

LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH GROWTH IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION: AN APPRAISAL OF EPISCOPAL AUTONOMY/PARTICIPATORY ADMINISTRATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY ANGLICANISM

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Abstract

The system of leadership or governance, no doubt, is the most important factor that upholds a church, society or group's sustainable existence and relevance. In Christendom, the office of a bishop evolved from the authority of the apostles of Jesus Christ, who left the work of world evangelization to them after his ascension into heaven according to Christian tradition. Using the qualitative methodology of research, this work applied both the primary and secondary methods of data sourcing to discuss episcopacy in Christianity as it applies in Anglicanism. The primary source and motivation for the research was mainly participant observation and experiential involvement in Anglican Church life, supported with secondary data such as literature and journals already written on the topic of the research. It was noted that the use of councils in the early Church with time, necessarily gave way to a single-leader bishop with authority to rule and be the rallying point in church governance. Generally, bishops are considered successors to the apostles, maintaining an unbroken line of authority back to the early Church, and entrusted with guarding the apostolic faith and maintaining unity in the Church. Leadership can take many forms, often emphasizing maintaining authority in a single person or a group of prominent persons. Basically, the diocese which is the third and the most significant level of church administration is headed by the Diocesan Bishop who is supposed to share authority with both the clergy and the laity of the diocese. This paper notes that the participatory leadership of the Anglican Church varies from province to province and from one diocese to the other because of the principle of autonomy. The historical roots of some of the terms and appendages used for the office and the person of the bishop in contemporary times have been highlighted in this work, like the usage of the majestic 'we', the lordship of bishops, and their rule by divine permission, all deriving from practices of the secular monarchy of the medieval periods. This article while offering insight into the biblical and historical origins of the office of bishops in Christianity, and noting the possibility of cases of abuse of its privileges and neglect of its responsibilities re-enforces the importance and effectiveness of the episcopacy in the Anglican Communion as a central rallying point for the effective dispensation of authority and cohesive administration, for the sustainable growth of the Anglican Church world-wide.

Key words: Leadership; Church Growth; Episcopal Autonomy; Participatory Administration; Anglican Communion

Introduction

The Anglican Communion is a branch in Christianity comprising of an international association of national and regional Churches originating from the missionary enterprise of and in full communion with the Church of England, and having the Archbishop of Canterbury as its spiritual head. Ezeakunne (2016) avers that each church has its own doctrine, liturgy, and canon law based in most cases, on that of the Church of England, with each having its own legislative processes and overall Episcopal administration under the leadership of a local primate who has the rank of "Archbishop". It is worthy to note that the Archbishop of Canterbury who is the direct religious head of the Church of England has no formal administrative authority outside the jurisdiction of

England, but is recognized as the symbolic head of the Anglican Communion. Among the Communion's primates, he is considered as the *primus inter pares* – the first among equals, and this equally applies in the relation of individual primates with other bishops in their provinces or national cum regional churches.

Stefon (2025) further describes the Anglican Church as a religious body of national, independent, and autonomous churches throughout the world that adheres to the teachings of Anglicanism, and that evolved from the Church of England, with the Archbishop of Canterbury as its most senior bishop and titular leader, and united by a general agreement with the doctrines and practices defined since the 16th century in the Book of Common Prayer. *The Church of Nigeria Church Book and Desk Diary* (2024) lists the 48 autonomous churches and Provinces of the Anglican Communion as presently constituted across the five continents of the world. Out of these forty eight national churches, forty-two are full provinces of the Anglican Communion, while the remaining six are autonomous churches also known as “Extra Provincials” within the Communion that are yet to achieve a full provincial status. Leadership and administration in the Anglican Church are basically anchored on the bishops whose role it is to set and regulate the theological and liturgical tempo of his diocese in line with the general common principles of the Anglican Communion.

Organization and Structure of the Anglican Communion

In the reforms made in the Church of England in the sixteenth century, a complicated interplay between the king and parliament along with the convocation of Bishops and clergy served to form the early administrative form of the Anglican Communion. According to Ibeto (2012) these three groups were responsible for the formulation and approval of the formularies (liturgy) of the church and the exercise of doctrinal and moral discipline. With the growth of the Anglican Church into a worldwide communion, the office and role of the Archbishop of Canterbury assumed historical significance for member churches of the communion as the spiritual head of the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Church has an Episcopal system of church government, a system of church administration involving the bishop as the head of a democratic institution comprising synod, boards, councils and committees comprised of both the clergy and laity. Basically, Anglican Church administration depends on the local constitution of each diocese and the canons (laws) of each autonomous church province. According to Ezeakunne (2016), these provinces may take the form of national churches (such as Nigeria, Canada, Uganda or Japan) or a collection of nations (such as the West Indies, Central Africa, or South East Asia), or geographical regions (such as Vanuatu and Solomon Islands), etc.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has a primacy of honour over the other primates of the Anglican Communion and ranks as the *primus inter pares* (first among equals) even though he does not exercise any direct authority in any province outside England. As the spiritual head of the Anglican Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury maintains a certain level of moral authority, and has the right to determine which churches will be in communion with his See. He hosts and chairs the Lambeth conference of the Anglican bishops every ten years, and decides who will be invited to the conference. He also presides over the Anglican Communion primates' meeting as well as the Anglican Consultative Council. All the international bodies are consultative and collaborative, and their resolutions are not legally binding on the autonomous provinces of the communion. This lack of a central cohesion in matters of authority means that decisions are often expressed and understood in permissive rather than obligatory terms. This principle is also true of the decisions made by provinces, to some extent, as they apply to the constituent dioceses. The structures of communion or instruments of unity that allow Anglicans to meet and recognize the prevalence of the diversity of opinions among Anglicans and allow unilateral actions by provinces on certain issues as they have no enforceable legislative authority over autonomous provinces and dioceses. In each province or country where Anglicanism exists, the Church is

