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Church Members Reflection on the Involvement of Lay or Ordained Leaders in Active Politics: A study of MCK Kaaga Circuit

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to explore the reflection of church members on the involvement of lay or ordained leaders in active politics specifically in MCK Kaaga Circuit

Methodology: This study employed descriptive research design. The target population was 11 Kaaga circuit local churches. The study used simple random sampling method to obtain 30% of the 11 local churches to obtain 3 local Methodist churches in Kaaga circuit. The study used purposive sampling method to get a sample of 12 respondents who included 6 church leaders and 6 members. These 12 respondents were purposely selected based on their past experience as political aspirants in various political position in the just concluded 2013 national elections. The study used unstructured interview guides to collect the data.

Results: The study results have proved that it is not wrong for spiritual leaders to join politics since they cultivate and incorporate the virtue of honesty, Holy spirit led administration of resources, democracy and bring Godly light in their political platforms. However, one cannot serve two masters (politics and church leadership) since one may bring division in church. In addition, politics is seen a breeding ground for engagement in corruption, unfulfilled promises hence making politicians liars, deviation from God's purpose of spreading the gospel and accumulation of huge masses of wealth so as to terminate opponents. Nevertheless, politics are not all that bad when their contribution to the community is considered. Politics have been seen to expand of leadership skills of the politicians, growth in developmental agendas and social interactions skills. This reasons therefore makes the church to greatly support the few leaders who have shown interest in politics since they would represent the church members in politics more than what was being done outside the church. In addition, the church also prays for them before venturing into political journey and the church members are requested to vote for them.

Unique contribution to theory, policy and practice: The study recommends that church members get empowered with information on the relevance of politics and how they interrelate with religion. The spiritual leaders should be trained on good governance skills before they engage into politics so that they can practice them effectively when they get positioned. The church management should work hand in hand with the government on delivering various projects of the society. This would make it easy and realistic to church members to believe that a spiritual leader has societal interests when they contest any political positions. The church should engage external

institutions such as universities that offer leadership and theological courses to its members on how to translate church language to a language the community can understand for effectiveness.

Keywords: *Church members, Lay or Ordained leaders, Active politics, MCK Kaaga Circuit*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social interactions between people and how they conduct politics is an intertwined phenomenon. Most developed nations governments' activities cannot really exist cohesively without the human attribution and interactions (Katongole, 2011). As people co-exist with each other, they are able to generate cumulative resources that require leaders among them to govern for the greater good of the society. Administration of people's resources which relies on robust leadership system, has been an outcry since time immemorial (Gifford, 2009). People desire to see Godly leaders in whom have participated in an election hence the relevance and existence of any politically contested community leadership (Strenski, 2010). This means that the church and politics exist both in the same environment thereby requiring people to advance both mandates.

The principals of the church and engagement in political affairs has for a long-time shaped how Christian's livelihood is affected in diverse nations. This is because, people have given priority to them hence their contribution to their lives is paramount. According to Wagon (1988), when Christians seeks to exclude politics from their thinking, they are bound to distort their theologies for politics are inescapable aspect of human existence with direct relevance to the divine human encounter. It is therefore possible for Christians to think as Christians about politics and when they do so, they make a contribution to the civil society of which they are a part of.

From the view of biblical ideologies, politics can be traced early in the Old Testament [OT] where the children of Israel had to live day by day with both Godly guidance and also leadership aspects. For example, Moses often provided guidance on spiritual areas such as sacrifices, prayer and an intermediary between God and the Israelites. However, when Israelites had human related conflicts with each other, he settled the conflicts through leadership (Exodus 14:13). Further on, during the era of Prophet Samuel, Israelites demanded that he chooses a human King amongst themselves so that they can be like other neighboring nations (1 Samuel 8:5). This is where we notice anointing of the first King Saul who was succeeded by other kings such as David and Solomon hence politics taking shape henceforth till even in the New Testament [NT] kings such as Herod.

Politics in the early global church history is established from various spiritual leaders who provided political acumen in their time. Such kind of leaders include St. Augustine who existed between 354 to 430 C.E. St. Augustine stood out through his political opinions and viewpoint on impartiality, nature of human civilization, purpose of government, and connection between church and the government which molded the contemporary western values. This leader founded a theological foundation that was later expanded by Martin Luther.

