



The Role of Qur'anic Ethics (Akhlāq Al-Qur'an) In Shaping the Governance: The Philosophy of Sultan Muhammadu Bello

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Abstract

Sultan Muhammadu Bello (1781–1837), the founding Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate and son of Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio, stands as one of the most prolific scholar-statesmen in the intellectual and political history of sub-Saharan Africa. As the first Sultan of Sokoto and a towering figure in West African Islamic scholarship, Bello governed a vast multi-ethnic polity grounded explicitly in the normative framework of Islamic civilization. This paper examines the foundational role of Qur'anic ethics Akhlāq al-Qur'ān in shaping the governance philosophy of Sultan Muhammadu Bello, arguing that his statecraft was inextricably rooted in a coherent Qur'anic moral vision that he systematically translated into political praxis. Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative, text-analytical approach, employing classical Arabic source criticism and historical-contextual analysis. Primary Arabic manuscripts are critically examined and cross-referenced with secondary historical scholarship on the Sokoto Caliphate. The paper further analyses how his Qur'anic ethical framework addressed concrete governance challenges such as taxation, judicial integrity, the rights of non-Muslim minorities (ahl al-dhimma), the conduct of war, and the welfare obligations of the Muslim state. The findings reveal that Sultan Bello conceived of governance as an inherently moral enterprise, inseparable from the Qur'anic imperative of commanding good and forbidding evil (al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar). The study concludes that Sultan Muhammadu Bello's governance philosophy represents a sophisticated and historically significant instantiation of Qur'anic ethics in political practice, one that anticipates contemporary discussions in Islamic political thought on the compatibility of Qur'anic moral values with effective and just governance. The paper contributes to the growing body of scholarship on African Islamic intellectual history, the political thought of the Sokoto Caliphate, and the enduring relevance of Qur'anic ethical frameworks to contemporary Muslim governance discourse in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: *Akhlāq al-Qur'ān, Sultan Muhammadu Bello, Sokoto Caliphate, Islamic Governance, Siyāsa Shar'iyya, Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah, Qur'anic Ethics, Political Philosophy in Islam, Nigeria.*

Introduction:

The Moral Foundations of Islamic Governance

Among the most distinguished characteristics of Islamic political thought is its insistence that governance must be inseparable from morality. In the Islamic worldview, the state is not a mere instrument of power or a mechanism for distributing resources; it is, at its core, an institution entrusted with the sacred responsibility of establishing justice, promoting virtue, and preventing corruption. This understanding finds its deepest roots in the Qur'an itself, where Allah addresses the Prophet and, by extension, all Muslim leaders:

'O David, We have made you a successor on the earth, so judge between people with truth and do not follow desire, lest it lead you astray from the way of Allah'¹.

The ethical imperatives embedded in such verses constitute what Islamic scholars have long called Akhlaq al-Qur'an the moral character and conduct enjoined upon believers, particularly those entrusted with authority over others.

Sultan Muhammadu Bello stood within this tradition not merely as an inheritor of its teachings, but as one of its most articulate and active practitioners in sub-Saharan Africa. Son of the great reformer Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio and founder of the Sokoto Caliphate's administrative framework, Bello governed a vast and diverse territory for over two decades (1817–1837). His governance was shaped by a deep personal piety, rigorous scholarly formation, and a sincere commitment to Qur'anic principles of justice, consultation, accountability, and compassion. To understand Bello's political philosophy is, therefore, to engage seriously with the ethical content of the Qur'an as he understood and applied it².

Qur'anic Ethics (Akhlaq al-Qur'an): A Brief Conceptual Overview

The term Akhlaq al-Qur'an refers to the body of moral teachings, ethical norms, and character virtues that the Holy Qur'an prescribes for the believer in all dimensions of life personal, social, and political. Classical scholars have identified several key ethical themes that run through the Qur'an: 'Adl (justice), Ihsan (excellence and beneficence), Tawadu' (humility), Shura (consultation), Amanah (trustworthiness), Rahmah (mercy), and Hisba (accountability for public conduct). These are not abstract philosophical ideals; they are concrete moral dispositions that the Qur'an demands of every Muslim, and which Islamic political thought has consistently held to be the necessary qualities of a legitimate and righteous ruler.

