

# **A Valedictory Lecture**

## **INTELLECTUAL LEGACIES CULMINATING TO THE ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION AND BEYOND**

**BY**

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## **Introduction**

The Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace and Blessing of Allah be upon Him) between 610 A.D had brought to completion the religion of Islam as declared by the Prophet at his Last Sermon on Mount Arafat (Being on Arafat, recitation of the Holy Qur'an and supplications to the Creator, Allah, have been compulsory pilgrimage (Hajj rites). The Holy Qur'an and the sayings and deeds of the Prophet constitute the Islamic way of life (Sharia).

Since the era of the commencement of Islam there had been significant milestones that marked outstanding events in its path. The Companions of the Prophet had followed in his stead, particularly the four right-guided Caliphs, Abubakar al-Sadiq, Umar b. Khattab, Usman b. Affan, and Ali b. Abi Talib (may their souls rest in peace). Subsequently came an era of blending of the Islamic knowledge with knowledge acquired from antiquity, particularly of Greek and Byzantium origin. This led to an explosion of knowledge resulting in new frontiers of knowledge including the Sciences, Mathematics, Medicine, Agriculture, Geology, Astronomy, Philosophy, Art, and Music which brought about the Golden Era of the Islamic civilization for 1000 years. Beyond this era, there arose a scholar in West Africa who sought to revive the correct Islamic practices among predominantly Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, that is, Shaikh Usman Danfodio (1754 – 1817 A.D). Therefore one identifies three prominent

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intellectual legacies of the Muslims. The 1<sup>st</sup> Legacy is the *Qur'anic Legacy* that emanated from the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Legacy is that of the *scholars of Bait ul-Hikma* consequent upon establishment of the monumental library by Al-Mamun, the 7<sup>th</sup> Abbasid Caliph. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Legacy is that of the *scholars of the Jihad of Shaikh Usman Danfodio*.

### **The 1<sup>st</sup> Legacy: The Qur'anic Legacy**

The Holy Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) piecemeal over a period of twenty three years, 610 – 633 A.D. The reason for the piecemeal revelation was to allow for assimilation of the Message as it went hand-in-hand with practice. In many instances the Prophet led in practice and was imitated by his Companions (*Sahaba*). The first pillar of Islam is faith in One God. ALLAH, the Creator, Nourisher, Sustainer, the Beneficent, the Merciful and the Lord of this world and the hereafter. Belief in Muhammad as Prophet and Messenger of God and His Prophet constitute complete faith. The second pillar is prayer (*Salat*), the compulsory one being the five daily prayers, the Friday prayer, and the Eid prayers. The third pillar is compulsory poor-due (*Zakat*) which is an annual payment of alms to the poor and needy from wealth (money, gold, silver), farm produce, livestock, and stocks that accrued over one year. The fourth is *Fasting*, an annual practice in the entire month of Ramadan. The fifth pillar is Pilgrimage (*Hajj*), also an annual performance of rites at and around the Holy Ka'aba which is in Makka, Saudi Arabia.

Islam enjoined marriage, legalized trading but has forbidden usury. Thus constituting a family is the bedrock of society, therefore, there are many injunctions pertaining to interpersonal relations, such as, being good to one another, helping one another, avoiding cheating, gossip, fighting, and enmity. The essence of these teachings is to bring about harmony, peace, and tranquility in society through *al amr bil ma'aruf wa annahy anil munkar*, that is enjoining the good and forbidding indecency and evil. To this end, Islamic injunction employed three approaches, viz, preventive, punitive, and curative. To prevent indecency, the Holy Qur'an enjoins on Muslim women to dress properly by covering their bodies such that nothing is revealed except face and hands. Muslim men and women are told to lower their gaze when in a mixed gathering.

Islamic injunctions have sought to safeguard:

- i. Human life (by the punishment for murder)
- ii. Family (by the punishment for adultery and fornication)
- iii. Property (by the punishment for theft)
- iv. Human conscience (by the punishment for consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs)

Curative measures are reflected in prayer and supplication. Badri (1979) narrated how he cured a Muslim woman with obsessive compulsive disorder through attending *tarawih* prayers with her, i.e., the prayer performed in the mosque at night during the entire month of fasting (Ramadan).

Good governance was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the rightly guided caliphs who succeeded him. Economic stabilization measures were implemented through compulsory poor-due (Zakat) which was paid to the poor and the needy.

It was all these teachings which were practiced by the Muslims that transformed the people of Arabic from a barbaric, lawless people to a refined, united, brotherly Muslims of excellent and exemplary personality.

### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Legacy: Legacy of the Scholars of House of Wisdom (Ba'it-ul Hikmah)**

The second legacy marked the stage for harmonizing the Qur'anic knowledge with other knowledge such as Greek and Persian Literature. This was embarked upon by All-Mamun, the seventh Abbasid Caliph (813 – 833 A.D.), who established a monumental Library, Bait ul-Hikman. Scholars from far and near converged on this library studying, translating works into Arabic and compiling treatises. According to Encyclopedia Britannica ( ) Al-Mamun imported manuscripts of particularly imported works that did not exist in the Islamic countries from Byzantium. 'Developing an interest in the sciences as well, he established observatories at which Muslims scholars could verify the astronomic knowledge handed down from antiquity'.

