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AN EXAMINATION OF
CLERGY - LAITY RELATIONSHIP IN THE
PRACTICE OF THE DOCTRINE OF PRIESTHOOD
OF ALL BELIEVERS

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ABSTRACT

This work is an attempt to examine the Clergy-Laity relationship in the practice of the Doctrine of Priesthood of all believers with a view to studying this historical, biblical and theological concept of priesthood and priesthood of all believers as it affects the interpersonal and functional relationship of the Clergy and the Laity in the Church.

In this work, the position and the role of both the Clergy and Laity in the practice of the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers is properly examined. Certain practical issues and their implications were studied. These issues include the tension and crisis of equality, responsibility and authority and the implications for Mission/Evangelism, Church Leadership/Administration, Administration of Church Ordinances, and Commitment to specialized Christian ministries. However, this work gives an analysis of what the doctrine of priesthood of all believer is and what it is not, and how it should be handled by both the Clergy and Laity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Considering the tensions and struggles existing between the clergy and the Laity due to the practice of the doctrine of Priesthood of all Believers in a local Church, one may be left with the impression that the doctrine is not a friend of smooth human and functional relationship among the components of a local Church. This is not so, if the doctrine is properly interpreted, understood and practiced.

This essay has, examined the Clergy-Laity relationship in the practice of the Doctrine of Priesthood of all Believers, and these conclusions can be drawn from the work.

While all Christians are Priests before God, all Christians do not have the same role or office. The Clergy are called out of the Priesthood, and remain part of the Priesthood. The ministry of the Clergy is to equip the Laity for their own ministry. They are not above the Laity in all matters of the Church, nor are they under the laity as inferior who is subordinate to a superior. A reality that must be embraced in the practice of this doctrine is that somebody needs to be seen as the leader in the Church.

The Clergy-Laity distinction is not to be understood in terms of hierarchy but rather to be interpreted in terms of role difference. Both the

Clergy and Laity are of equal importance in the life and ministry of a local Church.

Before this doctrine can be effectively practiced, it calls for mutual understanding and respect between the Clergy and the Laity. While the Clergy are not to lord it over the Laity, the Laity also are expected to respect the Clergy who minister among them. The authority that is exercised by a Clergy is understood to be the one given to him by the Laity for the sake of smooth running of the Church.

A wrong interpretation and application of this doctrine can lead to unhealthy tussles for equality, responsibility and authority between the Clergy and the Laity. These tussles have great implications on the life and ministry of a local Church. The tussles are capable of breeding disobedience, rebellion, revolt and even conspiracy from the Laity against the Clergy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A critical study of the Clergy-Laity relationship in the practice of the doctrine of priesthood of all believers has revealed that certain issues need to be addressed before a healthy working relationship could be established between the two parties.

The first issue is that in every denomination where the doctrine of priesthood of all believers is to be practised effectively, the doctrine must be properly studied and interpreted in relation to the place and role of both the clergy and laity in the overall life and ministry of the Church.

This will forestall unhealthy tension and rivalry in Clergy-Laity relationship.

Both the Clergy and Laity need to recognize and appreciate the gifts of God in their lives. There is no need to covet one another's gift. Let each person recognize his gifts and determine to work within the scope and functional provision of that gift. There is need for clear-cut role definitions in the practice of priesthood of all believers.

Both the Clergy and the Laity must be made to know that it is not the position occupied in the congregation of believers that is of utmost importance, but the fulfillment of one's calling and ministry in whatever position. This will give both parties a sense of commitment and responsibility in their respective callings and ministries.

The Laity must avoid the temptation of rating themselves more competent than the Clergy that God has put into their midst to serve him. Even though a pastor may not measure up to the expectations of some Church members in terms of the styles and techniques of doing things in ministry, yet he is still the called servant of God among them. He must be seen as the leader and allowed to work with the authority the congregation has given to him.

There is need for more lay training which will enable laypersons to better understand their ministry and perform satisfactorily. A short term theological training can prepare some of them for some of the specialized ministries of the Church, and make them to be in good partnership with the Clergy.

Finally, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is a blessing to the Church of Christ and must not be turned to a curse through the Clergy-Laity dicotomy. Therefore, we can confidently say that, "the doctrine is not difficult but the people practicing it."