

## ***Historical Perspectives on Good Governance in Islam: The Case of Caliph Umar bn Abd Al-Aziz, Umar II 61-101 AH, (680 – 719 CE) and its Relevance to Contemporary Nigeria***

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### ***Abstract***

*The Islamic polity started on good and sound footing, during the period of the Prophet (SAW), likewise during the periods of the four rightly guided caliphs, they did their best, and they kept the tempo. However, with the ascendancy of the Umayyad caliphate, the polity not only drifted from the ideal, even semblance of good governance can hardly be discerned. Thereafter, with the ascendancy of Umar II, former ideal of good governance was restored, despite the hurdles that were encountered. Umar II even though from the Umayyad caliphate and beneficiary of the whole drama, however took far reaching decisions that restored not only the normality, but comparable to what obtained during the reigns of the four rightly guided caliphs. Nevertheless, good governance was achieved to the detriment of the dynasty and its cronies. But the wider interest of Islam and Muslims was what forced the leader to take such stance and boosted his morale to champion such a course, which ultimately led to his demise. This paper looked at Umar the second, his life history, ascension to power achievements, particularly his policies with respect to the Umayyad's ruling house, his policies toward different and contending Islamic sects and how his policies on good governance, succeeded in wielding different but contending Islamic sects together as well as his economic policies that succeeded in uprooting poverty; silenced the contending forces that nearly ruined the dynasty; but succeeded in entrenching an era of peace and stability. The paper lastly discussed the lessons for contemporary Nigeria that became saddled with problems, almost similar to what obtained in Umar's period and a way forward together with conclusion.*

### **Introduction**

After few decades with the emergence of Islam, the flower of freedom and justice almost became uprooted, this had to do with the power struggle and the ambition of man which at times proves detrimental to overall progress of the society. The tree of freedom and justice,

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unity and oneness of Islam towered everywhere, in the Islamic domain, from the prophet's period up to the reign of the four rightly guided caliphs.<sup>1</sup> However, forces of disunity began to emerge at the tail end of the period of the third caliph (Uthman bn Affan)<sup>2</sup> as well as the period of the fourth caliph Aliyu bn Abi Talib.<sup>3</sup> The forces that reared its ugly head then, were the forces that succeeded to a large degree in arresting the growth of Islam in all its ramifications.<sup>4</sup> These were also the forces that finally gave birth to the Umayyad dynasty. With their emergence, the flower of freedom, justice and equality of mankind almost became extinguished.<sup>5</sup>

Many leaders that succeeded the founder of the dynasty were not only incapable, tyrannical, greedy but perverse politicians that failed to capture the essence of power. Their leadership was detrimental to Islam and Muslim cohesion; it was also detrimental to the dynasty itself.<sup>6</sup> However, in the midst of chaos and topsy-turvy atmosphere, Umar II emerged, ascended the throne and arrested for thirty months the sudden decay of Islamic polity.<sup>7</sup>

His stay even though brief and short, however far reaching changes were achieved, that have far reaching consequences on the Islamic polity till today.<sup>8</sup> Umar first restored the confidence of the Muslims of various persuasions who were before in disarray and against one another. He indicated his willingness to toy the line of the prophet, a radical departure from the stance of his predecessors (the Umayyad). Every Muslim both the high and the lowly was equal before the caliph and was treated with justice and fair play. He ensured that the grievances against his kith and kin were heard and redressed.<sup>9</sup> In this way the Islamic polity became resuscitated, life began to blossom, each segment judiciously tried to contribute its quota towards successful implementation of his noble policies of running the dynasty with justice, fair play and effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the period of the prophet up to the tail end of the period of the third caliph, peace reign supreme in the Islamic community.

<sup>2</sup> The third Caliph ruled for twelve years. However, toward the last quarter of his reign protest from many quarters followed, that led to his assassination.

<sup>3</sup> The contending forces that led to Uthman's death, reared its head throughout the period of the fourth Caliph. Aliyu bn Abi Talib, during his period, the entire Ummah was engulfed with turmoil. For details of the above disturbing phenomenon, see *Hadrat Ali Murtad*, by Masud ul-hassan, as well as Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A short history*.