Subsequent to this pioneering effort was the development of original works by a number of Muslim scholars. Yakub Al-Kindi studied Greek science and composed 265 treatises on music, astronomy, and medicine. He also

harmonized the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Thabit ibn Qurra (b. A.C. 826) and Al-Battani (877 – 918 A.D.) were considered the greatest Muslim geometrician and trigonometrician respectively. Al Razi (865 – 930 A.D.) was the greatest writer on medicine. He introduced the use of minoratives and is said to have invented the sextant and discovered the nerve of the larynx. His scientific output amounted to more than 200 works, half of which were medical. His treatise ‘On Smallpox and Measles’ presented the first clear account of these diseases. This work was translated into Latin, English, and various other languages (Gulick, 1980).

Another scholar of fame was Abu Ali Al-Husayn ibn Sina (A.C. 980 – 1037). He restated the legacy of Greek medical knowledge and integrated it with the Islamic contribution in his monumental ‘Canon of Medicine’ (Al-Qanun fial-Tib). This book was translated into Latin in the twelfth century and became a guide for medical study in European universities until 1650 A.D. According to Gulick (1980) Ibn Sina was not merely famous for his works on medicine, he had produced an important treatise on the formation of mountains, stones, and minerals, a scientific document bearing significantly on the development of knowledge of geology and notable particularly for its discussion on the influence of earthquakes, wind, water, temperature, sedimentation, desiccation and other causes of solidification.

Ibn Al-baytar, author of the greatest Arabic book on Botany of the age, ‘Collection of Simple Drugs’, collected plants and medicinal herbs on the

Mediterranean littoral from Spain to Syria, described more than 1,400 medical drugs and compared them with the records of over 150 authors preceding him. Similarly Al-Ghafiqi of Cordoba traveled widely in Spain and Africa to collect samples of plants and drugs and he described them with greater precision than had ever been done before.

Abu Rayhan Muhammad Al-Biruni (973 – 1048) determined almost exactly the specific weight of eighteen precious stones and metals, described many minerals from the natural, commercial, and medical point of view, and composed a pharmacology.

Jabir Al-Tusi (d. 815) was described as having influenced the course of European Alchemy and Chemistry. He described, possibly introduced, improved methods of evaporation, filtration, sublimation, melting, distillation, and crystallization (Gulick, 1980).

Outstanding among the scientists who developed the knowledge of optics was Abu Ali Al-Hasan ibn Haytham of Basra (965 – 1038). His main work ‘On Optics’, survived only in Latin translation. He discussed the propagation of light and colours, optical illusion, the law of reflection, spherical and parabolic mirrors, and refraction, and he related the details of experiments for testing the angles of incidence and reflection. He was perhaps the first physicist to note the magnifying power of lenses (Gulick, 1980).

Islam has a system of reward and punishment both in this life and the hereafter. The reward element for a believer and truly practicing Muslim is seen

in terms of inner peace and tranquility as well as sufficiency and contentment. In the hereafter reward for such a person is a blissful paradise (Al-Jannah fir-daus). Punishment for erring and sinful believers is that they do not find ease and tranquility in this life and, for those who do not repent to Almighty God, their punishment in the hereafter is a blazing fire (Jahannum).

It was such a rich culture of knowledge and education, in their spiritual context, which culminated into the Islamic civilization that permeated the entire world for nearly 1000 years. Unfortunately, it was halted by the combination of Mongol invasion and the Crusades; and subsequently colonization in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which resulted in the ascendancy of secularism, especially through secular education introduced in all parts of the Muslim world by the colonialists.

### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Legacy: Legacy of Shaikh Usman b. Fodio (1754 – 1817 A.D.)**

One hundred (100) years following the decline of Islamic civilization, precisely in 1754 AD Shaikh Usman b. Fodio was born in Marata which was in the Hausa state of Gobir. At the young age of 20, in 1774, Usman b. Fodio started preaching, teaching, and writing. He would preach to people in the neighbourhood of Degel where his family had moved and teach those who cared to study under him. He then started writing treatises, i.e., short books that dealt with one subject each, for his students. The subject matter of those intellectual activities was to expound correct knowledge and practice of Islam which he pursued for thirty years up to 1804, when war broke out between Shaikh Usman



and his Community (Jama'a) on one hand, and Yunfa, the then ruler of Gobir. How did it happen? In early 1804 the Shaikh and his Community made a *hijra* (immigration) to Gudu, on the outskirts of Gobir to escape attacks and atrocities of Sarki Yunfa. Eventually he attacked the Shaikh and his Community at Tabkin-kwotto and was defeated. In the next six years a series of battles ensued between Shaikh Usman Danfodio and other Hausa Kings ranging from those in the neighbourhood such as Kebbi, Zamfara, Gumi, Gwandu to those far away such as Katsina, Kano, and Daura. By 1810 virtually all the Hausa Kingdoms had been fought and defeated. Trusted companions of the Shaikh replaced the defeated Hausa Kings as new rulers.