Imam al-Ghazali, in his celebrated work *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, dedicates extensive chapters to the ethics of governance, arguing that a ruler's inner moral character inevitably shapes the quality of his rule³. He writes that 'the rectification of the subjects depends on the rectification of the ruler, and the rectification of the ruler depends on the rectification of his heart.' This classical position was shared and elaborated by Ibn Taymiyyah in his *Al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyyah*, where he grounded political authority entirely in the Qur'anic obligation to fulfil trusts, establish justice, and obey Allah. It was precisely this tradition of ethical governance that Sultan Bello inherited, studied, and strove to implement in Sokoto⁴.

The Intellectual Formation of Sultan Muhammadu Bello

Sultan Muhammadu Bello was, first and foremost, a scholar. Born in 1781 in Degel to Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio, he received his early education directly from his father, who was himself a prolific author, theologian, and Sufi master deeply immersed in the Maliki jurisprudential tradition and the Qadiriyyah Sufi order. Bello studied the classical Islamic sciences Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Arabic grammar, logic, and Tasawwuf from an early age. By the time of the Sokoto Jihad (1804–1808), he had already emerged as a leading intellectual voice, responsible for much of the ideological and literary production that justified and guided the reform movement⁵.

His most famous work, *Infaq al-Maysur fi Tarikh Bilad al-Takrur*, is a remarkable synthesis of history, political theology, and governance theory, drawing extensively on Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions to define the obligations of Muslim rulers. In another work, *Usul al-Siyasah*, Bello explicitly outlines the ethical principles that must govern a Muslim ruler's conduct, grounding each principle in Qur'anic authority. This intellectual formation meant that Bello did not approach governance as a pragmatist improvising under circumstances; he approached it as a scholar-ruler consciously applying a divinely revealed moral framework to the challenges of statehood⁶.

4. Justice ('Adl) as the Cornerstone of Bello's Political Philosophy

Of all the ethical imperatives of the Qur'an, none was more central to Bello's governance philosophy than 'Adl (justice). The Qur'an states emphatically:

¹ Qur'an 38:26

² A. D. H. Bivar & M. Hiskett, 'The Arabic Literature of Nigeria to 1804: A Provisional Account,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 25, no. 1/3, 1962, pp. 104–148

³ A. H. M. al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, vol. 2, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, n.d., p. 147

⁴ A. A. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyyah fi Islah al-Ra'i wa al-Ra'iyyah*, trans. O. A. Farrukh, Dar al-Arabiyyah, Beirut, 1966, p. 11

⁵ M. Bello, *Infaq al-Maysur fi Tarikh Bilad al-Takrur*, ed. C. E. J. Whitting, Luzac & Co., London, 1951, pp. 1–20

⁶ H. A. S. Johnston, *The Fulani Empire of Sokoto*, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, pp. 55–80

'Verily, Allah commands justice and beneficence and giving to the near of kin, and forbids indecency and evil and transgression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed'⁷.

In his writings and administrative practice, Bello returned repeatedly to this verse as a programmatic statement of what governance must achieve. For him, justice was not merely the absence of oppression; it was the active establishment of a social and political order in which rights were protected, resources were distributed equitably, and the weak were defended against the powerful⁸.

Bello established a system of Qadi courts throughout the Caliphate, staffed by learned scholars trained in Maliki jurisprudence, to ensure that disputes were resolved according to Islamic law rather than customary practices that had, in his father's assessment, corrupted pre-jihad Hausa governance. He personally took a close interest in the quality of judicial appointments, insisting that judges must be people of moral integrity, free from bribery and partiality. This institutionalisation of judicial ethics was a direct expression of his Qur'anic conviction that justice is the basis of all legitimate authority⁹.

Shura (Consultation) and the Ethics of Collective Decision-Making

A second defining ethical principle in Bello's governance philosophy was Shura the Qur'anic injunction to govern through consultation. The Qur'an praises the believers as those 'whose affairs are a matter of counsel among themselves' (Qur'an 42:38), and commands the Prophet explicitly: 'Consult them in the matter; and when you have decided, put your trust in Allah' (Qur'an 3:159).

Bello understood these verses not as optional encouragements but as binding obligations upon Muslim rulers. His administration of the Sokoto Caliphate was characterised by a deliberate effort to institutionalise consultation at multiple levels of governance¹⁰.

The Grand Council of the Caliphate, which included senior scholars, Emirs, and trusted advisors, met regularly to deliberate on matters of policy, taxation, defence, and jurisprudence. Bello did not rule as an autocrat; he ruled as a scholar-king who believed that the collective wisdom of learned and experienced men was closer to Qur'anic guidance than the unilateral decisions of any single individual, however wise. This consultative culture had a direct practical effect: it built consensus, distributed responsibility, and created a sense of shared moral ownership over the Caliphate's decisions. Contemporary political scientists would recognise this as a form of participatory governance but for Bello, it was simply the Qur'anic ethic of Shura made institutional¹¹.

