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Sherif Yusuf,
Ibrahim Suberu

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Nigerian Politics and Politics in Nigeria: A Contemplation of Islamic Political Thought in Nigeria

Sherif Yusuf*

Ibrahim Suberu**

Abstract

Democracy in Nigeria is characterised by corruption, irregularities and injustice. The level of political hostility in the country has resulted in loss of lives and properties and as a result, there have been hindrances to peace and national development to prevail in Nigeria. Hence, the ugly political developments have generated a lot of concerns and questions such as what are the causes of the political unrest in Nigeria? Is democracy really paying off as a political system in Nigeria? What has been the result of democracy in Nigeria? Can there be a better political system in Nigeria? If so, can Islamic political system fulfil the longing of Nigerians? Answers to these questions shall form the body of this research. The research discovers the absence of fairness in the electoral process and bad governance in Nigeria. This research reveals the flaws in effectiveness of democracy as a system of government in Nigeria. It proposes adopting an alternative model of governance. Lastly, this research contemplates the Islamic political model for a better Nigeria.

Keywords: Islam, Politics, Political Thought, Nigerian, Government, Governance.

* PhD. Student, the Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria sherifluv89@gmail.com.

** Lecturer Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. ibrahim.suberu@unport.edu.ng.

Introduction

In Nigeria, many people consider politics as a dirty game claiming that Nigerian politics is characterized with injustice and irregularities. Akintola observes that, in Nigeria, “the absence of good governance and paucity of visionary leadership has brought the economy to its knees; corruption has become Nigeria today?”¹ The problem is multifaceted and it reveals the weakness of democracy as a manmade political system different from Islamic political system. Islam neither contents itself with teaching abstract values and ideals nor does it encourage dogmatism. The religion provides guidance for man in all aspects of his earthly life to live his life successfully and to gain the eternal salvation in the Hereafter.² The pragmatic aspect of the Islamic theory as established in the glorious Qur'an is exemplified in the life of the Prophet of Islam. Prophet Muhammad, being the interpreter per excellent explained the Qur'ān unambiguously through different means. These means include self-demonstration and explanation etc. The *Sahabas* (companions) who had paid undivided attention to the message delivered to them, also took a very motivated action and replicated his teachings in not only their socio-religious but also in their political endeavors. Prophet Muhammad's lifestyle: economic, social, political, educational and spiritual, forms the basis of the administrative success of the companions and their successors. This present work provides a viable and feasible solution to Nigeria's socio-Political institution. The Islamic political thought is believed to have a divine origin. It is bound to transcend others. Hence, there is no doubt that Nigerian politics can better off, if it strictly adopts Islamic political system of governance in place of democracy.

Literature Review

The centrality of this work is to weigh the current Nigerian political system with Islam political system with the attempt to proffer solution for the myriad of political turmoil bedeviling Nigeria nation. Noibi (2012), in his work “*Islamic Formula for the Eradication of Corruption in Society*” explicates the focus of Islam on instilling and

¹ Okurounmu, “Most Politician Guilty of False Assets Declaration,” *The Punch* (2015), www.punchng.com assessed on 11 June 2020.

² Noibi Dāwud Shittu, “Islamic Formula for the Eradication of Corruption in Society,” in *Religious Understanding and Co-operation in Nigeria*, ed. Ismail Balogun (Department of Religions University of Ilorin: Shebotimoh Publications, 2012), 133.

ensuring consciousness and moral standard as the viable tool to eradicate corruption and attain the eternal felicity. He noted that Islam provides guidance for man in all aspects of his earthly life so that he can live successfully not only in socio-religious but also political affairs.³

Also, using the Islamic eschatological record of good governance assess Nigeria situation, Akintola (2009)⁴ enumerates the major problems facing Nigeria as a country. His work explains the absence of good governance and paucity of visionary leadership that brought Nigerian economy to its knees. The article however provides Islamic leadership style as a catholicon for the identified problem. Oloso K.K. is another researcher that provides us with the definition and role of politics and religion. The author describes politics as the science and art of government that deals with the form, organization and administration of state or organization and with the regulations of its relations with other states.⁵ Other related texts like “Islamic History”⁶ and Principle of Governance and Issues of National Integration (An Islamic Perspective)⁷. These works consider historical records of the Prophet and his successors to ensure a feasible solution to the problem studied,

