

**CHRISTIANS' SINCERITY IN PRAYING FOR LEADERS (1TIMOTHY 2:1-4): RE-CONSIDERING A HOLISTIC APPROACH IN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Assemblies of God Church, popularly known by its evangelism wing (Back to God Movement) was founded in the 1950s by white missionaries accompanied by Reverend Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu. It was Reverend Bhengu who then continued with the work with other pastors such as; Murwisi, Rikuku and Nhende the late among others. Since the establishment of the church, (1 Timothy 2: 1-4) has been like an anthem in church services. The reference, (1 Timothy 2:1-4) admonishes believers to pray for all people and in particular "...for those in positions of authority". However, with the polarization of the country political arena, do Christians really mean their prayers or it is just meant to fulfil the programme? Is it possible to separate Christians from politics, given that there are some brethren who are full-time church participants, yet holding important positions in political parties or very vocal in politics? From this observation, do Christians pray with sincerity when they quote (1 Timothy 2:1-4)? If they are sincere, how do they balance Christian work with their political interest? This study unravels these pertinent questions trying to provide answers thereof. A qualitative approach was used to gather data. Respondents' views were solicited through interviews, observation as well as secondary sources. Results did show that some believers were not sincere with their prayers whereas others were quite genuine. It has been recommended that a more liberal approach to praying for leaders be instituted rather than a rigid one.

**1.0 BACKGROUND**

The practise of praying for all people in Assemblies of God Church has been there since the advent of the movement in the 1950s. It is quite important to mention that the Church was officially registered in 1959. According to the Church's Constitution, service procedure demands that (1 Timothy 2:1-4) be ready in every Sunday service. After reading this portion of scripture, congregants should pray in light of the said reference. There are different ways through which this prayer can be conducted. It's either one individual do pray for the country or the whole church who should pray. (1 Timothy 2:1-4) says:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, thanksgivings and intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is

good, and it acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The reference urges that Christians should pray for leaders. But of interest, is the section which says that "for kings and all who are in positions of authority." This implies that Christians should pray for President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party, ministers, Members of Parliament (MPs), leaders in the uniformed forces and all sectors of the country. It is not possible to study all the sectors of leadership. Therefore, this paper is framed within prayers mainly for the President and not necessarily all the leaders.

It is known that there are other church members who do not support President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa of ZANU PF. Some do belong to opposition parties such as National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), Movement for Democratic Change Tsvangirai (MDC T) and Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC A) among other political opposition parties. It is therefore a fact that the church is not composed of congregants from a single party. In that regard then, congregants have different perceptions in relation to their political orientations. Just like in the secular world, it is a challenge for people to agree on political issues given that they come from different political backgrounds. Is it possible then for the whole church (assembly) to pray in unison for President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa? What kind of prayer will be offered by those who do not support the President? Will they pray for the success of the President whom they do not get along with? This has been observed from several contexts in which the Nelson Chamisa of MDC A maintained that the President (Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa) rigged the elections in July 2018 (Dzirutwe, 2018). This is the major thrust of this paper to find out different perceptions that come forth from believers when they are instructed to pray for their country. In simple terms, do they make a prayer that supports the current President or it's a pray him out kind of prayer? A prayer is made to remove the president from office.

The reference (1 Timothy 2:1-4) makes it clear that when leaders are prayed for, "we live a peaceable life in all godliness". What kind of peace is Paul talking about in this case? Is he referring to political peace? The other angle of argument that may come out is that, can we talk of peace in Zimbabwe given the levels of brutality to opposition leaders and civic organisations? Will brethren who belong to other parties really pray with sincerity when they are asked to pray?

