




# Patterning Constitutional Conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

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## ABSTRACT

This paper set out to analyse the patterning of conflict in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ) with the introduction of the Constitution; which has been described as an unfair proposition, given that conflict is inevitable in a postmodern society. Conflicts in communities have largely been caused by resource scarcity, group affinities, and poor leadership. The study used data collected from participants who were purposively selected to answer electronic questions posted on a WhatsApp group platform for this study. They were randomly chosen from the national fellowship of the COCZ pastors. The study observed that conflict was caused by the shifting centres of power through the adoption of the Somabhula Conference Centre. These conflicts thus bolster a deeper appreciation of Christian identity and mission in contemporary ecclesiastical circles. The data analysed revealed that there are three frameworks: concept, content, and composition of constitutions. It also revealed that conflicts in Zimbabwean churches happened in the Anglican Diocese of Harare; the Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe; the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe and the Marange Apostles' succession battles. Positively, conflicts have been observed to remove complacency among the leadership and followership. It concluded that citing the 2015 Constitution, therefore, becomes an unfair proposition as conflicts occurred in the history of mission churches in Zimbabwe inclusive of the conflicts in the COCZ history. This study contributes in a small measure to discussions around international best practices for resolving church conflicts.

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## INTRODUCTION

The patterning of conflict in the church with the making of laws appears to be an irresponsible escape from the realities of church histories, conflicts, and crises associated with post-modern society. The making of laws in the COCZ thus has been intertwined with the influence of enlightened men in its leadership such as Judge Justice Sero Nare who initiated the concept of constitution-making in their 2008 Men's Fellowship in Karoi. Research on the COCZ indicates an awareness of the causes of conflicts in that church that are historical such as colonially distorted identities,<sup>1</sup> wherein there was an

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell Mushayamunda, "Decorticating the Division amongst Congregations of Church(es) of Christ (Instrumental) in Zimbabwe: A Quest for Truth and Reunion" (Mutare School of Preaching (MSOP), 2022).

existing division between mission stations affiliated with the New Zealander group (midlands) and the American group (Masvingo).<sup>2</sup> The subject is within the area of study in the COCZ where literature is being developed by students and scholars. From this background, this study attempts to assess the patterns of conflicts in missionary churches which suffered from a leadership vacuum at the departure of missionaries and those who were left to mind over mission stations dissented on progressive suggestions for the COCZ.

The ascendance of pastors into the church leadership such as Pastor Fanny Nyamutora as Church President (2012 – 2013) who did not have control of mission stations but could formalise the drafting and adoption of the constitution as well as the SCC project turned out to be a challenge. This led to complex lapses with constitution writing as dissenting voices were from post-missionary caretakers of mission stations.<sup>3</sup> In this qualitative study, interviews and interactions with members of conflicted churches in Zimbabwe such as Anglicans, Pentecostals, Baptists and Apostles indicate that these struggles are not peculiar to the COCZ. There is a common trend of worldliness among churches today causing positive and negative challenges leading to structural transformation and destructive in-fights. That is why George Wiegel argues: ‘[T]he ‘real world’ is the human universe that has been redeemed and transformed by the atoning death of the Son of God. The Church is not ‘here’ and the ‘real world’ there; the story of the Church is the world’s story, rightly understood. Conflict can function as an opportunity for transformation in the church.’<sup>4</sup> These challenges will forever be found in Christian churches, and in response to man’s understanding of these trends and patterns, this article discusses the content, concept, and construction of the Constitution in relation to economic determinism and the divisions it causes in the life of the church. This study attempts to provide responses to existing literature gaps within the study of conflict in the COCZ.