<sup>4</sup> Masud al-Hassan – *Hadrat Ali Murtad* (R.A.) pp. 143-182. See Philip K. Hitti- *The Arabs: A short history*, pp. 53-62.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Abu Zahra *Tarikh Madhahib al-islamiya*. pp. 11-80.

<sup>6</sup> Sibi ibn Jauzi *Tadhkirat al -khawas*. Pp 175-180.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Jauzi *Sifat al Safwat*. Pp. 306-312, Vol II.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammed Abd- Al-Latif Alam-al-islam fi al-asr-al-umawi. Pp. 169-182.

<sup>9</sup> Uwaymir Anjum "Umar bn Abd Aziz, Role Model Ruler for all times" In *Al-Jum'ah magazine*, Vol 23, Issue 06. P.21.

<sup>10</sup> Uwaymir Anjum p.22.

Certain measures taken by the caliph against his lieutenants were harsh, but necessary. Various degrees of the past rulers had succeeded in amassing immense wealth to the detriment of the wider Islamic society.<sup>11</sup> Their kith and kin were favoured in every respect. This naturally alienated many, brought anger, frustration and general discontent against the regime. Unfortunately the Yazids and Hajjaj of the dynasty in the most brutal ways kept the regime going before Umar's ascension<sup>12</sup> when relief and succour was temporarily experienced. However different Islamic groups looked at ways and means of ending the period of mis-rule.<sup>13</sup> Umar's salutary and quick intervention not only restored the confidence of the Muslims on the polity, it also reduced bickering between different contending forces against the regime. In other words, different Islamic sects mellowed to some extent on their attitudes toward the dynasty.

His conciliatory postures with the kharijites and Shiites is a hallmark of foresight in statesmanship.<sup>14</sup> These policies witnessed unprecedented growth not only on the polity, but in the economic, religious, as well as social realms.<sup>15</sup> An analysis of Umar II's achievements and the way he tackled the socio-economic problems of his society is worth undertaking, particularly the lessons involved. The problems that saddled Umar II are typical of our today's hobbessian state of nature, a polity in which all the marks of greatness are there, but always regressing to the brink of abyss. Umar's policies has a lot to offer to Nigerian society of today, a situation whereby the country is enmeshed in many tangles that are bent on destroying the country altogether. The absence of true and effective leadership from the bottom to the top is a sorry reminder that the road to greatness is yet to be attained.<sup>16</sup> The Sunni, Shiites division as well as kharijites found in the Umayyad period could be likened to the intense rivalry between the *Tariqa* group, the *salafis* and the *Shiites*. Each sees itself as the upholder of the ultimate truth, but the most recalcitrant of the three are the *salafis*.<sup>17</sup> The pretensions that whatever is

<sup>11</sup> Uwaymir Anjum p. 21-25.

<sup>12</sup> See Sawaiq al-muhriq, by Haitami. The author had chronicled what transpired during the Umayyad early period especially the process of protecting dynasty from collapsing.

<sup>13</sup> Shiites, Kharijites and other prominent companions and Tabiun - were against the Umayyad's rule of exclusion.

<sup>14</sup> Uwaymir Anjum "Umar bn Abd Aziz- Role Model Ruler for all times" In *Al-Jum'ah magazine*, vol. 23, Issue 06. Pp. 31-31.

<sup>15</sup> Umar II policies earned him praise till today. The orientalist, even though against some of his economic policies, however paid glowing tributes to his administration generally

<sup>16</sup> Many works were written on the problems of the country and the way forward. See Allison A. Ayida-*Rise and fall of Nigeria: The history and the philosophy of an experiment in Africa Nation Building*. See, Umar Abdullahi on the search for a viable political structure: *Reflection on the political thought of Sheikh Abdullahi Danfodiyo*. See also, *The impoverished generation, the poor man's clean rags: the philosophy of an African Democracy* by Deman Nwoko e.t.c.

