THE LAITY AND CHURCH POLITICS: AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT.

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Introduction

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit".1

Just like every other human organization, the church is entangled with issues and problems, some of which are spiritual leadership and administrative problem, doctrinal, interpretation of values and etiquette, continued exodus of members, illiteracy, disenchanted youth, financial and economic problems, among others, the aftermath of which resulted into politics within the church and schism which had hitherto negatively affected church growth and development.

In the words of Oyelana, the church of Jesus Christ within God’s purpose is one, with a major task to glorify God and spread the gospel message to all nations.3 The birth of the church was as a result of the events recorded in the Acts of Apostles, Chapter 2; and with the preaching of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all". This emphasis unity in all no matter your gender, race, ethnicity, or your nomenclature in the church or the society.

1 Eph. 2: 14-18
2 Oyelana (1996:36)
3 Matthew 28:19-20, Mk 16:15;18
4 Eph 4:5-6
The church today, however, either Orthodox or Pentecostal have been witnessing tribalism, political divisions, and painfully fragmented into several units right within the church. This division has brought about serious controversy leading to a dichotomy between the laity and the ordained. This is against the Bible as noted in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded by John, Chapter 17, verses 20 through 21.

This study therefore, empirically examined the laity and church politics. This study adopted a descriptive study using valid survey. The sample of this study consists of twelve (12) major denominations randomly selected from in an ‘African milieu. The outcome of this study revealed existence of internal politics within the church, and that 81% poor church growth was accounted for by church politics and the role played by the laity. Misuse of office or power by leaders, communication gap, and competing goals between the laity and the ordained were the top three predictors of church politics. The results equally shows that the ordained, laity, and significant others contributed significantly to the existence of church politics; while 35.2% of the variance in church growth and development was accounted for by church politics. Based on the findings, the implications were highlighted and recommendations made.

**Concept Clarification**

**The Lay or Laity**

Defining the concept of "lay" has been so difficult due to the perception of the individual and the circumstances behind it. Lay could be defined in the context of function as those Christians who are excluded in the administration of the sacraments and preaching. By nomenclature, they are not being referred to as a priest, reverend, or pastor. By location, they serve outside the church; by remuneration, they are not paid; by education, they did not receive theological training; and by lifestyle, they are not "religious" but occupied with secular life.

Harkness\(^5\) in a survey study of who a lay is, showed that approximately about sixty per cent of her subject among twelve thousand members of the Methodist Church in the United States sees the laity as the non-ordained Christians whose function are to assist the ordained (clergy) in the process of achieving the church mission of evangelism and winning more souls for Christ, as well as administration function.

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According to Rahner⁶, people may view a lay person negatively or positively, and at times both. To Rahner, lay persons are seen pessimistically as "those who are not in the hierarchy of the church, without proper hierarchical powers either legal or liturgical, and, second, as people distinguished from those in the religious life, who have taken the vows of the Evangelical Counsels. Optimistically, Rahner defines lay persons as "those remain in the world and have specific tasks in society that determine their 'status' in the church, and (positively again) lay persons in the church are called, adopted, commissioned and blessed persons fully functioning as co-operators of the grace of God in and through the church's life because of their baptism and confirmation".

In this study, a lay man is seen as an individual who do not get involve in purely clerical positions or offices, though, may participate in ecclesiastical government and doctrinal teaching as directed by a clergy. Therefore, the laity are ‘Christian faithful, as referred to in varied denominations, not in holy order (Ordained ministry as pastors/reverend, apostles, evangelists). They are baptized and/or confirmed and by this made one body in and with Christ, and established among God's people. On their own part, they function with the mission of Christ with respect to the church and the world.

**Church Politics**

Just like conflicts, church politics have both negative and positive connotations, which in turns have consequences on individuals as well the church as whole. The word politics comes from the Greek word "polis", meaning the state or community as a whole. In this study church politics will be seen as a contest between people with opposing needs, values or/and goals. This is often rooted in the people’s beliefs, as well as their goals' perceptions as opposed to objective facts.

Politics within the church is normal and even healthy part of interpersonal relationship within the laity and the ordained. There is no other reason for this except that two individuals are not expected all the times to agree on everything at all times.

Thus, a church politics could be likened to what Action Aid⁷ and Hoivik and Meijer⁸ sees as “incompatible behaviour between parties whose interests are or appear to be,

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⁸ Hoivik, D; Qualls, C, Jr; Mirabile, R; Cariello, N; Kimbrough, C; Colton, H; Anderson, S; Santostefano, M; Morgan, R; Dahl, R; Brown, A; Zhao, Z; Mudd, P, Jr; Oliver, W, Jr;
incompatible or clashing.” Two things could be taken from these simple definitions. The first is that conflict emanates from (social) relationships. The conflicting group must groups must reside in close proximity whether physically or psychologically.

Antecedents and Consequences of Church Politics

The antecedents and consequences of church politics is enormous. However, in the course of this research few of them will be empirically examined. Numerous wrangles and divisions in the church due to church politics occurred due to the powers given to the church leaders especially the pastors by the appointing authorities.