## 2.0 HISTORY OF ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe started in the 1950s. The first crusade was held in Highfield by Reverend Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu. He was born on 05 September 1909 at sentiment, a Lutheran Mission Station in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He was the founder of the Back to God Crusade in the 1950s that has become institutionalised within the Assemblies of God. He taught his church to be self-sustaining and also encouraged material independence through hard work. He died on 07 October 1985 at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa. Bhengu combined evangelism with development, which was critical for the black people who were under a repressive regime in South Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa. He was a religious revolutionary who 'planted' more than 2000

churches in South Africa and neighbouring countries by emphasising non-denominationalism without pressurising converts to discard their churches to join any. He was determined to build a movement that would be a vehicle to reach out to the continent of Africa through his churches (Lephoko, 2018).

The vision of Bhengu was to take the gospel from Cape to Cairo. He had a mandate from (Matthew 28:19-20). From King James Version;

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

At one time in a vision, Bhengu saw a multitude of people who were crying and pointing to him for help. They were saying 'We are dying, we are dying. We are perishing. Help us out of here.' It was only the gospel that would set these people free. He was moved to preach the gospel to all races in Africa. Bhengu was one of the most prominent church leaders in Africa: an evangelist, teacher and church planter. At one time he was described as the Black Billy Graham of Africa (Lephoko, 2018).

It is almost impossible to talk about the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe without also talking about of his friends, Alfred Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi (Lephoko, 2018). These friends helped greatly in his quest to bring light and deliverance to the world. Since the official establishment of the church in 1959, the evangelism team has been moving in different parts of the country planting churches. To date, the church in Zimbabwe is boasting of 60 years and is still growing.

## 2.1 The Church Organogram

Assemblies of God is scattered all over the country in all the provinces of Zimbabwe. The movement has the highest decision-making board called National Conference or National Assembly. The National Conference then elects the National Executive comprising of nine members who decide on the affairs of the church. The National Executive is a sub-committee of the National Assembly. Whatever is bound by the National Executive applies to all assemblies all over the country.

Under the national Executive, we have the District Council which delegates power to the District Council Committees (DCC). The DCCs are found in all provinces. DCC control individual assemblies. From the DCC we then move on to the local assemblies which are autonomous in their affairs. But still, they have to report to the DCC. Lastly, we then move on to preaching points which are controlled by the different assemblies. It is very important to note that all these offices are occupied by pastors.

## 2.2 Church Service in Assemblies of God

The service in Assemblies of God Church comprises the following stages as enshrined in Article 4.16.3;

- Singing of devotional songs or hymns
- Opening hymnal song and prayer
- Short word to prepare people to worship
- Open praise and worship – devotional choruses, hymnal songs, Psalms, prayers
- Reading of (1 Timothy 2:1-4) and pray.
- Announcement
- Choir
- Word of God
- Closing hymnal song and prayer

The procedure manual of the church makes it mandatory for the Master of Ceremony (M.C) to read this portion of scripture from (1 Timothy 2:1-4). After the reading of the verses the congregation is then asked to pray in relation to the scripture above. However, other M.Cs are no longer reading from the same reference (1 Timothy 2:1-4) They can pick other references such as (Romans 13:1 and 2 Chronicles 7:14). Regardless of the passage of scriptures that is picked, the congregation will still pray for the country and its leadership. It is therefore fair to argue that (1 Timothy 2:1-4) in Assemblies of God Church has a long history in Zimbabwe. At the same time, the practice has been observed religiously. The generation of the elderly, who happened to be there during the time Nicholas Hepworth Bhengu (the founder of the church) follow the dot the procedure manual religiously as was relayed to them. Any deviation from the system would call for the conservatives to caution M.Cs on how the service is supposed to run. With this observation then, (1 Timothy 2:1-4) is somehow sacred in the movement.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research was framed within the qualitative paradigm. This paradigm emanates from the sentiments that knowledge is personal, unique and subjective. Moreover, the situations in which people live are fluid hence, they change constantly. Ausubel et al (1978) emphasise that "each and every event is conditioned by variables such as time, location and culture which are interactive and therefore no two situations...can be identical and cannot be the basis for generalisations." Silverman's (1993) asserts that in qualitative research, there are multiple interpretations and perspectives of reality. Hence events can be better understood when situated in the social and historical context of the research. Qualitative research embroils people being studied in their natural context, their experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Patton, 2002). "Qualitative research also provides an encounter with the world and the ways in which people construct, interpret and give meaning to their experiences" (Roux & DuPreez: 2005:277-278). Furthermore, qualitative methodology was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of the inter-relationships amongst believers in their quest to fulfil (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Qualitative methodology is interpretive in nature. It allows the researcher to gain intuitions through discovering meanings by improving the comprehension of the whole (Creswell, 2003). To obtain the findings, this study used observations, interviews, and document analysis as data collecting instruments.

