

GENERAL SYNOD AND LEADERSHIP FACTOR IN THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA, ANGLICAN COMMUNION: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

In the Anglican Communion, the synod has emerged and consequently recognized as one of the most useful instruments for the governance of the Church and even evangelism in some instances. The synod, which is generally defined as a council of a church convened to discuss topics like administration, doctrine and application, is being increasingly employed to debate on issues that affect the modern Church. In many parts of the world, the synod is being influenced by socio-democratic forces, which are usually expressed by the laypeople. Nevertheless, the General Synod of Anglican Communion has in recent years play some crucial roles in shaping the church constitutions, especially regarding the area of theological opinions of various church leaders. In Nigeria, the General Synod of the Anglican Communion has featured multiple presentations regarding a national church constitution. Today, the General Synod of the church is usually conducted from the theological perspective, which justifies the use of current political and social ideas in redefining the church structures. In the quest to involve the entire church community, the parliamentary model is increasingly used in various synods. Although whether such a model is ideal and reliable has always been debatable, the fact remains that its use demonstrates the potential of synod's platform for governance. In other words, in addition to providing some useful information and advice, the synod could possibly be used as an instrument of leadership in the Anglican Communion. However, in the most cases, the Anglican Church of Nigerian has found it extremely difficult to implement and enforce the outcomes or decisions of its General Synod at the diocesan levels of the church. This challenge is largely attributable to the highly autonomous nature of each of the church's dioceses. Consequently, due to its high autonomy, each of the dioceses tends to be highly reluctant in putting into practice the decisions reached at the General Synod. Thus, this academic research will strive to explore the potential of the synod as an instrument of leadership in the Anglican Communion. It will also look at the various challenges of employing synod as a tool of leadership in Anglican Communion

Keywords: General Synod, Leadership, Church, Anglican Communion, Christianity

Introduction

Leadership is one of the fundamental elements of every organization, society or body. Its very existence is almost as old as mankind. Leadership can be described as an inherent feature of human society. This is because, in every human setting, there is always the need to have a leader, who will be responsible for maintaining orderliness. This requirement is even needed in the family, which is the smallest societal unit in existence. Any organization or society without a leader will ultimately be lawless and out of control. Thus, the significance of leadership in any religious or political society cannot be overstressed.

Leadership generally manifests in various forms and degrees. But in all leadership styles, the leaders usually exercise legitimate power with the subordinate's mandate to follow such figures. This is because; the position of the leader demands such. In his study, Eche (2018) observes that even though leaders of various societies and organizations usually possess formal authorities, they nevertheless tend to depend majorly on their informal authority. According to the author, this informal authority is what they typically use to influence their subordinates. Due to their naturally exalted position, leaders are usually trusted by the subordinates, who in most cases find their judgment to be fully acceptable (Uka, 2008). The subordinates also respect leaders for their expertise and integrity. These imply that subordinates follow their leaders not because of their position, but due to their specific roles in the organization. This is clearly manifested in the case of Mahatma Ghandi, who wielded great influence and authority over all Indians, despite the fact that he held no official position.

The Anglican Church of Nigeria, which is a well-structured Christian organization, has leaders that wield great authority within the Church. They are largely responsible for maintaining orderliness and coherency within the Church. As Christian leaders, it is very imperative to note that the Anglican Bishops and Priests did not thrust such responsibility upon themselves. This postulation is confirmed in Heb 5:4 which states that, "No one chooses for himself the honour of being a high priest. It is only by God's call that a man is made a high priest-just as Aaron was". Thus, Christian leaders are human instrument used by God, which means that the subordinates are indirectly accountable to God Almighty through their leaders. What this simply means is all subordinates are obliged to respect and obey their leaders. However, many times, the subordinates in the Church failed to fulfil this obligation absolutely.

For instance, according to the constitution of the African Church of Nigeria, the General Synod is the Church's constituted legislative body. But in most cases, the Anglican Church of Nigerian found it extremely difficult to implement and enforce the outcomes or decisions of its General Synod at the diocesan levels of the church. This challenge is largely attributable to the highly autonomous nature of each of the church's dioceses. Consequently, due to its high autonomy, each of the dioceses tends to be highly reluctant in putting into practice the decisions reached at the General Synod. This problem is the major motivation of current study. Thus, this academic study will strive to explore and reiterate the potential of the General Synod as an instrument of leadership within the Anglican Communion.