The work of Oloyede and Adebayo is on Good Governance is a lesson for democratic dispensation in Nigeria. The inaugural address of Ali bn Abi Talib in a letter sent to his people after his assumption of staff of office.⁸ Badmus Olanrewaju Yusuf hammers on utilizing the Qur’ān in Stabilizing Society. He posited that capability of the Qur’ānic message to stabilize the society has been proven beyond doubt. The author

³ Ibid., 133.

⁴ Ishaq Akintola, “Good Governance in Islamic Eschatology: Ahmad Sannias a Case Study,” in *Correlates of Islam*, ed. Badmus Olanrewaju Yusuf (The Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, 2009), 122.

⁵ Oloso Kamil Koyejo, “Religious Value and Political Mandate”, in *Correlates of Islam*. ed. Badmus Olanrewaju Yusuf, Is-haq Akintola and Salisu Taiwo Moshood (Nigeria: The Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, 2009), 2.

⁶ Rahim Ahmed, *Islamic History* (Lagos: Islamic Publication Bureau, 1981), 45-51.

⁷ Usman, A. M, “Principles of Governance and Issue of National Integration: An Islamic Perspective,” *Anyigba Journal of Arabic & Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004): 85.

⁸ Ishaq Oloyede and Adebayo Olanrewaju, and Rafiu Ibrahim “Good Governance in the Works of Shaykh Adam Al-Ilory: A Lesson for Democratic Dispensation in Nigeria,” in *Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory In the Tableau of Immortality*, ed. Abubakre Razaq Deremi (Nigeria: University of Ilorin Library and Publication Committee, 2012), 2:118.

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concludes that the provision of the Qur'ān for establishing the healthy society is based on natural justice, logic and facts that are difficult for anyone to fault.⁹

Above all, the available works dwell so much on the Islamic provisions for good governance, particularly as demonstrated by the early Islamic generations and their predecessor. The works also made available the Islamic political system cum Western political system with little effort of contemplating Islamic Political system for a better Nigeria.

Research Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is a critical analysis based on inductive and deductive approaches. Survey method involving qualitative research methodology is explored in this work. Secondary data is utilized to study issues that have developed over a period of time. Journals, Magazines, Newspapers, published and unpublished library materials are consulted to gather a large size of information. The specific aim of this study is to examine the Nigerian politics and contemplate Islamic political model for Nigeria.

Definition and Role of Politics

Politics is defined as the science and art of government; the science dealing with the form, organization and administration of state or organization, and with the regulations of its relations with other state.¹⁰ The above suggests that politics is the art of government; it is about state and all what concerns it. This includes, policy making, formulation of rules and regulations as well as enforcing them for the good of the society. It is ideas and activities relating to gain and using power in a given society, institutions etc. It is the activities of people who are concern with gaining personal advantage within a group, organisation etc.¹¹ Politics is also described as the way government is managed and controlled. This is done primarily by those who are involved directly in government, such people are, law makers, executives and judiciaries.¹²

⁹ Badmus Olanrewaju Yusuf, *Utilising the Quran, Stabilising the Society* (The 156th Inaugural Lecture, University of Ilorin, 22nd January), 2015.

¹⁰ Koyejo, "Religious Value and Political Mandate," 2.

¹¹ Procter, Paul. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Harlow [England]: Longman, 1978.

¹² Amy Troolin, "Politics: Definition and Source of Governmental Conflict," www.study.com, accessed on 16 August, 2019.