allowed to develop its liturgical language, music and customs, promoting a wide variety of practice which also occasionally tends to breed opposing viewpoints.

The basic levels of church administration in the Anglican Communion are:

The Province

This is the national church or province of the Anglican Communion as contained within a particular country, or a geographical region comprising of more than one country. Emmanuel (2002), commenting on the administrative structures in the Anglican Church calls it the next level of structure after the world wide conglomeration as the autonomous province level. Presently, there are forty-two autonomous provinces in the Anglican Communion. Each province is headed by a primate who is always in the rank of an archbishop and presides over the general synod, the Episcopal synod, and the Standing Committee meetings of the national Church cum province. Like the primates' conference at the world level, the Episcopal synod is a conference of all the bishops in an autonomous province. The Episcopal synod provides the forum for the bishops to harmonize their positions and consult with one another to keep abreast with common developments and trends. The provincial standing committee is the executive arm of the general synod, and both comprise of the houses of bishops, clergy and laity. Whereas the general synod meets once in three years, the standing committee meets at least twice a year to appraise and monitor development in the dioceses. Each autonomous church can be further divided into smaller ecclesiastical provinces within the national church headed by provincial archbishops from whom the primate is elected whenever there is a vacancy at the national level. The ecclesiastical province is administered by means of provincial council and standing committee, as well as by the meeting of the bishops in the province.

The Diocese

A province is made up of dioceses, each headed by a bishop. He presides over the diocesan synod which holds a session once a year and three of such sessions make one synod. After three sessions, the house of laity is literally dissolved and new diocesan officers are appointed or nominated, while various constituencies (parishes and groups) elect new delegates to the next synod. Further down the pecking order, each diocese is divided into archdeaconries or deaneries which are groups of churches or parishes under an archdeacon who is appointed by the bishop. The archdeacon presides over the archdeaconry board which like the diocesan board meets regularly to appraise the work of parishes and churches in the archdeaconry and reports back to the diocesan board if need be. The diocese is where much of the action in the Anglican Church revolves.

An archdeaconry or deanery is in turn divided into districts or parishes. A district or parish may comprise of one or more churches according to the local constitution of each diocese and strength of the churches involved. Districts and parishes consist of local church stations and they are headed by district Superintendents or parish vicars, and administered through the district or parish church councils. The last grass-root level of administration is the local church which could be under either an ordained person or a lay worker, depending on the strength of its population and the peculiarities of its location.

According to Wotogbe-Weneka (2014) the diocese is the fundamental unit of church government in the Anglican Communion. This is because the other ones higher than it are mere consultative bodies, for example, the general synod and the Anglican Consultative Council. At the diocesan level, the diocesan bishop administers the diocese 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 implements all the decisions of the synod which is duly constituted by the three houses – bishop, clergy and laity. The bishop is the power-holder on whom authority resides in the diocese and he is expected to be the one that is endowed with leadership qualities and special

attributes that commends him to those he leads as a servant-leader who must give account of his stewardship to God.

The Historic Episcopate in Anglicanism

The history of the episcopate in Christianity dates back to the early church led by the apostles who received the mandate of leadership of the movement that Jesus established. Ramsey (1960) intimates that writers like Newman and Charles Gore held that the office of a bishop was passed down from the apostles through men like Timothy and Titus to single bishops in particular localities (monarchical episcopacy). However, Bishop Lightfoot argued that monarchical episcopacy evolved upwards from a college of presbyters by the elevation of one of their number to be the Episcopal president. Sheldon (1909) points out that the implications of the apostolic succession for the nature of the episcopate and the church were spelt out by later Anglo-Catholic writers that there can be no real and true Church apart from the society which the apostles founded, and which has been propagated only in the line of the Episcopal succession, and that a church stands or falls by the Apostolic Succession. In other words, there has never been a Church without a bishop, and there never can be. In a slight variance on this, Tomline (cited in Sheldon, 1948) states:

I readily acknowledge that there is no precept in the New Testament which commands that every church should be governed by Bishops. No church can exist without some government, but though there must be rules and orders for the proper discharge of the offices of public worship, though there must be fixed regulations concerning the appointment of ministers, and though a subordination among them is expedient in the highest degree, yet it does not follow, that these things must be precisely the same in every Christian country; they may vary with the other varying circumstances of human society within the extent of a country, the manners of its inhabitants, the nature of its civil government, and many other peculiarities which might be specified (p. 5).