### **The Constitutional Context in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe**

The COCZ is a product of the Restoration Movement that sought to complete the Reformation Movement. It adopted the 1794 *Springfield Presbyterian Last Will and Testament* and the 1809 *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* sloganeering: ‘Call Bible things by Bible names’; and ‘No creed but the Bible, where the Bible speaks we speak, where the Bible is silent, we are silent’.<sup>5</sup> The normativity of scripture (*sola scriptura*), in Christian living,<sup>6</sup> is probably a Scottish Puritan and Swiss Calvinistic principle borrowed from St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274), an earlier Western proponent of hermeneutics in theology in his posthumous classic publication, *Prima Pars: Summa Theologica*.<sup>7</sup> Sentiments of the Restoration fathers considered significant historical heritage, but contemporaries fail to distinguish Scriptural authority from its interpretations. The ‘ethos’, ‘pathos’ and ‘logos’ of the church became solely drawn from the maxims of the founders that favours oral traditions rather than written constitutions.<sup>8</sup> This denies young people from understanding the basics of power distribution in the COCZ structures. Traditions, like constitutions, concretize belief and demarcate worship and practice behaviours. This conflict has a group that supports traditions and the other constitutions. ‘The church had no known code for rules and regulations, although elderly members reported that they had a constitution crafted in 1972 that did not make it into the hands of the

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<sup>2</sup> Gift Masengwe and Bekithemba Dube, “‘Robert’s Rules of Order’ on Religious Conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (March 22, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2666>.

<sup>3</sup> Gift Masengwe and Bekithemba Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe,” *Theologia Viatorum* 45, no. 1 (June 14, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/TV.v45i1.109>.

<sup>4</sup> George Weigel, “John Paul II and the Priority of Culture,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 80 (1998): 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> William G McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening and Reform* (University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas H Olbricht, “Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ,” *Restoration Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1995): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Benzinger Brothers, 1702).

<sup>8</sup> Evan Mabani. Pastor, Former National Youth President, Domboshava Church of Christ. Interview. Windsor Park Church of Christ, Gweru. 3 February 2018, 8:21 am

younger generations'.<sup>9</sup> Dissenters to constitutions are accused of using the Restoration Movement dictum that young people don't understand. This contrasts the absolutist authority of the Bible in the Calvinistic tradition adopted by the COCZ because interpretations are now applicable within generations of interest. The COCZ claims to be a New Testament Church, requiring appropriate biblical hermeneutics to inform its constitution-making processes.<sup>10</sup> Consensus in any case protects the institution from abusive leaders and evil members.<sup>11</sup> This can be found in written documents because a written constitution clarifies lines of authority, responsibility, accountability and professionalism on belief, worship, and practice in the church.<sup>12</sup> This questions the applicability of older traditions in guiding postmodern congregations without the use of constitutions in the COCZ.

### Church Conflicts in Zimbabwe

The first church to fight about tradition and change of constitutions in Zimbabwe was the Church Province of Central Africa (CPCA), Anglican Diocese of Harare and Mutare under Bishops Nolbert Kunonga and Elson Jakazi, respectively. The bishops attempted to change the CPCA constitution to form an Anglican Church Province of Zimbabwe without constitutional discussions on the process. violence erupted from hyped opinions on gay marriages and greediness that claimed lives.<sup>13</sup> The matter was resolved when Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, came to Zimbabwe and confronted President Robert Mugabe to intervene and allow the CPCA to use its educational and health institutions for worship and fundraising.<sup>14</sup> He also clarified the Anglican position on marriage, politics and national development, and criticised President Mugabe's bad stewardship of Zimbabwe.

The Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe is another classical example.<sup>15</sup> It adopted its numerously amended and less relevant constitution to contemporary members in 1961 from South Africa.<sup>16</sup> The constitution directs church worship (faith confession), governance, and discipline.<sup>17</sup> Amendments are done under the watchful eye of the AFMZ National Workers' Council in view of Scripture and national laws.<sup>18</sup> With unclear terms of office, without handover-takeover procedures, without disciplinary strategies, and without doctrinal and liturgical standards to counter new religious movements, it became irrelevant to use it to guide policy-making in that church.