<sup>17</sup> For a better understanding of the ways and manner in which the thinking of many *Salafis* went contrary to the aspirations of the country and their contrariness with the stance of other Muslim group. See, ShaykhMuragi *Ijtihad fil-islam*, the whole work is on present day problem of the Muslim especially their failure to link the present with the past in such a way that the present and the past Dr. Bello Bala DIGGI: Historical Perspectives on Good Governance in Islam: Historical Perspectives on Good Governance in Islam: The Case of Caliph Umar bn Abd Al-Aziz, Umar II 61-101 AH, (680 – 719 CE) and its Relevance to Contemporary Nigeria pp. 134 - 148

not found in the Qur'an and Hadith is outside religion is an abnormality that no sound scholarship can agree to.<sup>18</sup>

Religious groups must be clear on what religion demands, waylaying of the ordinary and attempt to gain adherents must be revisited. The bizarre scenario has reached a situation whereby each group hold preaching session with the single aim of ridiculing the other. Hardly do you find common factor that unites them together, talkless of extending the hand of fellow feeling of belonging to one Abrahamic family to the Christians.<sup>19</sup> Muslims against Muslims or Muslims against Christians, however the loot from the state at times unites them together, after the sharing they return to trenches.

The relations between Muslims themselves and that of the Muslims and Christians are a sad story that is recounted with nostalgia. However hope is not lost with the present dispensation and its readiness to confront the forces of retardation, if Umar II model's is followed certainly good governance can be achieved and an era of effective cooperation among different religious groups is not far, likewise the road to progress and greatness is not far and can be realised.

### **Birth and Early Life**

Umar bn Abd-al-Aziz bn Marwan bn al-Hakam was from the Umayyad family on the paternal side while on the maternal side, he was from Umar I. His mother was Umm 'Asim layla bint 'Asim bn Umar bn al-khattab. He lived in Madina, Damascus and Egypt. His father was once a viceroy in Egypt. In his early life, he studiously associated with scholars, became a scholar and excelled in the sciences of hadith. He frequented scholarly circle even when he was a governor; he had great respect and veneration for the learned.<sup>20</sup> on hadith matter, his authority was acknowledged. The scholarly attributes were what helped him when he was a governor and later a caliph. From a worldly and extravagant prince in the mould of the Umayyad princes, Umar II became transformed to a mystic who led not only frugal life, but translated the frugality to the entire caliphate.<sup>21</sup>

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can determine the future. But pre occupation with the past, without reviewing what necessitates certain action pose an obstacle to the unity of the different Islamic groups, particularly in the country. See also, Abu Zahra *Tarikh Madhahib al-islamiyya*. As well as, Alawi's *Minhaj as-Salaf f'fahmi Nusus Bain Nadhr yat wa-al tatbiq*. The whole work is an attempt to enlighten the Salafis on the definition of Salafism and its numerous ways.

<sup>18</sup> Alawi al-Maliki See 'Qismu salis min fiqh kitab wasunnah. Pp. 149-180. In his work-*Minhaj as-salaf filimi Nusus...*

<sup>19</sup> Following many problems that bedevilled both Moslems and Christians, there emerged now dedicated Moslems and Christians who daily engage in dialogue with one another, and resolve to see things in different perspective as well as accommodate one another.

<sup>20</sup> Abul-Faraj Ibn Jauzi, *Siyarat-Umar bn Abd-al Aziz*. Pp 30-33.

<sup>21</sup> Abul-Faraj Ibid pp. 130.

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As the governor of Madinah he was said to have kept company of scholars and pious people. He was lenient towards the opponents of the Umayyad's dynasty, they were legion.<sup>22</sup> His early life styles, up to the period when he was a governor was that of luxury, pomp and extravagant. This is not surprising, almost all the Umayyad's princess were deeply steeped in luxury, with delicate and sophisticated taste; almost on the verge of extravagance; the enormous wealth at the command of the Umayyads and the repressive measures adopted by the states officials, in maintaining the state, helped towards such life styles, while the majority were in penury. The state officials enjoyed enormous power, they were totalitarian in fact, and the whole caliphate was exclusively runned by them. However, Umar II on assumption to the caliphate, completely changed, the dormant asceticism and frugality surfaced instantly. This in no small measure helped in the way and manner, the saintly personality ruled, during his brief, but fully engaged thirty months.