The historic episcopate is the understanding that the Christian ministry descended from the apostles by a continuous transmission through the line of bishops. The Anglican Communion accepts a number of beliefs for what constitutes the episcopate, not necessarily viewing it as conveyed mechanically through an unbroken chain of the laying on of hands, but as expressing continuity with the unbroken chain of commitment, beliefs and missions starting with the first apostles; and as hence emphasizing the enduring yet evolving nature of the Church. Griffiths (1991) intimates that outside Anglicanism, the general standard understanding of the term ‘historic episcopate’ is that Christian ministry has descended from the Apostles by a continuous transmission, and that this is the guarantee of the grace in the sacraments and the very essence of the Church. The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology asserts that the Anglican Church retained episcopacy, believing it to be not merely an administrative expedient of contingent historical origin but an essential part of the Church as founded by Christ. Its claim to apostolic succession is rooted in the Church of England’s evolution as part of the Western Church, as it retained its claim to apostolic succession in its Catholic past. The Preface to the Anglican Ordinal limits itself to stating historical reasons why Episcopal orders are to be continued and reverently used in the Church of England. Morris (1988) notes that the modern debate on the ‘Historic Episcopate’ in the Church divides in three ways – those who believe the ‘Historic Episcopate’ to be constitutive of the Church (of the *esse*); those who hold that it is a question of the Church’s “well being” (*bene esse*); and those who consider that it is a necessity for the Church to be fully itself (*plene esse*). The Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral includes the ‘Historic Episcopate’ as essential to the visible unity of the Anglican Church, but allows for its being adapted locally in its working to the varying needs and peculiarities of the local Church environment. However, Evans and Wright (1991) are of the opinion that this does not mean a general commitment to the idea that in the absence of the historic episcopate, there is no Church, and this aligns with the views of

those who believe that the emphasis on apostolic succession should essentially tilt more towards the retaining of apostolic teachings and doctrines rather than on the mechanical transmission of ministerial authority through a well established unbroken chain of apostolic ordination cum consecration.

In this regard, Ramsey (1960) points out that many Anglican writers blurred the distinction between succession in office as championed by Irenaeus, and succession in consecration, the main focus of St. Augustine, who spoke of succession as the channel of grace in a way that still failed to do justice to Jesus' capacity to dispense grace within all the areas of the church's life in the New Covenant. It is noteworthy that duly ordained people in a peerless unbroken succession traceable to the Apostles themselves can still deviate to a large extent from the core apostolic teachings and doctrines of the primitive Church. Also, Jesus, in keeping His promise of being with the Church till the end of the age clearly and inalienably reserves the sovereign divine right to dispense ministerial grace to whoever He wills in every generation and in every denomination, regardless of the much vaunted and controversial apostolic succession mechanisms in the wider Church. Ezeakunne (2015) cites the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as encapsulating the core four-point articulation of the Anglican identity, the fourth pillar of which is the 'Historic Episcopate, locally adapted'. The thirty-nine articles of religion as contained in the Book of Common Prayer also constitute the doctrinal framework of the Anglican Communion, and article thirty-six which deals on the consecration of bishops and ministers states that:

The Book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops, and Ordering of Priests and Deacons, lately set forth in the time of Edward the Sixth, and confirmed at the same time by authority of Parliament, do contain all things necessary to such Consecration or Ordering: neither hath it anything that, of itself is superstitious and ungodly. And therefore whosoever are consecrated or ordered according to the Rites of that Book... we decree all such to be rightly, orderly and lawfully consecrated and ordered (p. 382).

The biblical New Testament model of ministry is amply reflected in the three orders that are accepted in the Anglican Prayer Book ordinal which states that it is evident unto all men, diligently reading the holy scripture and the ancient authors, that from the apostles' time there have been these orders of ministers in the Christ's Church which are bishops, priests and deacons. Robinson (2014) points out that there is the account of the apostles setting apart the seven deacons in Acts 6. St. Paul's Pastoral Epistles in 1&2 Timothy and Titus contain the required qualifications for overseers – bishops – elders; presbyters, and deacons. This demonstrates that the three orders were already an established part of apostolic practice within twenty-five years of the Resurrection. It seems that the relationship between presbyter and bishop was one of degree rather than order in some provinces of the Early Church. Robinson (2014) also surmises that that there is a suggestion that in both Rome and Alexandria, the elders elected one of their own numbers as bishop and set him aside for his new functions by the laying on of hands. On the other hand, in Ephesus and Antioch, bishops were treated as the fundamental order, and presbyters had only certain ministries delegated to them. In the end, possibly not later than 200 A.D., it was the Antioch pattern that won out. As a result of this process and the increasing number and variety of heresies, the Church decided that there was a need to regulate the ordination of bishops by legislating that the consecration of a bishop be undertaken by several (usually not less than three) bishops. This was to prevent one bishop who had gone off the rails theologically, going off and ordaining a slug of new bishops and starting his own church in competition with the Catholic and Apostolic variety. This was a sort of quality control exercise in that if the bishops of a province could accept as orthodox the man to be consecrated bishop, then the orthodoxy of the Church would be preserved.

