



AN EXEGETICAL APPRAISAL OF JOHN 21:20-22 AND ITS IMPLICATION TO ADDRESSING INTRA-MINISTERIAL RIVALRY AMONG THE CONTEMPORARY ANGLICAN CLERGY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Intra-ministerial rivalry among contemporary clergy in the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria) represents a significant ecclesiological and pastoral challenge that undermines the unity and mission of the Church. Unhealthy competition for recognition, influence and power among contemporary Anglican clergy have become prevalent in the Church of Nigeria, threatening the church's spiritual, administrative, and missionary health. This research seeks to examine intra-ministerial rivalry among contemporary Anglican ministers and proposes a biblical-theological response through an exegetical appraisal of John 21:20-22, where Peter was contentiously concerned of what becomes of John (the beloved apostle) in competition for influential position of primacy. The research work adopts a qualitative research method, combining biblical exegesis, theological analysis, oral interviews, personal observations and empirical insights from scholarly works. The findings of the study demonstrate that the root of rivalry lies in comparison and the desire to measure one's ministry against that of others. A critical analysis of the text John 21:20-22 reveals its theological implications for ministerial conduct. The researcher argues that Jesus' response to Peter – "What is that to you? You follow me" in John 21:22 provides a timeless corrective framework that emphasizes personal vocation, servant leadership and non-competitive but collaborative ministry; calling Church leaders back to faithfulness, humility, and focused obedience to their divine call. The research recommends that a healthy response to intra-ministerial rivalry in the Anglican Diocese of Umuahia requires transparent leadership, fair preferment, clear communication, prayerfulness, humility in service, collaborative ministry and a renewed commitment to servant leadership. Hence, ministry is not a competition for superiority but a vocation of service.

Keywords: *intra-ministerial rivalry, clergy, Anglican, John 21:20-22.*



Introduction

The Anglican Communion in Nigeria operates under a distinct ministerial hierarchy, ranging from deacons to bishops, aimed at facilitating effective ministry. However, unhealthy competition for recognition and influence among clergy have become prevalent in contemporary times, threatening the church's spiritual, administrative, and missionary health. Ministry within the Anglican church has historically been conceived as a divine calling grounded in humility, service, and spiritual accountability. Though, contemporary realities within many ecclesiastical contexts, reveal a shift toward power struggles and rivalry among ministers.

Despite the spiritual and theological foundations of ministry within the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria), rivalry among the clergy persists; leading to divisions, inefficiency, diminished spiritual authority, and weakens the church's testimony. This issue highlights a disconnection between established ecclesiastical order and individual ministerial aspirations. Today, intra-ministerial rivalry seems to be evident during preferments and the transfer of ministerial personnel. Thus, many clergy engage in unhealthy competition driven by ambition, material benefits, and hierarchical aspirations. The anxiety to be in the church leadership top rank is always evident before, during and after preferments/appointments by sometimes serving and would be ministers and the members inclusive. This has most at times led to open confrontation and expression of grievances.

Throughout the Johannine narrative, Peter is portrayed as a prominent apostolic figure, yet the Beloved Disciple repeatedly emerges as a model witness whose testimony carries significant theological weight. In John 13:23–25, the Beloved Disciple occupies a position of intimacy with Jesus. In John 20:1–10, although Peter enters the tomb first, it is the Beloved Disciple who is said to have seen and believed. Likewise, in John 21:7, it is the Beloved Disciple who first recognizes the risen Lord. These recurring portrayals have led some scholars to suggest that the Evangelist deliberately presents a nuanced relationship between Petrine leadership and Johannine witness. The parallels between this Johannine narrative and contemporary ministerial realities are difficult to ignore. As observed within many Anglican Dioceses in Nigeria, some clergy occasionally wrestle with questions that bear remarkable resemblance to Peter's inquiry. Why was one colleague appointed to a position of greater responsibility? Why has another minister received public recognition? Why does one parish flourish while another struggles? Why does one individual appear to enjoy greater influence within diocesan structures? Although such questions are deeply human, they reveal a persistent inclination toward comparison that transcends historical and cultural boundaries. In many respects, the experiences of contemporary Anglican clergy mirror the concerns reflected within the Johannine account. Just as Peter sought clarification concerning another disciple's destiny, contemporary Anglican clergy often find themselves preoccupied with the ministries, opportunities, and achievements of their colleagues. This research therefore, intends to investigate the implications of intra-ministerial rivalry on the contemporary Anglican clergy using John 21:20–22 as an exegetico-hermeneutical framework for understanding and addressing intra-ministerial rivalry within the context of Anglican Communion, particularly in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

The concept of rivalry refers to competition, jealousy, disagreement, or conflict between individuals or groups who seek the same recognition, authority, influence, or advantage. Rivalry usually develops when two or more persons see themselves as competitors in the pursuit of leadership positions, honour, promotion, status, or control. In church settings, rivalry may arise when ministers compete for offices, popularity, parish influence, congregational loyalty, or ecclesiastical relevance. According to Nwala (2014), rivalry is a social condition that emerges when personal ambition begins to replace collective responsibility and cooperation. This definition is



relevant to the present study because rivalry among ministers often begins when one minister sees another as a threat to his influence or recognition within the church.