Regionally in African nations, there have been spiritual leaders who have also taken the mandate to expound that Church and politics can work effectively and exultantly. In Zimbabwe, a Methodist minister who is Reverend Canaan Banana, ventured into politics and became the first president of

that nation. Others that have also followed the same path include, Desmond Tutu of South Africa; and Davis Gitari a Vocal Anglican Church.

In Kenya Archbishop Alexander Kipsang Muge, Arch-Bishop Mwananzeki both of the Catholic church in Kenya and Dr. Rev Lawi Imathiu who was once presiding bishop in Methodist church in Kenya (MCK) have ventured in political aspects. In the most current Kenyan political history, there have been spiritual leaders such as Bishop Pius Mwiru and Bishop Magrete Wanjiru who contested in presidential and parliamentary seats in 2007 and 2013 respectively. In Methodist church, there have been circuit leaders such as Silas Muriuki who became a member of parliament in North Imenti in 2007. The success and failure of these spiritual leaders in the political spectrum was of course based on their diverse opinions on governance and distribution of community resources with equality among other factors.

Nevertheless, involvement of spiritual leaders into politics spectrum has a share of criticism among church members hence causing divisions in church. There are church members who believe that politics is a dirty game and hence should not be involved with spiritual leaders. Therefore, this study aims to examine how MCK Kaaga circuit church members reflect on involvement of Lay or ordained leaders in active politics.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Spiritual leaders are supposed to provide religious guidance to the church members by providing services such as preaching, interceding, and praying for them. Spiritual leaders are viewed as role models in the society whereby they possess and provide leadership to the society. The scope of their work could be global, regional, national or local depending on their type of calling as far as ministry work is concerned. According to Eph 4:13-13, there are five folds of the ministry which include spiritual leaders being teachers of the Word, prophets, apostles, evangelists and pastors. Depending on the nature of their calling, spiritual leaders have a baseline mandate from Jesus Christ of winning souls to the Kingdom of God (Matthew 28:19-20). When Jesus sent his 12 disciples to the world, they were given power and authority to preach the gospel to all corners of the world (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, to some spiritual leaders, engaging in political spectrum is also one way of ensuring they have a higher platform. This platform is used to further the gospel through providing Godly leadership in community resource management at different political capacities. When they become successful politicians, they have more authority to ensure that the poor and needy have equal share of resources as the rich in the society. In addition, they also use political platform to provide resources to support various missionary activities in the kingdom of God to all corners of the world.

Nevertheless, not all church members conform to their ideology due to negative experiences associated with politics. This has caused major divisions among church members with others opting to change their membership to other churches whose spiritual leaders do not engage in active politics. The ideology that politics can be intertwined with church mandates has not yet sunk in many churches' members. The mere thought of a church lay or ordained leader becoming a politician is considered as fall from grace and faith hence not suitable to handle any office of church leadership. This is because, politics have in some instances contended with religion

functions. According to Strenski (2010), when various state countries were declared independent, they basically sidelined religion to be a private affair to people hence could not have any weight in public. Sharing the same sentiments, Trigg (2007) also adds in that, nations such as Europe and America began privatization of religion in 18th century to pave way for modern science.

Grace et al. (2009) posits that secularist do not acknowledge religious contributions to the society hence should be highly limited if not completely destroyed. In further support, Casanova (1994) depicts that government, economy and science have gained priority over religion hence making people believe that religion has no noteworthy significance in life. Interestingly, Woodhead et al., (2009) also shed light that in many modern nations, political leaders see to it that their nations are not influenced by religion but by social concerns. However, in third world countries, religion has had a significant influence towards politics with religious institutions receiving great recognition as major contributors to national coordination. So why then do church members view it negatively when their spiritual leaders engage into active politics? This creates a need to explore the main reasons why church members are of contrary opinion to their spiritual leaders engaging into active politics with a specific concentration of MCK Kaaga Circuit.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the reflection of church members on the involvement of lay or ordained leaders in active politics specifically in MCK Kaaga Circuit.

