The Quest for Leadership Positions in Nigerian Churches: Implications and Pathways

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Abstract

This research investigated the quest for leadership position in Nigerian churches and it implications in the body of Christ using some selected Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as a case study. Survey method were employed and data were collected using random sampling technique to generate a population size of 400. The population were selected from Christian in churches in RCCG, AG, CGM and Qua-Ibom church. 400 questionnaires were sent out, a total of 355 returned. With a mean criterion of 3.0, the statistical tools of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Cronbach Alpha correlation of 0.05 were used to analyse the study. Reviewing the impact of quest for leadership position in the body of Christ lead to: conflicts, factions, decline in morals, greed, hatred, disunity within the church, corrupt practices such as embezzlement, divert attention from the church's primary purpose which is winning of souls and spreading the Gospel, tarnishing of church's image and deter potential members thereby hindering church growth, spiritual harm, envy, gain for material things rather than serving the body of Christ. The study gave some recommendations and concluded that quest for leadership position in the body of Christ is one of the major challenge and problem faced by Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria by acknowledging these implications, Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region in Nigeria can strive to create a healthy leadership environment that prioritizes spiritual growth, servanthood, and the well-being of the congregation.

Keywords: Church; Implication; Leadership; Position; Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is regarded as one of the religious nations in the world that longs for church leadership position more than any other nations of the world. The world system of leadership is characterized by leadership tussle. That is why day after day, the world is always in a state of confusion, disorder, division and crises here and there. Thus, the Christian Church which is supposed to be the solution to the problems of the world especially that of leadership is now part and parcel of the problem. The world that is supposed to learn from the church, but the reverse seems to be case. The secular way of political campaign, bribery and corruption is the order of the day in the church, thereby giving room to the fact that there is no difference between the secular politics and the church politics. Politics has eventually found its route in the church due to the quest for materialism, power and popularity which Paul the Apostle warned the church of in Hebrews 13:5. The quest for these leadership position has brought about many issues, problems, confusions, fight, aggression, and divisions in the body of Christ in Nigeria. Sometimes it leads to the extent were police and court of law are being involved. A good example of leadership tussle in today's church is the court case of the Cherubim and Seraphim church leadership tussle as announced in the Premium Times News on the July 8th, 2014. The Federal High Court in Lagos fixed September 29th, 2014 for the continuation of the hearing in a suit filed against the church over leadership tussle. The plaintiff, Adepoju Arogundade, filed the suit in February, 2009, seeking an order reinstating him as the rightful leader of the church in Nigeria, to succeed his father as the senior member of the church after the death of his father as the church constitution clearly stated; in place of Adebola Adewuja who eventually succeeded his father. Osewa (2014) also confirmed that the leadership tussle in Celestial church of Christ (CCC) is worsening as the Police in Lagos invited the factional leaders for interrogation. Thus, investigation revealed that some of them heeded the police invitation and had made useful statements to the police on the leadership crises rocking the church. These problems are largely due to the untimely death of Oshoffa, even though he made it clear on what criteria should be used to select a successor, that is, the Holy Spirit would choose. All those claiming the leadership of the church claimed to have received revelation from God. All these started when Bada Oshoffa was just not accepted by some others who consider him inferior and wanted him to upstage his leadership. The ongoing power tussle between Rev. Paul Emeka and Rev.

Chidi Okwarifor of the Assemblies of God church has led to the division of the church, some for Rev. Emeka and others for Rev. Chidi. The crisis between the two fragmented groups is what makes the Kaduna State Government‟ decision to shut down the Assemblies of God churches within and around Saminaka axis including the church school and hospital (Daily Trust News on the 9th September, 2015). These leadership positions most times are given base on financial capability of the individual and not base on the level of one's maturity in the faith, also it may be given base on election which is tag "majority carries the vote" as this make contestant of such position to go extra mind to bribe, share wrapper/clothes, move from one house to another with all manner of drinks couple with money just to convince the members of the body of Christ in order to get their vote and when this purpose is been achieved, the role/duties of the position which is to move the body of Christ forward is been forgotten as these various leaders tries all possible best to make such they extort the Church so as to recover what they have spent in achieving the position. These secret campaign among the leaders and the members of the church before and during elections in-order to get into leadership just like the secular politicians has become worrisome. This is always seen when leaders and members bribe their ways into leadership. Kunyihop (2004), in his survey research, says, "Church leadership should know that people are seeing what is happening. They ask members to pray for the coming election, yet it is clear that people have already been allocated in such places." The end result of this is always the gradual abandoning of the church by some church leaders and members to form their own churches or join other churches. Some even go to the lent of acquiring magic or extra powers just to be a founder/leader of a church so as to be in-charge of the body of Christ. Nigeria has remained the burning crave for security from evil forces that threaten the normal life of men". Founders and leaders of some new generation churches have come up with their own sort of indoctrination and this seems not to conform to the tenets of Christianity. In relation to the world view of these churches, they do all it takes in order to get miracle happen. According Asogwa (2008), in their world view, solution to man's immediate problem must be sought otherwise the idea of supremacy of God, will be deficient and the Christian God will be considered ineffective. It is in respect to this assertion that Agunwa (2003) also observes that, "some independent churches who felt that Christianity could not adequately address particular human crisis or issues as much as the traditional religion did, felt, called to start churches where a

