

**AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA,  
ANGLICAN COMMUNION IN A WORLD OF CHANGE**

Godwin Aturuchi Eche, Ph.D

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt

[godwineche1@gmail.com](mailto:godwineche1@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*There is no gain saying the fact that the world is dynamic and daily under-going changes in every sphere of human endeavor. The Anglican Church in Nigeria is not left out in this change especially since it became an autonomous Church of the Anglican Communion. This is evident in the changes it has experienced in its leadership structure. Leadership is a human phenomenon instituted by God for the purpose of maintaining order in society. The Anglican Church in Nigeria as a human – religious organization has leaders whose duty it is to maintain order by offering quality control of the organization according to set guidelines. This paper set out to x-ray what leadership is, using the analytical descriptive method of data collection and interpretation in arriving at the finding. The finding revealed that prior to the inauguration of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion in 1979 leadership in the Anglican Church in Nigeria was in the hands of foreigners, but that has changed since then with Nigerian Clergy and Lay being in charge of the day to day administration of the Church. It further revealed that as people who possess certain level of authority, the Bishops and Clergy as leaders are expected to conduct themselves in an orderly manner. No leader can lead without people hence it becomes imperative for the leader to possess rational skills to be able to carry the people along. In conclusion, this work recommends that both secular and religious leaders should recognize the place of the divine (God) in leadership, in the exercise of their authority over the people they lead for the good of all.*

**Key Words:** Authority, Leadership, Church, Anglican Church

**Introduction**

Authority and Leadership are major requirements in any given society or organization. These two are not new in life and living. What is new however is the way different people exercise their authority and the ever expanding interpretations and analysis of styles of how people are led or should be led. In every human setting, right from the smallest unit which is the family to the larger society, there has always been the need for a leader whose duty it is to maintain an organized society. The absence of a leader in a society or

organization has the tendency of turning such a society or organization to a Hobbesian society where people behave any how they like without control.

The place of authority and leadership in the effective running of any organization either in religious, political or otherwise cannot be overemphasized. There are many kinds and degrees of authority and leadership. Authority exercised is a kind of legitimate power and people follow figures exercising it because their position demand so, irrespective of the person holding the position. Leaders in organizations and elsewhere have many formal authorities but they mostly rely on the informal authority that they exercise on people to influence them. Leaders are trusted for their judgment, respected for their expertise and cherished for their integrity, hence not followed because of the position they hold but because of the role they play in the life of those they lead. An example is Mahatma Ghandi who for most part of his life did not hold any official position to lead the Indian Freedom Struggle, yet exerted so much authority and exhibited unequalled leadership that won freedom for his nation.

As a well-structured Christian organization, the Anglican Church in Nigeria has leaders vested with authority to ensure that there is order in the system. These leaders did not thrust upon themselves such leadership positions for “no one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was” Heb.5:4, but are believed to have been chosen by God, using human instruments hence accountable to Him that choose them; and also respected and cherished by those they lead because of the integrity they exhibit.

### **Authority**

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines authority as “the power to give orders to people” (p.83). It is the power or right to direct, influence or to do something. Authority from the knowledge point of view is the power to influence people because they respect your knowledge or official position, while in the organization. It is usually the people or a group of people who have the power to make decisions or who have a particular area of responsibility in an organization. It is often said that the leader possesses authority which enables him lead. Authority determines leadership, for what makes a leader the leader he is, is the level of authority he or she wields or controls.

Giddens (1997) defining authority from the sociological point of view said:

Authority is a legitimate or socially approved use of power. It is the legitimate power which one person or group holds over another. The element of legitimacy is vital to the notion of authority and is the main

means by which authority is distinguished from the mere general concept of power. Authority by contrast depends on the acceptance by subordinates of the right of those above them to give those orders or directives (p.581)

Authority derives from subordinates. Without the acceptance of subordinates, there can be no authority, hence authority differs from power. Authority is not forceful upon the subordinates but earned. The position one finds himself or herself determines the level of authority such a person commands. Authority as the heart of leadership according to the scripture is servant hood (Mark 10:42-45), and the Holy Bible teaches that legitimate leaders have authority in the sense of a right to direct others. Authority comes from God and is delegated to human leaders for the good of all.

### **Leadership**

Leadership has been defined by different scholars from their various backgrounds and disciplines. Cole (1998), described leadership as “a dynamic process in a group whereby one individual influences the other groups task in a given situation” (p.9). Yukr (1987), on his part said “leadership is a process by which a person 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), talks of leadership as “the ability to influence people to willingly follow ones decision” (p.28). On his part, John Stott (1984) posits that “leadership is not restricted to a small minority of world statesmen or to the national top brass”.

