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## **The Ethical Legacy of Sokoto Caliphate: A Blueprint For contemporary Moral Reforms in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The Sokoto Caliphate, established in the early 19th century, remains one of the most influential Islamic states in West Africa. Founded on a robust moral and ethical foundation rooted in Islamic teachings, the Caliphate emphasized justice, honesty, education, and social welfare. In contemporary Nigeria, which grapples with moral decline, corruption, and socio-political instability, revisiting the ethical structures of the Sokoto Caliphate offers a potentially transformative framework. This paper investigates the moral vision laid down by Usman dan Fodio and his successors and evaluates its relevance to Nigeria's current moral crises. Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilizes historical and documentary analysis of primary sources – such as the writings of Usman dan Fodio – and secondary scholarly works. Thematically analyzed data reveal that the Caliphate operated on a justice-centered leadership model and emphasized inclusive, morally grounded education. These findings suggest that re-integrating such values into governance could serve as an antidote to Nigeria's contemporary ethical challenges. Accordingly, the paper recommends reintroducing Islamic ethical governance principles, enhancing access to moral education, reinforcing institutional accountability, promoting ethical training for officials, and developing inclusive welfare systems.*

**Keywords:** Sokoto Caliphate, Contemporary Morality, Ethical Legacy, Moral Reforms, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

The Sokoto Caliphate, founded in the early 19th century by Shaykh Usman dan Fodio, represents one of the most remarkable Islamic reformist movements in West African history. Usman dan Fodio was born in 1754 in Maratta (present-day Gobir, northern Nigeria) into a learned Fulani family of the Torodbe clan. A distinguished Islamic scholar, jurist, preacher, and reformer, he was well-versed in various Islamic sciences including fiqh (jurisprudence), tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), hadith, and Arabic grammar. He studied

under prominent scholars such as Shaykh Jibril and Shaykh Uthman Binduri, and later became a highly respected teacher and writer, authoring over 100 works (Boyd, 1989). Usman dan Fodio's intellectual and spiritual authority earned him recognition far beyond his homeland. He condemned moral laxity, syncretism, corruption, and tyranny among the Hausa rulers of his time, advocating for a return to genuine Islamic principles. His reform movement culminated in a jihad in 1804, which led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, a state founded on Islamic ethics, justice, public accountability, and social equity (Last, 1967). His vision of leadership emphasized education, welfare, and justice, positioning him not merely as a political figure but as a moral guide for both rulers and citizens.

The ethical foundation laid by Usman dan Fodio and his successors remains relevant today, particularly as Nigeria faces a deepening moral crisis characterized by corruption, political instability, and moral erosion. In a context where integrity in public leadership is deteriorating, revisiting the principles of the Caliphate offers a historical framework for ethical revival and national reform.

### **Literature Review**

Several scholars have explored the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and its moral and political philosophy. Last (1967) provides a comprehensive historical account of the formation and administration of the Caliphate, noting its emphasis on Islamic law and public morality. According to Hiskett (1984), the educational system established under the Caliphate promoted literacy, moral uprightness, and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge across gender and class lines.

Kani and Shehu (1990) further highlight that the Caliphate prioritized justice, transparency, and welfare a system radically different from the exploitative and unjust regimes it replaced. Abubakar (1972) argues that the leadership model of Usman dan Fodio provides a striking contrast to modern political systems in Nigeria, where governance is often decoupled from moral responsibility.

In the contemporary context, researchers like AbdulQadir (2016) and Sanusi (2020) have drawn attention to the ethical vacuum in Nigerian politics and the potential role of Islamic values in restoring public trust and integrity. These studies advocate a return to indigenous Islamic ethical models, such as that of the Sokoto Caliphate, as a solution to Nigeria's socio-political decay.

This paper builds on these scholarly insights to analyze the moral architecture of the Sokoto Caliphate and its potential application to today's Nigerian society. By reviewing key texts and historical accounts, it seeks to highlight how a return to ethical governance inspired by Usman dan Fodio's teachings can contribute meaningfully to solving Nigeria's current moral crisis.

