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AN ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK OF ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS IN NIGERIA

R. I. Adebayo

Introduction

That religion has a crucial role to play in improving the moral standard of its adherents is not a novel idea or a new assertion. This perhaps informs the recommendations of the National Ethical Re-Orientation Committee that religious leaders among others should provide moral leadership not only by their words, but more especially by their actions and that Religious Education has an important and crucial role to play in any effective moral education programme.¹ In the same vein, the immediate past President of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Adams Oshiomhole, believed that religious groups could also assist in the struggle against anti-people policies and decisions of the government.²

In spite of the fact that most Nigerian leaders and public administrators profess one religion or the other, negative influences have been imparted by them, as they have been found wanting in the fulfilment of the socio-political aspirations of the country. Greed, selfishness and corruption of all forms characterized the behaviour of many of the leaders. This explains why Soyinka (quoted by Adedimeji) describes Nigeria leadership as representative of "mere glorification of the older carnivorous, feudalism, god-fatherism, mafias, cabal tribalism, traditional rulership of royal blood hegemony and patron of serfdom."³ These are so because only lip service is paid to religion, while many lack basic knowledge of the religion they profess. Thus, one is tempted to conclude that religion could not reform Nigerian citizens and neither could Nigerian leaders be influenced positively by religion. Meanwhile, a cursory look at the instrumentality of religion used as an effective weapon to effect positive changes in the life of people governed by them, one then feels comfortable to say that religion could be used for such as well in Nigeria. In essence, the path of the political reform could be sincerely trodden if religion is bailed out of mere outward show in the country. It is on this basis that this paper intends to present an Islamic perspective of administrative responsibility to serve as searchlight for the illumination of political reform in Nigeria.

Administrative Responsibility as Conceived by the Prophet

The fact that Islam is not only a religion, but a complete way of life and code of guidance from the cradle to the grave and even to the world beyond is ascertained when considering its teachings on public administration. A demonstration of this was made by the Prophet who was not only a religious leader, but a public

figure and administrator who was being consulted by his companions on all matters of importance no matter how minute. He was described as:

the lawgiver, the ruler, the commander, the chief justice and the head of the administrative machinery. He regulated social relations: he formulated laws in the light of the Qur'an and enforced them; he raised armies and commanded them; he acquired territories and administered them.⁴

While at Madinah, the Prophet was said to have appointed officers who assisted him in the administration of the new state. He was however careful by not leaving the affairs of the state in the hand of those who canvassed for such. He once rebuked 'Abdul Rahman ibn Samurah for requesting for a post saying:

Do not solicit an office of authority, O 'Abdul Rahman, for if it is given to you at your request, you will be left therein to your own resources. But if it is given to you without asking, you will be aided therein (by Allah).⁵

One may quickly add that the Prophet's objection to giving posts to those who requested for it might be that he sensed one weakness or non-performance of those who were agitating for one, or that they made such request for personal interest, hence the denial. While we uphold the fact that one's competency and qualification for a post should be considered by people who would invite him to serve the community with such special endowment, it would not be out of place to demand for a particular post where one feels one could serve the community most. The case of Prophet Yusuf comes to mind here. In actual sense, the potentiality of Yusuf was discovered by the monarch. His innocence, wisdom, truth and trustworthiness were admired by the king. Impressed with these qualities in him, he invited him to serve him as a special adviser or confidential Wazir. Yusuf thus passionately requested to be put in charge of the granaries and store-houses where he believed he could perform better than anybody else.⁶

The Prophet further encouraged the Islamic concepts of justice and consultation in the administration of the state. He enjoined public officers to be accessible and approachable. He once said:

If God puts anyone in the position of authority over the affairs of the Muslims, and he secludes himself (from them), not fulfilling their needs, wants, and poverty, God will keep Himself away from him, not fulfilling his needs, want and poverty.⁷