The Concept of Christian Authority and Leadership

Generally, the term authority is the main element that enables a leader to lead a group of individuals. In its simplest term, authority simply refers to the ability to issue orders to people. Eche (2018) further described it as an individual's ability to influence other people due to their position or knowledge. In others words, such position and knowledge naturally elicit respect from the people, who are members of the organization. At times, the power to influence other people could also be exercised by a group of people. These definitions indicated that authority is primarily responsible for determining leadership. Furthermore, Giddens (1997) argues that what really make an individual a leader is the level of authority such person controls or exercise. It is also important to note that authority is manly derived from the subordinates. Hence, authority will not exist when there is no acceptance of subordinates. This is the major difference between power and authority. Unlike the former, authority is never forceful but rather earned. The level of authority one commands is primarily determined by the position occupy by such an individual. The Bible also recognized authority as being the heart of leadership. For instance, in Mark 10: 42-45, our Lord Jesus Christ stated that;

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

This implies that the Biblical teaching on legitimate leadership implies that the leaders' authority should mainly manifest in their ability to direct other people. This is because, authority originates from Almighty God and delegated to human leaders for the good of all people.

There have also been various scholarly definitions of the term leadership from different perspectives and background. For instance, Yukr (1987) defined leadership as a process through an individual "exerts influence over other people and inspires, motivates and directs their activities to help achieve group or congregational goals" (p.27). Rue and Byars (1997) described leadership as "the ability to influence people to willingly follow one's decision" (p.28). On the other hand, Cole (1998) defined leadership as "a dynamic process in a group whereby one individual influences the other groups' task in a given situation" (p.9). One general feature of all these definitions is that they affirmed authority as an integral feature of leadership. These different definitions also indicated that leadership exist in different forms. In fact, its exact form is principally determined by the nature of the society. For instance, in the local church, the clergy are the leaders. But in the universities, that position is occupied by the lecturers. Consequently, teachers, judges, business executives, social workers, politicians, labour union officials all possess leadership responsibilities in their respective areas of disciplines.

From the discussion so far, one can easily deduce that leadership is the act that enables one that stand out within a particular organization. Such individuals show other people the way to follow. This implies that it is practically impossible to have a leader without followership. The two are always complementary to each other. Thus, an individual or group of individuals can only be call a leader if they have people that look up to them for guidance and direction. This explains why it is always essential and even mandatory for every leader to lead well. That is the only way to maintain order within the organization and for the benefit of all people. The leaders' disposition is also among the major determinants of the followers' response and attitude. This explains why it is important for very leader to demonstrate great leadership qualities and potentials.

According to the Biblical injunction, the Church consists of individuals from different wakes of life, who come together for the sole purpose of worshipping the true God. This definition is also affirmed by Okwueze (2003), who defined the Church, as "an organized body of followers of Jesus Christ, the people of God as such" (p.32). In their study, Uche and Obi (2011) described Church as

“the sanctified body of believers, purchased with the precious blood of the Lamb, and called out for the purpose of worshipping God” (p.102). These definitions portrayed the Church as a gathering of people. However, the unique feature of such gathering is that it is inspired and triggered by God Himself. But nevertheless, like every other assembly, gathering and community, leadership remains an integral element of the Church. The leader is responsible for maintain orderliness and coherency. In the Anglican Church of Nigeria, the leadership role is not just restricted to the Primate, but also to the General Synod, which according to the constitution is the legislative arm of the Church.

The Anglican Church of Nigeria

In Nigeria, the Anglican Church, which is also known as Church of Nigeria, is an inherent part of the Worldwide Anglican Communion. According to Wotogbe-Weneka (1997), the name *Anglican* originated from the Latin name ‘*Ecclesia Anglicana*’, which simply means the “Church of England”. This meaning indicates the English roots of the Anglican Church. The term *Anglican* refers to any individual that upholds the teachings of the Church of England and also recognizes the Church’s authority. The Anglican Church is *Catholic* in the sense that it exists throughout the world and has a Universal acceptability. This is also affirmed by Boettner (1962), who stated that: “The Anglican Church is Catholic because it is found throughout the world and teaches universally and completely all the doctrines which ought to come to man’s knowledge concerning things visible and invincible, heavenly and earthly” (p.2). The universality of the Church of England explains why the word Anglican Church refers to any Church that maintains communion with the Church of England (Fape: 2010). Thus, right from the very beginning the Church of Nigeria has always recognized itself as part of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Before 1979, the Anglican Church in Nigeria existed as part of the Province of West Africa. According to Nwankiti (1996), the Province of West Africa comprised of several hundreds of ethnic groups with distinct cultures and languages. Eche (2018) further pointed out that this province covered the areas of Anglophone West Africa and consisted of two major types of Churchmanships namely “the High Anglican and the Evangelical Anglican” (p.69). The High Anglicans originated from the Society for Propagating the Gospel (SPG), which was the dominant force in the evangelizations of the then Gold Coast (known today as Ghana), while the Evangelical Anglican traced their origin to the Church Mission Society (CMS), which was responsible for the evangelization of

Nigeria. Nwankiti (1996) identified this difference as one of the major factors that militate against the in-depth discussion of the numerous matters that affect the various Dioceses.