1.4 Research question

What is the reflection of church members on the involvement of lay or ordained leaders in active politics specifically in MCK Kaaga Circuit?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by theory of religion in the public sphere by Habermas (2006). This theory stated that religion has something important to offer in the public sphere. Unlike what secularization in western communities emphasized that religion was irrelevant and with time it would disappear, Habermas (2006) contradicted this by emphasizing that religion was translating. This is because of the new changes in the world. Religion could now take part in providing meaningful solutions to world's problems such as helping the needy as long as religion translations its vocabulary from religious to secular to be part of the public sphere discussion. In context of this study, what this means is that religious activities have greatly contributed towards improvement of the livelihoods of people. Therefore, when religious leaders wish to participate in public sphere, they ought to complement the many contradictory sentiments thought by people via formal discussion practices. The use of translated language is what can make religion relevant in Public Square. Therefore, the study was concerned with how the church members reflect on the involvement of lay and ordained leaders' legislative issues

2.2 Empirical Review

A report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP] (2015) documented on what the precepts of good governance. The reports noted that good governance comprised as the process of making upright decision on administration of public resources by ensuring that the decision encourage liability, openness, obeying the law, including others, efficient, and are reasonable. While bad governance includes making bad decisions. According to UNESCAP (2015), political advantage is the best platform to check whether these attributes are keenly followed by politicians and in which differentiates and justifies a worthwhile politician or not.

A book by Katongole (2011) that is titled as the political theory of Africa, reveals that in African context, the society has been suffering under poor political leadership. This poor leadership had been fueled by insufficient planning, negligence in handling resources and clamping down of democracy caused by dictatorship ruling. According to Katongole (2011), the church has a solution by providing Christians who can contend for these political positions to bring the much-desired change anchored on Godly principles.

Haynes (2010) pokes holes on state leadership by revealing that the government hardly reaches all areas in the country. It therefore requires to work together with religious leaders since they have established religious societies in the interior of the unreached societies. This gives the government a chance to reach out to its citizen effectively without leaving some communities behind. However, Haynes (2010) adds that it is hard for the religion and politics to fully complement each other due to difference in ideologies they operate in. However, when they work together, they have the advantage of both government and church resources management so as to help the needy in the society.

A book by Gifford (2009) expounds on Christianity, politics and public life in Kenya with special attention to protestant and catholic churches in Kenya. Gifford (2009) notes both optimistic and undesirable factors that these churches have had on both politics and public life. The study reveals that the church has greatly avoided engaging in politics and whoever tries to engage in them is quickly considered a rebel. However, according to Gifford (2009), the future of churches in Kenya relies heavily on the direction politics take in Kenya. Therefore, Gifford (2009) urges those Kenyan churches should take charge and understand their position towards shunning corruption-oriented leadership style for the sake of the churches. Gifford (2009), does not expound more on how church leaders can join in politics to bring these changes in the government.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive research design. The target population was 11 Kaaga circuit local churches. The study used simple random sampling method to obtain 30% of the 11 local churches to obtain 3 local Methodist churches in Kaaga circuit (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The study used purposive sampling method to get a sample of 12 respondents who included 6 church leaders and 6 members. These 12 respondents were purposely selected based on their past experience as political aspirants in various political position in the just concluded 2013 national elections. The

study used unstructured interview guides to collect the data as directed by Bryman (2012). SPSS was used to conduct the analysis of the data. Additionally, the qualitative data (interview responses) was analyzed using the thematic technique. Detailed explanations were used to present the final results of the study.

4.0 FINDINGS AND PESENTATION

In the first interview question, the respondents were supposed to indicate whether lay or ordained leaders were supposed to join politics. Diverse responses were given but what stood out was that it was not wrong for spiritual leaders to join politics since they cultivate and incorporate the virtue of honesty, Holy Spirit led administration of resources, democracy and bring Godly light in their political platforms. However, other interviewees disagreed that one cannot serve two masters (politics and church leadership) since one may bring division in church, their faith weakened for example they may easily be swayed to speak a lie so as to taint their opponents' image during their campaigns. Further on, the respondents complained that failure to clinch a political seat had led to strained relationships due to low funds and depression caused due to defeat. Gifford (2009) agrees with the results that though the church leaders may offer solutions bad politics, they also stand a chance of moving with the tide of bad politics once they secure their political seat.

