A Critical Study of Quranic Commentators' opinions of Verses About Prophet Ibrahim's Imamate (As); An Innovative Analysis," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 4 (2022).

<sup>75</sup> Harmaini Harmaini et al., "Trust and Character Development (Life Lessons from Prophet Ibrahim As)," *International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>76</sup> Qur'ān 2:124.

whom Allah sent essentially to guide humankind from the darkness of disbelief to the light of faith. Aside from this basic role, many of them were also leaders who ruled over their people.

Having examined the life of Prophet Ibrahim vis-à-vis public leadership issues related to Nigeria, it is discovered the emphasis in Islam is on the servant-leader and guardian-leader types of leadership. This is because the leader is the servant of the followers and expected to seek their welfare and guide them toward good. Prophet Ibrahim seems to devote himself to this and for which he is described as an imam to the nations. Therefore, Nigerian leaders are expected to uphold these values and reflect on their roles not just as servant-leaders but also as guardian-leaders. However, regarding public leadership in Nigeria, selflessness in elected public leadership positions, competence and capacity to lead a country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and having an enlightened self-interest to mobilise and forge elite consensus on how to reposition, stabilise and develop the nation on a sustainable basis are areas where the country's leadership, even in the context of a civil democratic dispensation, leaves much to be desired. Based on the teachings from the life of Prophet Ibrahim, one is urged to consider leadership as a trust. In other words, it is a form of explicit contract or pledge between the leader and followers in which the leader will try to guide, protect and treat them fairly and with justice. Moreover, there is a salient connection between the exercise of power in Islam and integrity and justice. One who is opportune to be the leader should also be concerned with justice, trust, righteousness, keeping promises and credible associates. Conversely, these are the Muslim moral characteristics that Prophet Ibrahim embodies through his vision, courage, ability to articulate his vision as well as willingness to make sacrifices.

Although Prophet Ibrahim cannot be said to have led any particular country, there is no reason to believe that the leadership qualities found in him are limited to his time and age. Instead, what can be said is that he fulfilled the mission of leadership for which Allah chose him. That this kind of leadership or outlook of leadership can be and needs to be expanded to cover a country like Nigeria that has had and still has a profound crisis of leadership that is crying for urgent resolution should be self-evident. This view is based on the need to improve the leadership recruitment processes and get the leadership right in our contemporary times.

In general, this study finds the leadership qualities found in Prophet Ibrahim should be considered during the recruitment, selection or election of a public leader in Nigeria. Notwithstanding the complexity of the social, economic, political and fast technological advancement in recent times, more emphasis should be placed on the notion of servant-leaders and guardian-leaders. Since this study is largely based on the life of Prophet Ibrahim, it is not surprising that the notion of public leadership tends towards behaving ethically towards all – Muslims and non-Muslims alike; behaving righteously; striving towards self-improvement; and never breaking one's word, all of which can be learnt from Prophet Ibrahim's life.

## CONCLUSION

I have examined the history of Prophet Ibrahim as narrated by the Qur'ān and commented on by classical Muslim exegetes and contemporary scholars. Much of what I have written has focused on his character, resoluteness, fatherly role, leadership, righteousness and guided servanthood. I focused on areas in which lessons drawn from the story of Prophet Ibrahim could assist Nigerian leaders. I believe the traits I suggest, such as ethical and moral values, courage, avoiding corruption and corrupt practices, the spirit of sacrifice and devotion, and sincerity, are a serious step forward to “vaccinating” the country against indifference, iniquity, inequity, contempt and carelessness. In doing so, I believe Nigeria will make useful contributions, be conscientious and make a difference to the current state of affairs.

Finding a religio-spiritual way to address the problem of leadership will take the country to the next level. In reflecting on the recent happenings in the country, an editorial in the *Daily Trust* stated: “Life has lost its value under Buhari’s Nigeria.”<sup>77</sup> Of course, it is the researcher’s candid opinion that Nigerian leaders should embrace a prophetic public leadership framework like that of Prophet Ibrahim. However, in most instances, leaders can accomplish a lot through ethical and moral values, courage, avoiding corruption and corrupt practices, the spirit of sacrifice and devotion, and sincere communication.

Using a religio-spiritual way to address the myriad societal challenges is a reliable way of finding a lasting solution to the problems confronting Nigeria. Each of the values highlighted above could be a study in its own right to fully understand the implications of the lack of such attitudes and discipline can have on the growth and development of a country.

Moreover, beyond focusing on just the leaders, the populace of the country should also reflect on what they are doing; whether they are asking their leaders the right questions or trying to solve the problems. Such reflection will enable the populace never to lose sight of demanding accountability and transparency from their leaders. The questions to the promises of the leaders should always be: why? how? what difference it will make?

Finally, by looking at the prophetic public leadership framework, I believe that Nigerian leaders will make a difference and have an impact. It is not just about the leaders; what the populace does as citizens also matters. By becoming better, they will be able to put Nigeria on the path of growth and development as well as improve the nation-building process.

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<sup>77</sup> Editorial, “Life Has Lost Its Value Under Buhari’s Nigeria,” *Daily Trust*, December 12, 2021, <https://dailytrust.com/life-has-lost-its-value-under-buharis-nigeria/>.

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