### 3.1 Case study

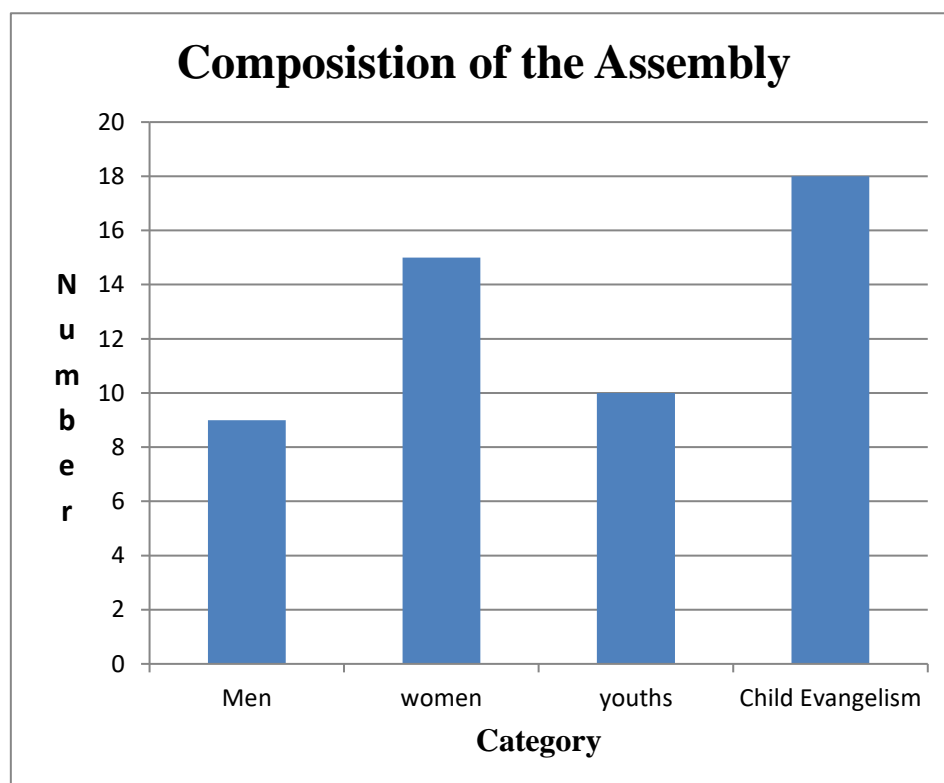
In this study, I picked a case study so as to find out a detailed understanding with regards to (1 Timothy 2:1-4) an Assemblies of God. More (2004: xiii) postulates that "case studies ... broadly represent the total population. However, the case studies will never be representative in a statistical sense but they reflect the main characteristics of the whole population." More so, in a case study, it is not frequency or representativeness that matters, but it is the depth and that is why in my study I chose one assembly and its cell groups. In studying a smaller representative the researcher can gather a lot of data. Therefore, for this paper, Darwendale View Assemblies of God Church in Norton was picked by the researcher through convenience sampling. It was easy to reach all places and concerned members for the study. After all, there was no transport cost for the researcher because the researcher is a resident within the place.

## 3.2 Findings

The paper unveiled a lot of responses from different believers who expressed diverging opinions. The following responses will suffice the gist of the paper.