### **His Emergence as the Caliph**

Caliph Sulayman was Umar's cousin. He had high opinion of Umar. Yet he had no grown up son to succeed him. He was said to have been advised on his death bed by his adviser Raji bn Haywah the scholar, to appoint a righteous successor in the person of Umar bn Abd-al-Aziz. The caliphate had many contenders, but the right choice was neither interested nor enmoured in the whole affair. During this period, Umar II had jettisoned the extravagant life style associated with the Umayyad princes and state officials generally. It was the corrupt lifestyle displayed daily that angered many, and caused hatred of the dynasty.

Umar II statement after he was handled the mantle of the caliphate indicated how insignificant it was in his estimation, particularly with its totalitarian approach to power. His terse statement bear witness to his perception of the caliphate.

*O people, I have been burdened with this task without any opinion, or desire, or consultation with the Muslims (that is without the input of the Ummah's shura) I hereby set you free to choose for yourself.*<sup>23</sup>

Umar II near rejection of the caliphate was borne out of the desire to rework the whole system of governance, particularly the way and manner the Umayyads came to power and how they

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<sup>22</sup> Abul-Faraj Ibid pp. 153.

<sup>23</sup> Uwaymir- Anjum, pp. 25.

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wielded it without the peoples consent and approval. However, he accepted it with reluctance, but in his psyche there was the zeal and tenacity to make a difference. Before his ascension, the dynasty had little semblance of anything Islamic only in name. He initiated many policies and executed successfully most of them in his brief period which posterity cherished, admired and accepted them.

### **Achievements**

The emergence of the Umayyad dynasty and the policies it pursued, almost wrecked the Islamic polity, to a student of history's observations. The dissensions caused by the dynasty in the process of assuming power and the repressive policies that followed, almost brought an end to the nascent but promising Islamic regime.<sup>24</sup> However in the sea of misrule and brigandage there emerged alone voice, who within a short span of time arrested the cancer of decay and destruction of the Islamic polity occasioned by the emergence of the Umayyad caliphate. It is for this reasons he is dubbed Umar II, bearing the name of the stern and just Umar bn al Khatab, whose lineage on the maternal side Umar II belonged. This paper will not do justice to the caliph if it attempts to capture all his achievements, however attempt will be made to dissect his achievements on three key areas that had effected all aspects of his achievements. His policy towards members of the Umayyad ruling house; his approach towards the aggrieved particularly the Islamic sects and lastly his economic policies, that ensured peace and stability. It also calmed prayed nerves from many quarters. These far reaching changes were what also led to his poisoning by members of the Umayyad ruling dynasty. They were not happy with his policies of reversal, the policies that entrenched the Umayyads into power but alienated the Muslim majority, particularly the non Arabs, the non Muslims and the freed slaves.

### **Umar II, Policies Pertaining to the Umayyad Ruling Class**

Abd al-Aziz, Umar's father was once a governor, Umar himself was once a governor and his wife was the daughter of one of the caliph's in dynasty. To mention them as the beneficiaries of the dynasty is to say the least. Members of the dynasty had amassed wealth most of it however corruptly. The empire was administered as a family cartel. Wealth amassed was to the detriment of the unity and cohesion of the Muslim Ummah as a whole. The conduct of certain

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<sup>24</sup> The tail end of the third Caliph's reign, the whole period of the fourth Caliph reign up to the emergence of Muamiya, the first caliph, in the Umayyad dynasty, it is a story of squabbles, constant struggle for power and active divide and rule with the intent of having power. However, the casualty was the Muslims and the Islamic polity, which since then suffered irreversible misfortune and the dislocation of yesterday, till today hunts the ummah.

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caliphs of the dynasty was not only ruthless, but their misrule did not spare even the “nobles” of the Ummah.<sup>25</sup> This further alienated the regime and made it unpopular in the eyes of the teeming Muslim masses.