Amanah (Trustworthiness) and the Ethics of Public Office

The Qur'anic concept of Amanah trustworthiness or fidelity to one's obligations occupies a central place in Islamic political ethics. The Qur'an commands:

'Verily, Allah commands you to render back trusts to those to whom they are due; and when you judge between people, that you judge with justice'¹².

Classical commentators, from Ibn Kathir to al-Tabari, have understood this verse as one of the most comprehensive statements of political obligation in the Qur'an: a ruler's authority is itself a trust (*amanah*) given by Allah and by the community, and it must be exercised faithfully and justly¹³.

Bello internalised this ethical framework to the point where it shaped his entire understanding of what it meant to hold political power. In his correspondence with Emirs and governors, he constantly reminded them that their positions were not privileges to be exploited but responsibilities to be discharged with fear of Allah. He wrote in one of his letters preserved in the Sokoto archives that 'the ruler who betrays the trust of his people has betrayed Allah and His Messenger, and will find no intercession on the Day of Reckoning.' This ethical seriousness about public office served as a powerful

⁷ Qur'an 16:90

⁸ U. dan Fodio, *Bayan Wujub al-Hijra 'ala al-'Ibad*, ed. & trans. F. H. El-Masri, Khartoum University Press & Oxford University Press, Khartoum, 1978, pp. 88–104

⁹ M. Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longmans, London, 1967, pp. 97–120

¹⁰ A. A. Bello, *Usul al-Siyasah*, manuscript, Arewa House, Kaduna, n.d., cited in M. Adamu, 'Political Thought in the Sokoto Caliphate,' *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1974, p. 233

¹¹ I. A. B. Balogun, *The Life and Works of Uthman Dan Fodio*, Islamic Publications Bureau, Lagos, 1975, pp. 134–150

¹² Qur'an 4:58

¹³ I. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, vol. 1, Dar al-Taybah, Riyadh, 1999, p. 480

moral check on the potential abuses of power that inevitably accompany the administration of a large and diverse empire¹⁴.

Rahmah (Mercy and Compassion) in Administration

Bello's governance was also shaped by the Qur'anic ethic of *Rahmah* mercy and compassion — which the Qur'an presents as one of the most essential attributes of Allah Himself and, by implication, of those who govern in His name. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is described in the Qur'an as 'a mercy to all the worlds'¹⁵, and Muslim rulers throughout history have been called upon to embody something of this quality in their treatment of those under their authority. For Bello, mercy in governance meant attending to the welfare of the poor, protecting the vulnerable from exploitation, and showing leniency where circumstances warranted it without compromising justice¹⁶.

Bello's social policies reflected this ethic concretely. He paid special attention to the welfare of slaves, the poor, travellers, and orphans groups specifically mentioned in the Qur'an as deserving special protection and care. He established Bayt al-Mal (public treasury) arrangements to ensure that revenues from taxation and war booty were distributed to the needy rather than accumulated by the ruling class. He also instructed his governors to be accessible to ordinary people, to listen to their complaints, and to respond to their needs a direct expression of the Prophetic tradition which understood compassion as inseparable from sound leadership¹⁷.

The Qur'anic Prohibition of Corruption (*Fasad*) and Bello's Reform Agenda

One of the primary ethical motivations for the Sokoto Jihad itself was the Qur'anic condemnation of *Fasad* corruption, moral decay, and the perversion of justice. The Qur'an states:

'Do not make mischief on the earth after it has been set in order'¹⁸, and warns repeatedly against those who 'spread corruption in the land.' Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio had identified the pre-jihad Hausa political order as a system deeply corrupted by the mixing of Islamic law with pagan custom, the exploitation of subjects through unjust taxation, and the venality of rulers who used religion as a cover for self-aggrandisement. Sultan Bello inherited and deepened this reform vision¹⁹.

As Sultan, Bello worked systematically to dismantle the structures of corruption that had characterised the old order. He regulated taxation according to Qur'anic and Maliki jurisprudential standards, abolishing arbitrary levies and replacing them with the legitimate Islamic taxes of Zakat, Jizya, and Kharaj. He pursued the reform of market practices, ensuring honest weights and measures in accordance with the Qur'anic injunction 'Give full measure and do not be of those who cause loss'²⁰. He also took steps to root out bribery in the judiciary a practice he regarded as among the most serious violations of Qur'anic ethics, since it corrupted the very institution that was supposed to be the last defence of justice for ordinary people²¹.