On 24th February 1979, the then sixteen Nigerian Dioceses separated from the Province of West Africa and formed an entirely new Province with Rt. Rev. Timothy O. Olufosoye as its first Archbishop. It was this historical moment that all the churches founded by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Nigeria as well as the Niger Missions founded by late Bishop Ajayi Crowther fused together to form the Anglican Church of Nigeria. Today, the Church of Nigeria which started with just sixteen dioceses has grown to sixty-four dioceses grouped into fourteen Ecclesiastical Provinces. The Church now has sixty-eight Bishops, including fourteen archbishops. This implies that it is among the largest Christian organization that exists within Nigeria.

Authority and leadership in the Anglican Church in Nigeria

As already pointed out, leadership and authority manifest in various forms. However, one basic feature common among all forms and types of leadership is that the leader is always a model who every other person looks up to. In most cases, they possess the ability and charisma that usually differentiate leadership from authority. Such ability is what enables the leader to direct activities through inspiration and motivation. Coincidentally, these are among the major roles, which Anglican clergy in overseeing the daily operations of the church.

According to Fape (2010), the Anglican Church is “Episcopally led and Synodically governed” (p.65). This statement is a clear expression of the nature of leadership within the Church. It simply means that the Diocesan Synod is largely responsible for providing the authority wield by the Bishop. In his article, Wotogbe-Weneka (2014) identified the diocese as the central unit of government in the Anglican Church. In other words, the Diocese is the highest governing body within the Church. Wotogbe-Weneka (2014) admitted that there are other higher bodies in the Church, but these are mere consultative bodies. Typical examples include the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and the General Synod. At the Diocesan level, the Bishop is in control of the region’s administration. He usually exercises his authority through the Diocesan Synod with the Diocesan board as the executive arm responsible for all decisions of the synods. This organizational structure gives the Diocesan Synod a great

autonomy and the ability to exercise authority and power at the expense of the General Synod.

Eche (2018) observes that the Anglican Church principally consists of three houses of existence namely: the house of Bishops, the house of Clergy and the house of Laity. The Bishop is responsible for governing the Church unit, which in this case is the Diocese. However, he is usually assisted by the Synod, which consists of the clergy and laity. As already pointed out, the Synod is the highest decision making body at the Diocesan level and is usually under the directive of the Bishop. It is important to note that the concept of leadership and authority in the Anglican Church should never be differentiated from the mission and ministry of the Church itself. The conceptual meaning of leadership and authority in this case is significantly different from that of the world. In Mathew 20: 25-26, Jesus Christ states that: ““You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” This biblical verse clearly shows that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself recognized the significance difference between scriptural concept of leadership and authority, and the world’s perception of that same concept.

Similarly, Omeire (2000) posits that the Church’s concept of leadership is in sharp contrast from that of the world. He attributed such difference to the fact that the church is meant to prioritize winning of souls for the Kingdom of God. According to him, “the pattern of Christian authority and leadership are simply Christ like leadership which involves to serve and to lead by example” (p.161). But this does not mean that a church leader would not be a person of authority. Like every other leader, the Bishops of the Anglican Church must be in a position to issue commands to their subordinates. Such privilege and position means that his words should be recognized as a policy statement that would be binding to subordinates (clergy) as well as the laity. Omeire (2000) observes that this position is the main reason why the Anglican Bishop is usually referred to as “Diocese personified” (p. 161). Nwachukwu (2018) observes that; “Power resides on the leader, and that power implies action, doing something; while authority connotes position or office that ignites the power” (p.11). This description adequately fit the position of the Anglican Bishop in the Church as the power of authority unarguably resides with the holder. According to Nwachukwu (2018), outside the office of leadership, the person would not be able to exercise that ability to “command, lead, order or direct them” (p.11).