Rivalry does not always appear through open confrontation or visible hostility. It may manifest in subtle forms such as envy, unhealthy comparison, gossip, resentment, exclusion, and silent opposition. According to Kanu (2017), rivalry becomes dangerous when individuals focus more on personal advancement than on the common good of the institution they serve. This observation applies to ministerial settings where clergy who should work together for the growth of the church may instead become competitors because of selfish interests. In organizational and religious institutions, rivalry is often connected to scarcity of opportunities, unequal recognition, and struggles over leadership succession. Where titles, positions, and privileges are highly valued, competition can easily become unhealthy. Ekwunife (2016) observes that conflict and rivalry often increase in institutions where authority is centralized and transparent systems of reward are weak. This viewpoint helps to explain rivalry within church structures wherein promotions, appointments, parish postings, or diocesan responsibilities may create tension among ministers.

Furthermore, rivalry may be emotional, spiritual, or institutional. Emotional rivalry occurs when one person envies the gifts, success, or popularity of another. Spiritual rivalry may arise when ministers compare congregation size, preaching ability, miracles, or public acceptance. Institutional rivalry may occur when clergy members struggle over offices, church influence, or diocesan appointments. According to Oguejiofor (2018), rivalry in religious organizations often hides under claims of zeal, doctrinal purity, or loyalty to church tradition. This is significant because ministerial rivalry is sometimes difficult to identify and resolve. Biblically, rivalry is associated with envy, selfish ambition, strife, and division. The New Testament warns against attitudes that destroy unity among believers. In John 21:20–22, Peter showed concern about the future of another disciple, but Jesus redirected him to focus on his own calling. This passage suggests that rivalry often begins when attention shifts from personal faithfulness to comparison with others.

Rivalry can produce serious negative consequences such as disunity, suspicion, factionalism, poor cooperation, and reduced effectiveness. In church settings, it may weaken evangelism, discourage younger ministers, and damage the witness of the church before society. According to Nwosu (2020), leadership rivalry in Christian organizations affects morale, teamwork, and institutional credibility. This is true in many denominations where internal competition overshadows the mission of the church. However, some scholars distinguish between destructive rivalry and healthy competition. Healthy competition may inspire excellence, discipline, and innovation when guided by ethics and mutual respect. Destructive rivalry, on the other hand, is driven by jealousy, pride, bitterness, and hostility.

Intra-ministerial rivalry refers to conflictual or competitive relationships among ordained ministers within the same denomination, often expressed through struggles for recognition, authority, visibility, and perceived effectiveness in ministry. This phenomenon is highly relevant to the interpretation of John 21:20–22, where Jesus corrects Peter's tendency to compare his ministerial destiny with that of John the beloved disciple. Matshobane and Masango (2018) describe church leadership rivalry as a power struggle within ecclesiastical government where authority, control, and influence become contested among leaders. According to Abioye and Alao (2020), intra-ministerial rivalry is an internal tension between various hierarchies of church leaders in which their activities are in constant overlap. In the context of this research, intra-ministerial rivalry is understood as a state or situation in which ministers of the same religious group are engaged in a prolonged period of competition with each other with greater conflicting personal factors.



An Overview of Intra-Ministerial Rivalry and its Implications

Intra-ministerial rivalry has serious implications for the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria) because it affects both ministry and administration. A church that is divided among its ministers cannot fully embody the unity and peace that it preaches. The implications of intra-ministerial rivalry extend beyond the clergy to the entire life and witness of the church. Rivalry among ministers weakens ecclesiastical unity, reduces pastoral effectiveness, and negatively affects the spiritual growth of congregations. Where ministers operate in suspicion and hostility, church members often become confused and polarized along personality or factional lines. Ogbonnaya (2014) avers that unresolved ministerial conflicts damage the moral credibility of the church and discourage public confidence in Christian leadership.

Contemporary realities within many Christian traditions increasingly suggest that ministry is being interpreted through lenses that differ considerably from the ideals espoused by Scripture. Issues of ambition, competition, and the pursuit of ecclesiastical recognition have become recurring themes in discussions concerning church leadership. In many instances, positions that were originally intended for service are gradually being perceived as symbols of influence, privilege, and institutional significance. Consequently, ministers are often confronted with the tension between divine calling and human aspiration.

The Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria) is not isolated from these broader ecclesiastical realities. Through years of ministerial engagement, participation in diocesan activities, and interaction with fellow clergy, the researcher has observed certain patterns that raise important theological and pastoral concerns. These observations do not imply institutional failure nor are they intended to cast aspersions upon the integrity of the Church or its clergy. Rather, they reflect human experiences that have become increasingly discernible within the ordinary life of the Church. Among these observations is the growing tendency toward comparison among clergy. Conversations surrounding ecclesiastical appointments, parish postings, ministerial visibility, and proximity to diocesan leadership occasionally reveal underlying sentiments of competition and dissatisfaction. While such sentiments are seldom expressed publicly, they often emerge in informal interactions and suggest the existence of unresolved tensions within ministerial relationships. Particularly noteworthy is the manner in which ecclesiastical appointments are sometimes perceived. Appointments to positions such as Canon, Archdeacon, and other offices of responsibility, though intended to facilitate effective governance, are occasionally interpreted as measures of ministerial relevance and accomplishment. Consequently, clergy who are not preferred do experience feelings of disappointment or exclusion, while those appointed may become subjects of speculation and comparison among their colleagues.

Similarly, parish postings have increasingly become a source of concern within ministerial discourse. Certain congregations are generally perceived as more desirable due to their financial stability, geographical location, and institutional prominence. As a result, assignments to such parishes may inadvertently communicate notions of preferential treatment or ministerial status. Clergy serving in less privileged contexts may consequently struggle with questions relating to equity, recognition, and institutional appreciation. Furthermore, the researcher has observed that differences in ministerial visibility frequently contribute to unhealthy comparisons among clergy. Some Clergy whose parishes experience remarkable growth, infrastructural development, or increased public recognition often become reference points against which others measure their own ministries. In such circumstances, ministry risks becoming performance-oriented rather than vocation-centered. The emphasis gradually shifts from faithfulness to fruitfulness, from obedience to achievement, and from discipleship to distinction. Another troubling development is the emergence of cliques and informal alliances among clergy. Although fellowship and friendship remain integral aspects of ministerial life, there are instances where ministers appear to identify



themselves and others according to perceived loyalties and affiliations. Such perceptions, have the potential to undermine trust, weaken collegiality, and foster an atmosphere of suspicion within the diocesan community.

Financial accountability may also suffer where rivalry produces unhealthy competition over church resources and influential postings. Disagreements over parish finances, diocesan levies, and access to church resources often reflect underlying struggles for control and authority. These disputes may intensify existing rivalries and weaken accountability mechanisms within the church. In most situations, prolonged conflict may discourage younger ministers from remaining committed to ministry, thereby affecting leadership continuity within the church. For this reason, the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria) must continually emphasize servant leadership, transparency, humility, spirituality, and mutual accountability as essential values for sustainable ecclesiastical administration.

According to U. Ebere (personal communication, 29th January, 2026), intra-ministerial rivalry leads to jealousy, envy and wrangling among the clergy, it leads to decline in the numerical growth of the congregation, it has resulted in hatred among ministers and between clergy and their members and thus has degenerated to physical confrontation among different hierarchies in ministry. B. Anorue (personal communication, 29th April, 2026), opines that intra-ministerial rivalry has paved the way for wrong persons to get to leadership positions in the church, owing to sycophancy and untrue loyalty. Consequently, some ministers have chosen to be indifferent and stay on their own because of clique alliances. While some carry out their ministerial duties with bitterness, rancour and rebellion.

The cliques or the numerous factions have become a threat to the unity of the clergy in the Anglican church. According to G. Nwabuisi (personal communication, 29th January, 2026), there is neither concern nor genuine interest in what happens to a fellow minister. Intra-ministerial rivalry has weakened the prayer life, the spirit of evangelism, commitment to Bible study of some clergy and leads to moral decline among both ministers and members. According to G. Nwabuisi (personal communication, 29th January, 2026), there are cases where it is obvious that the Vicar and his curate(s) are not in good terms to the point that members become their mediators. Such ministers automatically loose spiritual authority over the church and the spiritual lives and growth of the congregation becomes at stake in such unhealthy atmosphere of intra-ministerial rivalry. Intra-ministerial rivalry may discourage someone from continuing in the ministry especially for the beginners or feeble-minded. Some people's enthusiasm is also adversely affected, as ministerial prowess or gifts may be caged.