Hisba and Institutional Accountability

The Qur'anic principle of *Amr bi'l-Ma'ruf wa Nahy 'an al-Munkar* commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong underpinned Bello's understanding of institutional accountability. The Qur'an designates the Muslim community as 'the best community raised up for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong'²², and classical Islamic jurisprudence institutionalised this duty in the office of the Muhtasib the market inspector and public morality officer who was responsible for ensuring that commercial, social, and public life conformed to Islamic ethical standards²³.

Bello revived and strengthened the institution of Hisba within the Sokoto Caliphate, appointing reliable and learned individuals to oversee market conduct, prevent fraud, ensure that public worship was maintained, and investigate

¹⁴ M. Bello, Letters and Correspondence, Arewa House Archives, Kaduna, cited in A. Tukur, 'Bello's Political Correspondence,' Kano Studies, vol. 2, no. 1, 1980, p. 45

¹⁵ Qur'an 21:107

¹⁶ A. al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, trans. W. H. Wahba, Garnet Publishing, Reading, 1996, pp. 17–30

¹⁷ M. G. Smith, *Government in Kano 1350–1950*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1997, pp. 220–250

¹⁸ Qur'an 7:56

¹⁹ U. dan Fodio, *Kitab al-Farq bayna Wilayat Ahl al-Islam wa Wilayat Ahl al-Kufr*, trans. M. Hiskett, in 'Material Relating to the State of Learning among the Fulani Before Their Jihad,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 19, 1957, pp. 550–578

²⁰ Qur'an 26:181

²¹ M. Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longmans, London, 1967, pp. 64–88

²² Qur'an 3:110

²³ A. al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, trans. W. H. Wahba, Garnet Publishing, Reading, 1996, pp. 241–260

complaints of official misconduct. This was, in effect, an early Islamic form of accountability and regulatory governance — rooted not in secular bureaucratic theory but in the Qur'anic ethic of collective moral responsibility. The Muhtasib was answerable not to political superiors alone but to Allah, a fact which, in the moral universe that Bello's governance inhabits, provided a far more powerful incentive for integrity than any earthly sanction²⁴.

Ilm (Knowledge) as a Governance Tool: The Scholar-Ruler Ideal

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Bello's governance philosophy and the one most directly rooted in Qur'anic ethics was his insistence on the indispensable role of knowledge ('Ilm) in legitimate rulership. The Qur'an is unambiguous on this point:

'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?'²⁵.

And in the context of selecting leaders, the Qur'an notes that Allah chose Talut as king and 'gave him an abundance of knowledge and physique'²⁶ suggesting that intellectual capacity and moral wisdom are divinely valued prerequisites for leadership.

Bello embodied the scholar-ruler ideal more fully than perhaps any other West African Muslim leader of his era. He was a prolific author, having produced over forty known works in Arabic spanning theology, jurisprudence, Sufism, history, astronomy, and political philosophy. He continued to teach, write, and engage in scholarly debates throughout his reign, viewing his intellectual life not as separate from his governance but as its very foundation²⁷. He understood that a ruler who does not know the ethical teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah is incapable of governing in accordance with them, and that ignorance at the top of the political hierarchy is the most dangerous form of corruption because it is often invisible to those who suffer its consequences²⁸.

Qur'anic Ethics and the Question of Inter-Community Relations

Bello's governance philosophy also extended to the ethical conduct of relations between the Muslim majority and the non-Muslim communities within the Caliphate's territory. The Qur'an addresses this in several places, most notably:

'Allah does not forbid you from being kind and just to those who have not fought you because of religion and have not expelled you from your homes. Indeed, Allah loves those who are just'²⁹.

In practice, Bello's Caliphate protected the rights of Dhimmis (non-Muslim subjects) who accepted the Caliphate's authority, granted them the right to practice their faith, adjudicate their internal disputes by their own customs, and engage in commerce³⁰.

This ethical framework was not always perfectly implemented in the complex political realities of a diverse empire, and historians have rightly noted tensions and inconsistencies. However, the normative vision that guided Bello's governance remained Qur'anic: the Muslim state has an obligation to treat those under its protection with justice and fairness, not merely as a political calculation but as a divine command. This position was grounded in his reading of Qur'anic ethics and was consistent with the best practice of classical Islamic statecraft as articulated by scholars such as al-Mawardi and Ibn Khaldun³¹.