mélange of both Christianity and indigenous religion occur". The story of a ritual church leader/founding pastor who buried three able bodied men for the foundation of his church building, is a clear indication that some pastors and some church leaders engage in some form of human sacrifice in combination with the worship of God. (a blending of inimical traditional religion and Christianity which is inhuman and typically unAfrican). According to Ogara (2016), "the corpses of three men were buried inside the foundation of a building suspected to be a church under construction and their bodies totally covered with concrete at Ugwuaji area of Enugu State". It was gathered by Ogara (in press) that the construction of the building whose owner could be described as a leader/pastor commenced recently and was at the foundation level before the gory discovery. Below is a picture to buttress this fact.



Photo (1). Exhumed body from church foundation photo credit: Premium Newspaper

In like manner, Police arrested a ritual pastor at Ajuona Obukpa for sexually molesting church members. According to Raphael Ede (in press) The pastor by name Sunday Egbo of Christ Mercy Ministry, Ajuona Obukpa, in Nsukka Local

Government Area of Enugu, has confessed to raping one of his church members, Ukwueze Ifebuche Blessing and attempted to use her for money ritual. Egbo was said to have invited his victim for prayer session when he had the carnal knowledge of her. Afterwards, Egbo seized her pants, brassiere and brought out a small bottle and wanted to insert it in her private part, but she struggled and ran out of the room naked. This attracted members of the public leading to the arrest of the said pastor. Items recovered from the ritual pastor includes: 10 female pants, 12 brassieres 1 small coffin, olive oil, an amulet and talisman.

Below are the photos of Sunday Egbo and the items to attest to this fact.



Photo (2). Ritual pastor caught for sexually abusing church members. photo credit: the punch newspaper

It is thus excruciating to observe the activities of some leaders of the new generation churches in Nigeria who in spite of their education and training have left these educations /training just to be a founder/leader of a church believing by this means they can get their ends met and also gain populace, respect and societal recognition. The early Christian church knew no leadership tussle but as the church grew, the quest for materialism, power and popularity crept in, thereby giving room for division and hence proliferation of churches. It must not be forgotten that the emergence of African Independent church movement (AICM) and Pentecostalism has been attributed to leadership tussle in the main line churches. Obiora (1999) supports this when he describes independent churches as

by-products of crises which set in-between an apprentice pastor and a senior pastor resulting in separation. Unlike the earthly rulers, Christian leaders are servant-leaders who demonstrate true greatness by humbly serving God and His people as it is recorded in 1 Peter 5:5-6. How much of this do we see in our churches today in Nigeria? Are we not instead seeing leaders and members who are fighting over positions, and splitting up at every slight disagreement? The greed, malice, selfishness and quest for position among leaders and members of the body of Christ call for concern; this among others is what prompted this study. This research however, intends to investigate the quest for leadership position in Nigerian churches and it implications in the body of Christ using some selected Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as a case study.

Theoretical Literature

This paper is anchored by the structural conflict theory of Marl Marx which believes that society is in conflict between the classes. They believe that the Bourgeoisie oppress the Proletariat through various social institutions without their full knowledge which result for the need of social change in order to achieve a just society.