The discussion so far revealed that in Anglican Church, the Bishop is the leader of the Diocese. All authority under his jurisdiction usually resides with him. Consequently, the Bishop is usually expected to be endowed with special attributes and good leadership qualities that commend him to those he leads. In other words, Christian leadership ought to be characterized by altruistic humble services as the Bishops and Priests are servant leaders that will inevitably give account of their stewardship to God Almighty. This also implies that despite the highly autonomous nature of the various Dioceses, each of the dioceses suppose to oblige with the decisions of the General Synod, which unarguably is the highest legislative body at the national level. Unfortunately, as already pointed out severally, the dioceses tend to be highly reluctant in putting into practice the decisions reached at the General Synod.

The Constitutional and Functional Role of the General Synod in Anglican Church of Nigeria

According to the Anglican constitution, the General Synod was the legislative body of the Church of Nigeria. The constitution also stipulated clearly that any directive, resolution or enactment established at the General Synod should be binding to all members, officers, dioceses and provinces of the Anglican Church of Nigeria. This constitutional stipulation established the General Synod as the highest decision making body in the Church of Nigeria.

Structurally, the General Synod consists of three components namely: The House of Bishops, the House of Clergy and The House of Laity. Normal sessions of the General Synod were usually held once in three years. However, the Primate, Metropolitan and Archbishops are primarily responsible for determining circumstances under which the synod is to be held. Furthermore, before convening the synod, the Primate, Metropolitan and Archbishops must obtain request from at least one-third of the House membership. The constitution also stipulated that the Primate of the Anglican Church of Nigeria should always preside over the General Synod as its president. However, if there is any vacancy in the office of the Primate or absence of the primate, the synod should be headed by the Dean of the Church of Nigeria or in his absence the Provincial Archbishop senior by presentation as Archbishop, and if none be present, the Bishop senior by consecration, shall preside. The potential role of the General Synod as the ultimate tool of leadership in the Church of Nigeria is also reflected in its constitutional functions, jurisdictions and powers. For instance, as the legislative arm of the Anglican Church, the General Synod is primarily

responsible for determining the various matters or issues that affect the Church all over the country. It is the only institution that is tasked with such huge responsibility.

Thus, the structural and organizational arrangement of the General Synod as well as its constitutional roles and functions in the Church clearly reflects the supremacy of the General Synod in decision making within the Anglican Communion. Apart from the fact that the constitution established the General Synod as the legislative arm of the Church of Nigeria, the sessions always involves the most senior members and leaders of the Church. This clearly indicates the potential of the General Synod, as the ultimate tool of leadership within the Anglican Communion. It also implies that the various autonomous dioceses that made up the Church are under obligation to always observe the directive, resolution or enactment reached at the General Synod. Consequently, any dioceses that failed to fulfill this important obligation is unarguably working against the ultimate objective of the Church of Nigeria, which is to evangelize the nation and win souls for salvation. An act of insubordination contradicts the vision statement of the church, which according to Okoh (n.d) states that: "The Church of Nigeria shall be bible based, spiritually dynamic, united, disciplined, self-supporting, committed to pragmatic evangelism, social welfare and a Church that epitomizes the genuine love of Christ" (p.5).

It is an undisputable fact that any form of insubordination is a clear manifestation of disunity. Thus, any autonomous diocese that refused to head to the directive, resolution or enactment of the General Synod is unarguably contributing to the disunity of the Church, which was already pointed out, clearly contradicts the vision statement of the Anglican Church.

The General Synod as an Instrument of Leadership in the Anglican Communion

According to Ugwu and Okwor (2013), the authentic concept of Christian leadership is based on the Biblical oriental shepherd figure, which recognizes leadership as service to the people. The shepherd figure is a well-known concept in the ancient Israeli tradition. According to this tradition, the shepherd is responsible for rearing and taking care of the sheep not for its meat, but for its sacrifice, prestige and wealth. Lamido (2007) observes that such tradition enables ancient Israelis to "develop intimate and committed relationship with their flock" (p. 22). The familiarity and meaningfulness of the concept of a caring

shepherd prompt scholars to extend it to human relationships. For instance, Still (1994) described shepherd as having the same meaning as a pastor that tend to his flock. In this case, the process of tending to the flock includes feeding, serving, guarding, ruling and leading the people of God. Similarly, Stott (1992) defined shepherd as someone that “exercises pastoral functions to the people on behalf of God (p.273).”

The above definitions clearly indicated that the term pastor and shepherd could be used interchangeably. This is because, the two terms refer to individuals that are entrusted with the responsibility of leading the people of God, who in the Old Testament are the Israelis. Consequently, the two terms could also be used in reference to religious and even political leaders appointed by God Almighty to carter for his flocks and instruct them to abide by the law. This postulation is also confirmed by Ugwu and Okwor (2013), who observed that:

The people needed constant instruction and care from human shepherds; the priests and the prophets led them in worship, taught and counselled them on religious and moral questions, while the judges and the kings protected them from enemy nations and administered justice in the land (p.51).