## 3.3 Composition of the church

The Church's composition is as shown in the graph below:



The church is composed of 9 men, 15 women, 10 youths and 18 Child Evangelism (C.E). The church has recently acquired an autonomy status. This means that the church is able to run its affairs reporting to the District Council Committee which has the overall oversight of all assemblies.

From this composition, data were gathered from mature and elderly congregants. Therefore, youths and C.E. were not involved in the collection of data. Due to other commitments of the congregants, responses were solicited from 5 men and 9 women.

### 3.4 Fulfilling the mandate

There was a section of believers who argued that praying for the President is a duty of all Christians. They believed that they are fulfilling their mandate as the body of Christ. It is actually a sin to know what is right and then fail to do it (James 4:17);

“Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

Therefore, when one knows the right thing to do, they have to do it, lest they incur the wrath of God. Christians know what they are supposed to do (to pray for the President). Hence, there is no way they cannot follow a simple Bible command. Consequently, praying for the President is something that has to be done by all who profess to be Christians. From this backdrop, prayer should be done sincerely regardless of one's political orientation. Christianity has to be above all political differences. To that end, sincerity in prayer is not debatable. One has to adhere to the reference (1 Timothy 2:1-4) and pray for the President sincerely. Moreover, congregants should pray with a clean conscience, without a grudging heart. One of the respondents said;

“Do you really know that the peace we are enjoying in Zimbabwe is because of the prayers that we make for our country? We pray for the President of the country so that he is empowered by the Lord to promote peace in the land. If we fail to pray, who then will cover the gap? That is why we keep on praying for President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa. More so, (2 Chronicles 7:14) emphasise the need for us to pray for our country. Personally, when I come to church I put aside the political orientations.”

From (2 Chronicles 7:14) the Bible says;

“If my people who are called by name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

From this comment, it was clear that the respondent was wholehearted in prayer. But the practicality of this type of prayer is difficult to go by. This mainly emanates from the sentiments that the other party, particularly MDC Alliance is yet to come to terms with what they claim to be the stolen elections of 31 July 2018. Those who argue for sincerity in prayer are not part and parcel of those who have been affected by the ‘rigging’ of elections. Already, this is showing divisions within the church on the basis of political differences.

### 3.5 Is sincerity practical?

The word sincere has been defined by The Oxford American College Dictionary (2002) as; doing something free from pretence or deceit; proceeding from genuine feelings, not dishonest or hypocritical. Is it possible to talk about absolute sincerity? Sincerity is a product

of a cheerful mood. It is something that will never be forced on an individual. One can only be sincere if one is happy. Therefore, in the case of the Zimbabwean situation, there is a big number of the electorate who were frustrated by the outcome of the 2018 harmonised elections. This contention has never been solved even though the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the current President of Zimbabwe (Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa). If there is a section of people who are not happy can they really pray with sincerity?

Responses from the participants on this question were varied. Others maintained that it is possible to pray sincerely, while others argued that sincerity is a non-starter. Those who argued that sincerity is possible were saying; prayer is done when one has a burden. This burden is to see the country going forward economically, socially and politically. When one has a burden, they will pray honestly. At the same time, sincerity in prayer goes with maturity in the Lord. It is those who are mature in Christ who can make honest prayers without pretence. Recently saved brethren will take time to appreciate sincerity in prayer especially when praying for those things they do not go along with. Therefore, in light of this discussion sincerity is double-edged.

### **3.6 We live in a spiritual realm**

There was a section of believers who maintained that when praying for leaders of the country they do not do in the physical. Christianity is spiritual warfare. So prayer is spiritual. One of the participants argued that;

“Whenever we pray for the President of the country we do put aside our political affiliations. We do pray with a clear conscience and a sober mind. We are not affected by the political differences that you are talking about. After all, those who were elected to lead the country were put there by God. (Romans 13:1) “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.” Therefore, we will be genuine in our prayer. We will not be fooling anyone by praying in dishonestly.

