

**EVANGELICAL IMPACTS OF THE AWKA DIOCESAN SYNOD OF
THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION, 1987 - 2011**

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Abstract

This paper discussed the importance of Diocesan synod of the Anglican Communion and the evangelical impacts of the synod. People had always perceived the yearly synods of the Anglican Communion as a waste and of no evangelical importance to the church. There is this notion that the Synod is usually more of a social than religious gathering with no spiritual importance. This paper thus based on these assumptions and perceptions using both primary and secondary sources of data collection studied Diocesan Synods of the Anglican Communion with special reference to 1987-2011 synods due to the landmark achievements recorded within these years. It was discovered that the Diocesan Synod of the Anglican communion Awka had impacted both positively and negatively to the host communities and the Diocese as a whole. The paper therefore concludes that the synod sessions has always provided the Diocese with fertile opportunities to evangelize, reflect on its mission focuses and strategies, engage in critical self-appraisal, and address issues in the light of its vision and mission.

Keywords: Anglican, Communion, Diocese, Evangelical

Introduction

The principle of believing that nothing happens until it happens locally has guided the growth and development of the Awka Diocese of the Anglican Communion within the 25 years under review. This grass-root approach has guided the rotation of synod venues, thereby bringing the evangelistic polity to the doorsteps of the faithful. This rotation of synod venues has brought so much impacts, both positive and negative to the host communities and the surrounding communities as well as the synod delegates. These evangelical impacts of the synod are what this paper

discusses. Each synod carries and creates avenues for evangelism in the host communities. The visit to the traditional institutions and other prominent places, praying together and sharing views in common, worship and open air crusades are sure ways of spreading the gospel and thereby enabling the church to grow and develop. Since the creation of the Awka diocese of the Anglican Communion, there has been series of synods conducted in the diocese and which sought to or rather had their various impacts on the members of the Anglican Communion and Christians in Awka diocese in general. Even though those impacts can be seeing in both negative and positive aspects. The choice of the year 1987 – 2011 was because of the landmark achievements recorded within these years and also the need to reduce ignorance associated with poor articulation of the evangelical trend in Awka diocese.

Conceptual Clarifications

Evangelical

The term evangelical, which has to do with evangelism, is defined according to Hornby (2000), as wanting very much to persuade people to accept one's religious views and opinion. Evangelism according to Udezo (2007), is "to bring or to announce the *euangelion*" (p.70). This according to Chatfield (1998), is not merely for people's conversion, but for their caring and disciplining. In like manner. Oji (2010) defined evangelism as "the spreading of the gospel, God's good news and God's good news is Jesus Christ" (p.96).

Synod

The word synod according to Oji (2007) is "from the Greek word *synodos*, meaning assembly" (p.117). He went further to define it as a local or provincial assembly of bishops and other church officials meetings to resolve questions of discipline, administration and other church matters. Anikwenwa (2002) defined synod as the most representative assembly of the diocese in Anglican Communion, consisting the bishop, the house of clergy and the house of laity. Shriver(1993) defined synod as composing of clerical, and often lay delegates, being part of an episcopal polity and which each church or province of the Anglican communion is governed.

Anglican Communion and the Synod

The word synod in some churches is used to signify an organizational unit, as in the Presbyterian Church where a synod consists of a number of presbyteries and some laity. It is sometimes used synonymously with the word council. According to Oji (2007), the word synod is from the greek word, *synodos*, meaning assembly. However, in the Christian church it means a local or provincial assembly of bishops and other church officials meeting to resolve questions of discipline, administration and other Church matters. Some Churches have tried differentiating between synod and council, stating that synod is more encompassing than council as it is regarded as a local affair. The name council was used in the early church to mean any church meeting and even building where services were held. Stressing further Oji (2007) stated that during the 3rd century the word council came to have special sense of meetings of bishops, though not only bishops were present, for the administration of the church.

