

The leadership style in Nigeria and the way forward

If there is any thing that Nigerians of all walks of life are unanimous about, it is the fact that Nigeria has a stunted growth. Countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, and many others that were at the same developmental level with her in the 60s during the peak of the decolonization process, have since gone far ahead on the human, material and infrastructural development scales. In contrast, Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world, appears to be on a steady decline and decay.

Since many of the developed nations of the world, as well as those currently making giant strides among the 'third world' countries, are not as much endowed as Nigeria in terms of natural resources, a lot of analysts have concluded that the real problem must be in ourselves, especially those piloting the affairs of the country.

The Nigerian Muslims Network, NMN, an online network of Muslims at home and in the diaspora, agree with this position. Leadership style plays a key role in uplifting any human society or holding down the wheel of progress. It is the foundation that determines progress or the absence of it.

Abubakar Siddique, the first Caliph, leader of the Muslim community after the transition of Prophet Mohammed [Peace be upon him], in his inaugural speech, stated that: "I have been chosen to rule over you, though I am not the best amongst you. Help me if I am right; correct me if I am wrong. The weak among you will be strong until I have attained for him his due...and the strong among you will be weak until I have made him give what he owes. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His prophet; if I do not obey them, you owe me no obedience."

The speech undoubtedly was a social contract of sort. Here, the leadership, without being forced to do so, willfully set the limits of its own authority over the citizenry as well as outlined the duties of the governed to the government and the society.

Indeed this may well be a true statement on ‘servant leadership.’ Applying the instruments of authority for the benefit of the downtrodden and the weak, as well as taming the excesses of the powerful individuals and establishing institutions in order to bring about a just and balanced society.

What are the philosophical/ideological basis and the manifestations of the dominant leadership style in Nigeria? Do they conform to the leadership style and the worldview of the man who had the singular honour of being titled *as-Saadiq al Amin* - the Truthful and Trustworthy by no less a person than Mohammed, the messenger of Allah?

The answer is no. In Nigeria today, leadership across the board - from local to national level - is all about the wellbeing of the leaders and their cronies and the entrenchment of their rules by hook or crook means. Their misrule is also manifested in the spate of onslaughts against perceived opponents. While in the process, the interests and wellbeing of the society are undermined or even ignored. This ought not to be so, as the purpose of leadership is about the wellbeing of the society.

Service has thus taken the backstage and the motivation for aspiring to the public offices, both elective and appointive, appears to be the craze for ill-gotten wealth. Today, the most lucrative vocation is politics. It is also the easiest means of making money. If anyone doubts that, such a person simply needs to go through our daily newspapers as well as the weekly newsmagazines to read about the large-scale-looting of the treasury by those entrusted with the leadership of this country, past and present.

When Abubakar as-Siddique asked people to defy his authority if he disobeyed Allah and His messenger; he was in effect saying he would lose his moral authority if he breached his oath of office. It is necessary for our public officers, Muslims and non - Muslims alike, to take a cue from this and re-dedicate themselves to the nation and the people. The negative image of Nigeria in the comity of nations - as a haven of rogues and

corrupt people - will not abate until the leadership leads the way by living a life of transparency.

Nine years after the advent of civil rule, might is still right and the institutions of government in Nigeria are still at the beck and call of the rich and the powerful. The weak are left in the cold unprotected by government. This ought not to be so if we are really desirous of building a just society. It is noteworthy that President Umaru Yar'Adua has sent a signal that he would want to be seen as a 'servant leader,' and it is our wish that this will go beyond the realm of slogans. We also hope leaders at the lower levels would henceforth have it at the back of their minds that they are on their position of authority by the permission of Allah, out of the millions of other qualified Nigerians. They should, therefore, fulfill their aspect of the social contract by giving selfless service in accordance with their oaths of offices. Nigeria has stagnated for too long and it is high time we all, particularly the leadership, turned a new leaf so that the country can take its rightful position in the comity of progressive and forward looking nations of the world. When that time comes, Nigerians would be proud of their nationality unlike the current trend which breeds disillusionment.

Ibrahim Taiwo Abdulkadir
Chairman, NMN Publicity and Current
Affairs Committee (2008 – 2010)

Umar Bello
Secretary, NMN Publicity and Current
Affairs Committee (2008 – 2010)