It is significant to note that from the end of the war in 1810 up to 1815 when he moved to Sokoto, Sheikh Usman b. Fodio devoted his time to writing. From the start of his writings in 1774 to the end, Shaikh Usman b. Fodio is reported to have written 115 works comprise poems, treatises, and textbooks. (Balogun, 1981). The major works are as follows:

- i. Bayan wujub al-hijra ala al-ibad.
- ii. Ihya al-sunna wa-ikhmad al-bid'a.
- iii. Nasihat ahl al-zaman.
- iv. Nur al-albab.
- v. Ulum al-muamala.

Considering the Shaikh's intellectual output both in terms of preaching, teaching, and writing, one debunks the notion in some quarters that the

Shaikh's preoccupation was only holy war. Far from it! The Shaikh engaged in a concerted effort to restate the correct Islamic teachings to follow Muslims whose understanding and practice of Islam was mixed with bad customs and traditions.

### **Conclusion**

This Lecture has dwelt on three notable Legacies of the Muslims spanning One Thousand, Three Hundred and Eighty Eight (1,388) years which have impacted positively on the world. It produced the golden era of the Islamic Civilization that bequeathed learning and scholarship as well as scientific innovations and inventions which became a light that shone across the globe at a time when Europe was in darkness. In fact during Renaissance Ibn Sina's books became the first textbooks in European universities. This feat declined when Europeans imperialism envied it and launched the Crusades.

The aftermath of the Crusades was colonialism and secularism, the former has had both positive and negative effects on the Muslims while the latter has tended to undermine Islamic faith and practice. This is what contemporary scholars<sup>1</sup> have been grappling with; in other words, how does the Muslim Ummah educate its young ones to become prepare Muslims amidst a secular education system? A related question is, how does the Muslim Ummah implement Islamic political and economic systems in the wake of Western democracy and secular economic system which have permeated the world?

## **Lessons from the Legacies**

1. The invitations by the people of Medina to the Prophet (peace be upon him) to migrate to their city is of significance to us. How did it happen? The Prophet had met with a group of men from Medina who pledged themselves to Islam and the Prophet (The first Aqabah pledge). A year after, seventy-three men and two women of the Medinites set out to Makkah to meet the Prophet. The meeting took place at Aqabah, on the outskirts of Makka. They pledged to protect the Prophet as they protect their women and children should he migrate to Medina (the second Aqabah pledge) (Bashier, 1978).

On the contrary in present times people disregard this important code of behaviour thinking that gestures suffice. No they do not! The point is if you want something from someone you do so diplomatically, thus honouring the person.

2. Weekly sermon (Khudba) at mosques is good, especially now that it is translated into Hausa for the comprehension of the majority of worshippers. Similarly the yearly interpretation of the message of Holy Qur'an (Tafsir) during the month of Ramadan is commendable. Children receive Islamic education at conventional school and at evening Islamiyya schools and weekend Tahfiz schools. These efforts should be sustained.

3. It is knowledge explosion which results in civilization. Systematic spread of knowledge during the early era of Islam paved way for further explosion of knowledge during the reign of Caliph Al-Mamun. These culminated into the Golden Era of the Islamic civilization which shone light that permeated the world for over 1000 years up to 1650 A.D. Its decline was as a result of the Mongol invasion and the Crusades, series of wars launched on the Islamic world by European Christians as they envied the great strides of the Muslims.
4. There has been a decline in concerted efforts of the Islamic movement which was very active in the past. The movement used to participate in organized national events such as the recently conducted nation-wide hearings on the review of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The movement needs to be reinvigorated.
5. Minority anti-Islamic groups in Western Europe have caused sectarian tensions in renowned Islamic historical centres such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The killing of Muammar Gaddafi, former Libyan leader by former U.S. Government has led to a split in the nation and war between warring parties. That ultimately triggered similar upheavals in Mali with consequential collateral damage in neighbouring Western African states such as Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. The Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C.) has been weakened by conspiracies that made ineffective in confronting threats to Muslim nations. There is, therefore, the need to receive O.I.C. so that it can play a unifying role expected.

## **End Notes**

A list of several contemporary scholars includes those alive is as follows: Abdul A'la Mawdudi, Shaikh Hassan Al-Banna, Syed Qutb, Muhammad Qutb, Dr. Ali Shari'ati, Professor Zaki Badawi, Dr. Ahmad Ghorab, Professor Isma'il Raji Faru'qi, Ahmad Deedat, Waziri Junaid Buhari, Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gummi, Shaikh Ahmad Lemu, A'isha B. Lemu, Dr. Zakaria Bashier, Shaikh Nasiru Kabara, Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi, Sheikh Qaribullah Nasiru Kabara, Professor Muhammad Sani Zaharadeen, Professor Isma'il Balogun, Professor Ibraheem Sulaiman, Dr. Umar Farouk Malumfashi, Sheikh Kabiru Haruna Gombe, Professor Aliyu Gwandu and Dr. Isa Ali Pantami.

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