Administrative Responsibility as Practised by the Caliphs

The companions of the Prophet, especially the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, left no stone unturned in emulating the Prophet in his administrative style. Though some new developments were noticed, they held tenaciously to the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet as the bases of their administration. Abubakr's acceptance to rule the *Ummah* was conditionally based on the urgent need to unite the Muslims under one umbrella at a point when the *Ummah* was in a state of disintegration consequent upon the death of the Prophet. His acceptance speech demonstrated the principles of democratic and constitutional government as well as his leadership style. He emphasized equality of all in his adjudication of justice and did not see himself as a leader but a servant leader. He was quoted to have said:

You have elected me your *Khalifah* although I am not better than you. I need all your advice and all your help. If I do right, help me. If I do wrong, correct me. In my sight, the powerful and the weak are alike and to both I wish to render justice. You should obey me as long as I obey the Lord and His Prophet. If I disobey them, you should forsake me.⁸ The weakest among you is powerful in my eyes until I do not get him his due *in-sha Allah*. The most powerful among you is the weakest in my eyes until I do not make him pay due rights to others *in-sha Allah*.⁹

Age was no barrier to appointment into offices of responsibility during the tenure of Abubakr. He objected to the suggestion of some companions that he should change the command of Usamah who was scheduled to lead an expedition against the Romans of Syria on the excuse that he was too young to lead an expedition. The young man later returned to Madinah triumphantly.¹⁰ Consequent upon the occupation of Syria by the Muslims, Abubakr appointed Yazid ibn Sufyan as the governor of the conquered part of Syria. Apart from the fact that he did not favour his kinsmen with high offices, he warned the newly appointed governor against undue privileges and benefits to his kinsmen. He quoted the Prophet to have said:

If a Muslim officer appoints his kins on big posts which they do not deserve, he will be cursed for that by Allah and Allah will not accept any of his excuses or apology for that until he enters hell.¹¹

The period of Umar ibn al-Khattab was regarded as the golden age of Islamic history. Like his predecessor, Umar addressed the Muslims thus:

Brothers in Islam! I am not your ruler who wants to enslave you. I am a servant of God and His people. I have been entrusted with the heavy

responsibility of running the caliphate administration. It is my duty to make you comfortable in every way and it will be an evil day for me if I wish you to wait on me every now and then. I want to educate you not through my precepts but by my practice.¹²

Indeed, Umar practically demonstrated Islamic administrative ideals during his tenure. To the governors designate, he addressed them thus:

Listen, verily I am not sending you as rulers and potentates. On the contrary, I am sending you as the leaders of guidance so that men may follow you. Render unto Muslims their rights; beat them not, lest you humiliate them; praise them not, lest you make them undisciplined. Do not shut your doors against them, lest the strong amongst them devour the weak ones.¹³

The sense of accountability of Umar was superb. Any appointed official in his administration must, as a matter of policy, declare his assets both before and after his tenure of office. Umar was conscious of accountability to the extent that he would not use public fund for his own personal benefit. It was said that he kept two lamps, one bought and maintained with the public money and the other bought with his personal money. He would not light the public lamp for his personal work.¹⁴

Caliph Uthman was known for his simplicity, generosity, magnanimity and accessibility. He rendered selfless services to the Muslim empire and spent a lot to improve the standard of living of his subjects. Before he was entrusted with the office of the caliphate, he had taken steps to alleviate the suffering of the Muslims. Upon his assumption of duty, he judiciously used public funds for the construction of roads, bridges, mosques and guest houses in different parts of the empire.¹⁵ His simplicity was so much that he did not pay adequate attention to his personal security. Some disgruntled elements took advantage of this to assassinate him.