Furthermore, intra-ministerial rivalry affects evangelism and mission. Energy that ought to be directed toward soul winning, discipleship, and pastoral care is often redirected toward personal struggles and internal politics. When clergy are preoccupied with internal struggle, less attention is given to mission, discipleship, and outreach, which are central to the church's calling. According to J. Apugo (personal communication, 31st January, 2026), the church members often circulate the minister's ill easily into the community. Hence, to evangelize becomes difficult because nothing good is being spoken of the church. Evangelists, deacons and pastors no longer go out for evangelism and those who manage to evangelize do not win souls because the news of the crisis is all over the social media. Nmah (2017) corroborates that the impact of intra-ministerial rivalry will dapple the spirit of evangelism and soul winning and that members will not be committed to outreach programs. These realities point to a more profound concern: the gradual emergence of intra-ministerial rivalry within contemporary Anglican ministry. Although rivalry is seldom acknowledged openly, its manifestations are evident in subtle forms of comparison, competition, and dissatisfaction.



Collectively, these implications indicate that intra-ministerial rivalry among the contemporary Anglican clergy extends beyond administrative disagreements to encompass social, economic, and spiritual dimensions. If left unresolved, such tensions threaten ministerial unity, compromise pastoral collaboration, and weaken the church's witness in society. Addressing these challenges requires a renewed commitment to servant leadership, transparency, and mutual accountability, consistent with the biblical and ecclesiological ideals of Christian ministry.

An Exegesis of John 21:20-22

Textual Reading: ²⁰ Ἐπιστραφεὶς τ ὁ Πέτρος βλέπει τὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀκολουθοῦντα, ὃς καὶ ἀνέπεσεν ἐν τῷ δείπνῳ ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν· Κύριε, τίς ἐστὶν ὁ παραδιδούς σε; ²¹ τοῦτον ὁ οὖν ἰδὼν ὁ Πέτρος ἔλεγεν τῷ Ἰησοῦ· Κύριε, οὗτος δὲ τίς; ²² λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν τ ἕως ἔρχομαι, τί πρὸς σέ; σύ ἴ μοι ἀκολούθει ἰ.

Textual Criticism

A comparison of this text with other variants reveals few textual ambiguities. In other words, the textual tradition of John 21:20–22 is relatively stable, yet several variants require careful evaluation. In verse 20, some manuscripts like $\mathfrak{P}^{99\text{vid}}$ κ D K N Γ Δ Θ Ψ f^{1.13} 565. 700. 892. 1241. 1424. f sy^h pbo insert the conjunction δέ after ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς. However, the shorter reading preserved in our Nestle-Aland text and other Alexandrian witnesses like $\mathfrak{P}^{109\text{vid}}$ A B C W 33 lat is generally preferable because scribes frequently insert conjunctions to smooth transitions. Likewise, the omission of ἀκολουθοῦντα in some witnesses like κ^* W ff² pbo likely arose from accidental simplification. Since the participle contributes directly to the thematic continuity of discipleship, its inclusion is more original.

In verse 21, several Byzantine variants like A K W Γ Δ Θ Ψ f^{1.13} 565. 700. 892. 1241. 1424 $\mathfrak{P}$ sy^r omit οὖν. Nevertheless, the conjunction is strongly supported by early Alexandrian witnesses such as κ and B. Internally, οὖν explains the logical transition from Peter's observation to his question. The omission probably emerged from scribal attempts to abbreviate the sentence. Similarly, the variant εἶπεν replacing λέγει appears secondary in κ W f r¹ vg^d because Johannine narrative style frequently employs the historical present λέγει. The most important variant occurs in verse 22 concerning the omission or inclusion of μοι. Some later Byzantine witnesses like C² K Γ Δ Θ Ψ f^{1.13} read σύ ἀκολούθει (you follow), while earlier and more reliable manuscripts including $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$, κ , and B preserve σύ μοι ἀκολούθει (you follow me). The inclusion of μοι is both externally and internally stronger. Externally, it enjoys support from the earliest Alexandrian witnesses. Internally, it is the more difficult reading because it intensifies the relational dimension of discipleship. Therefore, the reading preserved in our Nestle-Aland critical text is closest to the original manuscript tradition. By the principles of *lectio difficilior* and multiple attestation, the more difficult and longer reading containing μοι should be preferred. Jesus' command is therefore not merely "follow," but "follow me," thereby emphasizing Christ-centered discipleship rather than institutional competition.

The Working Translation

²⁰ Turning around, Peter sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following; who also leaned on his chest at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one betraying you?" ²¹ Peter seeing him, says to Jesus, "Lord, but what about this one?" ²² Jesus says to him, "If I will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow me".



Delimitation of the Text

The text will be set out as a unit of its own in order to fully understand the logic of the text and to obtain some insight into the structure of Jesus' corrective response to Peter in John 21:20-21. The following observations are relevant here as this section concerns itself primarily on the delimitation of the text.