The second question was related to respondents giving highlights on why they thought politics was a dirty game. There were very diverse responses gives such as politics was a breeding ground for engaging in corruption, unfulfilled promises hence making politicians liars, deviation from God's purpose of spreading the gospel and accumulation of huge masses of wealth so as to terminate opponents. Rowe (2012) also established that politics venturing among church members may a trigger to corrupt proceeds finding their way to church. The third question mandated the interviewees to name some of the contributions that politics had made towards the community's welfare. These contributions included expansion of leadership skills of the politicians, growth in developmental agendas and social interactions skills. Beyer (2006) also named advancement of leadership skills as one of the direct contribution of politics in a person's life.

The fourth question required interviewees to explain the experiences they got after engaging in politics. The respondents indicated that the church had greatly supported the few leaders who showed interest in politics since they would represent the church members in politics more than what was being done outside the church. In addition, the church also prayed for them before venturing into political journey and the church members are requested to vote for them. However, the respondents complained that spiritual leaders also received few supports from other church members since majority were not happy with the decision. The few that supported were rewarded handsomely when their leaders got elected in the political seats such as issuance of bursary and jobs. This definitely brought a problem since the other church members felt left out hence politicked these political leaders to stop serving as their spiritual leaders. When politics engulfed the church, many members left the church with other having no interest in church activities. The fifth question required respondents to highlight some of the valuable lessons that church leaders

should learn before venturing into politics. The respondents noted that biasness should be avoided, pray, make a move and maintain the Christian standards while in politics. This is because both church and politics work at par in giving valuable advice to the state. According to Woodhead (2009), the church cannot assume that politics does not exist and vice versa. Therefore, the two institutions need to work in harmony so as to bring transformation to the rapidly changing world.

Results on the Research Question

The study had a mandate to inquire on the reflection of church members on the involvement of lay or ordained leaders in active politics specifically in MCK Kaaga Circuit. The respondents opined those political positions boosted their role model statuses, developed their church in terms of development projects and helped the needy.

For example, one member opinion as quoted stated that,

“They can play a vital role in politics whereby they can influence politics positively by bringing soberness in political issues.”

However, a portion of respondents complained that it led the leaders to have more greed for money and power, abandoning their religious calling, hypocrisy and disunity in their family, friends and church affiliated to them.

For example, one member opinion as quoted stated that,

“Politics is so much involving hence they can neglect their role of serving God.”

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary of the findings

The study results have proved that it is not wrong for spiritual leaders to join politics since they cultivate and incorporate the virtue of honesty, Holy spirit led administration of resources, democracy and bring Godly light in their political platforms. However, one cannot serve two masters (politics and church leadership) since one may bring division in church. In addition, politics is seen a breeding ground for engagement in corruption, unfulfilled promises hence making politicians liars, deviation from God’s purpose of spreading the gospel and accumulation of huge masses of wealth so as to terminate opponents. Nevertheless, politics are not all that bad when their contribution to the community is considered. Politics have been seen to expand of leadership skills of the politicians, growth in developmental agendas and social interactions skills. This reasons therefore makes the church to greatly support the few leaders who have shown interest in politics since they would represent the church members in politics more than what was being done outside the church. In addition, the church also prays for them before venturing into political journey and the church members are requested to vote for them. Habermas (2006) also discovered that true religion should not be looked at only in terms of content and truth but also it should be a religion where its members look upon in terms of transforming their holist lives (political life included) so that their life here on earth can be meaningful.

5.2 Conclusion

The study depicts that politics and the church as two sides of a coin. There are church members who support while other do not support mixing politics and religion. The one who support, have come out to prove that politics can shape one's leadership skills, provide resources and equality among the needy in the society. However, politics has led the leaders to have more greed for money and power, abandoning their religious calling, hypocrisy and disunity in their family, friends and church affiliated to them.

5.3 Recommendations and Contributions of the Study

The study recommends that church members get empowered with information on the relevance of politics and how they interrelate with religion. The spiritual leaders should be trained on good governance skills before they engage into politics so that they can practice them effectively when they get positioned. The church management should work hand in hand with the government on delivering various projects of the society. This would make it easy and realistic to church members to believe that a spiritual leader has societal interests when they contest any political positions. The church should engage external institutions such as universities that offer leadership and theological courses to train its members on how to translate church language to a language the community can understand for effectiveness.

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