<sup>9</sup> Gift Masengwe and Francisca H. Chimhanda, "Towards an Authentic Transformation of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (March 18, 2019), 2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.4776>.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Conradie, "The Road towards an Ecological Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 93, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Sigmund C. Shipp and Curtis W. Branch, "Local Residents' Wishes and Black College/Black Church Community Development Corporations," *Journal of African American Studies* 10 (2006): 32–45.

<sup>12</sup> Shipp and Branch, "Local Residents' Wishes and Black College/Black Church Community Development Corporations," 32.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Handley, "From the Archive: Dr. Williams meets Mr. Mugabe and beards Kunonga." September 6, 2019. Accessed 27 December 2020. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/journalists/paul-handley>

<sup>14</sup> Handley, "From the Archive: Dr. Williams meets Mr. Mugabe and beards Kunonga."

<sup>15</sup> Norman Chivasa and Francis Machingura, "'One Person's Meat Is Another's Poison': Conflict Management in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Religion and Theology* 2, no. 1 (1979): 73–84; N. Pavari, *The Historical Background of the Apostolic Faith Mission: Another Dimension* (Harare: Print Media, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM), *The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe Policy Document* (Gutu: Rufaro Conference Centre, 2017); Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM), *The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe Constitution & Regulations* (Gutu: Rufaro Conference Centre, 2017); Munetsi Ruzivo, "Succession Debates in the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church," *Multiplying in the Spirit: African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe*, *BiAS* 15 (2014): 15–32.

<sup>17</sup> Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield Miss: Gospel Publ. House, 1953).

<sup>18</sup> Marius Nel, "Church and War: A Change in Hermeneutical Stance among Pentecostals," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1–8.

The Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe (BCZ) is a third example with members protesting constitutional reform and they went ahead to form the African Baptist Churches of Zimbabwe.<sup>19</sup> Its 1963 constitution had been amended severally, and they wanted to suggest that the pastor should take a central position in the church.<sup>20</sup> Dissenters protested against the assertion that the pastor should become the ‘chief administrator of the church.’<sup>21</sup> This means the national president would appoint all church secretaries, legal affairs, and project coordinators.<sup>22</sup> Hierarchy in an egalitarian Baptist church is an abhorrent religious flue. The BCZ however refused to ordain female pastors favoured by dissenters who refused hierarchy and centralization as Episcopalian on church properties.<sup>23</sup> The BCZ condemned autonomy based on a lack of discipline, coordination, consultation, and strong leadership. Dissenters cited greediness as a reason to interfere with Baptist Christian liberty.<sup>24</sup> Dissenters finally formed a new denomination, the African Baptist Churches in Zimbabwe, ‘the vanguard of the Baptist beliefs and distinctives’ in 2014, to uphold the sanctity of the Baptist doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

The African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange (AACJM) is the fourth denomination to have conflicts in Zimbabwe. It used oral tradition to legitimise the High Priest based on Genealogical or Paternity Models.<sup>26</sup> Genealogically, all of Momberume's bloodline are eligible (first opinion), yet by paternity, the High Priest should come from Johane Marange's bloodline (second opinion). The genealogical model successfully wrestled church leadership from the paternity model when Noah Taguta, son of Arnold Taguta, elder brother to Johanne Marange (1912–1963), founder of AACJM became High Priest.<sup>27</sup> Noah was installed High Priest as the eldest surviving member of the Momberume bloodline. The genealogical-paternity continuum has led the conflict into lawsuits concerning the high priesthood, church relics, shrines, and burial rituals with violent incursions at common sites, and unsuccessful use of sex scandals and fraud charges to wrestle power from the beholder.<sup>28</sup> The church leaders have resorted to the public courts which on one end use chieftainship (genealogical) and on the other inheritance (paternity). Noah Taguta argued that when the church was formed, Arnold Taguta was the eldest son of Fureni Sithole. The founding of the church happened on consensus among brothers that Johane Marange, the youngest son, would lead first, and the rest of the family members would take turns to become high priests because they all originated from the same Fureni Sithole.