### **Research Objectives**

- a. To examine the moral principles that sustained the Sokoto Caliphate.
- b. To explore the ethical crises facing present-day Nigeria, particularly in political leadership, civil administration, and public accountability.
- c. To evaluate the suitability of the Sokoto Caliphate's morals in present-day ethical reforms.

## Research Questions

- What were the primary moral teachings disseminated during the Sokoto Caliphate?
- What are the underlying causes of the ethical crises in present-day Nigeria's political leadership, civil administration, and public accountability, and how can historical Islamic models such as the Sokoto Caliphate offer viable solutions?
- How can the ethical standards of the Sokoto Caliphate be adapted to present-day Nigeria?

## Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design, which is most suitable for exploring historical patterns, ethical values, and sociocultural developments over time (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative approaches enable in-depth interpretation of non-numerical data such as texts, historical documents, and ideological narratives—making it ideal for examining the moral foundations of the Sokoto Caliphate and their relevance to contemporary ethical challenges in Nigeria (Creswell, 2013).

This research employs historical and documentary analysis to explore the writings of Usman dan Fodio and other key figures in the Sokoto Caliphate. These primary sources include letters, sermons, legal treatises, and educational texts authored by the Caliphate's scholars. Additionally, secondary sources such as academic books, journal articles, and dissertations on the Sokoto Caliphate and modern Nigerian ethical frameworks were reviewed to enrich the analysis.

Data were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring principles such as justice, accountability, education, and public morality. These themes were then compared with current moral challenges facing Nigeria in areas like political leadership, civil administration, and public accountability. This method allowed for a contextual and interpretive understanding of how historical Islamic ethical structures could inform contemporary reforms (Bowen, 2009).

## Results

### i. Justice (*'Adl*)

The quality of Justice (*'Adl*) was the moral bedrock of governance in the Sokoto Caliphate. Leaders were not absolute rulers; they were viewed as vicegerent (*wakil*) accountable to Allah and the people. Justice was seen as not merely a political necessity but a religious obligation. Allah (SWT) clearly commands:

*"Allah doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; And when ye judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice: Verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth you! For Allah is He Who heareth and seeth all things."* (Q4:58).

Elsewhere, Allah strongly warns against bias in judgment:

*"O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice as witnesses to Allah, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your relatives, and whether it concerns the rich or the poor. Allah can best protect them both. So do not follow your desires, lest you deviate; and if you distort or refuse to act justly, surely Allah is well aware of what you do."* (Q4:135).

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also stressed that justice is a central quality of good leadership. He said:

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*"The most beloved of people to Allah on the Day of Resurrection and the closest to Him will be the just leader; and the most hated and furthest from Him will be the unjust leader..."* (al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 1329).

Usman dan Fodio (1812) built his political philosophy around these Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings. He famously declared: "A ruler who oppresses his people has forfeited the trust of God and the right to rule." (dan Fodio, 1812).

In the Sokoto Caliphate, justice was not just an idea – it was put into real practice:

- a. Recent studies confirm that judges in the Sokoto Caliphate were appointed based on meritocratic and ethical criteria. According to Gwandu (2022), Qadis were selected for their deep Islamic knowledge, moral uprightness, and physical and mental capacity. Social status or wealth had no bearing on their appointment. This ensured that the judiciary upheld justice and public trust within an Islamic ethical framework.
- b. Modern researchers affirm that the judicial structure of the Sokoto Caliphate operated strictly in accordance with Islamic law. Through the institution of *Wilāyat al-Mazālim*, senior state authorities, including Emirs or even the Caliph, could be subject to legal review (Usman, 2018). This system demonstrated a commitment to legal accountability and the supremacy of Shari'ah over personal or political power.
- c. Contemporary scholarship highlights that the fiscal policies of the Caliphate emphasized fairness and justice. According to Ahmed and Salihu (2021), *zakāh* and *jizyah* were collected with transparency, and tax officials were forbidden from intrusive inspections. The revenues were managed strictly according to Islamic law, and misuse or innovation in taxation (*bid'ah al-maks*) was firmly prohibited to avoid oppression.