Empirical Literature Review

Deborah et al (2023) examine "church administration in Nigeria: problems and way forward". The paper is meant to discuss the various problems hindering effective church administration in Nigeria. The secondary data were gathered from print materials and online publications. The paper concluded poor funding, lack of current data, insecurity, government policies, corruption, quest for leadership position, poor leadership skills and disunity among Christian's leaders have hindered effective church administration in Nigeria. Based on these problems identified, the paper hereby recommended the following; diversification of church sources of income, generation of reliable data, provision of adequate security to Churches across the Country, address issues of corruption in the church through accountability and ensure effective training for church leaders in the areas of church administration.

Danbaba (2016) investigate church leadership tussle: its implication for the growth of evangelical church winning all (ECWA) in Kaduna State. The research is aimed

at investigating the implications of leadership tussle for the growth of ECWA in Kaduna State. In conducting this research, a survey research design was adopted in this study. In order to cater for the large population of about 350,000 people involved in this research work. Thus, a cluster random sampling was used to obtain the 900 respondents needed for the study. A form of questionnaire divided into two parts and interview were the instruments used in identifying the impact of leadership tussle on the growth of ECWA in Kaduna State. Descriptive data analysis was adopted using percentages, mean, t-test for analysing the data obtained. The major findings of the study are: that leadership tussle leads to jealousy, envy and wrangling in the church, it contributes to the decline in the numerical growth of the church; it has resulted in hatred between members and between leaders and their members and thus has degenerated to physical confrontation among different factions formed. It has paved the way for wrong persons to get to the leadership position in the church. The divisions or the numerous factions have become a threat to the unity of the church. Leadership tussle has weakened the prayer life, the spirit of evangelism, commitment to Bible study of members and leaders and led to moral decline among members. The following recommendations were made: both the clergy and the laity should shun greed, selfishness, quest for power, popularity and materialism. Leadership tussle can be overcome when members and clergy see leadership as a means of serving God and humanity instead of self. Both members and clergy should try to live out the humility which Christ taught the church to do. Leaders should shun hatred and malice and be committed in prayers, in-depth personal Bible study, awaken the spirit of evangelism and be dedicated to church activities.

Danjuma (2008) conducted a survey on the "Causes and Effects of Leadership Struggle among Christian Ministries in Federal College of Education (FCE), Zaria". In his research, he came up with the following objectives: To find out the causes of leadership struggle among Christian ministries in the Federal College of Education (FCE), Zaria; to investigate the effect of leadership struggle among Christian ministries in Federal College of Education (FCE), Zaria; and to investigate the effect of leadership struggle on the growth of the Christian ministries in Federal College of Education (FCE), Zaria. He used 300 respondents as his sample population and 8000 people as his general population to gather the information needed. He used descriptive survey design, with questionnaire and

interview to gather data. He also used mean and percentages in analysing the data collected. The study found out leadership struggle among Christian ministries in FCE, Zaria is as a result of materialism, envy, power and popularity, financial gain, greed, selfishness and ungodly ambition and has affected the Christian ministries in FCE, Zaria in several ways among others are: division (disunity), proliferation of Christian ministries, giving room for unqualified leaders to get into church leadership, hatred, decline in the spiritual commitment of leaders and members in their various fellowships.

Markus (2006) on the "Effects of leadership struggle on the unity of Christian denominations in Kachia Local Government Area." With the general population of 45000 people, he sampled 600 respondents. In order to realize the objectives of the research, he used questionnaire in gathering his data after which he used mean and percentage in analysing his data. After carrying out the research, the study found out that materialism, envy, power and popularity, financial gain, greed, selfishness and ungodly ambition as the remote causes responsible for leadership struggle among Christians in Kachia Local Government Area which has affected the unity of Christian denominations in Kachia. The study also finds out that division (disunity), proliferation of Christian ministries, giving room for unqualified leaders to get into church leadership, hatred, decline in the spiritual commitment of leaders and members in their various denominations are the effect of leadership struggle among Christians in Kachia LGA. Although many literature has talk about leadership tussle in Christianity of which the last literature was carried out in 2016. This research focus on the quest for leadership position in Nigerian churches and it implications in the body of Christ and pathway using some selected Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region.