Church conflicts emanate from varying backgrounds, worldviews, beliefs, and practices related to economic determinism. Church leaders change the ‘rules of the game’ to align and legitimize particular personalities on their access to, and control over, church resources. Constitutional conflicts, and the leadership transformation they bring, maybe a permanent feature in every church.

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<sup>19</sup> Sineke Hlomani, “The Impact of Congregational Autonomy on a Baptist Worshipper: A Comparative Analysis of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe and African Baptist Churches in Zimbabwe on Congregational Autonomy” (Bulawayo, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe (BCZ), *The Constitution of the Baptist Convention in Zimbabwe (Amendments)* (Gweru: Chiundura Baptist Seminary, 2010), *Art. VIII, Sub-sec. (a-c); Art. XI, Sec. 5.*

<sup>21</sup> BCZ, *Article IX, Sec. 8, Sub-sec. b.*

<sup>22</sup> BCZ, *Art. IX, Sec. 3.*

<sup>23</sup> BCZ, *Article XI, 3; Article XV, 3, (2-3).*

<sup>24</sup> Hlomani, “The Impact of Congregational Autonomy on a Baptist Worshipper: A Comparative Analysis of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe and African Baptist Churches in Zimbabwe on Congregational Autonomy.”

<sup>25</sup> Hlomani, “The Impact of Congregational Autonomy on a Baptist Worshipper: A Comparative Analysis of the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe and African Baptist Churches in Zimbabwe on Congregational Autonomy.”

<sup>26</sup> Tendai Magaracha, “Economic Determinism in the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange” (University of Pretoria, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Ruzivo, “Succession Debates in the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church”; T.J. Magaracha and G. Masengwe, *Power Struggles and Cultural Identity Crises in African Initiated Churches (AICs): Investigating Factors and Dynamics behind the Schism in the African Apostolic Church of Johanne Marange (AACJM)* (Lambert Academic Publishers, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Magaracha, “Economic Determinism in the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange.”

## Conceiving Constitutional Conflict in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

Relating conflict in the COCZ with the adoption of the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2015 constitution ignores the commonality of conflict across churches and nations where parties pursue personal rather than collective interests.<sup>29</sup> Parties use different dynamics of power to enforce revolutions or perpetuate inequalities.<sup>30</sup> Two interdependent parties with incompatible goals, express their struggle using ‘scarce rewards’ to obtain desirable goods for their party by developing competitive bargaining power.<sup>31</sup> Conflict is what LeVine calls ‘intra-family—interpersonal conflict between family members.’<sup>32</sup> ‘Conflict is the social process in which individuals or groups seek their ends by directly challenging antagonists by violence or threat of violence.’<sup>33</sup>

Conflict deliberately opposes, resists, or coerces people to do what they will not necessarily want to do. This active disagreement between opposing parties generates incompatibilities of opinions, perceptions, or principles.<sup>34</sup> Parties must become aware of the disagreement and their bargaining powers. There is an interdependent relationship between conflict, tension, and friction because ‘Every relationship...no matter how close, how understanding, how compatible there will be times when ideas, actions, needs or goals won't match those of others around’.<sup>35</sup> Parties, especially leaders, have interaction rights and responsibilities as family members, associates, partners, and neighbours.<sup>36</sup> Interaction is transforming and necessitates friction.<sup>37</sup> Epistemologically transformative measures however can be taken to counteract destructive conflicts by accommodating ideas of incompatible groups/individuals, their interests and preferences at intra-personal, inter-personal, and extra-personal levels<sup>38</sup> because clashes of interests begin in the individual and extent into the wider community.<sup>39</sup>

African politicians suffer from residual elements of conflict and discontent from their former colonizers, making them less committed to their leadership. This, therefore, denies them to be true unifiers and chiefs who can motivate and mobilize people to pursue policies of inclusion and integrity.<sup>40</sup> This altruistic leadership position is only possible after addressing intra-personal conflicts.<sup>41</sup> Residual elements create adversarial approaches in churches, especially on constitutional reform. Such individuals will be able to handle conflicts.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Alastair McKay, “How Does the Church Handle Conflict in Its Midst and What Challenges Does It Face in Handling Conflict Constructively?,” 2016, <https://www.bbministries.org.uk/wp.content/uploads/2016/04/>.