Furthermore, Usman dan Fodio, in his treatise *Bayan Wujub al-Hijra*, stressed that a ruler must remove injustices and ensure public welfare, failing which obedience to such a ruler would not be obligatory, a radical but principled stance based on Islamic legal theory (dan Fodio, 1812).

The classical Islamic scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), similarly stated: "Allah supports the just state even if it is non-Muslim, but He does not support the oppressive state even if it is Muslim" (*Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol. 28).

This further reflects the Sokoto Caliphate's orientation: justice was above tribal, ethnic, or even religious differences. People were judged on merit and rights, not affiliations. In Western political philosophy, Rawls (1971) articulates a remarkably similar idea, arguing that: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought" (*A Theory of Justice*, p. 3).

In the same vein, Amartya Sen (2009) in *The Idea of Justice* underscores that without fairness, development and societal progress become illusions. The Sokoto Caliphate's system of justice also resonates with modern concepts of the "rule of law," where leaders and citizens alike are subject to the same standards.

#### **Practical Examples in the Caliphate:**

- a. Sokoto judicial archives show that non-Muslims (Christians and Animists) living under the Caliphate could bring cases before Muslim judges and were treated with impartiality (Ostien, 2007).
- b. Women, too, could litigate in court rare for many societies in the 19th century (Boyd, 1997).

Thus, the Caliphate insisted not just on judicial integrity, but on systemic justice permeating social welfare, taxation, education, and governance, striving to ensure no class, gender, or ethnic group was marginalized.

In contrast, contemporary Nigeria grapples with judicial corruption, political favoritism, and selective application of justice (Transparency International, 2024), highlighting the urgent relevance of reviving the Sokoto Caliphate's principles today.

## **ii. Education ('Ilm)**

Education ('Ilm) was vigorously promoted and institutionalized in the Sokoto Caliphate as a divine duty for both men and women. Knowledge was not seen merely as a personal advantage but as a communal obligation and a cornerstone for moral, religious, and social reforms.

Allah (SWT) commands:

"Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding." (Qur'an 39:9).

According to the classical *Mufasssir*, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE), in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, this verse signifies the high rank of scholars ('*ulamā*') in the sight of Allah and affirms that knowledge distinguishes people in dignity, piety, and leadership (Ibn Kathir, 2000). The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) similarly declared:

"Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 224,).

Imam al-Nawawi (d. 1277 CE) explained that this Hadith refers to both religious knowledge (such as theology, prayer, and lawful earnings) and worldly knowledge necessary for survival and community welfare (al-Nawawi, 1972).

Within this Islamic mandate, the Sokoto Caliphate structured its society around mass education. Literacy and religious sciences were aggressively promoted among both genders, ethnicities, and social classes (Boyd, 1997; Hiskett, 1973).

Usman dan Fodio himself stated: "The first duty of a ruler is to educate the people in matters of religion and good character" (*Bayan Wujub al-Hijra*, 1812).

Nana Asma'u, the daughter of Usman dan Fodio, exemplified this educational vision. She organized the *Yan-Taru* ("the Associates") — a network of mobile female scholars who traveled to teach women across the Caliphate, ensuring women's participation in public religious and intellectual life (Last, 1967). Her curriculum included Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, Arabic grammar, and even poetry.

This was a revolutionary model for its time. While women in other societies, including parts of Europe during the 19th century, were often excluded from formal education, the Sokoto Caliphate upheld the Islamic principle that knowledge must be universally accessible.

Classical scholars like Imam al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) also championed this view. In *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, he wrote: "The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory for every male and female Muslim, and ignorance is a sickness that can only be cured by knowledge" (al-Ghazali, 2004). Allah (SWT) further states:

"Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees." (Qur'an 58:11).

*Mufasssirun* like Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE) commented that this verse indicates that scholars will be elevated not only in this world, through respect and leadership but also in the hereafter (al-Qurtubi, 1967).