Methodology

The study used survey method and purposive research design approach as the research design. This action was taken to guarantee that the target population could be reached. The study chose to utilize the survey method because the objectives is to assess the impact of quest for leadership position in Nigerian churches and it implications in the body of Christ and pathway using some selected Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The research used primary data, and its sample was drawn at random from Christian in churches in

Niger Delta Region of Nigeria such as The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Church of God mission (CGM), Qua-Ibom Church, Assemblies of God Church (AG). The random sampling technic was used to get a sample size of 400 from the intended population. A self-structured questionnaire titled quest for leadership position in Nigerian churches and it implications on the body of Christ and pathway (Q.L.P. N.C.I.B.C.P.) was used to perform this study. The research utilized this questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire was delivered to each responder in unique sets of a total of 400 copies. 355 of those copies were returned and utilized for the analysis and interpretation of the data indicating that 88.6% of respondents completed the survey. The research questions were analysed using a mean criterion of 3.0 for the research question, an aggregate mean below 3.0 means the respondents disagree with the stated research question while an aggregate mean of 3.0 and above means the respondents agree with the stated research questions. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information from the respondents, and to suit the need and purpose of the study. The questionnaire was designed in two (2) sections. The first section looked at demographic data of the respondents such as; gender, age, marital status, academic qualification, leadership position heard in church etc. and the second section analyse the impact of quest for leadership position in Nigerian churches and it implications in the body of Christ and pathway using some selected Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region. The questionnaire adopted a 5-point Likert scale of Strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (U), Strongly Disagreed (SD), and Disagreed (D). In addition, the responses from survey respondents were compiled and assessed using SPSS and Cronbach alpha correlation of 0.05 coefficient.

Table 1. Regional Distributions of the Questionnaires

Selected State	Name of Selected L.G.A	Names of Churches Selected	No. of Questionnaires Distributed and No. Returned
Akwa Ibom	Uyo Eket	Qua-Ibom Church	100/83
Delta	Oshimilli South Ika South	Assemblies of God	100/91
Edo	Akoko Edo Esan Central	CGM	100/87
Rivers	Port Harcourt Obio/Akpor	RCCG	100/94
			400/355

Source: author's compilation (2024)

Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings

Presentation of data

The data analysis is based on research objectives. Primary data were reviewed. In the main analyses, participants were identified according to demographic characteristics. Age, gender, marital status, leadership positions held and all other demographic variables are calculated as percentages. In secondary analysis we use mean, standard deviation and Chrombach alpha correlation of 0.05 for descriptive statistics.

Table 2. Respondents Socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	192	54.1
Female	163	45.9
Total	355	100
Marital Status		
Widow/Widower	132	37.2
Married	223	62.8
Total	355	100
Age Range		
30-40 years	73	20.6
41-50 years	94	26.5
51-60 years	83	23.4
61 years and above	105	29.5
Total	355	100
Highest Educational Qualification		
FSLC/WAEC	61	17.1
NCE/ND	90	25.4
HND/BSC	137	38.6
MSC/PHD	67	18.9
Total	355	100
Position in Church		
Pastor's	112	31.5
Deacon/Deaconess	79	22.3
Board of Trustees	106	29.9
Church Worker	58	16.3
Total	355	100
Total	355	100

Source: Authors Survey, 2024.

In Table 2 we can see the details of the population. Among the 355 respondents, the majority of them are male accounted for 54.1% of the total. According to their

marital status, 223 are married and both couples are still alive (62.8% of the total) and 132 are widow/widower (37.2% of the total). In terms of age, most respondents are over 61 years of age; Similarly, when asked about their educational status, HND/BSC have the highest constituting of 137 (38.6%) respondents and the lowest respondents have MSC/PHD; in terms of the various position handled in church, the highest is pastors which is 112 (31.5%).

Data Analysis

In order to determine the appropriateness of the research questions, the data of this study are presented and analysed below using mean, standard deviation, SPSS software and Crombach Alpha correlation coefficient of 0.05.

Research Question

What are the implication of quest for leadership position in the body of Christ in Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?