Going further, Stott said:

In every society, it takes a variety of forms. Clergy are leaders in their local church and community; parents are leaders in their homes and family; so are teachers in schools, and lecturers in colleges. Senior executives in business and industry; judges, politicians, social workers and union officials, all have leadership responsibilities in their respective sphere (p.327)

Leadership therefore is that act whereby someone stands out to show others the way to follow. There can be no leader without followership. Every leader must have followers who look up to him or her for direction and guidance. It is therefore expected that leaders must lead well in a bid to maintain order in the organization for the good of all. The disposition of the leader goes a long way to

determine the attitude and response of the followers hence it is expected that the leader must exhibit very high leadership potentials and qualities.

### **Church**

The New Concise Bible Dictionary (1989) says that “the English word ‘Church’ comes from another Hebrew word ‘*qahal*’ (to assemble), meaning ‘a local assembly’ of people” (p.90). Church is the people of God who come (assemble) together to worship. According to Schilling (1998), the first Old Testament word used for Gods people are ‘*QAHAL*’ (from Hebrew *qhl* - to assemble)” among the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

The New Testament word for Church is “*ecclesia*” derived from the Greek verb ‘*ek-kaleo*’, which simply means ‘to call out of’. In secular Greek, ‘*ecclesia*’ was used for various types of assemblies that came together for political or religious purposes. However, in the New Testament, it is a term which designated the people of God - those whom God has Himself called out of the world and made a special people of faith. Schilling sums it up when he said that “the Church is a group of people that God has called out of the world through Christ for the purpose of worshipping and serving Him (p.9).

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines Church as “a building where Christians go to worship”. From the Biblical definition, the Church is the people of God who come together to worship. It is a local assembly of believers called out for a special purpose. This assertion agrees with Okwueze (2003), who opined that “Church is an organized body of followers of Jesus Christ, the people of God as such”, which is also corroborated by Uche and Obi (2011) when they opined that “the Church is the sanctified body of believers, purchased with the precious blood of the Lamb, and called out for the purpose of worshipping God” (p.102)

The church therefore is a called out people by God for a special purpose. No matter how one looks at the Church, it is a gathering, assembly, community of God’s people, called out by God Himself for the sole purpose of worship - an organization where people share a common doctrine in an organized manner in a building or a designated place for that purpose. It could also refer to a particular group of Christians such as the Anglican Church, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church, Deeper Life Christian Church, etc.

## **Anglican Church**

The Anglican Church in Nigeria also known as the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) is a part of the universal Anglican Communion. The word Anglican is derived from an ancient Latin name for the 'Church of England' '*Ecclesia Anglicana*'. This means a Church which arose from and has root in England (Wotogbe-Weneka: 1997:17). Anyone therefore who upholds the teachings of, or system of the Church of England and emphasizes the authority of that Church, is called an Anglican. The Anglican Church is a Catholic Church in the sense that it has a Universal acceptability - extending and existing throughout the world - hence the word Anglican Church itself refers to any Church in Communion with the Church of England.

Emphasizing the Catholicism of the Anglican Church, Boettner (1962) said 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 Anglican Church in Nigeria from its "very beginning understands itself to be part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It also shares the teaching of the Reformed Church that sheds off the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church to maintain the Apostolic Faith" (Fape: 2010:65).

The Anglican Church in Nigeria prior to 1979 was part of the "Province of West Africa which stretched over the area of Anglophone West Africa and included hundreds and thousands of ethnic groups, languages and cultures. Again the countries concerned were of varying political status" (Nwankiti: 1996:23). The Province of West Africa contained two kinds of Churchmanship - the 'High Anglican and the Evangelical'. The former was the tradition from which sprang the Society for Propagating the Gospel (SPG), which evangelized the Gold Coast - present day Ghana; while the later was the tradition from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) which evangelized Nigeria. According to Nwankiti (1996) this was why "someone humorously said 'the General Synod was merely "cosmetic", indeed so for the differences stated above did not allow in-depth discussions of many matters of common interest to all the Dioceses.

By 1979, Anglican Dioceses in Nigeria numbering sixteen were constituted into a Province. This was on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1979 with the Rt. Rev. Timothy O. Olufosoye as its first Archbishop. On that day in history all the churches started by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Nigeria, including Bishop

Crowther's Niger Mission churches all fused together to become what is known and referred to today as Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion.