In spite of the fact that 'Ali's tenure was not peaceful due to the circumstances his assumption of office, his administration was remarkable. To ensure Islamic administrative morality, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib offered the following suggestions to his newly appointed governor of Egypt on the modality of appointment of public officers that would work with him:

... Then come officers of your state.... They must be appointed after a careful scrutiny of their capabilities and characters. These appointments must be made on probation without any kind of favouritism being shown or influence being accepted While selecting your officers, take care to select experienced and honourable persons.... They are not greedy and cannot be easily corrupted.... Keep them also well paid, so that they may not be tempted to lower their standards of morality and

may not misappropriate the cash of the state which they hold in their trust.¹⁶

The Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphates equally produced some caliphs who strictly adhered to the Islamic tenet of public administration. That notwithstanding, one does not claim that these caliphs were infallible neither does one exonerate them of human errors and weaknesses. The complex nature of the society, the vastness of the empire, as well as other human factors were responsible for the mistakes they made. In spite of this, public administrators have some lessons to learn from them. Meanwhile, it is pertinent to discuss the basis of administrative responsibility in Islam which has guided the caliphs to achieve the feats mentioned above.

The Basis of Administrative Responsibility in Islam

The basis of administrative responsibility in Islam revolves round the creation of human beings on earth for the purpose of harnessing the natural resources for the improvement of terrestrial world. As the *khalifah* of Allah on earth, they share some attributes of Allah, though not in total perfection, for them to carry out this assignment conscientiously. The Qur'an confirms that the vicegerency of man implies a great honour done to him.¹⁷ By virtue of being the vicegerent of Allah on earth, man owes an obligation to Him by abiding the instructions given him on the one hand, and also owes an obligation to deal justly with the members of the community within which he operates on the other. His relationship with Allah is epitomized in his belief in him. *Iman* in Allah, according to Abdel-Rahman, induces such charitable virtues as optimism, humility and moral courage. To him, faith in God is a prerequisite of good administration, as it leads to moral courage which is indispensable to administrative responsibility in at least three respects, namely, administrative decisions "to choose between firing an employee for malpractice and a sympathy-arousing appeal for mercy on the part of an employee who must support a family; to guard against bureaucratic practices inimical to administrative responsibility; and to guard against bureaucratic sycophancy which may lead to public policy actions or inactions with disastrous consequences."¹⁹ This view is also shared by Usman that a pious leader will be just, courageous and "not afraid of facing or enforcing the prescribed punishments, a man of sound judgment and diplomacy in handling affairs, capable of being strict when necessary and lenient where leniency is required."²⁰ In essence, the foundation of effective administration is faith in Allah. Through it, justice is maintained.²¹

Another basis of administrative responsibility in Islam is knowledge. Knowledge is an attribute of Allah. He is the Source of all knowledge. Realizing the fact that the task of vicegerency could not be accomplished without knowledge, Allah taught man (Adam) the nature of all things. With this Adam exalted other Allah's

creatures including the angels who were only celebrating and praising His Holy name.²² In the same vein, prior the divine call of Muhammad into prophethood, the first assignment given to him by Allah was to read in the name of the Lord, the Source of all creations. This implies that the task of administration could not be successfully accomplished without knowledge. Thus, the Prophet considered knowledge as a yardstick for appointment into positions of authority. Stressing the imperative of knowledge for administrative responsibility, Jimoh opines that it would be difficult for 'Ulu'l Amr and their subjects to resort to Allah and His Apostle in case of any disparity in their interaction, as instructed by the Quran, in the absence of knowledge about the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.²²

Furthermore, *amanah* is another unique basis of administrative responsibility in Islam. The Qur'an says:

We offered the Trust to Heaven and Earth and to the mountains too, yet they refused to carry it and shrank back from it. However, man accepted it; he has proved most tyrannical, most foolish.²³

This guiding principle assisted the Companions of the Prophet especially the Rightly-Guided caliphs to discharge their administrative duty conscientiously. They strongly believed that the task of administration was *amanah*, which they had undertaken from Allah through their appointment by their people. It is no gainsaying that should public officers see the restoration and safety of public property to their right owners as a matter of religious and administrative duty, mutual confidence would have been promoted in the society, while the welfare of the people would have been ensured. Suhufi cited many Qur'anic verses as well as Prophetic traditions to emphasise the importance of trust in public administration. In one of the traditions, he quoted the Prophet to have said:

One who commits breach of trust and does not restore the entrusted property to its owner will be treated at the time of his death as not being one of my followers and will become subjected to Divine wrath.²⁴