In the Anglican Communion, synods are held in provincial and diocesan levels, while councils are held at the Archdeaconry, Parish and local church levels. Dioceses always look forward to their annual synods. Synods in the communion are the representative assembly of the Church at the Diocesan level, consisting of the House of Bishop(s), the House of Clergy, and the House of Laity. Anglican Dioceses and Provinces worldwide have common Characteristics with regard to synodical government and functions. The Bishop is the president of the synod at the Diocesan level, and assisted by synod officials elected in a duly constituted synod meeting. While the Archbishop and primate of the province lead the synod at the provincial level, and assisted by Clerical and Lay synod officials duly elected in a meeting of the synod. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) (1987) states that "the life of a synod shall be six years and shall terminate on the 31st day of October in the sixth year of the synod" (p. 28). Session of a synod shall hold at such times and places as the Bishop who is the president of the synod may appoint; communicating the date and venue to the members through the clerical synod secretary not less than twenty one days before the appointed date. The presence of the Bishop or his representative and one-fourth of the clergy and one sixth of the lay representatives shall be the quorum for a meeting of the synod for the due exercise of its powers.

Functions of the Synod

The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) (1987) stipulates the functions of synod as follows:

1. The synod of the Diocese has the power to enact laws, rules, regulations, policies, guidelines and resolutions and to take such other decisions for the administration, management and control of the affairs of the Diocese as shall be conformable with the Diocesan constitution.
2. The synod shall work for the advancement of Christian religion and education, promotion of religious and charitable purposes and provide the machinery for the smooth administration of the Diocese.
3. It shall appoint the Diocesan council and such boards and committees as are prescribed by the constitution.
4. It may by resolution appoint other Boards, committees, or other bodies as it deems necessary which shall consist of members of the synod and any other members that the Bishop or the Diocesan Board may deem fit in the circumstances.
5. Notwithstanding other provisions of these regulations the synod has power from time to time to make regulations and issues guidelines, and directives for the election of representatives to committees and other bodies in the Diocese.

The second function as stipulated above is geared towards evangelical agenda. This has to deal with the generally accepted notion that synod is policy making meeting for administration of the Church.

Positive Impacts of the Awka Diocesan Synod

Training of Clergymen

The 1989 synod which deliberated on the theme: "word of God", brought to the fore the need for deeper and further training of the clergymen. The synod made emphasis on the correct interpretation of God's word for sound evangelism and discipleship. This is because the distortion of the word of God is dangerous in the course of spreading the good news. The synod therefore advocated for both spiritual and academic training of the clergymen in the diocese. Thus, according to Kanu and Ofonakara (2010), "it should be noted that the mission and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ is not for the faint hearted" (p.1). They went further to state that if the

missionary candidates has no personal relationship with his saviour, he will hardly be able to convince others to put their faith in him.

The natural reaction of anyone genuinely called is a feeling of insufficiency or unworthiness. Judging from this natural endowments the diocese also understood the feeling of incapability by her genuinely called ministers of undertaking the responsibilities. According to Chiegboka (1999);

The fishermen whom Jesus picked out as His first followers were simple folk. They did not come from the schools and colleges; they were not drawn from the ecclesiastics or the aristocrats. They were neither learned nor wealthy. They were mere fishermen. (p. 85).

From the above mentioned, the diocese through the synodal theme of 1989 and deliberations saw the need for training and retraining of her minister for effective and undiluted evangelization. Also, the predictions of the second coming and the coming to an end of the world in the year 2000 by some prophets of doom gave another major concern on the training of clergymen in the diocese and for which also the 1999 synod gave attention to. This is to avoid the church from spreading erroneous theology and distortion of the word of God. On this Okoye (2010) said, "if the Church, however, goes astray...it would be turned into an instrument of spreading erroneous theology, thereby expanding the frontiers of the tyranny of those St. Paul rightly describes as false prophets...". (p. 140).

Financial Support in the Areas of Infrastructural Development

Financial support in the areas of infrastructural development has been coming from responsible Christians giving of lives and possessions which are brought under Christ's leadership. The Diocese has witnessed tremendous growth in the areas of infrastructural development, which the 1994 synod gave attention and support and for which many projects have been undertaking since after the synod. Thus in looking at the 1994 synod theme which discussed the Christian stewardship, Anikwenwa (1994) discussed stewardship as holistic and not just about giving out time, talents and possession as many people quickly concluded on hearing the word. He therefore went further to state that stewardship involves responsible Christian giving of lives and possessions. The resultant effects of this synod is that projects were sponsored by many young men who served the church at no cost. Example of such infrastructural development

and projects are St. Thomas vicarage Neni, the present temporal bishops court Awka, St. Paul's Umuokpu, St. John's Church Abagana, St. Christopher's Church, Awka, All Saint's Church Awka, Christ Redemption church Awka. In these places, people come out understanding the need of the diocese to build church structures for the diocese. Counting on the need for infrastructural development, financial support to the diocese and evangelism in a holistic perspective, Anikwenwa (2002) states that;

It is useful to wave our hands and minister healings to those oppressed with various diseases and infirmities, but it is even much better to stem the tide of such diseases by preventive therapy, and by providing an enabling environment and structures that would be responsive to the need of people. No area of life, therefore should be left out of the evangelistic endeavours. (pp. 98 - 99).