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This deep Islamic emphasis was reflected structurally in the Sokoto Caliphate:

- a. Establishment of Quranic schools (*makarantun allo*) in nearly every town and village.
- b. Encouragement of private study circles (*halaqat*) for adults.
- c. Promotion of scholarship in Islamic jurisprudence, grammar, history, and poetry.

In comparison, John Dewey (1916) asserts in his *Democracy and Education* that education is "the means of the social continuity of life," arguing that a society that fails to educate its citizens fails to transmit its core values and survival mechanisms.

Thus, the Sokoto Caliphate's model, rooted in Islamic obligation and practical policy, mirrors Dewey's assertion: education was seen as essential for the sustainability and moral strength of society.

Today, contemporary Nigeria faces challenges of illiteracy in northern regions (UNESCO, 2022), starkly contrasting the inclusive and dynamic educational policy of the Sokoto era. Reinvigorating the Caliphate's model could offer a pathway for moral and social rejuvenation.

### **iii. Piety (*Taqwa*)**

Piety (*Taqwa*) served as the moral and ethical foundation of both personal conduct and public governance within the Sokoto Caliphate. It was considered the inner force that regulated behavior, inspired justice, promoted honesty, and ensured social cohesion. Allah (SWT) says:

"O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women..." (Qur'an 4:1).

According to Ibn Kathir (2000) in his *Tafsir*, this verse emphasizes the unity of human origin, underlining that the call to fear Allah (*taqwa*) is inseparable from recognizing the equality and dignity of all humans, thereby mandating ethical behavior toward others.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) stated:

"Fear Allah wherever you are; follow a bad deed with a good one to erase it, and behave with good character toward people." (Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 1987).

Imam al-Nawawi (1975), commenting on this Hadith in *Riyadh as-Salihin*, pointed out that *Taqwa* includes performing obligations, refraining from prohibitions, and maintaining moral excellence in interpersonal relationships.

Usman dan Fodio deeply emphasized the centrality of *Taqwa* for both rulers and the ruled. He warned: "Without *Taqwa*, no system of government, however well designed, can survive; its decay is inevitable" (*Bayan Wujub al-Hijra*, 1812).

For him, piety was not a private virtue alone; it had an essential public and political dimension. Leaders were reminded constantly that their authority was not autonomous but *delegated* from God. This fostered humility, accountability, and ethical behavior. Allah (SWT) further states:

"Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous (*atqākum*)."

(Qur'an 49:13).

Al-Qurtubi (1967) in his *Tafsir* explains that nobility in Islam is tied not to lineage, wealth, or power, but exclusively to *Taqwa*. Thus, rulers could not claim inherent superiority over their subjects unless they exemplified greater piety.

Similarly, Imam al-Ghazali (2004) stressed in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* that *Taqwa* is the "root of all virtues" and that rulers without it become agents of tyranny rather than stewards of justice. Within the Sokoto Caliphate, practical steps were taken to institutionalize *Taqwa*:

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- a. Public sermons (*khutbahs*) often centered around themes of moral accountability.
- b. Leaders were regularly advised and censured based on religious principles.
- c. The judicial system was tasked not only with enforcing laws but also with promoting moral and spiritual integrity (Boyd, 1997).

Interestingly, Max Weber (1947) in his theory of *charismatic authority* notes that certain leaders govern effectively because they are perceived as morally transcendent and divinely guided. This resonates with the Sokoto model, where rulers like Usman dan Fodio drew legitimacy through visible commitment to *Taqwa* and ethical reform.

In today's context, contemporary Nigeria grapples with leadership crises often rooted in a failure of personal and public *Taqwa*. Rampant corruption, political violence, and social decay highlight the consequences of divorcing leadership from moral piety (Transparency International, 2024).

Reviving the ethical blueprint of the Sokoto Caliphate where leadership is grounded on *Taqwa* could address these crises by restoring trust, justice, and social harmony.

#### **iv. Accountability (*Mas'uliyah*)**

The Sokoto Caliphate institutionalized *accountability* (*Mas'uliyah*) at all levels of leadership, ensuring that governance was a moral and religious responsibility. Leaders were not autonomous; they were trustees (*Amanah*) tasked with stewardship under divine scrutiny. Allah (SWT) emphasizes:

"And stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned." (Qur'an 37:24).