It is further noted that, conflicts in churches are accelerated by refusal of the clergy to hand over power after elections. This happens quite often where the incumbent declines to step aside in transitional leadership. This finally results in two or more different camps each with a leader and a claim for legitimate leadership. Christian leaders now use the church as an instrument for gaining supremacy and power at the expense of other Christian virtues, which is destructive.\(^9\) When church politics is at its peak in churches, they affect the worshippers particularly when such conflicts end up either in splits or closure of the church. "It is difficult for Christians to cope up with the situation, bearing in mind that they join churches in order to get divine solace and spiritual nourishment"\(^10\).

According to Burges\(^{11}\) cited in Gathuki\(^{12}\), "some of these ordained priests and laity treat the church like private property, exclusively co-owned and managed by spouses, close family members and friends". It has been observed that these leaders exercise a lot of authority, in effect jeopardizing the purpose of the church organs. Church boards and councils are relegated to simple means of legitimizing the will of the leaders.

Baptism is another major cause of rancor between the laity and the church.\textsuperscript{13} Although most churches believe in baptism, differences occur due to the controversy on whether a new believer should be baptized immediately after conversion or later.

It was observed by Adeyemo\textsuperscript{14} that finances is among the many causes of church politics and conflicts, while the "gospel of prosperity" has become the sermon of almost every preacher.

**Research Questions**

1. Does politics exist in the church; and what effect does it have on church growth?
2. What are the top three most important and three least important predictors of church politics?
3. To what extent will the ordained, laity, and others perceived the top three most important predictors of church politics?
4. To what extent has church politics affected church growth and development - physically and spiritually?

**Methodology**

**Research Design:** This study adopted a survey research design. This survey design was preferred since the researcher cannot control the conditions experienced by the church understudied. This is so, because the researcher is only interested in establishing the existence of church politics and the role played by the laity.

**Study Population:** The target population covers the ordained (priest, pastors, apostles, and the elders), the laity (confirmed members of the church through baptism, confirmation, or any other means) and church members. This study specifically covers 12 major denominations in African setting. These denominations are: The Church of the Lord (Aladura), Anglican Communion, Christ Apostolic Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Celestial Church of Christ, Methodist Church Nigeria, Four Square Gospel Church, Winners Chapel, Catholic Church, and Methodist Church Eleja.


Sample and Sampling Techniques: One hundred and twenty participants were selected through purposive and stratified random sampling techniques.

Research Instrument: Relevant information for this research were obtained through the following instruments to arrive at the findings. They are:

i. Oral Interviews: Conscious efforts were being made by the researcher to have personal interview with the some priests, lay and other key leaders within the church.

ii. Questionnaire: The researcher also used structured questionnaire based on the variables of the study.

Administration of Research Instrument: The researcher personally administered the entire questionnaire to all the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected in this study were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive tools of simple percentages was used to describe the demographic variables of the participants. The research questions raised to guide the study were tested using the Multiple Regression Analysis at the 0.5 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Respondents Demographic Description (N = 120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 above shows that out of the one hundred and twenty (120) participants in the sample, 78 (65%) were males, while 42 (35%) were females.

Seventeen (14%) of the participants were between 21 and 30 years of age, twenty-nine (24%) were within the age bracket of 31 and 40 years, forty three (36%) were between 41 and 50 years, while the remaining thirty-one (26%) were 51 years and above.
Eighteen (15%) of the participants were pastors, 55% (60) were laity and the remaining 30% (36) were significant others.
The aspect of the questionnaire that shows the participants' marital status revealed that 31% were singles while 69% were married.

Table 1: A descriptive table showing the existence of church politics and effect on church growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Laity, church politics and church growth</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Do you agree that politics exist in the church?</td>
<td>49 (40.8%)</td>
<td>50 (41.7%)</td>
<td>10 (8.3%)</td>
<td>11 (9.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Do you agree that the role played by the laity on church politics has negative effect on church growth?</td>
<td>27 (22.5%)</td>
<td>71 (59.2%)</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
<td>17 (14.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Do you think that church politics give negative resultant effects based on the role played by the laity?</td>
<td>35 (29.2%)</td>
<td>70 (58.3%)</td>
<td>13 (10.8%)</td>
<td>2 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Does church politics contribute to poor church growth due to the role played by the laity?</td>
<td>71 (59.2%)</td>
<td>16 (13.3%)</td>
<td>28 (23.3%)</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total scores | 182 (37.9%) | 207 (43.1%) | 56 (11.7%) | 35 (7.3%) |

Weighted average | 81.0% | 19.0% |

Source: Field Survey, 2016

In Table 2, it was shown that 40.8% and 41.7% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that politics exist in the church while 8.3% and 9.2% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the item. Item two that assessed the participants’ agreement on the negative effect of church politics on church growth revealed that 81.7% of the participants consented to the negative effect of politics within the church on church growth while 18.3% disagreed. Item 3 showed that church politics give negative resultant effects as perceived by 87.5% compared to 12.5% who disagreed. Also, 72.5% of the participants agreed that church politics contributed to poor church growth as against 27.5% who did not agree to the fact that church politics contribute poorly to church growth.