But it went on ruling through Machiavellian tactics. However Umar II interval gave respite to the Ummah, restored the glory of the regime and that of the Muslims, even though most of the bad and repressive policies that Umar II went against, continued with his demise. On ascending to the throne he indicated that the will of the people was supreme, even though he came through the Umayyad’s tactics or appointment, he prepared the Ummah (shura) to decide his fate, his continuation. It was a riot act to the dynasty. He considered himself as the caliph of the entire Ummah, not that of the Banu Umayyad, for three days people thronged his house to hear from him, but he avoided contact with them, after which he came out and delivered this important sermon and riot act not only to the ruling family but to all that were bent on misrule.

*O people! Return to your lands, for I may forget you when you are here with me, but I remember you in your lands. Know that I have employed some men over you as governors who are not the best of you, but they are better than others. Know that if anyone has been wronged by his ruler, he needs no permission to enter upon me. Others I shall not see. Know that I have prohibited this wealth upon me and my family, for if I were to keep it for myself from you, I would truly be misery. By God, I have no interest in this life except in order to revive the sunnah and walk on the path of truth.*<sup>26</sup>

Umar’s announcement of people’s freedom to report any injustice done to anybody by any state official opened the flood gate of complaints, by thousands of the aggrieved. Many both the high and the lowly, Muslims and non Muslims complaint in an open court against the injustices perpetrated by the Umayyad ruling class and its cohorts. History has recorded how diligently Umar II directly and indirectly attended to their complaints, grievances and assuaged their problems. In many instances, testimony of a confiscated property led to the reversal of such impious act. Heaven had testified to his resoluteness in redressing the mischief, injustice and imbalance perpetrated by the Umayyads.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> From the inception of Hassan to the Caliphate, to his withdrawal, as well as to Hussain refusal to pay *bay’a* to Yazid, and what followed, are chilling on what happened to the noble specie of the Muslims, what of the ordinary.

<sup>26</sup> Uwaymir pp. 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> Abul-Faraj Ibn Jauzi pp. 74-93.

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One can recall briefly what transpired particularly with the ascension of Yazid to the throne<sup>28</sup>; the incidence of karbala<sup>29</sup> and its consequences which later hunted the Yazid regime and led to its demise. The schism of the Kharijites<sup>30</sup> as well as the counterattack by the mainstream Sunni, from Shiite's attack. The above contending issues were enough to put an end to the regime, talkless of moving the society forward. Umar II, however with determination and foresight, initiated policies that disarmed both the Shiite's and the Kharijites, while the Sunni attacks on the Shiite's was not allowed to continue.

The Shiite's were known to be vehement against the Umayyad, this was not unexpected given the tragedy they suffered in the hands of the Umayyads particularly the second Caliph, in the Umayyad Caliphate in the person of Yazid. However, Umar the II foresight, sagacity and true leadership qualities enabled him to resolve the contending issues, he succeeded in recording achievement in intergroup relations that was unmatched five decades with his demise, let us foray in to some of the issues one by one even though briefly.

### **The Shiite Contention**

The history of the coming of the Umayyad to the throne need not detain us here. What is obvious however is that they succeeded to the throne, in such a way the the Islamic policy was nearly brought to an end. Umar forbade excessive praise of the rulers both the Umayyad and otherwise in the pulpit talkless of abusing any. It was the tradition of the Umayyad and Cronies to shower abuses on Ali at the pulpit. This drew the reaction of his supporters and the reappraisals cannot be imagined. Permit me to quote the observation of the scholar pertaining to Umar's approach on this serious and demanding issue.

*Umar II was an Umayyad Prince, yet he was willing to criticize and can condemn his family heroes who mistreated their enemies. it was his formative and foundational Sunni inclusion that guided his tongue as well as his policies not his Umayyad lineage nor Umayyad policies. Thus he refused to curse Ali and his family from the pulpit, as had been the custom since the time of Mu'awiyah (Hisham, the next caliph, followed in Umar II*

<sup>28</sup> Following the collapse of the agreement reached between Muawiyah and Hassan, as well as the ascension of Yazid to the throne and the revolt that followed, the Ummah's cohesion and unity was almost destroyed.