Table 3. Participants' perception on the implication of quest for leadership position in the body of Christ in Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

S/N	Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1	Competition for leadership positions lead to conflicts, factions, decline in morals, greed, hatred and disunity within the church.	**4.61**	**4.16**	**Agreed**
2	The desire for power and influence can lead to corrupt practices, such as embezzlement or manipulation.	**4.43**	**3.98**	**Agreed**
3	Leaders may prioritize personal interests over the needs of the congregation.	**3.94**	**3.58**	**Agreed**
4	Unchecked ambition can lead to abuse of authority and lack of transparency.	**4.42**	**4.02**	**Agreed**

5	Infighting over leadership positions can divert attention from the church's primary purpose which is winning of souls and spreading the Gospel.	**3.90**	**3.55**	**Agreed**
6	Publicized power struggles tarnish the church's image and deter potential members thereby hindering church growth.	**4.21**	**3.78**	**Agreed**
7	It leads to unhealthy competition can lead to spiritual harm, including pride, envy, and bitterness.	**3.14**	**3.05**	**Agreed**
8	The pursuit of power and position can contradict biblical principles of humility, servanthood, and love (Matthew 20:26-28, 1 Corinthians 12:22-25).	**4.89**	**3.98**	**Agreed**
9	The focus on leadership positions indicate a lack of spiritual maturity and understanding of God's sovereignty.	**3.60**	**3.33**	**Agreed**
10	Leadership aspirants may misuse their spiritual gifts for personal gain for material things rather than serving the body of Christ.	**3.94**	**3.61**	**Agreed**
11	After gaining church leadership position, these leaders may prioritize cultural sensitivity, incorporating local traditions and values.	**4.42**	**3.98**	**Agreed**
12	Leadership struggles can exacerbate existing ethnic or regional tensions within the church.	**3.99**	**3.54**	**Agreed**

13	The quest for leadership positions may highlight issues related to	**3.33**	**3.16**	**Agreed**
14	gender equality and youth empowerment. Leadership aspirants prioritize the interests of their socio-economic group over that of the church.	**4.14**	**3.79**	**Agreed**
	Aggregate Mean	**4.10**	**3.68**	**Agreed**

Source: Author's survey, 2024.

As seen in Table 3, item 1-14. The table aims to discuss the implication of quest for leadership position in the body of Christ in Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. As shown in the table above, the mean criterion for this study is 3.0. Additionally, based on all responses, the standard deviation is 3.68 and the aggregate mean is 4.10. According to the findings, all the respondents' anonymously agreed that quest for leadership position has negative impact in the body of Christ in Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Responses to the research questions revealed the impact of quest for leadership position in the body of Christ in Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The study found out that competition for leadership positions lead to conflicts, factions, decline in morals, greed, hatred and disunity within the church, corrupt practices, such as embezzlement or manipulation, prioritization of personal interests over the needs of the congregation, abuse of authority and lack of transparency, divert attention from the church's primary purpose which is winning of souls and spreading the Gospel, tarnish the church's image and deter potential members thereby hindering church growth, lead to spiritual harm, including pride, envy, and bitterness, contradict biblical principles of humility, servanthood, and love, indication of a lack of spiritual maturity and understanding of God's sovereignty, lead to misuse their spiritual gifts for personal gain for material things rather than serving the body of Christ, prioritization of cultural sensitivity, incorporating local traditions and values, exacerbate existing ethnic or regional tensions within the church, highlight issues related to gender equality and youth empowerment and making church leaders to

prioritize the interests of their socio-economic group over that of the church are all the impact of quest for leadership position in the body of Christ in Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as seen in table 3 above. The study is in line with the findings Deborah (2023), Danbaba (2016), Danjuma (2008) and Markus (2006) that quest for leadership position in the body of Christ lead to conflicts, factions, decline in morals, greed, hatred and disunity within the church, corrupt practices such as embezzlement or manipulation, divert attention from the church's primary purpose which is winning of souls and spreading the Gospel, tarnish the church's image and deter potential members thereby hindering church growth, lead to spiritual harm, envy, gain for material things rather than serving the body of Christ. Consequently, through the findings of the research question and the associated empirical literatures evidence, this study has been able to highlight the impact of quest for leadership position in the body of Christ in Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria which is the objective of the study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Quest for leadership position in the body of Christ is one of the major challenge and problem faced by Pentecostal Churches in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria by acknowledging these implications, Pentecostal churches in Niger Delta Region in Nigeria can strive to create a healthy leadership environment that prioritizes spiritual growth, servanthood, and the well-being of the congregation.

Recommendation

The following recommendation are made for the body of Christ in Niger Delta Region and Nigeria as a whole that churches should:

1. Emphasize spiritual growth and maturity.
2. Establish clear leadership selection processes.
3. Foster a culture of servant-leadership.
4. Encourage accountability and transparency.
5. Prioritize unity and cooperation.
6. Develop leadership training programs.
7. Seek guidance from scripture and biblical principles.

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