John 21:20–22 forms an independent literary unit within the epilogue of the Gospel of John. The pericope begins with Peter's observation of the Beloved Disciple and ends with Jesus' corrective response. Structurally, the passage possesses narrative completeness because it contains observation, inquiry, and response. Thematically, it addresses vocational comparison and discipleship, thereby distinguishing itself from surrounding sections. The passage stands out from verses 15–19 which focuses on Peter's restoration and pastoral commission. There, Jesus emphasizes shepherding responsibility, sacrificial love, and martyrdom. In contrast, the exegetical text (20–22) introduces a new concern: Peter's curiosity regarding another disciple's destiny. The transition is indicated by the participle Ἐπιστραφεῖς ("having turned around"), which introduces both a physical and thematic shift.

The pericope is equally distinct from verse 23 which contains an explanatory clarification regarding misunderstanding among the brethren. Whereas our text, verses 20–22 consist of direct dialogue between Jesus and Peter, verse 23 represents editorial commentary explaining that Jesus did not actually promise the Beloved Disciple would never die. This narrative change confirms the boundaries of the unit. The text therefore stands independently because it possesses literary coherence, thematic uniqueness, and structural completeness. Its primary theological purpose is to reject comparative discipleship and reaffirm individualized vocation. The researcher intentionally isolates this text in order to emphasize that discipleship must not be measured through rivalry or comparison with others.

Semantic and Syntactic Analysis

An exegetical appraisal of the text makes an understanding of words used a necessity. The verbs, both main and subordinate clauses are highlighted differently and then commented upon very briefly. Phrases, clauses and sentences would also be given a technical clarification wherever and whenever it is required. It shall follow a pattern of analysis of verse after verse beginning with verse 20. Notably, the semantic structure of John 21:20–22 revolves around discipleship, comparison, vocation, and divine sovereignty.

Verse 20 Main verbal clause: Ἐπιστραφεῖς ὁ Πέτρος βλέπει τὸν μαθητὴν

Ἐπιστραφεῖς: This is aorist tense, passive voice, participle, Masculine nominative singular of the verb ἐπιστρέφω (to turn).

βλέπει: Present tense, active voice, indicative mood, 3rd person singular, from the verb βλέπω - (I see). The present tense heightens narrative immediacy. Syntactically, the participles Ἐπιστραφεῖς and ἰδὼν create narrative movement from observation to comparison. This Ἐπιστραφεῖς implies Peter's physical turning symbolizing narrative distraction; he shifts attention from his own calling to another's destiny. Bernard (1953) states that this is a peculiar kind of curiosity, which we find in people of very active minds, where Peter is eager to ascertain at once who is the traitor in the company. Verse 20 breaks off predictions about Peter and turns interest to the beloved disciple. He appears and significantly, already following. According to Black (1964), martyrdom is perhaps the clearest and simplest way of following Christ and bearing witness to him, but it is not the only way. The beloved disciple also follows and bears witness. The author's desire to set forth Peter and the Beloved Disciple as having different yet equally significant vocations is generally recognized.

Verse 21 Main phrase: τοῦτον οὖν ἰδὼν ὁ Πέτρος



ἰδὼν: This is aorist tense, active voice, participle, from ὁράω (to see). This participle ἰδὼν meaning “Having seen” triggers the comparative question because sight leads to comparison. According to Bernard (1953), “Peter has been told that he will die by crucifixion and him at once asks what is to be the fate of his friend” (p. 711). According to Laymon (1972), “his query about the fate of this companion in verse 21 is both a natural curiosity about the destiny of the man himself and a deeper allusion to those whom the beloved disciple represents figuratively” (p. 728). Whether soon or later, the summons of Jesus comes to every disciple, to follow him and to bear witness to him. Peter is viewed as the model Shepherd for all other shepherds of the Lord’s flock. The qualities of the Beloved Disciple, however, are equally needed in the leadership of the Church.

Verse 22: λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι is the main clause; while τί πρὸς σέ; σύ μοι ἀκολουθεῖ is the subordinating clause.

μένειν: This is present tense, active voice, infinitive mood, from the verb μένω (to remain, stay or abide) which implies a continuous action, μένω is a central theological verb (cf. John 15:4–7). It denotes covenantal abiding, perseverance, and relational constancy. Remaining is not superior to martyrdom. It is simply a different mode of faithful discipleship. The succeeding phrase “What is that toward you?” meaning “That is not your concern” establishes vocational boundaries. A bishop’s calling differs from that of an archdeacon. A parish priest’s ministry differs from diocesan administration. Generational succession differs from vocational faithfulness; hence, Christ refuses to allow comparative evaluation of callings.

The third-class conditional clause Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι expresses hypothetical possibility and emphasizes Christ’s sovereign authority over the destiny of His disciples. The syntax preserves ambiguity while affirming divine prerogative. According to Black (1964), whatever be God’s will for the beloved disciple is no business of Peter’s; it is his to follow and not to concern himself with the destiny of others.