The principle of trust (*amanah*) entails putting round pegs in round holes in terms of appointment. This implies that a competent candidate who has the ability, experience and other necessary qualifications needs to be considered for any administrative post rather than giving preference to political affiliation or ethnic consideration. The Prophet considered misplacement of trust as a sign of the last Hour when he said:

Expect an enormous confusion and end of the world whenever trust is lost. "How shall it be lost, O Messenger of Allah?" He replied saying: "When matters are entrusted to those who are not qualified for them. then you should expect the Hour."²⁵

The principle of *Amanah* extends to that of accountability which teaches that every public officer shall be made to account for his stewardship; hence, the need for him to be transparent in his dealing with those who either voted him in or appointed him to represent them.

Implications for the Nigerian Public Administrators

Nigeria is blessed with both human and natural resources. The management of these resources constitutes a major obstacle to the development of the nation to an enviable position among other nations. Faithlessness and selfishness have not allowed her to forge ahead in her socio-economic and political programmes. A faithless leader or public office holder would find it difficult to sanitize the community by enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil. The havoc of faithless public administrator as it affects Nigeria is succinctly described by Jimoh who writes *inter alia*:

The same set of people who served in the previous regimes and are known for the atrocities they perpetrated are still given appointments. Many cases of the irregularity abound. Thus, the vicious cycle continues. This coupled with the fact that the system itself is ungodly, gives holders of public posts ample opportunities to run the country's affairs as they like. While they arrange for themselves fantastic salaries and allowances, the masses bear the brunt... They also award contracts to themselves and, worst still, dip their hands into the nation's purse and loot its treasury. All these, resulting from negligence in the appointment of public officers, have caused undue harm to the whole nation, such that the germs of corruption and mischief have now extended to the entire body politics of the nation.²⁶

The principle of vicegerency as enshrined in the Quran implies that sovereignty belongs to Allah alone. The Qur'an, without mincing words, declares that "unto Allah belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and Allah has the power to will anything."²⁷ Be that as it may, Allah has assigned man to act as His vicegerent on earth for the purpose of maintaining the natural endowments.²⁸ This implies that he takes instructions from Him and acts according to His command. Man's attempt to digress from this or to decide to follow his own whims and caprices leads him astray and he acts tyrannically, recklessly and oppressively constituting himself a demi-god in his community. At the initial stage, when Adam strictly adhered to the instruction of his Creator, he was living happily in the Garden. When he however decided to violate His instruction, he fell from grace to grass. In the same vein, public administrators should first see themselves accountable to Allah, the true

Sovereign. A reflection of this will then be felt in their dealings with those they administer. For instance, a leader who considers himself accountable to Allah will not deceive, manipulate or even fool the people whom he claims to serve, as he believes that even though the electorate cannot see him, Almighty Allah is keenly watching him. Unaware of this, public administrators do take the oath of office on assumption of office holding either the Qur'an or the Bible, forgetting that the hand of God is upon their hands during the course of the oath taking. Not knowing the gravity of oath-taking, the whole programme is turned to merry-making celebrated by friends and well-wishers. An oath taker who doesn't understand the content of the Holy Book he is holding will no doubt act contrary to it. An oath taker whose case could not be decided based on the content of the Book in case he violates any, will see the ceremony as mere administrative protocol and routine, and so pays only lip service to it. Little wonder then that some people are agitating for swearing with iron and cutlass, which they erroneously believe, could do instant judgment for their violators.