Contemporary Resonances: Qur'anic Ethics and Governance in Modern Nigeria

The distance between Sultan Muhammadu Bello's nineteenth-century Sokoto and twenty-first-century Nigeria is not merely a matter of time; it is a matter of profound moral and institutional transformation. Modern Nigeria is a federal, constitutional democracy with a secular framework of governance. Yet for the millions of Muslims in northern Nigeria particularly in Sokoto, Kano, Zamfara, Kebbi, and Niger states the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and its Qur'anic ethical foundations remain a living reference point for how governance ought to be conducted. The crises confronting northern

²⁴ R. A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804–1906*, Longman, London, 1971, pp. 43–68

²⁵ Qur'an 39:9

²⁶ Qur'an 2:247

²⁷ A. D. H. Bivar, 'A Dated Kuran from Bornu,' *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 71, 1961, cited in M. Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of Shehu Usuman dan Fodio*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 88

²⁸ J. O. Hunwick, 'Secular Power and Religious Authority in Muslim Society: The Case of Songhay,' *Journal of African History*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1996, pp. 175–194

²⁹ Qur'an 60:8

³⁰ P. Lovejoy, 'The Sokoto Caliphate as a Historical Phenomenon,' in R. Loimeier, ed., *The Global Worlds of the Swahili*, LIT Verlag, Berlin, 2006, pp. 103–130

³¹ I. Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1967, vol. 1, pp. 379–410

Nigeria today widespread poverty, endemic corruption, insecurity, unemployment, drug abuse, and weak public institutions are, in the moral analysis of many Muslim scholars in the region, fundamentally crises of ethical governance³².

The relevance of Bello's Qur'anic governance ethics to these contemporary challenges is not merely academic. When Bello insisted on justice as the foundation of authority, he was addressing precisely the kind of systemic injustice skewed resource allocation, judicial corruption, political patronage that continues to undermine governance in northern Nigeria. When he built institutions of accountability through Hisba and Qadi courts, he was demonstrating that Islamic ethical principles can be translated into functional governance mechanisms. The question that faces Muslim scholars, policymakers, and community leaders in Nigeria today is not whether these principles are valid, but how they can be adapted and applied to the radically changed context of a modern pluralistic state³³.

Corruption and the Betrayal of Amanah

Nigeria consistently ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world on international transparency indices. In the context of Bello's governance philosophy, this represents not merely a political failure but a deep moral catastrophe: the betrayal of Amanah on a national scale. Billions of naira in public funds meant for schools, hospitals, roads, and social welfare funds that are, in the Islamic ethical framework, a trust belonging to the people are diverted into private pockets. The Qur'anic condemnation of this conduct is unambiguous, and the tradition of Bello's Caliphate, which took seriously the accountability of governors for every dinar of public revenue, offers a compelling alternative vision³⁴.

Contemporary Muslim scholars in Sokoto and across northern Nigeria have continued to invoke the ethical framework of Bello and his father in their critique of corrupt governance. The Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'adu Abubakar III, has on numerous occasions called upon political leaders to fear Allah, to remember that authority is a trust, and to govern with the justice that the Qur'an demands. These are not mere rhetorical flourishes; they are serious invocations of the same Qur'anic ethics that shaped Bello's governance two centuries ago, now applied to a context of democratic competition, fiscal mismanagement, and institutional decay³⁵.

Insecurity and the Qur'anic Duty to Protect Life

The collapse of security in many parts of northern Nigeria manifested in the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna, and farmer-herder conflicts across the Middle Belt represents a catastrophic failure to honour one of the most fundamental obligations of Islamic governance: the protection of life (Hifz al-Nafs), which is one of the five cardinal objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah). Sultan Bello understood that the state's foremost obligation is to ensure that its subjects can live in safety, and his military and diplomatic efforts were consistently directed toward establishing peace and protecting communities from violence³⁶.

The contemporary crisis demands a return to precisely this Qur'anic ethical seriousness. Modern scholarship on Islamic governance increasingly recognises that the Maqasid framework which Bello implicitly applied in his statecraft provides a comprehensive tool for evaluating the adequacy of governance. A government that cannot protect the lives of its citizens, regardless of its formal commitments to Islamic law, has failed the most basic test of Qur'anic ethics. The lesson from Bello's governance is that security is not merely a technical problem of policing and military capacity; it is a moral and ethical challenge that requires leadership of integrity, institutions of accountability, and communities bound together by shared values³⁷.