The final imperative σύ μοι ἀκολουθεῖ (you follow me) is emphatic because the pronoun σύ (you) appears explicitly. Jesus personalizes the instruction and redirects Peter toward his own calling. Applied to Anglican ministry, the syntax teaches that ministers should concentrate on their God-given responsibilities rather than become consumed with rivalry and ecclesiastical comparison. As Black (1964) rightly notes, “Peter, then, is to follow, to be a shepherd, and to bear witness by his death. The beloved disciple also follows, and bears witness, though in a different way” (p. 218).

ἔρχομαι: present tense, middle voice, indicative mood, 1st person singular, from the verb ἔρχεται (I am coming). This may possibly imply futuristic: “until I come” referring to Parousia, resurrection appearances or eschatological vindication. The ambiguity reinforces divine sovereignty over destiny. Pregeant (n.d.) states that the way in which the author has presented the scene shows that he was not solely concerned to correct the misapprehension about the survival of the Beloved Disciple till the Parousia of Christ. He is at pains to remind the reader of the unique relation to the Lord of this disciple, and therefore his special ministry to the rest of the disciples and to the Church: his record of the Lord’s brusque correction of Peter, when he wanted to know what service was appointed for that disciple and what would happen to him, is part of that representation. Peter was being given the privilege of labouring for Christ to old age, and to complete it with the crown of martyrdom. No such honour was given to the Beloved Disciple. Johnston (2003) notes that by the time chapter 21 was written and the gospel went into circulation both disciples had died, one with the glory of martyrdom and one with a peaceful end at Ephesus. It is reasonable to suggest that this presentation of the relations of Peter and the Beloved Disciple, to the Lord and to each other, was made for the benefit of Churches which were inclined to exalt one over against the other. the tendency to favour one apostle more than another is seen in the Corinthian correspondence of Paul (1 Cor. 3:3-4). And that would be the more natural in circles where one apostle was known and loved, and others were



known only through second-hand reports. The anonymity of the Beloved Disciple indicates that he was so well known in the Churches he served that there was no need to use his proper name, but it is well possible that he was quite unknown in many areas of the Church, whereas Peter was known to all (Johnston, 2003). It was desirable therefore for Christians elsewhere to learn how the famous Peter and the comparatively unknown Beloved Disciple were related. So, the author endeavours to show that both men were gifts of the risen Lord to the Churches, very different in gifts and calling, but with important tasks to perform for the benefit of all. That the saying of verse 22 circulated among the Johannine Churches is evident from the reference to the 'brothers' (21:23), who understood it as a promise from the Lord that the Beloved Disciple would survive till the Parousia. The saying has caused some commentators as much perturbation as 'the brothers', to judge from their anxiety to empty it of real eschatological content. Although outside vv. 20–22, verse 23 clarifies misunderstanding regarding "remaining." Some manuscripts smooth the text to reduce eschatological confusion.

The subordinating phrase is: σύ μοι ἀκολούθει

ἀκολούθει (v. 22): This is present tense, active voice, imperative mood, 2nd person singular, from the verb ἀκολουθέω (to follow).

This implies a continuous action, to keep following. The emphatic pronoun: σύ (you), meaning: "You - keep following!". This phrase denotes personalized, ongoing discipleship and not competitive leadership. According to Brown (1970), the one thing that matters is that he should follow his lord in the present moment to hear what further word may yet be addressed to him, and in the days and years ahead, as the risen Lord guides him and reveals his unfolding task, till the final call to follow him in a death to the glory of God. Accordingly, the command given in verse 19 is repeated, only yet more emphatically: "As for you, *you follow me*". The verb ἀκολουθέω (to follow) is central within Johannine theology and denotes committed discipleship. In verse 22, the imperative ἀκολούθει expresses continuous action and demands sustained obedience. The command therefore redirects Peter from distraction toward faithful commitment. The phrase τί πρὸς σέ (what is that to you?) semantically carries the force of dismissal. Jesus rejects Peter's attempt to evaluate his own ministry in relation to another disciple. According to Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy (1970), Jesus tells Peter that the death of the beloved disciple is none of his concern. Jesus neither affirms nor denies the possibility; to do either would be to satisfy Peter's idle curiosity. Hence, the statement τί πρὸς σέ (what is that to you?) establishes vocational boundaries and affirms that divine assignments differ among disciples. Comparison is therefore presented as spiritually unhealthy and leading to rivalry.