The point we are trying to drive home here is that religion has not been allowed to govern the activities of its adherents. Nigerians are only being known to be religious at personal level. Religion becomes a national concern when the going is getting tough for the nation, during religious festivals, and during oath taking. In spite of this, the nation is still being regarded as a secular nation. In essence, the secular solutions being proffered to a multi-religious nation like Nigeria would for long remain a mirage, as it is no better than application of a drug meant for pigs and dogs to heal human beings. Lamenting on the consequence of neglect of divine guidance on the part of Nigerian leaders, Raheem identified the qualities of arrogance, egocentricism, godlessness, unforgiving spirit and lack of trust in God as some of the shortcomings of Nigerian leaders.²⁹ A unique pointer to this was the incessant change in the leadership of the National Assemblies both lower and upper chambers between 1999 and 2003 on the allegations of fake certificates and misappropriation of public funds. The adamancy of the headship of the House of Representatives to step aside to allow for proper investigation of the ₦628 million renovation of two official quarters saga is equally an evidence to the fact that the leaders are selfish, as the resources that could take care of a local government area for a year is being looted within a day by some faithless leaders.

It needs to be mentioned that the type of education received by Nigerian leaders has been considered grossly inadequate. Two shortcomings in the western type of education could easily be identified here, namely, faithlessness of the education system and its production of scholars who are alien to its environment. Speaking in this vein, a renown professor was claimed to have observed that our system of education is incapable of producing scholars who are sufficiently informed about our society and are equipped with the ability to solve its problems. In the words of Sulaiman, he says:

Our education system produces scholars who are intellectually and morally aliens to our environment. While they understand or claim to understand everything about America, Soviet Union or Europe, they are generally ignorant or grossly misinformed about their own people and countries. Even when they study our environment, they do so from the perspectives and intellectual frame forced on us by colonialists. Thus, they see the wrong picture of us. Therefore, our intellectuals are as harmful to us as the colonialists have ever been..... Our universities have continued to deny our existence and to produce for these nations, politicians who are dishonest, businessmen who believe that exploitation is a legitimate means of enrichment and scholars who are mere agents of falsehood.³⁰

From the above, it could be seen that the type of education received by Nigerians lays emphasis on individualism and self-centeredness. Hardly is anything mentioned about community services and patriotism. The adverse effect of such faithless education received from Nigerian educational institutions is mentioned by Mutahheri when he observes:

Knowledge without faith is a sharp sword in the hand of a drunken brute. It is a lamp in the hand of a thief to help him pick up the best articles at midnight. That is why there is not the least difference in the nature and conduct of the faithless man of today who has knowledge and the faithless man of yesterday who had no knowledge. After all what is the difference between the Churchill, Johnsons, Nixons and Stalins of today and the Pharaohs, Genghis Khan and Attilas of yore.³¹

On this note, one needs to commend the efforts of the Federal Government in its crusade against corruption through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). As much as the efforts are desirable, we wish to reiterate the need for a review of the nation's constitution which gives immunity to some public office holders to allow for justice to take its normal course. Also, the Yar'adua's administration's commitment to the rule of law is commendable. However, Raheem raised some pertinent issues that could hamper the success of the rule of law. He observes:

....both the content of the so called law and the process of adjudication are faulty. In the first instance, those who make the laws have vested interests. As human beings, they may rate their interest above the public's interest. Various loopholes are created in the so-called constitution to give room for manipulation. In the same vein, those

charged with enforcing the law, or interpreting and applying it are, to a large extent, people of the same ilk..... Secondly, the police, the lawyers and the judges are drawn from a society that is deeply sunk in materialism; people who have little consideration for being accountable to God - the Creator.³²

Conclusion

In the foregoing, we have identified the basis of administrative responsibility as enshrined in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet and as practised by the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. The implication of this style of public administration for public administrators in Nigeria has also been discussed. This has revealed that the blessedness of the country with human and natural resources has been hampered by her Godlessness and selfishness and too much emphasis on secularism. The adoption of secularism and dichotomization of religious and secular education have been considered a serious threat to effective public administration in Nigeria, as the system of education produces selfish leaders who see themselves accountable only to the electorates who can be easily deceived to achieve their selfish end. Faithless education no doubt breeds faithless people and faithless administrators. Therefore, we wish to renew our call for total revamping of the nation's education system in order to allow for religious studies at all levels of education. A slot of Religious Studies in the curricula may not solve the problem. Rather, Religious education should be integrated into all teaching subjects in the school system. In the same vein, there is the need for religion to be given adequate consideration in the country's constitution.

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