Another definition suggests that, politics is wider in scope than government because the formal cut-across all spheres of human life - governmental, economic, educational, cultural, work, art etc. while the later is an aspect of the formal.¹³ Hannah Arendt submits that politics is the interaction of free and equal citizens in society.¹⁴ Be that as it may, it is clear from the above definitions of politics that everyone is a politician in one way or the other. This signifies that, Ernest Benn's definition of politics that is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exist or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy, does not sound plausible. And the common statement of the majority of people that 'I'm not a politician' or 'I hate politics' appears as a misused statement. Aristotle in his own scholarly statement supports this assertion by stating that man is by nature a political animal.¹⁵

The duties expected of politics to discharge have been spelt out in the various meanings given to it. George Orwell noted that in their age “there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics’” all issues are political issues.¹⁶ Frankly speaking, politics is never a game of black snow and white shadows, but a medley of rainbow cake and tree cereal one may not like eating it, but it pleases the eye with its cornucopia of flashy colours. Politics is essential for the overall good interest of human societies. It is the manner in which a society chooses its leaders and makes decisions about national policy, allowing every citizen to be actively involved. Some meaningless debates and conflicts which characterise politics have attracted people's attention, so it is pilloried. However, it must be noted that the conflict in politics sometime serves as a cornerstone of a functioning democracy.

Nigerian politics is corrupt just because it is characterized with irregularities and bad leadership and as such it is not being practiced as good politics as expected. But the question which deserves undivided attention is that, what corrupt Nigerian politics? Can Nigeria as a place or entity which corrupt its politics or the inhabitants of the place

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nicholas Lemann is Pulitzer-Moore Professor of Journalism at Columbia, and a staff writer for The New Yorker, https://archives.cjr.org/essay/the_limits_of_language.php, accessed date, 10 July 2020.

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(Nigeria) are the agents of corruption? This would take us to a pictorial analysis of Nigeria Politics and Politics in Nigeria.

Nigerian Politics and Politics in Nigeria

There is no country in the world that does not have a certain way it governs the activities of its subjects. Nigeria as a democratic country has its unique ways of politics. Nigerian politics takes place within a framework of federal system - presidential and representative. The executive power is exercised by the president while the legislative power is exercised by the two chambers of the legislatures - the House of Senate and the House of Representative. The two chambers are called the National Assembly which serves as a check on the executive arm of government. Supreme Court of Nigeria is the highest judiciary arm. Hence, the theory of separation of power is in use in Nigeria constitutionally.

However, the level of inordinacy in Nigerian politics is examinable through its people's submissions. In his own statement Olosoto posited that, conduct of election is riddled with massive rigging, myriad of tension, chaos and breakdown of law and order with neither accepting to be a magnanimous winner nor a patient loser. The results of the election are often greeted with a spate of protestations, challenges and litigation.¹⁷ The cause of the persistence of the injustice in Nigerian politics has been linked with the excessive love of wealth. Speaking on the general corruption which engulfs the Nigerian society, Noibi noted certificate racketeering, examination malpractices and rigging of elections as part of the society menace in Nigeria.¹⁸ Specifically, factor that is responsible for poor politics in Nigeria is godfatherism. Hence, the level of corruption in Nigerian politics is unimaginable, despite the existence of the several anti-corrupt agencies in the country. The judiciary has been compromised for selfish gains and there is little or no regards for the rule of law. Some 'powerful politicians' find it very appropriate to disregard the provisions of the constitution and act in accordance with their own volition. They, at several occasions, manipulate the judicial processes.¹⁹

More importantly, Nigerian politics is bedeviled with a lot of social vices such as assassination kidnapping of perceived opponents, political brigandage, political

¹⁷ Koyejo, "Religious Value and Political Mandate," 5.

¹⁸ Noibi Dāwud Shittu, "Islamic Formula for the Eradication of Corruption in Society," 131.

¹⁹ Okurounmu, "Most Politician Guilty of False Assets Declaration".

gangsterism, etc. Nigeria is regarded as one of the richest countries in the world blessed with abundant natural resources yet the absence of good governance and just leadership; it is rated among the corrupt nation in the world. It is based on this challenge that this article recommends alternative political system for the country.