Theological Reflection and Hermeneutical Application

The problem of intra-ministerial rivalry has become increasingly visible within ecclesiastical traditions, including the Anglican Communion in Nigeria. Tensions among clergy sometimes emerge through competition for leadership positions, parish influence, and diocesan recognition. Such rivalry often generates division and weakens ministerial cooperation. John 21:20–22 provides a biblical corrective by confronting the spirit of comparison and unhealthy competition among Church leaders. Barclay (1975) states thus:

The text, samples two of the great figures of the church, Peter and John. To each Jesus had given his function. It was Peter's to shepherd the sheep of Christ, and in the end to die for him. It was John's to witness to the story of Christ and to live to a great old age and to come to the end in peace. That did not make them rivals in honour and prestige, nor make the one greater or less than the other; it made them both servants/ministers of Christ. Therefore, let



every minister serve Christ where God has set him. As Jesus said to Peter: “Never mind the task that is given to someone else, your job is to follow me”. (p. 182).

Therefore, one’s ministerial glory should never be in comparison with others; rather each should glory in the service of Christ in whatever capacity that he is allotted to (be it a Venerable, Canon, Vicar, Curate or Assistant pastor). Peter’s question concerning the Beloved Disciple reflects the tendency among ministers to evaluate their success through comparison with colleagues. Although Peter had just received a solemn pastoral commission, he became distracted by another disciple’s destiny. Jesus immediately redirected him toward personal obedience. Barclay (1975) corroborates thus:

It may be indeed, it was inevitable, that people would draw comparisons in the early church. Some would say that John was the great one, for his flights of thought went higher than those of any other man. Some would say that Paul was the great one, for he fared to the great ends of the earth for Christ. But this text says that Peter, too, had his place. He might not write and think like John; he might not voyage and adventure like Paul; but he had great honour and the lovely task, of being the shepherd of the sheep of Christ. (Pp. 106-107).

Ministry therefore is not a competition for superiority but a vocation of service. The passage further teaches that different ministers possess different callings. Peter was destined for pastoral leadership and martyrdom, while the Beloved Disciple represented enduring testimony and witness. Jesus refused to compare these vocations competitively. Likewise, Anglican ministers must understand that differences in office or assignment do not imply superiority or inferiority.

The enduring command “You follow me” remains the solution to hierarchical rivalry within the Church. Ministers who focus on Christ-centered discipleship are less likely to become consumed by jealousy, unhealthy ambition, or political maneuvering. The Church must therefore cultivate humility, servant leadership, fairness, and spiritual accountability. The call of Christ in the gospel is by definition one that must redirect our lives. It calls ministers in the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria), like Peter, to a life of undistracted discipleship to Christ. When Peter then, with traces of his old self still rising to the surface, asks, what about this man? (21:21), Jesus in effect answers, ‘that is none of your business’! Ministers are not called to look at other people and at God’s dealings with them, but they are called to look unto God and follow wherever he may choose to lead them in his service.

Within ecclesiastical structures, loyalty is often regarded as a virtue; however, historical and contemporary experiences reveal that loyalty is sometimes driven by self-interest rather than a genuine commitment to righteousness and truth (Brueggemann, 1990). This phenomenon is not nascent in the current dispensation of ministry in Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria). John 21:20-22 serves as a striking example of untrue loyalty in the context of intra-ministerial rivalry. In this text, Peter who was the leading apostle shifted attention on comparing his primacy to John (the beloved), demonstrating how personal ambition and political manoeuvring can be cloaked in the guise of loyalty (McCarter, 1984). The text serves as a biblical paradigm for critically analysing the role of comparison and untrue loyalty in leadership crises.

While Peter’s question is sometimes viewed as trifling, posed merely to enable the saying of Jesus to be announced in verse 22, it is comprehensible enough, given the frequent association of Peter and the other disciple in the Gospel. If Peter’s path in life has now been made known to him, it is natural for him to be curious as to what is in store for his colleague. (Beasley-Murray, 1987: 36).



But the answer of Jesus is unexpectedly sharp in tone. He makes it plain that his will for his friend is of no concern to Peter, not even if that disciple is called to tread a quieter and less demanding way than his; if instead of the call to martyrdom it be the Lord's will for the Beloved Disciple to remain till the Lord himself shall come, that should make no difference to Peter in the pursuit of his vocation.

The Anglican Communion in Nigeria has faced significant leadership challenges, particularly in recent decades, as theological, administrative, and ideological disputes have fuelled division (Akinola, 2007). These disputes have often been exacerbated by conflicting allegiances, where individuals pledge loyalty, not necessarily based on biblical principles but out of political expediency. Similar patterns of power struggles have been observed in global church history, where leadership disputes frequently stem from self-serving alliances rather than genuine theological convictions (Hastings, 1994). Just as Ahithophel's loyalty to Absalom was ultimately self-serving and destructive, contemporary church politics often reveal similar tendencies, where leaders and followers manipulate allegiance to secure positions of influence (Dumbrell, 2002). This dynamic has led to increasing fragmentation within the church, with theological integrity often taking a secondary role to political manoeuvring (Olupona, 2011).