<sup>30</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>31</sup> Ronal B. Adler and N. Towne, “Resolving Interpersonal Conflicts,” *Looking out, Looking in, USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc* 355 (1990): 355.

<sup>32</sup> Robert A. LeVine, “Anthropology and the Study of of Conflict: An Introduction,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (Sage Publications Sage CA: Thousand Oaks, CA, 1961).

<sup>33</sup> J. L. Gillin, “Cultural Sociology” (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1948).

<sup>34</sup> Jane Anthony, *Conflict Management: From Theory to Practice* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Adler and Towne, “Resolving Interpersonal Conflicts,” 357.

<sup>36</sup> Shelton Mafohla, “Clergy-Laity Relations: An Investigation into Power Relations between the Clergy and Laity in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ),” *Bachelor of Theology and Religious Studies Dissertation, Midlands State University, Gweru*, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Blackburn and David Brubaker, “Conflict in Congregations” (C. Schrock-Shenk, and L. Ressler, Making peace with conflict: practical ..., 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Gregory Tillett and Brendan James French, *Resolving Conflict: A Practical Approach*, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Norman Chivasa, “The Nature, Extent Causes and Consequences of Conflicts Involving Pastors” (GMHB Publishing House, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Adebayo Adedeji, “Structural Adjustment Policies in Africa,” *International Social Science Journal* 51, no. 162 (1999): 521–28.

<sup>41</sup> Tillett and French, *Resolving Conflict: A Practical Approach*.

<sup>42</sup> Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation* (Herald Press, 1999); Tillett and French, *Resolving Conflict: A Practical Approach*; G Harris, “Conflict Resolution and Mediation Services in South African Universities: A Cost Benefit Analysis,” *Durban: UKZN*, 2007.

Positively, conflict awakens parties to move in the direction of positive change because ‘Without conflict, we should have been stagnant’.<sup>43</sup> It uncovers biases, interests, goals, diversities, and positions. Interestingly, all relationships have a binding, agreement or a contract called a constitution. Constitutions are instruments that define powers, demarcate rights and responsibilities, and regulate relationships between parties.<sup>44</sup> It embodies institutional rules and regulations that are in line with faith narratives, histories, and traditions to prevent despondencies and confusion that distort and negate relationships.<sup>45</sup> They direct Christian belief and practice.

### **Studying Church Conflicts Using the Conflict Theory Framework**

The Conflict Theory Framework is a sociological theory that explains social structures and relations in a scientific way. The theory desires to give scientific explanations of conflict, by emphasising its causes, variations, and effects. The framework centrally concerns the unequal distribution of power and scarce resources. Conflict theorists [like Karl Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Lewis Coser, Ralph Dahrendorf, and Randall Collins] focus on three stratification systems: class, status, and power.<sup>46</sup> Power is at the core of society’s attributes that cohesively integrate other structures in social relations. The function of conflict is to locate the place of power and power-holders as well as its subjects. Society is sometimes held together by coercion and exploitation rather than consensus which does not imply agreement and togetherness; for instance the lay-clergy conflict in the COCZ.<sup>47</sup> Conflict arises where religious power is unequally distributed.<sup>48</sup> Conflict is vital for group formation and survival. The necessity of dis/harmony and dis/association for group continuity contradicts Parsons who feels conflict is a disease that must always be eliminated from society.<sup>49</sup> The Parsonian equilibrium approach reiterates that conflict is an unavoidable functional aspect of all social relations.<sup>50</sup> Differential interests are only negated or escalated where self-interests are super-imposed upon others. Benefits include intangible weapons in conflict such as emotional solidarity and symbolic goods.<sup>51</sup> The COCZ conflict thus is not necessarily negative, especially at the congregational level. Stratifying conflict makes it dysfunctional for individual choices and oppressive group structures.<sup>52</sup> The functionality of conflict depends on situations rather than consensus. Church conflicts arise in normal human interactions by members of the community of faith. This study attempts to appropriate and improve churches’ socioeconomic, religious-spiritual, and political-ethical relations by examining constitutional laws in their religious life.