<sup>29</sup> Leading scholars and writers have written on the tragedy of karbala. It was one of the factors that facilitated the destruction of the ummah and its aftermath, accentuated their divisions; the narratives on both Sunni and Shiites account is chilling and mind boggling to say the least.

<sup>30</sup> Masud ul-Hassan Hadrat Ali opcit, pp. 264-270, see also Abu Zahra, Tarikh, pp. 158-178

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*footsteps in this regard). Umar distinguished between the later Umayyads (Marwanids) whom he criticized liberally and the early Umayyads (Sufyanids) of whom he criticized by name only Yazid bn Mu'awiyah under whose rule Al-Husayn, the grandson of the prophet (S.A.W) had been martyred. He said: 'If I were among the murderers of Al- Husayn, even if God had forgiven me, I would not have entered paradise (out of embarrassment before the prophet).<sup>31</sup>*

The testimonies of the above scholar on Umar II and his effort at restoring the dignity of the prophet household was enough to sooth and cushion the Shiites. He strenuously protected the household of the Prophet not out of fear of the Shiites, but because the house deserved all the honour and protection, more than the one accorded to the ruling house itself. The Shiites deserve respect and sympathy in the light of what transpired. He likewise went vehemently against the Umayyad family of making unsavoury remarks against Ali, which naturally drew the ire and resentment of the Ali's proponent (Shiites). This action of Umar II to a large extent calmed the Shiites, temporarily they were given a sense of belonging in a dynasty that hunted and persecuted their beloved and allies.<sup>32</sup>

### **Umar II and the Kharijites**

The Kharijites were defeated by the Umayyad on the battle front. Their confrontation started with Iman Ali. He tried all manner of persuasion to make them to see reasons and continued with the fight, but they refused, they denounced both Ali and Mu'awiyah<sup>33</sup>. Where Ali and Mu'awiyah failed to a large extent, Umar II succeeded.

Umar engaged them in polemics and they bent their anger to their satisfaction on issues that bordered on Yazid and the misdeeds of his ilk. Umar attimes gave them direct answer, at times evaded, because it involved going historical and the atrocities of the Yazid's of this world and the atmosphere and the mood of the time did not warrant it. Umar II leniency towards some of their demands or questions angered some of the *Marwanid's* and it was what led to his poisoning according to some account, because they sensed Umar's sympathy and leaning

<sup>31</sup> Uwaymir pp. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Uwaymir Ibid pp. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Msud ul-Hassan pp. 264-270

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towards a reversal of certain acts, that the *Kharijites* formally advocated, particularly the *Shura*.<sup>34</sup>

He was also sympathetic to the cause of the non Arabs, the Umayyads were known to have promoted total inclusiveness of the Arabs, while the non Arabs were treated as second class citizens with little or no space in the scheme of affair of the dynasty; Umar readily addressed the imbalance. Umar II policies in a nutshell towards the Shiite, *Kharijites*, as well as the non Arabs helped a lot in dousing the tension and mutual distrust during his reign and it gave them a sense of belonging as well. Peace and cohesion was not missed during his brief but glorious reign, even though officials of the Umayyad dynasty preferred repression of the opponents, this however continued with the demise of the Caliph. However, his approach to governance was the best in a multicultural, multi-religious society of the *Umayyad*.

### **Umar II and his economic policies**

Certain scholars were not comfortable with Umar II's economic policies, particularly the near emptiness of the treasury that was experienced throughout his reign. But that was the best policy considering the background of such measures. Let us briefly dig in to the history of the *Umayyad's* Financial affairs, prior to Umar II ascension. *Umayyad's* governors and other provincial rulers considered government treasury as theirs for the asking. It was plunder beyond calculation. They cornered most of the state resources. The greediness reached its crescendo, as a result of which converts were not needed; because conversion to Islam automatically exempted them from paying *jizya* (tax) which the Umayyad preferred, because it swelled the treasury, than their conversion. But Umar II preferred their conversion even if the treasury would remain empty throughout his reign. On this, the noble Caliph declared:

*By Allah! I wish that all the people had professed Islam until we- me and you included become farmers, eating what we carried with our own hands.*<sup>35</sup>

Umar II continued to answer the governors on the question of treasury and the implication of accepting Islam by non Muslims, in its stead he urged the governors and state officials to be frugal and independent and spared the treasury of their unjustified demands. Umar's frugality

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<sup>34</sup> Uwaymir pp. 28-29.