The concept of a "monarchical episcopate", a system where a single bishop is appointed from the group of elders to be the head of a specific church or region with every other person in the church serving below him subsequently came into play. Truglia (2006) states that what makes the concept

such an interesting case is that according to some scholars, it is proof that the early church broke with earliest recorded tradition in which the bishop was simply an elder, and that churches had several elders (bishops) ruling at the same time, often referred to as the “plurality of elders”. This is given credence in the injunction given for elders to be appointed in every city as contained in the Book of Titus 1:5. The use of these multiple elders leading together in the post-apostolic times naturally evolved into the most outstanding singular elder becoming bishop in the cities may be, through charismatic ability and sheer force of personality, rising to the top and emerging as a monarchical bishop. This evolution also intrinsically implied the several elders of a church recognizing and appointing one of them so endowed with extra-ordinary qualities to become an overseer among them. The monarchical episcopate also evolved due to need to concentrate leadership to effectively fight the danger of the doctrinal and disciplinary differences that threatened the unity of the church, and this transition to monarchical episcopate took place at the beginning of the third century. Thus from this historical background developed the modern shape of the episcopate that is practiced in contemporary Christendom. Robinson (2014) surmises that episcopacy continued in the Church of England and the Church of Ireland because enough of the Bishops accepted the Reformation and this made the historic episcopate to continue. Whereas Matthew Parker was consecrated by four bishops under the Catholic Ordinal in 1559 back in the reign of Henry VIII, a casual glance down the succession list will show that the Church of England preserved the historic episcopate and made it a tool for re-enforcing the Reformed doctrine of the Church of England that birthed the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Church maintains a basic identity with the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches on the issue of apostolic succession. However, Anglican Reformed tradition is wary of the fact that when apostolic succession is extremely tied to the ‘hands on heads’ manual transmission of Episcopal lineage and authority, there is the danger of this largely empirical approach being regarded as more important than the over-riding necessity of the consecrated person retaining the core Apostolic teachings and doctrines of the Apostles. Anglicans adhere to episcopacy not as an end in itself, but as a biblical institution that aids in the smooth administration of the Church, believing that it is not a bit good unless the faith which is taught and which the bishop represents is that of the one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church as contained in the same Holy Scriptures handed down by the early Christians.

The Anglican Episcopal Polity

According to Harper (2003) ‘Episcopal polity’ is a hierarchical form of Church governance in which the chief local authority is called a ‘bishop’. The word is derived from the British, Latin and Vulgar Latin terms “*ebiscopus*”, “*biscopus*”, and from the Greek “*episkopos*” which means “Overseer”. The term ‘Episcopal polity’ is also used by other major Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox, Methodist and Lutheran Churches, etc. Lately, it has been observed that the new generation (Pentecostal) churches have also adapted to the use of “Bishop” to identify their leaders. The traditional role of a bishop which is to act as the head of a diocese is also known as *eparchy* - government by an *episcopus* (bishop). Government in the Anglican Church is synodical (by Synods), consisting of three houses: laity (usually elected parish representatives), clergy and bishops. National, provincial and diocesan synods maintain different scopes of authority, depending on their canons and constitutions. The bishop supervises the clergy within his diocese and is their representative to both civil structures and hierarchy of the Church. Expounding the principle of the synodical government of the church, Evans and Wright (1991) cite a report of the 1867 Lambeth Conference as follows:

In the organization of Synodical order for the government of the Church, the Diocesan Synod appears to be the primary and simplest form of such organization. By the Diocesan Synod, the co-operation of all members of the body is obtained in Church action; and the acceptance of Church rules is secured, which in absence of other law, usage or enactment,

gives to these rules the force of law 'binding' on those who, expressly or by implication, have consented to them. The constitution of the Diocesan Synod may be determined either by rules made for that branch of the Church established by the Synod of the province, or by the general consent in the Diocese itself. (p. 332).

According to Lane (2023) Anglicans have historically understood the episcopate to encompass the unique ministry of connection – building and leadership. Bishops are therefore entrusted with an incomparable role in Synods and Councils. While bishops pursue their ministry partnering with and maintaining obligations to presbyters, deacons and the lay-people, they are nevertheless called to exercise leadership in a way that is unique among the other orders of church ministry. The 1888 Lambeth Quadrilateral upholds the Historic Episcopate as an irreducible *sine qua non* in Anglican polity. Lane (2023) intimates that less than a decade after 1888 when Anglican claims were challenged by Pope Leo XIII in his bull *Apostolicae Curae* in 1896, the Archbishop of Canterbury and York, Frederick Temple, and William Maclagan released a response, *Saepius Officio*, an action taken to re-enforce the obviously irretrievable Anglican position, instead of the other available options of either denigrating or simply ignoring or waving the bull aside. A bishop provides ecclesiastical leadership in his diocese in accordance with the Episcopal system of the Church. The Anglican sacramental theology of the episcopate is contained in the Church's ordinal which stipulates a bishop as a shepherd of Christ's flock and guardian of the faith of the apostles, proclaiming the gospel of God's kingdom. He is further regarded as the principal minister of the word and sacraments, and to preside over the selection, training and ordination of deacons and priests, and join in the consecration of bishops, among his other ecclesiastical functions in Church administration.