This Church which started with sixteen dioceses has grown to fourteen Ecclesiastical Provinces, one hundred and sixty-four dioceses in Nigeria and overseas. There are fourteen Archbishops and also one hundred and sixty-eight Bishops (including the Archbishops), at leadership positions in the various dioceses and in Church of Nigeria Universities and Theological institutions.

### **Authority and Leadership in the Anglican Church in Nigeria**

No matter how authority and leadership are defined, one basic fact that stands out is that there is always someone who every other person looks up to, to show others the way – that possesses the charisma and ability to make a difference by way of authority and leadership. That person is referred to as the leader and some of his or her functions include directing activities through motivation and by inspiring the led. These are the roles various leaders in the Anglican Church such as the Bishops and the Clergy play in the day to day running of the Church organization in Nigeria.

Authority and leadership in the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion is clearly expressed in the maxim that “the Anglican Church is Episcopally led and Synodically governed” (Fape 2010:65). What this means is that the Bishop is vested with the authority to lead the Church and this authority is provided by the Diocesan Synod.

According to Wotogbe-Weneka (2014), a diocese is the centre of church government in Anglican Communion. In fact a Diocese can be said to be the apex of government in the Anglican Church. This is because the other ones higher than it are mere consultative bodies eg., the General Synod and the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). At this level, the head of administration is the Diocesan Bishop through the Diocesan Synod often described as the pool of power in the Anglican circles. The executive arm of the Diocese is the Diocesan Board which takes all the decisions of the Synod.

The Anglican Church in principle recognizes the existence of three houses viz: the house of Bishops, the house of Clergy and the house of Laity. The Bishop governs and leads the Church unit (the diocese) committed to his charge with the assistance, advice and support of the Clergy and the Laity which makes up the Synod which is the highest decision making body of the church (of course led by

the Bishop). The concept of authority and leadership in any organization cannot be divorced from the total ministry and mission of such organization. Religious concepts of authority and leadership must be differentiated from the leadership concept of the world. Jesus Christ Himself observed a parallel line between the concept of authority and leadership and leadership in the world (Matthew 20:25-26).

Omeire (2000) posits that authority and leadership in the world contrasts that of the church since that of the church is designed after the priorities and characteristics of the Kingdom of God. Quoting Dennis Roberts, Omeire wrote "the pattern of Christian authority and leadership are simply Christ like leadership which involves to serve and to lead by example" (p.161). A leader must be a person of authority. He must be in a position to issue commands to his subjects. That is the position and privilege the Anglican Bishop occupies and enjoys in the Anglican Church in Nigeria. He wields much authority and sometimes uncontrollable powers to the extent that his word is often seen as law and policy statement in his diocese which is binding on his subordinates (Clergy) and parishioners (Churches) alike. He is the trail blazer and rallying point for all in the diocese and the Anglican Church at large. The Anglican Bishop is referred to as the 'Diocesan' meaning the 'Diocese personified'.

Nwachukwu (2008) description of a leader fits adequately with the place of the Anglican Bishop in the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion. She said:

Power resides on the leader, and that power implies action, doing something; while authority connotes position or office that ignites the power. Outside the office of leadership, a person has no such powers (ability) over others to command, lead, order or direct them. Power resides with the authority holder (p.11)

The Anglican Bishop is the power holder upon which authority resides in the diocese which is why he is expected to be one that is endowed with leadership qualities and special attributes that commends him to those he leads. Christian leadership should be characterized by selfless humble service. This is the kind of leadership that the Anglican Church in Nigeria displays in its seven levels of administrative structure starting from the Station, Parish, District/Deanery, Archdeaconry, Diocesan, Provincial and Church of Nigeria levels. The leaders see themselves as servant leaders under Christ who must give account of their stewardship to God.

### **The place and importance of People in Leadership in the Anglican Church**

The place and importance of people in authority and leadership in the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion cannot be overemphasized especially in the present times we find ourselves when religious organization are becoming more worldly than even secular organizations. The Anglican Church leadership has remained focused guided by those Biblical principles which stand it out as a pacesetter in Nigeria. Modernism and secularism has not done much damage to the authority of those who lead. The whole issue of authority and leadership still revolves around the ability of the leader to obtain and retain people. The Anglican leadership recognizes the importance of people, for without the people, there can be no church, and without the church there can be no one to lead. This understanding places great demand on leaders at every level to value their greatest asset which is the people. People are the most important asset of the leader and his authority derives from the people. The truth of the matter is that no matter who the leader may be, or his level of leadership, he (the leader) cannot get far without the support of the people, and this support is made possible by the leader's ability to relate well with the people.