<sup>35</sup> Uwaymir p. 27

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and simplicity was a big relief to the treasury, unlike before. He considered himself as an employee of or representative of the Ummah, not its master or owner. His asceticism (zuhd) helped a lot in lightening the burden of the treasury. The unjust policies of the former Umayyad rulers particularly, economic policies were vehemently denounced by the caliph.

*Umar's concern of disassociating from the practice of earlier Umayyad governors is most intense in the case of governor of Iraq, Al-Hajjaj bn Yusuf whose oppression, heartless discipline, disproportionate punishment, along with great cunning and dreadful effectiveness, had brought a measure of peace and stability to the troubled lands of Iraq and the surrounding regions.<sup>36</sup>*

At every opportunity, Umar II denounced the tyrannical way and manner the Hajjaj of this world ruled. On this, he has this to say;

*I have written many letters to you for the sake of God's reward and blessings in order to distance you from the affairs of Hajjaj, awakening in you aversion of his oppressive methods for he was an affliction (bala) which befitted the sins of the people by virtue of their misdeeds. God, Glory to Him, adverse through him whatever he willed and cut-off his term and granted the people safety and well benign.<sup>37</sup>*

His economic policies promoted prosperity and contentment throughout the empire, during his thirty month reign. It also inspired many to do more, particularly the wealthy to ward the general good of the Ummah. It was said that during his reign, rich men used to come to the communal treasury with money urging it to be spent on the poor but had to return with the money, because there were no poor in need of Zakat. The Alms collected in Africa, the collectors could not find a needy. This led to buying slaves and freeing them.

He entrenched many policies that led to increased welfare of the ummah; as a result of which there was no needy. The unmarried were given money to marry, while the indebted were also bailed out through the Zakat payments. Notwithstanding the above measure, the treasury did not collapse, rather the general contentment of the subjects, was the overriding interest of the Caliph.

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<sup>36</sup> Uwaymir p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Uwaymir pp. 30-31.

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The success recorded by the caliph were many and within a short period. However, what helped and facilitated these achievements were his humility, caution against Haram (Wara), fear of God (Taqwa), Asceticism (Zuhd), as well as blank forbearance, and tolerance of differences and attitudes towards state opponents as well as different dissenters. The qualities helped in glueing together different societies, and were made to work together for peace and progress of the state. The above success was achieved through dialogue, persuasions, sermons, and preachings, contrary to what his predecessors and successors engaged in. He inculcated a sense of history in his people, he always emphasized the virtues of the prophet, his companions, and their followers, while the activities of the despots were discouraged and denounced.

He encouraged them to read the sirah of the Prophet; where lofty ideals and aspirations were known. This was done to the chagrin of the Umayyad who detested the memory of good governance, because their record was the antithesis of what the Caliph wanted his subjects to know and imbibe. He was conscious of the redeeming features of history. He inculcated its consciousness on the psyche of his people. He always emphasized on mutual agreement, mutual consultation, and other issues that binded different societies together. Umar II policies are germane to our contemporary situations, and if applied, myriads of our problems can easily be resolved.

### **Lessons for Contemporary Nigeria**

Under the leadership of Umar bn Abd al-Aziz, the multicultural and multi-religious societies were made to work harmoniously. Any tendency that stired primordial interest was stopped. Muslims of different sects were made to work together, likewise, their relations with members of other faith was cordial.