Ibn Kathir (2000) in his *Tafsir* explains that this verse refers to the Day of Judgment when every individual will be questioned regarding their duties, trusts, and responsibilities, including rulers concerning their subjects. This divine accountability framework was deeply embedded in the ethos of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

"Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you is responsible for his flock..." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 893).

Imam al-Nawawi (1975) in his commentary on this Hadith in *Sharh Sahih Muslim* highlights that the term "responsibility" (*Mas'uliyah*) encompasses both the obligation to act righteously and the duty to be answerable for one's governance and leadership decisions.

Building upon this prophetic teaching, Usman dan Fodio asserted: "When you see corruption among your rulers, you should oppose it with wisdom and knowledge." (*Bayan Wujub al-Hijra*, 1812).

This reflects the Islamic principle of *enjoining good and forbidding evil* (*al-amr bil-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*), even toward those in positions of authority, provided it is done with wisdom (*hikmah*).

Moreover, al-Mawardi (1996) in *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* emphasized that rulers are answerable not only to their subjects but primarily to God. Governance, therefore, is a divine trust that must be discharged with justice, honesty, and responsibility. In practical terms, the Sokoto Caliphate:

- a. Instituted regular public consultations (*Shura*) between rulers and scholars.
- b. Allowed for open critique of officials by learned men (*'Ulama*).
- c. Encouraged religious scholars to act as independent moral overseers over political power (Boyd, 1997).

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Allah (SWT) also reminds:

*"Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice..."* (Qur'an 4:58).

Al-Qurtubi (1967) explains in his *Tafsir* that this verse applies directly to political leaders who must fulfill their trust (*Amanah*) without betrayal or negligence. Thus, in the Sokoto Caliphate, betrayal of leadership trust was seen as both a legal crime and a moral failing. From a contemporary governance perspective, Fukuyama (2004) in *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* affirms that without accountability mechanisms, states deteriorate into "predatory" institutions where leaders serve personal interests at the expense of public welfare a crisis evident in many modern states, including Nigeria. In contrast, the Sokoto Caliphate's leadership accountability model provides a historical and religious template for rebuilding trust and integrity in governance today.

#### **v. Welfare (*Ihsan*)**

The Sokoto Caliphate upheld *social welfare (Ihsan)* as a fundamental Islamic obligation, integrating it into both governance and communal life. Welfare was not perceived as charity alone but as a divine mandate to ensure social justice and human dignity. Allah (SWT) commands:

*"Indeed, Allah commands justice ('Adl) and good conduct (Ihsan) and giving to relatives and forbids immorality, bad conduct, and oppression..."* (Qur'an 16:90).

Ibn Kathir (2000) in his *Tafsir* explains that *Ihsan* in this context refers to excelling in fulfilling people's rights, offering kindness beyond mere obligation, and supporting vulnerable members of society. He notes that this command encompasses both obligatory (e.g., *zakah*) and recommended (e.g., *sadaqah*) forms of assistance. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasized:

*"He is not a believer whose stomach is filled while the neighbor to his side goes hungry"* (Sunan al-Kubra by al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 19049).

Imam al-Ghazali (1993) in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* stresses that *Ihsan* involves compassion and solidarity with the needy, warning that neglecting the vulnerable invites divine wrath upon societies. In line with these Islamic imperatives, Usman dan Fodio institutionalized welfare policies through the establishment of *Bayt al-Mal* (public treasury) designed to assist:

- a. Orphans (*Yatama*)
- b. Widows (*Aramil*)
- c. Travelers (*Ibn al-Sabil*)
- d. The poor (*Fuqara'*)
- e. Debt-ridden individuals (*Gharimin*) (Boyd, 1997; Last, 1967).