Leadership by “Divine Permission”

Anglican bishops are said to obtain their leadership position and rule in the church by divine permission, a tradition which evolved from the thought of kings ruling by divine right or through God's mandate. This is a doctrine that was used to re-enforce the political legitimacy of the monarchy in Western Christianity up till the Enlightenment period. Burgess (1992) surmises that this “divine right” theory of kingship suggests that a monarch is not accountable to any earthly authority (such as a parliament or the Pope), because their right to rule is derived directly from divine authority. Thus, the monarch is not subject to the will of the people, of the aristocracy, of any other estate of the realm, implying that their power is absolute. Philip (1911) asserts that in its full-fledged form, the “Divine Right” of kings is associated with Henry VIII of England, James VI and I of Scotland and England, Louis XIV of France, and their successors. Divine right of kings has been a key element in the legitimization of many absolute monarchies even in Christian Europe. Philip notes that one distinct notion related to divine right is *caesaropapism* (the complete subordination of bishops to the secular power), and *absolutism* (a form of monarchical or despotic power that is unrestrained by all other institutions including the Church). The concept of ordination cum consecration grace consequently brought with it largely unspoken parallels of the divine right attitudes within the Anglican and Roman Catholic ordained ministry and church leadership, and this developed and got entrenched in the church system over time. Evans and Wright (1991) aver that Anglican opinion has differed as to the way in which Episcopal government is *de jure divino* (by the divine right of kings). Some hold that Episcopal authority is *jure divino* but that it stemmed from the apostolic practice and customs of the Church and not from the absolute precept that either Christ or his apostles gave about it. On the other side, others hold that Episcopal government is derived from Christ via the apostles. Regarding the bishop's administration of the diocese, Anglicans often speak of “the bishop-in-Synod” as the force and authority of Episcopal governance. Such conciliar authority which the bishop shares with the clergy and the laity extends to the standard areas of doctrine, discipline, and worship. However, the limits of conciliar authority are also stipulated in article XXI of the thirty-nine articles of religion ratified in 1571, which

clearly states that General Councils may err and have erred, and that things ordained by such councils which are not premised on the Holy Scripture have neither strength nor authority. Thus, in recognition of the fact of the finite nature of man which is liable to imperfection, Anglicanism acknowledges that a bishop leading the diocese by ‘divine permission’ along with the conciliar participation of the clergy and the laity does not always guarantee a fail-safe outcome in terms of doctrinal and administrative infallibility.

The “Lordship” of a Bishop

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia states that “The Lord Bishop” is a form of address used for a bishop since the Middle Ages, an era when bishops also occupied and enjoyed the feudal rank of ‘Lord’ by virtue of their office. This tradition is not however unconnected with nor wholly dependent on the practice of English bishops having seats in the upper House of Lords, as the title was also applied to suffragan bishops who were not given a seat in the parliamentary House of Lords. The bishops who seat in the upper House are regarded as “Lords Spiritual” whereas other Lords from the laity section are “Lords Temporal”. Green (1937) posits that the use of the title appear to have been rare towards the late 19th century, although it is still used in formal circumstances for any diocesan bishop in the Anglican Communion or the Roman Catholic Church, except in the United States where the title is considered inappropriate for church leaders.

The British House of Lords membership constitutionally includes 26 places reserved for the bishops of the Church of England in the upper chamber of the parliament, and the “Lords Spiritual” sit on an *ex-officio* basis. This implies that they only remain in the house while they hold the office of bishop, and they cease from house membership when they reach the bishops’ statutory retirement age of seventy years. The term “lord” is also a general honorific title for those in authority, including kings, judges and bishops. Thus, the title “Lord Bishop” used by bishops in the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church emphasizes the bishops’ lordship and authority within the church and their role as leaders in their dioceses. The usage of the title has become less common in the churches of the Western world, but still part of the tradition in the churches of the developing countries of the world. In general, archbishops in the Anglican Church are addressed as “Your Grace” (also used for the dukes of England) while bishops are addressed in formal circumstances, as “My Lord” or “Your Lordship”, quite similar to what obtains in the Roman Catholic and other mainline Churches. It worthy of note that while the term “lordship” is used in some Anglican and other church traditions, it is traditionally not used to address bishops in the United States of America. In its place, “Your Excellency” or more simply “Bishop” is generally used regardless of the Christian denomination.