Putting aside political affiliations means that believers are practising epoche. This is a practice whereby one removes all underlying preconceived ideas. It refers to ‘bracketing’ preconceived ideas about one’s political understanding. The term comes from a Greek word-echo, which means ‘I hold back.’ It can also mean abstention or suspension of judgment. It is only by bracketing or suspending beliefs and judgments that a believer can pray effectively (Lester, 1999). By practising epoche, the main reason is to remove all bias in the topic under discussion. It means that the congregants can explore all the prayer requirements in the church objectively. When one manages to practice epoche, sincerity in prayer can happen because an individual will have transcended high above the physical. The only challenge with epoche is that is it really possible to suspend all reasoning?

The major challenge associated with epoche is how far can an individual suspends or brackets off all preconceived ideas? This is very difficult. That element of bias can still be identified because one is an interested member in a particular political group. It is very difficult to

maintain an open-heart and open-mind type of prayer. In as much as the believer must suspend all preconceived ideas, there is no standard to determine how far the believer has managed to employ epoche during the praying session (Moustakas, 1994).

### **3.7 The church should be very liberal**

Basing on the results of the July 2018 harmonised elections, the opposition, MDCA maintains that they got 2 600 000 votes (Dzirutwe, 2018). It is definite that some Christians constitute a certain percentage of those who voted for Nelson Chamisa. To that end then, these Christians' choices need to be maintained. Will they be able to continue praying sincerely when their own choice was denied? An obvious response will be that they cannot pray genuinely for someone whom they did not choose in the elections. Sincerity then in such circumstances is not possible. Some respondents opined that they feel good to pray for Nelson Chamisa, the President of the opposition leader. This is because he is the one whom they voted for. Moreover, they claim that he garnered more votes than the current President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa. Their sincerity in prayer, therefore, is directed to the opposition leader. This is regardless of the fact that he is not in charge of the country. The church must be in a position to give freedom to congregants to pray for whoever they want. Alternatively, the MCs can prescribe the church to pray for Nelson Chamisa because he commands a large proportion of voters in the country as well as praying for His Excellency President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa.

### **3.8 Higher order life**

Some respondents maintained that their sincerity is not marred by anything because of their level of maturity. There are different categories of people in the church. Among them is a group of people who are more mature and those who are new converts. There are different levels that are experienced spiritually. Those who are still young in the Lord, that is, recently converted, find it hard to put aside political orientations when they come to church. A sincere prayer is not for the simple-hearted. But for those who are spiritually sound. When praying for the President these Christians move from the level of the physical to a more spiritual level where they can actually see the impossible. Therefore, sincerity in praying for the President is a reality.

It is only the new converts who find it too hard to pray objectively without putting aside political interests. These ones find it a challenge to pray effectively for the President as prescribed in (1Timothy 2:1-4). The influence of the flesh takes time to completely get off their lives. However, with time, they will be able to fully comprehend the whole gist of praying for the President.

### **3.9 Praying him out of power**

Another area of interest that was raised was praying for the President out of power. This is whereby Christians pray for the ouster of leaders and opt for a new crop of governance altogether. References were taken from the case of Saul the King of Israel who was dethroned by Samuel when he had failed to implement the demands of God (1 Samuel 15:22-23). In the same token then, when the President fails to live to his dictates, he can be booted out. There is no evil in praying for the President out. After all, it is the plan of God to dethrone and



enthroned leaders. The following table is an indication of responses from the believers who gave their contributions on this issue. The table does indicate that a number of Christians believed that leaders can be prayed out of power.

**Table 2**

| <b>Pray them out</b> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| Frequency            | 6          | 9         |

### **3.10 It is God's business to enthrone and dethrone leaders**

The business of enthroning and dethroning Kings and/or Presidents is God's. No human being (Christians included) can ever brag of ousting a President from office by prayer. Human beings have no such authority to do that. A good example that has been cited was of the late President of Zimbabwe Robert Gabriel Mugabe. He was not removed by the masses or the soldiers. It was predestined that at such a time as November 2017, the former President will be ousted. In as much as people had negative feelings about the President for many years, it did not have an effect on his authority for 37 years in Zimbabwe. The coup de tat and mass rising of November 2017 that was led by the army was allowed to happen by God. So, the President's ouster was predestined by God. There is nothing like pray him out kind of prayer that will have an effect on the life of the President, or a long life the President type of prayer that will affect him.