The above citation revealed that one of the primary objectives of the church leadership is to provide guidelines, instructions and counselling for members. In the New Testament, the term leadership is conceptualized from two Greek words namely: *presbuteros* and *episcopos*. These two concepts clearly manifested in Saint Paul’s letter. For instance, in 1 Tim 3:1, 12, Saint Paul talked about the office of the deacon and Bishops. In Heb. 13: 7, he wrote; “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” These biblical quotations indicate the need for church members to honour and obey the church leadership. They also illustrate the distinctive Episcopal and Presbyterial nature of the Church.

The discussion so far revealed that it is mandatory and obligatory for every church member to always obey the Church leadership. As already pointed out, the General Synod represents the highest decision making body in Church of Nigeria. As the most senior leadership structure within the church, the General Synod could potentially have assumed the responsibility of protecting, guiding and developing intimate relationship with all the dioceses that made up the Anglican church in Nigeria. The General Synod could achieve this important objective through the formulation of directives and resolutions that will help ensure a successful realization of the church’s vision statement. This is because;

the General Synod is at the best position to deliberate on serious issues like administration, doctrine, culture as well as events that are capable of influencing the church's external and internal structures. In other words, as stipulated by Cox (2008), it is capable of making decisions at the highest hierarchal level of Church. Thus, the decisions of the General Synod of the Anglican Communion have the same power of law as that of the legislative arm of any national government. As a reputable leadership tool, the decisions reached at the General Synod are usually relayed to the members through nationwide communiqué (Usikaro, 2009). This helps to ensure coherency and unity of the church, which incidentally is one of the positive consequences of good leadership. It also confirms the inability of each of the diocese to operate effectively without guiding documents from the national level.

The Holy Bible in John 17:23 admonish Christians to always live in unity. Accomplishing this important objective would not have been possible without a successful institutionalization of a reputable and reliable leadership structure. This is exactly where the General Synod of the Anglican Church comes in, as it is also crucial for the unity of the Church in Nigeria. The absence of the General Synod could have dire consequences for the Anglican Church. In their article, Alokun *et al.* (2011) observed that many contemporary churches in Nigeria are characterized by tussle for leadership, politics, oppression, divisions, and disloyalty. One notable factor responsible for such acts of disunity is leadership issue. In some churches, the absence of a formidable national leadership structure has led to the emergence of ministries within the same church, which is a clear indication of disunity. Alokun *et al.* (2011) pointed out such dissident ministries usually "run parallel administrations without obtaining the proper permission from the church authority and that the system involves church politics, because leaders who engage in such act must be highly connected to the church authority" (p.367). Unfortunately, such incidents have huge negative implication for the administration and centralization of the affected churches. But in the Anglican Church, the institutionalization of the General Synod has enabled the church to avoid such acts of disunity. This affirmed the potential of the General Synod as reputable and reliable leadership instrument for the Anglican Communion.

Conclusion

This academic study investigated the potential of the General Synod as an instrument of leadership within the Anglican Communion. The research was

motivated by the inability of the national leadership of the Anglican Church of Nigerian to implement and enforce the outcomes or decisions of its General Synod at the diocesan levels of the church. This challenge is largely attributable to the highly independent nature of each of the church's dioceses, which make them reluctant to put into practice the decisions reached at the General Synod. In course of this study, it was revealed that the Biblical teaching on legitimate leadership implies that the leaders' authority should mainly manifest in their ability to direct other people as authority originates from Almighty God and delegated to human leaders for the good of all people. The constitution of the Anglican Church of Nigeria defined the General Synod as the legislative body of the Church of Nigeria. The constitution also stipulated clearly that any directive, resolution or enactment established at the General Synod should be binding to all members, officers, dioceses and provinces of the Anglican Church of Nigeria. This constitutional stipulation established the General Synod as the highest decision making body in the Church of Nigeria. Thus, the role of the General Synod as the ultimate tool of leadership in the Church of Nigeria is clearly enshrined on its constitutional functions, jurisdictions and powers. Even the structural and organizational arrangement of the General Synod reflects its supremacy in decision making within the Anglican Communion as it normally consists of the most senior members and leaders of the Church. The implication of this is that the various autonomous dioceses that made up the Church are under obligation to always observe the directive, resolution or enactment reached at the General Synod. Consequently, any dioceses that failed to fulfil this important obligation is unarguably working against the ultimate objective of the Church of Nigeria, which is to evangelize the nation and win souls for salvation.

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