### **The Bible on Constitutional Conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe**

The Bible has no specific constitutional provisions, except samples of religious laws for just living (the Decalogue), which is the basis of Old Testament prophecy. Vulnerable Israelite groups began to receive instructions in Egypt to guarantee their livelihood because the new Pharaoh did not know Joseph. Therefore relations do not provide survival and livelihood guarantees without a secure set of laws (Ex. 1:8). A list of universal principles (constitutions) rather than relations (Joseph) guaranteed Israel’s livelihood and protection. Universal principles hint at primitive accumulation that followed

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Harris and Ben Reilly, *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators* (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1998), 32.

<sup>44</sup> Kathleen M. Sullivan, “Unconstitutional Conditions,” *Harv. L. Rev.* 102 (1988): 1413.

<sup>45</sup> John Witte, *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Sherpherd Mafa, “Romans 12:14–21 and Social Conflict: A Case Study of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe” (MSU, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Mafohla, “Clergy-Laity Relations: An Investigation into Power Relations between the Clergy and Laity in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ).”

<sup>48</sup> Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1956), 8.

<sup>49</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Mafa, “Romans 12:14–21 and Social Conflict: A Case Study of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>51</sup> Randall Collins, *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science* (New York: Academic Press, 1975).

<sup>52</sup> Collins, *Conflict Sociology*.

Israel into the desert; where they could only collect extra manna and quail on the Sabbath Day (Ex. 16, 22). There, Moses appointed judges for government institutional (civic) hierarchies and administration (Ex. 18:13-26). The sign of a new relationship with God came with circumcision, to 'roll away the reproach of Egypt' (Ex. 13, 14, 21; Josh. 3, 4, 5). The Decalogue gave the final list of instructions written on stone tablets to reveal permanence and unchangeableness (Deut. 6:20). These unchangeable laws led Habakkuk to say: 'Write the vision and make it plain on tablets that he may run who reads it' (Hab. 2:2). Prophets were able to run with these principles to carry out social justice among the people of Israel.

The COCZ thus can appeal to the sediment of early Christians' thoughts and actions (Bible) in making constitutions. Some biblical principles may have been overtaken by time and events, thus contemporary governing documents become a requirement for principles, offices, accountabilities, and procedures in church life. Israel had agreed-upon values/elements of operation called extra-biblical materials.<sup>53</sup> Constitutions are extra-biblical materials presented in three parts: *Statement of Faith* (Covenant); *Fundamental principles/Management Guidelines* (Content) and *By-Laws* (Structures). Constitutions contain the rubrics of requirements for membership and leadership. The COCZ came from a capitalist background and thus is democratic in structure.<sup>54</sup> Denying a church that was formed by capitalists using democratic principles denies reality as seen in the *Last Will and Testament* (1794) and the *Declaration and Address* (1809). The Bible, being a sediment of beliefs and practices of the New Testament church has specifics that have expired with time. It needs good biblical hermeneutics to draft a culturally-specific church constitution for the postmodern church.

### Written Constitutions in the COCZ

The COCZ tradition denies the use of written constitutions.<sup>55</sup> Written constitutions de-personalize entities, and increase church potency, that is, polity, organization, governance, and administration.<sup>56</sup> '[T]he form of church government is immensely significant for both the harmony and the permanency of the church and its testimony'.<sup>57</sup> The COCZ emphasises democracy, representation, and multiple elderships to curb elitist manipulation.<sup>58</sup> The multiplicity of eldership, borrowed from Presbyterianism, is the disintegration of power from the centre to the margins,<sup>59</sup> against autocratic rulers that personalize institutions using the 'the letter that kills' (2 Cor. 3:6).<sup>60</sup> Constitutions are personalized by Episcopalian leaders for control of church properties.<sup>61</sup> While written constitutions outline important procedures, ideals, and requirements; and define membership and voting processes, guidelines on resources, and business conduct to bring civility into the church, autocratic rulers can manipulate that.<sup>62</sup> Historical evidence shows that organizations that were founded without written down guiding/regulatory

<sup>53</sup> M. Deneken, "Sacramental Theology of the Church and Romantic," 1993.