Politics in Islam

It is neither auxesis nor litotes to amplify here that political system is not alien to the religion of Islam as the religion theoretically and practically enjoined a divine politics; politics that is free from violence and injustice. Allah, in the Qur'ān, referred to the Muslim community as a single community, after having introduced Himself to mankind, commanded that every creature should worship Him without any alteration. The concept of community in Islam as visible in the Quranic verses is thus suffices to hold that Islam has a political system and politics is an integral part of it. This is because leadership itself is as old as community. Thus, the concept of community cannot become a reality without a comprehensive analysis of the leadership concept. Besides, history records the spiritual vis-à-vis the political role of the prophet in the desert Arabia communities.

In the Qur'an, Allah, the Exalted declared that, "Verily this community of yours is a single community"²⁰. The leadership in Islamic community must subject itself to the laws and commands of Allah and His apostle. The followers of leaders on the other hand must subject themselves to the authority of the leaders who are just, fair and God fearing. Allah, the exalted says: "And obey Allah and obey His apostle and those in authority (leaders) among you". In the Hadith, it is said that, "Every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is responsible for his flock"²¹. Hence, Islam and politics as some people believe should not be seen as the enemy of each other because the two are not strange bed-fellows. They are two sides of the same coin.²² In Islam, a leader to his subjects is like a heart to the body, if the former is sound and healthy, the later would be positively affected and vice-versa. So anybody whom Allah makes the ruler of the people but fails to take good care of them will not smell the sweet aroma of Al-Jannah.²³

²⁰ Al-Qur'an 21:92

²¹ Sahih-Muslim, Bk 20, Hadith 4496, USC-MSA web (English) reference. <https://sunnah.com/muslim/33/24>

²² Musa. Osuolale Adeniyi, "Towards Political Stability in Nigeria: Guide from Islam," Anyigba Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies 2, no. 1 (2005): 85.

²³ Akintola, "Good Governance in Islamic Eschatology: Ahmad Sannias: A Case Study," 124.

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In Islam, there are certain things to consider before one is choosing as a leader. The criteria for the selection or election of a leader in Islam includes possession of functional knowledge which will enable the person to subordinate his desires and those of his family to the sacred duties of leadership. Piety is another quality which is very essential for a leader to enable him to see his duties from his cosmic status as vicegerent of Allah. Another quality of a good leader has also been stated by Shayk Uthman Dan Fodio when he said, the love of learning, the desire to listen to it and holding the carriers of knowledge in great respect.²⁴ The implication of Fodio's point is that, the leader will be able to know and apply what he read concerning about what Allah wants the leaders to do while governing their subjects who are Allah's servant like him.

From all indications, it is clear that the Prophet of Islam was a great revolutionary, a universal Prophet, Revival of a universal religion and practical spiritual democracy, founder of a nation and social order, an advocate of respectable position for slaves and women, a comforter who brought miraculous change in religio-social life of Arabs as well as an ideal leader. Prophets unique achievement, character and ideal made him the greatest man of the world. This assertion has back up from poet Lamartine when he says "As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask: "Is there any men greater than he?"²⁵ In his own statement, Bernard Shaw exclaimed that: If the entire world was united under one leader, then Muhammad would have been the best fitted man to lead the people of various creeds, dogmas and ideas. Indeed the Prophet's politics is a unique on standard.²⁶

We cannot find any other political system as a politics in a particular sphere, but Islamic political system touches every aspect of life whether it is material or spiritual. He, the Prophet, introduced absolute equity in the society based on fairness and justices. Hence, the Rich and poor, husband and wife, master and slave enjoy equal rights in Islam. A typical example of the justices, fairness and equality that exist in Islamic politics is visualised in Prophet's judgment in the case of Taimah ibnUbairaq who was a nominal Muslim, and known with all sorts of wicked deeds. He was suspected of having stolen a set of armour, and when the trail was hot, he planted the stolen property into the house of

²⁴ Usman, "Principles of Governance and Issue of National Integration: An Islamic Perspective," 85.