Contemporary Nigeria is similar in every respect. Muslims of various sects are to be found. There is *Tariqah* groups, particularly the *Qadriyyah* and *Tijjaniyya*, the two dominant groups. The *Salafiya* have different variants from *Izala*, to *Yusufiyya* and what have you, while the *Shiites* are also significantly represented in every state of the federation like the other sects. However, it is saddening that everyday they are polarised. A common platform for their existence seems to elude this nation. In certain quarters, one has no right to unite to air any view pertaining to a particular sect, rather they want to hear the dominant one. Absence of

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dialogue, mutual interaction, together with absence of a national leader like Umar II, that can use all the positive avenue of wielding the above sects together in the vain. But given Umar's experience, the road to dialogue, less offending speeches, and emphasis on what bind them together can do a lot in fostering understanding, peace and mutual agreement among them.

Muslims relations with the Christians are also less encouraging. Umar II knew the scriptures, the impact of the Abrahamic faith, so he emphasized what binded the Muslims and the Christians. This is the lesson for our contemporary situations, Muslims, Christians and the Jews belonged to one tree, the Abrahamic faith. It is easy and better for them to work together than to go their separate ways. A situation whereby they work together is marvellous because what binded them is more than what separated them. Like Umayyad dynasty during Umar II periods, Moslims of various sects can peacefully coexist and work harmoniously for the peace and progress of Nigeria to the delight of all.

The current situation whereby key officers of the nation are viewed and assessed on merit not on religious grounds is encouraging. What needs to be done is for the leadership to exercise restrains fair play, as well as give and take in dealing with any or when they happen to be together.

Umar's stern and frugal life is what Nigerians especially of today expected from their leaders, from the president to governors, ministers, as well as members of the National Assembly. The frugality of Buhari is akin to that of Umar II. What remains is relentless effort in ensuring that other officials treat the Nigerian treasury as sacred and any offender should be treated appropriately, similar to what Umar II did.

No sacred cow, no family affair but Nigerianness and the sacredness of her resources, as well as the resolve to use it in the interest of all irrespective of party or religious affiliations. If this is done, Nigeria, like Umayyad dynasty, during thirty month of Umar bn Abd al Aziz can attain greatness. The economy of the Umayyad was quite different from that of Nigeria, but his stern and frugal life helped a lot in meeting the state and societal expenses; particularly, on Zakat. In Nigeria, the resources if judiciously tapped and used can to a large degree meet the expectations of the citizens, coupled with Zakat by the Muslims, as well as many noble foundations by the Christians. These two alone can effectively solve many economic problems if properly used.

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Lastly, Umar consciously cultivated the sense of history on his subjects. Nigeria of today is in need of historical consciousness more than the former. They need to know how frugal and committed the founding fathers were, how each region with meagre resources performed wonders to the consternations of other nations, but how the curse of oil has made us to see one another as liability with each wanting its separate ways. But human factors alone hold promise, in each state and local government, you see youth corpsers bubbling with zeal and life ready to give their best in the locality they found themselves which mostly is far from their "home area". What needs to be done is to galvanize and effectively use these resources to the betterment of the country; unemployment should not be a problem in a country with diverse resources, and the peoples energy should be channelled towards that. Lastly, the tenacity, commitment and sacrifice of Adamu Adamu's, the Fashola's, the Kayode's together with that of Ngige's and Amaechi's can do the magic, and the experience of the Umayyad under the Umar II can be tapped to the benefit of Nigerians of all persuasions.

### **Conclusion**

A society saddled with problems that seem insurmountable can regain its footstep if the leadership is determined. Umayyad dynasty before Umar II was a total failure in every respect, but his resolve and sincere efforts almost restored the dynasty, comparable to what obtained during the far rightly guided Caliph.

His policies, or his achievements are on three key areas, and the most important bailed out the dynasty, and restored it glory and confidence of the Muslims to their nation. The programmes are in relation to his relatives that held key positions, he did not allow them to do as they liked with the economy. Past grievances were effectively looked in to, contending forces were forged and made to work together, economic policies that were in tandem with the aspiration of the majority was vigorously pursued. The leader left the dynasty in a state of contentment and satisfaction, this also till today Umar is remembered and accorded all the respect and prestige accorded to the highly venerated, rightly guided Caliphs. That will also be the place of Nigerian leaders in history if they tenaciously follow Umar's footstep.

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