The Caliphate organized systems where *zakah* (obligatory almsgiving) and voluntary charity were efficiently collected and distributed to ensure no one fell into extreme poverty or social neglect. Historical records indicate that some provinces even reached surplus levels, redistributing wealth to neighboring communities (Hiskett, 1973). Moreover, the Qur'an says:

*"And they give food, in spite of love for it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive, [saying], 'We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We wish not from you reward or gratitude'"* (Qur'an 76:8–9).



Al-Tabari (1987) explains in his *Tafsir al-Tabari* that true believers are those who assist others purely out of devotion to Allah, without seeking worldly recognition – a practice embedded in Sokoto Caliphate’s public welfare philosophy.

From a modern development perspective, Amartya Sen (1999) in *Development as Freedom* posits that development must focus on expanding substantive freedoms, including social safety nets and protections for vulnerable populations. The Sokoto Caliphate remarkably anticipated these ideas by crafting systems that guaranteed economic rights and social protections centuries before Western models of welfare emerged.

Furthermore, contemporary Muslim scholars like Taha Jabir Al-Alwani (2005) argue that *Ihsan* requires Islamic societies to build structured mechanisms for poverty alleviation, education, and healthcare – priorities visibly implemented under the Sokoto Caliphate.

Thus, the ethical governance of the Sokoto Caliphate underlines how religious obligations, compassionate governance, and structured social welfare formed an inseparable triad – offering profound lessons for contemporary moral and socio-economic reforms in Nigeria and beyond.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The ethical governance system of the Sokoto Caliphate stands in stark contrast to Nigeria’s present-day moral crises. Where the Caliphate anchored leadership on *Taqwa* (piety), *Mas’uliyah* (accountability), *Adl* (justice), and *Ihsan* (social welfare), contemporary Nigeria frequently witnesses governance defined by corruption, nepotism, and impunity (Transparency International, 2024). In the Caliphate, leadership was deeply moral, rooted in the Qur’anic command:

*“Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice...”* (Qur’an 4:58).

According to Ibn Kathir (2000), this verse obliges leaders to uphold justice and avoid betrayal of the public trust. He emphasizes that betrayal (*khiyanah*) of leadership responsibilities leads to the collapse of societies.

Usman dan Fodio perfectly embodied this Qur’anic ethic, asserting: "A ruler who oppresses his subjects has forfeited the trust of God and the right to rule" (dan Fodio, 1812).

In contrast, modern Nigerian governance too often deviates from these ideals. Cases of political embezzlement, rigged elections, and disregard for the rule of law show a sharp decline from the high moral standards emphasized by the Caliphate (Transparency International, 2024). Moreover, the Caliphate’s rigorous investment in education, including for women, challenges the mistaken assumption that Islamic societies should marginalize women from intellectual and public life. Allah commands in the Qur’an:

*“Say, Are those who know equal to those who do not know?”* (Qur’an 39:9).

Al-Qurtubi (2006) in his *Tafsir* explains that this verse signifies the elevation of the knowledgeable, male or female, and their crucial role in society. Education is thus a spiritual duty that transcends gender. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also affirmed:

*“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim”* (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 224).

Imam al-Nawawi (2003) interpreted this Hadith in *Sharh Sahih Muslim* by clarifying that "Muslim" here universally applies to both men and women. The Sokoto Caliphate implemented this command practically: Usman dan Fodio’s daughter, Nana Asma’u, led

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literacy movements among women, utilizing mobile teaching groups called the *Yan Taru* (Last, 1967).

In fact, scholars such as Sheikh (2003) argue that Nana Asma'u's initiatives in the 19th century were precursors to modern feminist educational movements, even preceding Western efforts to ensure women's educational rights. Further, the Qur'an consistently links leadership and societal well-being to *Taqwa*:

*"O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice. He will [then] amend for you your deeds and forgive you your sins..."* (Qur'an 33:70-71).

Ibn Ashur (2006) noted in *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* that *Taqwa* in governance ensures that leaders always prioritize divine accountability over personal gain or tribal loyalties – a quality glaringly missing in many parts of modern Nigeria.