²⁵ Ahmed, *Islamic History*, 45-47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

a Jew, where it was found. The Jew denied the charge and accused Taimah, but some Muslims supported Taimah as against the innocent Jew on religious basis. When the case was brought to the Prophet, with Allah's guidance, he investigated it thoroughly and awarded each of them their due right as the innocence of the Jew was proven.²⁷ The fundamental citizen's rights and enlightened toleration which the Prophet gave the Christians and other non-Muslims at the time when bitter religious discrimination and persecution cannot be over emphasized.²⁸ Hence, Prophet Muhammad is the embodiment of all virtues; trustworthiness, sincerity, kindness, affection, generosity as well as great charm of mind and heart. After the demise of Prophet Muhammad, the *Khulafa'r-Rashidūn* (the four guided successors) took over the mantle of leadership of the Muslim community.

The era of these four (i.e. Abubakar, Umar, Uthman and Ali) great leaders is the most remarkable epoch in history of administration in the whole world. In this period, the ideals and teachings of the Prophet continued as a living force, and the *Khalifas* followed the tradition of the great teacher in their ideas and policy. This period nourished the democratic ideas of Islam and worked out a republican government to which the Muslims look with pride and inspiration. For example, the fourth Caliph, Ali in a letter sent to his people as his own inaugural address, says, Listen! Verily, for every people being led is a leader they follow and from the light of his knowledge they derive illumination. Behold! Your leader Ali is contented with two rags in his life and with two morsels of food. Behold! You may not be able to emulate in this way, but assist with contentment, courage, decency and appropriateness.²⁹ This explains the type of politics the companions practiced as they discharged the rights of their subjects to them without any consideration whatsoever but what Allah and His Prophet have commanded them to do.

Contemplating Islamic Political Thought in Nigerian Politics

In his inaugural lecture, Yusuf, noted that, The Qur'ān has come to establish a viable community and to organise a stable society, it came with a system of justice which cannot be influenced by love or hatred, a system of justice which will use the same scale for all. It also came with a system that promotes anything that will bring good to the

²⁷ Abdurahman Doi, *Shari'ah: the Islamic Law* (Malaysia: A.S. Noordeen, 1990), 4.

²⁸ Ahmed, *Islamic History*, 51.

²⁹ Akintola, "Good Governance in Islamic Eschatology: Ahmad Sannias: A Case Study," 118.

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people, encourage them to be virtuous and discourage them from evil practices. It must be noted that the provision of the Qur'ān for establishing the society is based on natural justice, logic and facts that are difficult for anyone to fault.³⁰

This is evident in the Qur'anic passage which throws a challenge to man on the duplication of the Qur'ān. Despite the higher level of knowledge which Allah endowed man with, the inimitability of the Qur'ān remains unchanged. It is this Qur'anic provision that was instrumental to the political success of the Prophet and his companions and as such they are regarded as best rulers ever exist. No doubt, that Allah, the Exalted, sent Prophet Muhammad with the Qur'ān in order to lead man aright to gain Allah's pleasure in hereafter. The fact that, the prophet was the overall head of the Muslim community during his reign is enough point to prove that he was not sent to be a spiritual leader alone rather he performed the two duties (political and spiritual leader). Here, it is clear that if the contemporary leaders could adopt the method of leadership used by the past ones as contained in the Qur'ān, they will also excel as the first people did. Hence, the Quranic law that a leader should not cheat his subject whatsoever. The Qur'ān mentions the rights of the leaders over the led and vice-versa. It says: And obey Allah and obey His apostle and those in authority (leaders) among you.³¹ Qur'an further enjoins the leaders to be upright in every action they take. It says:

O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah's sake, even if it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; whether he is rich or poor Allah has a better right over them both in compassion: therefore, do not follow (your) low desires, lest you deviate: and if you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allah is aware of what you do.³²

It is an Islamic doctrine that man is by nature is good; he is reduced to the lowest of the low only when he allows his passion to control him and he fails to take advantage of the opportunity offered him for his spiritual and moral advancement. Allah says, He is indeed successful who purifies it (his soul), and he indeed fail who corrupts it.³³ Shari'ah teaches against fraud and corruption in leadership and public responsibility. Such

³⁰ Yusuf, *Utilising the Quran*, 4-5.