According to Frederick (2003):

Gradually and slowly our Lord prepared St. Peter for his high office. When Jesus saw him first, He promised him a change of name. "And Jesus looking upon him, said: thou art Simon, the son of Jona, thou shall be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter" (John 1:42). Then he placed him at the head of the twelve and preferred him on many occasions. And when Peter has made his solemn confession of faith in the divinity of Christ, Jesus fulfilled His first promise, saying: "Thou art Peter and on this rock, I will build my Church, and to thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven...". Again, at the Last Supper Jesus told him that he had prayed for him especially that his faith might not fail. And now we have reached the climax. Our Lord commits to Peter the full and final charge of His whole flock, which comprises sheep and lambs, that is to say, pastors or bishops and the congregation of faithfuls. Thus, Peter was made the Vicar of Christ upon earth and the Head of the Church. (p. 728).

Peter's restless concern about the position and prospect of John symbolize intra-ministerial rivalry; a moment when human ambition seeks to replace divinely instituted authority. This is a replica of contemporary challenges in the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria), where issues of ranks, succession, leadership conflicts, and struggles for ecclesiastical power sometimes threaten the church's unity. In many dioceses, internal conflicts arise when individuals seek church leadership positions for personal gain rather than divine service. Similar to Absalom's rebellion, these struggles often create clichés, leading to disunity and weakening the spiritual and moral authority of the church. The Anglican Church in Nigeria must therefore emphasize the biblical principle that leadership is a divine calling, not a political contest. As McKenzie (2000) notes, biblical history teaches that power without righteousness leads to downfall. This serves as a warning to contemporary Anglican clergy that moral and theological compromise has long-term consequences. The Church must remain faithful to its mission of holiness and doctrinal purity rather than seeking cultural or political acceptance. Rather than endorsing rivalry, the text affirms complementary roles between Peter and the beloved Disciple. Their functions differ but are equally valid within the mission of the church. Ideally, every Anglican clergy has their own unique gift and place in the scheme of things irrespective of hierarchy. A pragmatic application of the exegetical interpretation of our text to the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria) would help to eschew all forms of



rancour, jealousy and internal suspicions; and rather, foster teamwork, collaboration and shared responsibility among the ministerial workforce.

Conclusion

This study concludes that intra-ministerial rivalry among contemporary clergy in the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria) represents a significant ecclesiological and pastoral challenge that undermines the unity and mission of the Church. The research underscores that intra-ministerial rivalry is not merely an administrative or interpersonal issue in context of Anglican communion, but a deeply rooted theological problem arising from misplaced priorities, particularly the elevation of status, power, and recognition of influence above service and discipleship. This study reveals that intra-ministerial rivalry negatively impacts the evangelical growth of the Anglican Communion (Church of Nigeria). Respondents were of the view that intra-ministerial rivalry weakens the spirit of evangelism and soul winning in the church as well as makes it difficult to organize crusade for soul winning by hindering outreach efforts resulting in stalled growth of the church. The study reveals that intra-ministerial rivalry tends to dilute the impact of the gospel message and weakens the outreach campaign's credibility along with effectiveness of the evangelism in the dioceses.

The exegetical findings from John 21:20–22 demonstrate that the root of rivalry lies in comparison and the desire to measure one's ministry against that of others. Jesus' response to Peter establishes a normative framework for Christian leadership, redirecting attention from rivalry to personal obedience and commitment to Christ. This Christocentric orientation redefines ministry as a vocation grounded in faithfulness rather than competition. Furthermore, the study affirms that the diversity of ministerial roles within the Church is not intended to create hierarchy-based superiority but to facilitate complementary service within the body of Christ. When properly understood, such diversity eliminates the basis for rivalry and fosters unity. Ultimately, the study contributes to theological scholarship by bridging biblical exegesis with contemporary ecclesial challenges, demonstrating that scriptural insights remain relevant for addressing modern ministerial conflicts. It calls for a paradigm shift within Anglican ministry from ambition-driven leadership to servant-oriented discipleship.

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List of interviewees

Ven. Dr. Gerald Nwabuisi	Acting Rector, Trinity Theological College Umuahia and Archdeacon of Afara Ibeku West Archdeaconry	29/01/26	
Ven. Joshua Apugo	Archdeacon of Afara Ibeku South Archdeaconry	31/01/26	
Rev. Ugochukwu Ebere	Priest , Cathedral chapel, Amuzukwu	13/11/25	
Rev. Ben Anorue	Priest , All Souls Church Umukabia	13/05/2026	