The Usage of the Majestic Plural

One of the outstanding features of the Anglican episcopate is the bishops’ usage of “We” when addressing the church or making *ex cathedra* pronouncements in his direction of the congregation in his diocese. The ‘royal we’ majestic plural (Latin *pluralis majestatis*) or royal plural, is the usage of a plural pronoun (or corresponding plural-inflected verb forms) used by a single person who is a monarch or holds a high office to refer to himself. The Oxford English Dictionary (Compact Edition) intimates that a more generic term for the use of we, us, or our, to refer to oneself in public communication is *nosism*, from the Latin word *nosis*, meaning “we”. Turner (2007) avers that apart from monarchs or other types of sovereign, the ‘royal we’ is also used in certain contexts by bishops and university rectors, citing that William Longchamp is credited with its introduction to England in the late 12th century. This evolved from the traditional practice of the *Chancery of Apostolic Briefs* – a former papal dicastery charged with drafting and issuing of the Pope’s directives. In the public situations in which it is used, the monarch or dignitary is typically speaking not only in their personal capacity, but also speaking for the people in an official capacity as the leader of a nation or an institution. In the grammar of several languages, plural

forms tend to be perceived as deferential and more polite in singular forms. Turner surmises that in the Commonwealth realms, the sovereign discharges their commissions to ranked military officers in the capacity of 'we'. Many official documents published in the name of the monarch are also presented with the 'royal we', such as decrees, letters patent, proclamations, letters of credence, etc. This practice has gained a strong place among bishops in the tradition of the Anglican Communion, and its usage is seen in episcopal letters commendatory, letters of orders and appointments, letters of release, deeds of relinquishment, mandates of induction, and in Bishop's Charges. The same majestic 'we' is used in public Episcopal pronouncements like preferment of priests to higher ranks, and so on.

The Autonomy of Dioceses

Every diocese in the Anglican Communion operates as an autonomous ecclesiastical entity with its own constitution, though deriving from the canons and regulations of the larger province or national church to which it belongs. The loose strings of fellowship which has held Churches of the Communion together in a communion of mutual inter-dependence is something that started with the very beginnings of Anglicanism, which respects autonomy of its various component sections. Mitchican (2012) intimates that the Lambeth conference was the first real attempt at establishing conciliarity in the burgeoning Anglican Communion, and the impetus was to checkmate the apostasy of John William Colenso the bishop of Natal, whose tolerance of polygamy in 1855, and his subsequent rejection of various biblical texts caused huge strife in the communion. In the first Lambeth conference in 1857, the bishops affirmed that for the purpose of binding the churches of the communion and missionary churches beyond them in the closest union with the mother church, that it is necessary that they receive and maintain without alteration the standard of faith and doctrines in use in the church, in other words, the Anglican formularies, including the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. However, the Lambeth Fathers allowed that each church might make certain alterations to the Prayer Book liturgies so long as no change or addition be made that is inconsistent with the spirit and principles of the Book of Common Prayer, and that all such changes be liable to revisions by any Synod of the Anglican Church in which the said province shall be represented. Mitchican (2012) surmises that though the gathered bishops believed in subsidiarity, they were unwilling to allow autonomy to become a bar to the exercise of a common Anglican faith. Thus, conciliarity as opposed to extreme autonomy became one of the chief motivating factors for the communion-wide synod of bishops in the Lambeth conference that meets every ten years. This is also replicated in regular statutory provincial meetings like the general synods, and the standing committee to heighten communion and discuss matters of common interest. The dioceses of the Anglican Communion operate as autonomous (self-ruling) ecclesiastical entities, but within the bounds of communion and inter-dependence. Each diocese is at liberty to govern itself based on the peculiarities of its local social and cultural contexts, without undermining the theological and liturgical principles that bind the constituent parts of their province together as a part of the wider Anglican Communion. This autonomy of provinces and dioceses, in some cases has been misinterpreted and misapplied out of context at various time in various provinces to the detriment of the common faith and order of the Anglican Church.

The Election of Anglican Bishops

Anglican bishops are typically elected by a combination of processes that vary between the different member churches within the Anglican Communion. Generally, the process involves the clergy and laity within a diocese or province voting to select a candidate, often from a list provided by a nomination committee or the bishops. Welch (2017) notes that in some cases, electoral colleges composed of clergy and lay delegates may be used to select the bishop. In some provinces, the approval of the Archbishop must be obtained before the consecration. Some call the selecting

committee “Electoral Synod”, composed of both ordained and lay members. Once elected and approved, the candidate is consecrated by the archbishop in the collegiality of other bishops. The following is a tabular presentation of the Episcopal election traditions in selected provinces of the Anglican Communion:

S/No.	Province/National Church	Minimum Age for Candidates	Minimum Ordination experience	Involvement of the Laity in the Election of Bishops.	Bishops' Retirement Age
1.	Nigeria	45 years	15 years	Clergy and laity give advice; only bishops nominate and vote.	70 years
2.	Uganda	45 years	10 years	Clergy and laity nominate; house of bishops elects.	65 years (review in progress for 70 years)
3.	England	-	-	Chosen from the clergy by the Crown.	70 years
4.	Scotland	-	-	Ordained and lay members vote.	70 years
5.	TEC (USA)	35 years	5 years	Clergy and laity do the selection/voting.	70 years
6.	South Africa	35 years	5 years	Nomination by clergy and laity.	70 years
7.	West Indies	30 years	-	2/3 majority from both houses.	70 years
8.	Trinidad & Tobago	30 years	-	Both clergy and Lay-people do the election.	72 years
9.	Korea	-	-	Both clergy and laity nominate and vote.	70 years
10.	Australia	35 years	-	Each diocese elects; and Province confirms	70 years
11.	Canada	30 years	7 years	The ordained and the laity elect the bishop.	70 years
12.	Rwanda	-	-	The bishops elect after the diocesan clergy and laity nominate.	65 years

In keeping with the openness and democratic principles in Anglicanism engendered by the reformation legacy, churches of the Anglican Communion involve both the clergy and the laity in the processes of selection cum election of her leaders. An analysis of the provinces sampled in the table presented shows that there are set standards and qualifications to be met by candidates for the election of bishops of the Anglican Church and their stipulated tenure of office which are ingrained in the Canons and Constitution of each national church or province. This rich tradition

makes for checks and balances, as the clergy and the laity to be ruled in the ecclesiastical administration of the church make a significant input in determining the outcome of who becomes the bishop to lead them. This makes for a smoother and credible leadership in which all the members of the flock of Christ are carried along in the diocese, and the bishop made to be accountable to those placed under his charge. This invariably makes for a wider acceptability of the leadership structure of the church in pursuing and fulfilling the evangelization mandate of the church in the world. However, a slight exception is noticed in the case of the Churches of Rwanda, Uganda and Nigeria, where only the house of bishops conducts the election of bishops. In both Rwanda and Uganda, the houses of clergy and laity nominate and screen the candidates while the house of bishops votes for the presented candidates to select the bishop of a vacant See. In the Church of Nigeria, the primate's advisory committee which is made up clergy and lay members in the concerned diocese plays the role of advising the bishops through the primate on the qualification and the desirability of the candidates to be elected. However, the recommendations of this committee have proven to be largely statutory and a fulfillment of formality and as such, does not really influence the outcome of Episcopal elections in most cases. This could also be the case in other provinces where the clergy and the laity participate in the preliminary processes but are excluded from the actual voting. The bottom-line however, is that all members of the three houses that constitute the church participate in one way or the other in determining the apex level of leadership of the Anglican Church, and in the process, check-mating the infiltration and the imposition of vested and parochial interests, which in turn leads to the institution of mediocrity in Church leadership.

Leadership in the Biblical Model

From the beginning, God has designed and put in place how His people should be governed, spanning the Old Testament to the New Testament times in the life of the early church. He has been appointing leaders for His people throughout religious life in the Judeo-Christian settings, which later developed to different levels of administration like the diocese and others, which in turn necessitated the episcopacy. This has always been accompanied by clear biblical injunctions and standards on how the people of God should be governed. However, due to the obvious limitations of man, the standards are known to be compromised in some isolated cases throughout the long history of the Church. Ezeigwe (2017) commenting on what could possibly lead to abuse of the episcopacy states that the usage of the "Diocesan" as a concept to refer to person of the bishop, which has turned from being an "adjectival" to a "substantival" encourages the prevalence of two major temptations of any bishopric: prelacy or *prima donna* (first lady) complex, and inordinate individualism, where one makes the church in his own image and likeness according to his whims and caprices, instead of in the image of God. He surmises thus:

A bishop exercises "presbyterium" eldership. But he exercises the "presbyterium" together with his presbyters (priests) and deacons in community with the faithful people. Consequently, the "episcopate" is exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways... The bishop not only speaks to the Church but also for the Church and with the Church. But he must cherish those relationships of fellowship and communion with both his presbyters in his diocese and with fellow bishops within a province or national church (p. 52-53).

Whenever the principles of conciliarity and shared authority are neglected through the overbearing influence of the bishop, the diocesan synod becomes more or less a readily available rubber-stamp to endorse the bishop's personal decisions and preferences, ensuring that the diocese is placed firmly under his whims and caprices as it were, and subsequently giving serious impediment to the collegial nature of shared authority of the Church in any given diocese. Cases of this excessive power-wielding scenario though always rare is observed mostly in the global South Churches that exist in the developing countries of the Anglican Communion, where democratic processes are still equally under development as well in the political spheres of such