Every leader needs relational skills. If a leader both religious and secular possesses relational skills, the crisis situation experienced by many organizations in recent times would be a thing of the past. Many Christian organizations today face crisis to the extent that one begins to wonder the real meaning and aim of setting up such Christian organizations and what they actually set out to achieve. The Anglican Church is devoid of such rancor and leadership crisis because it has set up defined administrative structures to address such crisis when it rears up its ugly head. This is because every leader and follower alike understands where his/her authority ends and where the other person's right begins. This accounts for the growth experience in the Anglican Church in Nigeria acclaimed as the most well administered and fastest growing Church in the Anglican Communion worldwide.

There is no gain saying the fact that the problem confronting and breaking Churches today is people oriented. The place of people in any administrative set up should be appreciated and nurtured. Leaders should improve on their relational skills to carry the people along. According to Uka (2003) "if your relational skills are weak, your leadership will always suffer. Rules and regulations minus relationship equal to resentment and rebellion - R + R - R = R + R" (p.26). You cannot but need the help of people. People are the reason for the rise and fall of organizations, the church inclusive. This is the secret which the

Anglican Church has discovered, harnessed and adopted in it's over 160 years of existence in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

No human organization or society can thrive and grow without acceptable administrative structures which places premium on people. Wherever there are people, authority and leadership become essential ingredients for harmony or else everyone would live as it pleases him or her hence such society or organization would become a Hobbesian society. No wonder Theodore Roosevelt quoted in Uka (2003) said that "the single most important ingredient in leadership is, knowing how to get along with various kinds of people" (p.27). When this is done, the led will be respected and their support will be guaranteed. The result will be peace and progress in every strata of such organization.

The place of God in leadership must not also be compromised since God has a leadership template of degree and kind for every human endeavor. This has been the secret of the Anglican Church leadership. Leaders therefore are expected to exercise their authority by first seeking God's will and leadership with all their heart for divine grace and direction. The Anglican Church pattern of leadership is well-organized and structured hence this work seeks to recommend it to not only other religious organizations, but to secular administrative organizations as well since we are living in a world of change. By so doing, the objectives that such organizations have set for themselves will be realized for the general good of humanity.

## **References**

Boettner, L. (1962) *Roman Catholic, USA; Presbyterian and Reformed*

Cole, G. A. (1998) *Management: Theory and practice*, London, England; Row

Fape, M. O. (2010) *Knowing the fundamentals of Anglicanism*, Sagamu, Nigeria; Joash

Giddens, A. (1997) *Sociology*, London, England; Polity

- Hornby, A. S. (Ed) (2010) *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of current English (8<sup>th</sup>)*, Oxford; University
- Nwachukwu, D. N. (2008) "Leadership development in the local church" in D. N. Nwachukwu (Ed) *Leadership skills and competences: Capacity building workshop manual*, Calabar, Nigeria; Robert Institute Word
- Nwankiti, B. C. (1996) *The growth and development of the Church of Nigeria*, Owerri; Ithem Davis
- Okwueze, M. I. (2003) *Ethics, religion and society: Biblical, traditional and contemporary perspectives*, Nsukka; Price
- Omeire, N, E. (2000) "Motivating and mobilizing the laity for Leadership in the Church" in A. O. Nkwoka, N. E. Omeire & C. O. Imo (Eds) *The church's mandate and 21<sup>st</sup> century mission*, Enugu, Nigeria; Rabboni
- Rue, L. W. & Byars L. L. (1997) *Management skills application (8<sup>th</sup> edition)*, Boston Irwin; Mc-Crew Hill
- Schilling, H (1998) *Doctrine of the church: Ecclesiology*, Uyo, Nigeria; The Saints Trust
- Stott, J. (1984) *Issues facing Christians today*, London; Marshall & Stott
- Uche O. O. C. & Obi, G. A. (2011) "Spirituality in eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Church" in P. E. Nmah & O. O. C. Uche (Eds), *Standing again on the mount*, Onitsha; Gucks
- Uka, E. M. (2008) "Ministers communication skills in management" in D. N. Nwachukwu (Ed), *Leadership skills and competences: Capacity building workshop manual*, Calabar, Nigeria; Robert Institute Word
- William, D. (1989) *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, Oxford, England; Lion
- Wotogbe-Weneka, W. O. (2014) *Anglicanism*, Owerri, Nigeria; Springfield
- Yukr, P. (1989) *Leadership*, New York; Harper Collins