Provision of Basic Social Amenities

The images which Jesus used to illustrate the influence he expected his disciples to exert in human society, even though they at that time were very few in number was to be salt and light to the whole earth. Thus, Stott (1990) states that;

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13 - 16). (p. 66).

One of the most important ingredients of religious, political, economic, cultural and social progress is community development. Development denotes creating through the establishment of spiritual, moral, social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect. Thus a creative and resourceful living church will always be a force sensitive to issues, questions, problems and needs of the masses and the community at large. Through the influence of the evangelical trends of the Awka Diocesan synods of the Anglican

Communion, the church provided such basic amenities like culvert at Awba Ofemili and Nkwelle Awka, provision of bore hole at Nigerian prisons Awka, Diocesan Hospital built by the Diocese at Awba Ofemili where no hospital had existed before. According to Iwe (1985), our developing country should tend at least in aspiration; towards a more robust human condition of living. Such a favourable condition would entail and witness for all our people an open and easy access to the material resources of modern civilization. It is a condition that would further engender victory over our physical and social scourges such as hunger, malnutrition, curable diseases, selfishness, bribery, nepotism, tribalism, mormonism, greed for power and position.

Ecumenical Spirit

The great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ to his eleven disciples (Matt. 28:16 - 20) cannot be accomplished in the modern gospel for the whole world without obeying Christ prayer for church unity (Jn. 17:6 - 20). This struggle and desire to be one united Christian is been pursued and manifested in the evangelical trends of the Awka Diocesan synod of the Anglican Communion. Irrespective of the Christian variations or affiliations, visits are usually made to the Traditional leaders of any community and in some cases neighbouring communities where synods are held. According to Oji (2007) synod preparations at times cuts across denominations, thereby promoting ecumenism. The members of the hosting community both Anglicans and non - Anglicans alike usually and always participate in the preparation for the synod meeting in their community. In some cases even those who are not Anglicans are made members of the local organizing committee. According to Nmah (2012);

Ecumenical is the Greek *oikoumene*. It means the whole inhabited earth. The symbol of the modern Ecumenical movement is the rudderless ship, on the sea with a cross as a mast. This means the gospel for the whole world. In this sense the ecumenical movement on ecumenism is the hope that all Christians world over might be brought into unity of love, which has been the dream from the beginning of the faith and that into which this unity all (human - kind) will ultimately be drawn. (p. 51).

Commenting further, Kalu (cited by Nmah, 2012) “avers that the essence of the organic unity is not moving into a unified church just in order to

have a longer organization or to get more worldly power but to win the country for Christ" (p. 58). Thus, the Awka Diocesan synod of the Anglican Communion through its ecumenical spirit sought to win the country for Christ and making all Christians one.

Youth Empowerment

According to Sazama and young (2006), youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youth and adults. Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for consequences of those actions. Thus, empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms rather than at the directions of others. Youths in Awka diocese has benefitted so much from the evangelical trends of the diocese. Paul University founded in 1904 and became a full pledged university on November 3, 2009, with the mission to offer access to university education to talented youth, and involving them in the discovery, generation, dissemination and application of high quality knowledge which will equip them with self-reliance and enlightenment service to the nation and mankind in a collegial atmosphere characterized by the fear of the Lord, academic freedom and critical enquiry; has been a source of educational empowerment to the youth. According to Oji (2007), the effect of the evangelical trend in Awka motivated the women who considered the wholesome development of their children very important to establish schools like Mary Sumner vocational institute, Awka. The skill acquisition and computer training centre, Agulu. These skill acquisition centres has through her industrial attachment exercise made remarkable impart in Awka and beyond.