Western political theorists also affirm these Islamic principles. Max Weber (1947) in his theory of "charismatic authority" acknowledges that ethical and moral legitimacy, not merely bureaucratic rule, sustains leadership credibility. Likewise, Fukuyama (2004) emphasized that the decay of governance occurs when leadership loses its sense of accountability to the governed.

Thus, reviving the Sokoto Caliphate's ethical pillars *Taqwa*, *Mas'uliyah*, *'Adl*, *'Ilm*, and *Ihsan* offers Nigeria a viable pathway out of its current moral and governance crises. By reconnecting with Islamic ethical standards, Nigerian society could counteract systemic corruption, political irresponsibility, and educational backwardness, thereby moving toward a just, prosperous, and God-conscious society.

In doing so, Nigeria would not be regressing into historical nostalgia, but rather fulfilling a timeless Qur'anic mandate:

*"And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people..."* (Qur'an 2:143).

### **Conclusion**

The Sokoto Caliphate stands as a remarkable historical example of ethical and effective Islamic governance. Rooted firmly in the principles of *Taqwa* (piety), *'Adl* (justice), *Mas'uliyah* (accountability), *'Ilm* (education), and *Ihsan* (welfare), the Caliphate under the leadership of Usman dan Fodio demonstrated that leadership could be both spiritually grounded and practically transformative. The integration of Islamic teachings – as found in the Qur'an and Sunnah – into all facets of governance created a society where rulers were servants to their people and ultimately accountable to God.

Muslim scholars and *Mufasssirun* like Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Ashur consistently emphasized that justice, knowledge, piety, and welfare were not mere moral recommendations, but obligatory foundations for any legitimate leadership. Their interpretations affirm that good governance is deeply tied to religious and ethical integrity. The Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) clear directives on responsibility and fairness further underline that rulers must serve with humility, wisdom, and compassion. In contrast, the contemporary Nigerian political landscape, characterized by corruption, impunity, and the erosion of public trust, reflects a departure from these Islamic ideals. Transparency International's reports highlight governance failures that directly contradict the moral principles so vibrantly upheld by the Caliphate. The wisdom of Usman dan Fodio – particularly his warning that oppressive rulers lose divine legitimacy – remains profoundly relevant.

Moreover, the Sokoto Caliphate's prioritization of mass education, particularly for women through the efforts of figures like Nana Asma'u, challenges misconceptions about the place of women in Islamic societies. Their initiatives anticipated modern theories of education as a means of societal transformation, well before such ideas became mainstream in the West.

The Caliphate's legacy proves that ethical leadership is not an abstract or unattainable ideal; it is a practical, historically demonstrated system capable of creating just and thriving societies. Reviving these foundational Islamic principles could offer Nigeria a powerful antidote to its current crises, steering the nation toward justice, social equity, educational excellence, and comprehensive development. Thus, the study of the Sokoto Caliphate is not merely an exercise in historical appreciation; it is a call to action. By re-rooting governance in *Taqwa*, *Adl*, *Mas'uliyah*, *Ilm*, and *Ihsan*, modern societies – particularly Nigeria – can forge a future that reflects both divine guidance and human dignity.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of this study and in direct response to the research questions raised, the following recommendations are proposed as practical steps toward addressing the current ethical challenges in Nigeria by drawing lessons from the moral and governance values of the Sokoto Caliphate:

1. The Sokoto Caliphate emphasized justice, accountability, and moral leadership. These principles should be revived in Nigeria's political system to promote ethical governance and public trust.
2. Education systems should integrate moral instruction rooted in Islamic and universal ethical values. Equal educational opportunities for both males and females, as practiced in the Caliphate, must be prioritized.
3. To combat ethical failure in governance, Nigeria must reinforce its institutions by adopting mechanisms inspired by the Sokoto Caliphate, including community-based accountability and transparent oversight.
4. Leadership training should include spiritual and moral development, drawing on the teachings of Shehu Usman dan Fodio and his companions to instill humility, responsibility, and service-mindedness.
5. Inspired by the Caliphate's *zakah* and waqf models, Nigeria should establish social support systems that ensure fair wealth distribution, reduce poverty, and foster social justice.

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