countries, and coupled with accompanying social problem of low literacy levels. The Anglican Church as a Christian denomination is basically (and in principle) an episcopally-led but synodically-governed Church in the context of the triad of scripture, tradition and reason. Ezeigwe (2017) intimates that in Anglican Church administration, the bishop is primarily a *pastor pastorum* (pastor of pastors), and also known as the *servus servorum Dei* (the servant of the servants of God) and thus, the main distinguishing paraphernalia of the bishop's office is the pastoral staff which symbolizes his pastoral responsibility as a shepherd among the people of God. This biblical ideal is not always achieved in all cases of the episcopacy. In some cases when diocesan bishops over-step their bounds and abuse their episcopal authority in the administration of their dioceses, the inherent measures of checks and balances seem to be overwhelmed and both relational and disciplinary problems ensue. *Latropedia*, the worship Wiki contains among its list of "latrias" the term "episcopalty", which it defines as the worship of bishops, from the Greek "latreia"- (worship) and "episcopos"- (bishop). The exalted office of a 'Diocesan Bishop' so endowed with episcopal powers over the diocese in the Anglican setting is such that when pushed to the extremes could also result in a *folie de grandeur* attitude in the "Diocesan", a French term which translates to "delusions of grandeur". This refers to a mental state characterized by the belief that one is of much greater importance, power, wealth or fame than one actually is. This 'winner takes all' attitude to leadership encourages a situation where the head becomes more of an absolute ruler rather than an exemplary consultative Christ-like leader, with a commanding but equally repulsive "know it all" approach in the administration of the diocese that is counter-productive to the gospel mandate of the Church.

The informal cum colloquial reference to the bishop as the "Diocesan" also unduly elevates the ecclesiastical office to a level where the episcopacy i.e., the bishop himself is consciously or otherwise is regarded as an "institution" on his own, with a synodical veto power that enables him to dictate and fully control the spiritual, administrative and socio-cultural trajectory of his diocese, and thereby firmly placing the reins of the so-called "synodical government" of the church in his hands. This research also notes the obvious temptation involved in a setting where a one-man "House of Bishop" with full veto powers in the decisions of diocesan synod has to work in the stated collaborative sharing principle of ecclesiastical authority with the two other multi-member "houses" of the clergy and the laity. It would normally take the possession of and demonstration of the Christian virtues of humility and modesty for such a leader to remain within the bounds of collegiality in the equitable sharing of authority in order to harness, synchronize and move forward with all the stake-holders in the diocese. Where the foregoing case of Episcopal leadership high-handedness is the norm, members of both the diocesan clergy and laity who naturally must strive to obtain Episcopal favours and career advancement through preferment and appointments are invariably forced into a sort of "ethical episcopalty". This is a setting in which pleasing the "Diocesan" by all means, even through sycophancy and praise-singing becomes the quickest way of achieving relevance in the diocese, as well as becoming a most worthwhile venture, and a manifestation of the standard of work ethics in the performance-drive of those called to the Christian ministry in the diocese. This phenomenon, it should be noted, is not peculiar to the Anglican Church, but obtains in the Episcopal polities and other types of church leadership. This also generally applies in other secular leadership settings involving human relational interaction, where working not particularly to please the leader and be in his or her good books becomes an existential threat against job security and promotion.

Conclusion

The Anglican Church is one the churches of the reformation heritage that retained the office and role of bishops within it as biblical and historical. This work has labored to highlight the historical origins of the episcopacy in Christianity and its *modus operandi* particularly in the Anglican Communion, bearing out its significance and utility value in the overall growth and progress of

the Christian religion in general, and Anglicanism in particular, over the centuries of its existence. The historic episcopate and apostolic succession in Anglicanism are well established concepts. But while sharing in the unbroken chain of apostolic ordination, the Anglican Church takes more pride in and lays greater emphasis on the teaching and doctrinal content of apostolic succession – the retention of the core teachings handed down from Jesus through the apostles. Going by the nature of the Anglican ecclesiastical administration, bishops are called to share leadership with other members of the Church. It certainly precludes the “me only” or “me alone” type of leadership because when leadership is shared, openness and accountability are enhanced; the work-force of the diocese is highly motivated, many more leaders are developed, the leader multiplies himself in other people, and consequently commands a greater credibility. These factors have helped to ensure a sustainable growth in the provinces and dioceses of the world-wide Anglican Church. The office of the bishop has been a stabilizing influence in the Anglican Communion since its inception, as bishops provide focus, authority, spiritual direction and support to the clergy and lay faithful in their dioceses. The Anglican episcopacy also plays a crucial role in safeguarding the apostolic teaching inheritance of Christianity. The bishops hold the responsibility of upholding sound doctrine in ensuring that the Church remains true to the original gospel message, as well as resolving conflicts and promoting unity within the Church in the collegiality of the clerical and lay ministries.

Since bishops are called and consecrated to serve God in the church not merely as a position of power or prestige but as a vocation of service, they also speak as the collective voice of the people and represent them in secular government circles in the fight against social inequalities and injustice. The office requires wisdom and dedication to the well-being of the people of God by exemplary Christian faith and conduct. Thus, in spite of the inevitable isolated cases of abuse of the office of bishop in the Anglican Communion and elsewhere, the episcopacy has come to stay in Christianity, and will continue to be one of the major institutions that sustains the growth and expansion of the Anglican Communion in the comity of other Christian denominations, far into the unforeseeable future.

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