³¹ AL-Qur'an 4: 59

³² AL-Qur'an 4: 135

³³ AL-Qur'an 91: 9-10

teachings include the injections on morality and sorts of moral conducts. Fear of Allah with virtuous character has been regarded as the epitome of morality.³⁴

In the Qur'an, Allah referred to the pious people as the most honoured. Hence, the affluent, political office holders, leaders of this material world etcetera are honoured too but nothing in the sight of Almighty Allah if they remain bad doers. This is contrary to the position of human beings who give regards to the rich not minding his evil deeds at the expense of the good servants of Allah, the Exalted. However, it is important to note that Islamic principles and teachings are universal in application. The message of both the Qur'ān and Hadith is universally to all *personam, rem and loci* (i.e all the creations or jurisdictions) unless the contrary is expressly stated.³⁵ To hit the nail on the head, our stand remains that, though the leaders are the main focus of this paper, all human beings are involved as individual has a vital role to play in each of their environment.

Bedside, the Prophet of Islam has made this clear when he said: “all of you are shepherds and shall be called upon to account on his flock. A leader is a shepherd upon his subjects, and shall be called upon to account on his flock; a man is a shepherd upon his family members and shall be called upon to account on his flock; a woman is shepherd in the household of her husband, and shall be called upon to account on her flock; a servant is a shepherd upon the wealth of his master, and shall be called on to account on his flock...”³⁶ In the Hadith above, an ordinary slave is also consider a shepherd, telling everyone that no matter the lowness of status of an individual he is a leader, and Allah will question his leadership. As if this is not enough, at the end of the Hadith, the Prophet uncovered the cloak of doubt.

From the above it is clear that, in order to mitigate- if not eradicate- ungodly politics in Nigeria, we must first get rid of fraud (whether vertical or horizontal) which nourishes corruption. It must be stated that, vertical fraud is that which is perpetrated by leader upon his subjects while horizontal fraud is done by masses or 'common men' among themselves. The examples of fraud perpetrated by masses among themselves include fraud in measuring a commodity or setting up a scale, sale of essential commodities, to

³⁴ Tamim Imam, Kamaldeen Muhammad and Abdulraheem Abolaji “The Effect of Corruption on Development in the Nigerian Society and the Islamic Remedy: Roles and Responsibilities of Muslim Youths,” *Al-Maslaha: Journal of Law and Religion* 6, no. 8 (2014-2016). 21-35

³⁵ Ibid., 23.

³⁶ Ibid.

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mention but few. Looting of public treasury, consummation of bribe, nepotism, favoritism among others forms the basis of leadership fraud. A lot of government workers and individual layman and tycoon have been found guilty of fraud in so many ways in the present day Nigeria. In summation, fear of Allah, trustworthiness, honesty, truthfulness, probity etc. as taught by Sharī'ah should be the bases of Nigerian politics if good politics is to be experienced.

Findings

1. From the foregoing, it has been established that man is naturally homo-religious and that politics is at play in personal life as well as communal life.
2. Politics is a tool to coordinate the society and bring joy and happiness to the citizens. It is very sympathetic that reverse is the case in Nigeria as the politicians have torn the nation asunder.
3. Democracy has failed as a political system in Nigeria hence Islamic Political system provides an unflinching and perfect model for humanity.
4. Islam discourages bad governance and call for justice in every aspect of socio-political, economic human endeavours.
5. It has been established that the statement credited to KARL_MARX³⁷, that, *Die Religionist das Opium des Volkes* which means" religion is the opium of the people" does not sound plausible because it is just idealistic but not realistic.
6. Finally it has been established in this work that natural instinct which gave birth to democracy cannot be overlooked. However, man needs to strongly hold unto the divine injunctions and law which is to direct and govern the affairs of man in order to prosper.

Recommendations

- For stable politics in Nigeria, it is recommended to adopt a fresh political system.
- Islamic political system will be a perfect model to salvage the nation from the current situation

³⁷ Karl Heinrich Marx was a German philosopher, economist, historian, sociologist, political theorist, journalist and socialist revolutionary. Born in Trier, Germany, Marx studied law and philosophy at university. He married Jenny von Westphalia in 1843.

- Political leadership should be entrusted to only persons of proven integrity, intellectual, moral and physical capacity to discharge the required responsibilities.

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