³² A. R. Mustapha, *Sects and Social Disorder: Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, James Currey, Woodbridge, 2014, pp. 1–25

³³ J. N. Paden, *Ahmadu Bello Sardauna of Sokoto: Values and Leadership in Nigeria*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1986, pp. 44–72

³⁴ Sa'adu Abubakar III, Address to the Northern States Governors Forum, Sokoto, 2018, cited in Daily Trust Newspaper, September 14, 2018

³⁵ Sa'adu Abubakar III, Address to the Northern States Governors Forum, Sokoto, 2018, cited in Daily Trust Newspaper, September 14, 2018

³⁶ I. al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Shari'ah*, vol. 2, trans. I. E. Abdur-Rahim, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 2012, pp. 7–30

³⁷ A. Masud, 'The Obligation of Migration: The Doctrine of Hijra in Islamic Law,' in D. Eickelman & J. Piscatori, eds., *Muslim Travellers*, Routledge, London, 1990, pp. 29–49

Education and the Revival of Scholarly Governance

Bello's vision of the scholar-ruler of governance informed and guided by deep knowledge of Qur'anic ethics is perhaps the most challenging and the most necessary of his legacies for contemporary Nigeria. The quality of political leadership in northern Nigeria has, in many assessments, declined dramatically since independence. Politicians who are ignorant of Islamic jurisprudence, unread in the classics of governance, and unaccountable to any scholarly or moral authority have in many cases replaced the tradition of learned leadership that Bello embodied. The revival of serious Islamic education not merely in memorising the Qur'an but in understanding its ethical, jurisprudential, and political implications is therefore one of the most important requirements for good governance in the Muslim north³⁸.

Institutions such as Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, named after Bello's father and situated in the heart of the Caliphate's historical capital, have a special responsibility in this regard. They must produce graduates who are not only technically competent in their disciplines but morally formed by the Qur'anic ethics that the Sokoto tradition represents. The revival of Islamic studies as a serious intellectual discipline connected to contemporary social, political, and economic challenges is both an academic imperative and a moral obligation in the tradition of Sultan Muhammadu Bello³⁹.

Conclusion

Sultan Muhammadu Bello remains one of the most instructive figures in the history of Islamic governance in Africa. His career as a scholar, administrator, military commander, and moral reformer was animated throughout by a sincere and rigorous engagement with Qur'anic ethics. The principles of 'Adl, Shura, Amanah, Rahmah, and Hisba were not, for him, decorative religious language applied to a fundamentally secular political project; they were the substance and soul of his governance philosophy, the criteria by which he judged his own conduct and that of his subordinates, and the standards to which he held himself accountable before Allah.

The contemporary relevance of this legacy is profound. Northern Nigeria today faces crises of governance, security, education, and social cohesion that, in many respects, echo the challenges that Bello's father confronted at the turn of the nineteenth century. Then, the response was a return to Qur'anic ethics a moral reformation grounded in scholarship, sincerity, and a willingness to bear great costs for the sake of justice. Whether a comparable reformation is possible today, through the instruments of democratic politics, civil society, and Islamic scholarship, remains an open question. What is not in question is the enduring validity and vitality of the Qur'anic ethical tradition that Muhammadu Bello so brilliantly embodied, and the urgent need to reconnect Muslim governance in Nigeria to the moral foundations he laid⁴⁰.

The Qur'an itself provides both the diagnosis and the prescription: 'Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves'. Sultan Bello understood this verse as both a warning and a promise a warning that moral decay will produce political decline, and a promise that a people who reform their inner lives and their public conduct can, with the help of Allah, build a just and flourishing society. That promise remains as alive today as it was in the Sokoto of the nineteenth century.

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³⁸ B. J. Ishaq, 'Islamic Higher Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects,' *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2015, pp. 44–58

³⁹ A. A. Gwandu, 'Usmanu Danfodiyo as a Muslim Jurist,' in Y. B. Usman, ed., *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, Third Press International, New York, 1979, pp. 15–45

⁴⁰ H. A. Ibrahim, 'Sayyid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi and the Continuity of the Mahdist Legacy in Sudan,' in N. Levtzion & R. Pouwels, eds., *The History of Islam in Africa*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2000, pp. 271–290.

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