In the area of spiritual empowerment, Diocesan crusades are held for the youths in the form of Jesus carnival which normally involves all the parishes and local unit churches in the Diocese. Anikwenwa (2009) stated also that the annual Diocesan Bible Study conference is an avenue of spiritual empowerment of the youth in the Diocese. The systematic study of the Bible is meant to disciple the youths while the lectures on

Anglicanism are meant to inculcate in them Anglican tradition and heritage. This is because the Anglican youth fellowship which is an umbrella body of all the youths in the Diocese, is one of the reliable agencies of evangelism in the Diocese of Awka. Members of the Girls Guild who are the future mothers in Awka Diocese are groomed to develop spiritually, mentally, physically and into useful womanhood. Thus skill acquisition learned in various churches equip them for production of pomade, candle, tie and dye, bead, detergent, body cream and so on.

Negative Impacts of the Evangelical Trends of the Diocesan Synods. Financial Implications

The hosting of synods carries with it enormous financial responsibilities. Even though a period of almost one year notice is usually given to the community that will host the next synod, the preparation is usually very capital intensive as communities sometimes go extra miles to borrow money to host synods in their community. Mgbemena (2013) states that hosting of synod is usually associated with huge expenditure. With the huge expenditure, some communities that do not have money or members that have money to support the church go into borrowing to be able to host the synod. In some cases members are hard pressed and taxed heavily in order to get money for the hosting of the synod. Achu cited in Egwuonwu (2013) lamented that he nearly stopped going to church as he was unsatisfactorily not happy with the enormous money been spent on synods and also coupled with the fact that he paid heavily through the nose for the synod.

Unhealthy Competitions

One of the negative impacts of the Evangelical trends of the Awka Diocesan synods, is that it brings about unhealthy competitions. The preparations heralding the synods are usually characterized with some unhealthy competition, as the host community sometimes tries to discredit the achievements of the other communities who has hosted synods in the past. They try to run down the efforts of other communities who had in the past hosted synods by saying some negative things or making some negative statements to discredit them. These other communities in turn would not want their efforts be brought to the mud and therefore will implore every means to defend their own achievements on the hosting of the synod. Thus Ekpe cited in Egwuonwu (2013), said

that no synod will be superior to Enugwu – Ukwu. The reason behind his assertion is because he was the chairman of the local organizing committee and a traditional ruler of the community.

With these undue and unhealthy competition, people tend to forget the reason and purpose of synod meetings. They give greater attention to the material aspect, basking in the euphoria of having or organizing an expensive synod.

Undue Exhibition of Episcopal Powers

At the beginning of each synod, the bishop address the participants. This address is usually referred to as the presidential or bishop's address. After the address then the synod discussions proper. In this address, the bishop reads out the activities of the diocese within the last synod and his mandates for the church. Usually certain issues are deliberated and debated upon by members of the synod. Clarifications are made on certain issues as demanded by members.

However, the undue exhibition of Episcopal powers has made members sometimes not to challenge the bishop's address. The term used for these address suggest in itself the exhibition of the Episcopal powers; thus militarising the synod which is supposed to be a Christian gathering.

Conclusion

In summary, this work examined the Evangelical Impacts of the Awka Diocesan Synod of the Anglican Communion, 1987 – 2011. It was observed that the period 1987 – 2011 witness some land mark achievements, and it is very important to reduce the ignorance and the poor articulation of the evangelical implications that have been inherent in the actualization of the land mark. It was observed that in the Diocese of Awka synods have a lot of effects in actualizing the land mark achievements which range from physical to spiritual gains. For example, synod nurture a sense of responsibility in persons in the sense that whenever a church is called upon to host a synod, its members swing into action, forming committee and making themselves available for service and assistance. The resultant effects of the synod experience on the host community and other members of the Diocese to evangelism have been discussed.

In all ramifications, synod sessions provided the Diocese of Awka with fertile opportunities to evangelize, reflect on its mission focuses and strategies, engage in critical self-appraisal, and address issues in the light of its vision and mission. Though this was not without some negative effects which also brought about in some cases abandonment of the more spiritual aspect of the synod to the pursuit of physical gratifications.

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OCHENDO: AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE STUDIES

ISSN: 26814-0788 (Print) 2814-077X (e). Vol. 1 No. 1. 2020

A Publication of the Association for the Promotion of African Studies

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