Therefore, the overall assessment of the respondents' perception of church politics and its effect on the church growth based on the role played by the laity revealed that 81% poor church growth was accounted for by church politics and the role played by the laity. It could be deduced that to a large extent church politics and the role played by the laity will affect the growth of church either positively or negatively.
Table 3: Important predictors of church politics as perceived by the church

N = 120

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Issue</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Mismanagement</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Gap</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/Racial Differences</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of Office or Power by leaders</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Physical Resources</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective Reward System</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatible Interest</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement about Church Strategy</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing Goals between the laity and the ordained</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing Principles between the laity and the ordained</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Frequencies were conducted to determine the top three most important and three least important predictors of church politics as perceived by the church. Generally from both the pre and post survey, eleven factors were identified. Out of these, misuse of office or power by leaders, communication gap, and competing goals between the laity and the ordained were the top three predictors of church politics. The three least important predictors of church politics are ineffective reward system; cultural/racial differences; and, disagreement about administration strategy.

Table 4: Model summary of regression analysis of the ordained, laity, and others perceived the top three most important predictors of church politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Adj. R²</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>R² Change</th>
<th>F Change</th>
<th>d f 1</th>
<th>d f 2</th>
<th>Sig. F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordained</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>6.543</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>3.911</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laity</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>3.002</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>10.543</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>4.216</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>7.876</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The results in Table 4 indicated the extent at which the ordained, laity, and others perceived misuse of office or power by leaders, communication gap, and competing goals between the laity and the ordained as predictors of church politics. For the ordained (R = .377; R² = .142;
Adj. $R^2 = .139; F_{(1,17)} = 3.911; p < .05$), it was observed that the ordained behaviour accounted for 13.9% variability observed in the church politics; 29.3% was observed for the laity ($R = .542; R^2 = .293$; Adj. $R^2 = .293; F_{(1,65)} = 10.543; p < .05$); while 19.1% was observed for significant others in the church. It should be noted, however, that all the yielded $f$ values of 3.911, 10.543, and 7.876 for ordained, laity, and others respectively were significant at less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the ordained, laity, and significant others contributed significantly to the existence of church politics.

Table 5: Model summary of regression analysis of the extent at which church politics affected church growth and development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adj. $R^2$</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>$R^2$ Change</th>
<th>F Change</th>
<th>d f 1</th>
<th>d f 2</th>
<th>Sig. F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>10.009</td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>17.426</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 5 shows the extent at which church politics affected the church growth. The table above revealed that church politics effect yielded a coefficient of multiple regression $R$ of 0.593, and a multiple $R^2$ (adjusted) of 0.352. This implies that 35.2% of the variance in church growth and development was accounted for by church politics. The table reveals that the analysis of the variance of the multiple regression data produces an $f$-ratio value significant at 0.05 level, $F_{(1,118)} = 17.246; P < 0.05$. The finding implies that the negative effect of church politics on the growth and development of the church could not have happened by chance.

Conclusion

Just like every other human organization, the church is entangled with issues and problems, some of which are spiritual leadership and administrative problem, doctrinal, interpretation of values and etiquette, continued exodus of members, illiteracy, disenchanted youth, financial and economic problems, among others, the aftermath of which resulted into politics within the church and schism which had hitherto negatively affected church growth and development.

This study therefore, empirically examined the laity and church politics. This study concluded, therefore, that church politics was as a result of incompatible goals and vision
between two groups or leaders; while these differences were based on misuse of office or power by leaders, communication gap, competing goals between the laity and the ordained, mismanagement of finances, ineffective reward system; cultural/racial differences; and, disagreement about administration strategy.

**Recommendations**

Unhealthy politics in the church is destroying the pastors and churches, while the unbelievers, are being turned away from Christ, and the church. Therefore, it is recommended that churches should ensure that their pastors and church leaders are thoroughly prepared for priesthood. This can be done through theological training or education followed by frequent in-service courses through seminars and conventions. Those in leadership should be able to demonstrate expertise and skills in their duties as church leaders. They should display good interpersonal skills such as wisdom, humility and commitment.

Church administrative structures should be strengthened such that authority vested in the various committees is allowed to operate. The church should follow the stipulated methods of appointing leaders to various positions.

**Bibliography**

**Books**


**Notes:**

10. Hoivik, D; Qualls, C, Jr; Mirabile, R; Cariello, N; Kimbrough, C; Colton, H; Anderson, S; Santostefano, M; Morgan, R; Dahl, R; Brown, A; Zhao, Z; Mudd, P, Jr;

Theses

Bible
12. Eph. 2: 14-18
13. Matthew 28:19-20,
14, Mark 16:15;18
15. Eph 4:5-6