This is fully portrayed when God enthroned the first King of Israel. (1 Samuel 10:1)

Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him and said, "Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people? And you shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies round about..."

It was God who instructed Samuel to anoint Saul to be the King of Israel. However, this is prior to the idea that the leaders of Israel had complained to Samuel about his two sons who were perverting social justice and accepting bribes (1 Samuel 8:3).

"Yet his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice."

It was God again who dethroned him in (1 Samuel 15:22-23) and put David in his place.

"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."

No human effort or prayer was required to make this happen. It was God's plan. Human beings can just act as conduits for God's plan to succeed. However, this does not relegate Christians' prayers to the dustbins. They should keep praying all the time (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

“Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances.”

However, believers should try by all means to pray and live holy lives acceptable before God so that they can be used as channels through which the divine plan unfolds. Thus, earnest prayer should go along these lines rather than genuinely praying for the President to be in or out of power. This does not work on its own.

There was also a section of respondents who maintained that they can change the seasons just like what Elijah did when he prayed for drought for three and half years. He also prayed for rainfall and it happened just as he had prayed. It should be noted that this type of prayer is accompanied by pre-conditions. One should be righteous, and their relationship with God should be unwavering. So when believers are praying for their President as in (1 Timothy 2:1-4) they should make sure that their relationship with God is undefiled. Whether this stage is attainable or not, it should be tabled out for another paper.

At one time the cries of Israel reached heaven in the book of Exodus such that God planned a rescue package for his people through the hand of Moses. It was already destined that Israel would be in slavery in Egypt for 430 years. Therefore, there was no prayer that could do anything save these people. Only God’s appointed time would. So sincere prayer then is the one that is in line with God’s plan. Anything that goes against the plan of God is a waste of time. What is needed then is for believers to know the divine seasons and what God wants so that they can pray effectively.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that whenever the church is giving instructions to pray for the President as rightly pointed out in (1 Timothy 2:1-4), the church should not make it mandatory to pray for the current President of the country neglecting other leaders of the opposition. They have to be liberal in their approach. This is so because the leaders of the opposition do command a following within the country. It, therefore, follows that some followers are in the church may be affected by praying for someone whom they did not vote into power. Members of the opposition within the church should also pray for their political leaders. If this is not done, congregants may not pray with sincerity as they should. These prayers do not come from the heart. They will be mere lip service. It is not very clear if God can answer such types of prayers that do not come from the heart. Alternatively, masters of ceremonies should be very clear in their call for prayer. They have to instruct people to pray for the President of the country Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa and also call people to pray for opposition leaders. Above all, church leaders should teach all brethren the importance of praying for the President. Clarity should be made on the teaching process such that all negatives perceptions are removed from the minds of the people. Moreover, there is a need to promote a balance between old Christians and the new converts so that the church moves at the same rate. This can be done by intense studies meant to equip the new converts so that they catch up with the old gurus.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The paper has found out that sincerity is a double-edged entity. Some say it is possible while others say it is impossible. There are others who can pray for the president with sincerity

whereas some find it difficult. If the church is thus, disjointed, it will not be able to achieve its intended objectives of praying for the President. It is, therefore, noble for all believers to move within the same directions in harmony. (Ecclesiastes 4:12) endorses that; "A threefold cord is not quickly broken." It shows the power of oneness and unity. It is therefore vital that Christians should be in unison in their prayer life rather than a situation where others pray for the success of the President and others are praying him out of power. The church should accommodate everyone even in terms of political differences. At the same time, personal purity and a close relationship with God are quite significant if ever we are going to have a church that acts as the conduit of God's victorious prayers.

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