<sup>54</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening and Reform*.

<sup>55</sup> Masengwe and Dube, "Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe."

<sup>56</sup> Gift Masengwe and Edwin Magwidi, "Africanising the Four-Self-Leadership Formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 47, no. 1 (June 2, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/8159>.

<sup>57</sup> Claudia Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, "India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance," *Available at SSRN 1789168*, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Gift Masengwe, F Machingura, and E Magwidi, "An Excavation on Church Governance: The Question of Autonomy in the Light of the Disempowered African Church Converts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ)," *Journal of Research in Peace, Gender and Development* 2, no. 9 (2012): 185–94.

<sup>59</sup> Gift Masengwe, "'Crossing Over' from an Ideal to a Real Church: Journeying from Gullibility to Responsibility," *Alternation - Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa* SP35 (December 1, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2020/sp35a8>.

<sup>60</sup> Lovemore Mbigi, *Spirit of African Leadership* (Knowres Publishing Randburg, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Masengwe and Dube, "Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe"; Masengwe and Magwidi, "Africanising the Four-Self-Leadership Formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe."

<sup>62</sup> Terence Jackson et al., "The Management of People and Organizations in South Africa and Zimbabwe: A Cross-Cultural Study," *Management Research Review* 23, no. 2–4 (2000): 98.

documents eventually devolved into mere gatherings of competing interests.<sup>63</sup> Even the godliest, in this case, can be filled with conceit, treachery, and betrayal.<sup>64</sup> Written down guidelines for church relations can regulate and control religious behaviour.

Constitutions further spell out calendars for meetings, gatherings, and attendees. These guidelines state the qualifications and conduct of leaders to be chosen.<sup>65</sup> This guides members on rules and regulations.<sup>66</sup> Demand for ethical behavior may make constitutions both restrictive and emancipative<sup>67</sup> as well as control access to power.<sup>68</sup> Constitutions protect organizations during conflict times, especially in the structure, organization, and functions of an institution.<sup>69</sup> Rules de-regulate human power to protect them from self-destructive conduct.<sup>70</sup> This has led to a historical trend of courts confirming the legal nature of policy manuals in church constitutions.<sup>71</sup> They assist when putting members under discipline, regulating resources, and outlining governance structures.<sup>72</sup>

### Unwritten Constitutions in the COCZ

The COCZ has, for a long time, operated under unregistered contractual agreements because they are unwritten for use in the courts of law.<sup>73</sup> It disregards constitutions because they are not referred to in the New Testament as the Jerusalem churches were living, growing, developing, and evolving ministries.<sup>74</sup> It forgets these ministries were later established and institutionalized as indicated in the Pauline epistles (Acts 6; 1 Tim. 3; Tit. 3; 1 Cor. 6).<sup>75</sup> Thus denying constitutions because they were not mentioned in the New Testament becomes a disservice to prominent institutions such as contemporary Sunday Schools, youth programmes, Bible camps, medical missions, church buildings, and street ministries.<sup>76</sup> Even ancient documents were developed and referred to as ungodly but later on significantly evolved into biblical texts.

### Field Study

Interviews done with the clergy in the COCZ for this study were carried out between April 2020 and April 2021 on WhatsApp revealing that pastors caused the fission and can amend it. Participants knew and supported the Constitution. There were also fence sitters who professed conservatism for fear of secularization, saying ‘the COCZ is being made into a denomination’.<sup>77</sup> Participants explored the term denomination widely. One participant stated:

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<sup>63</sup> Jackson et al., “The Management of People and Organizations in South Africa and Zimbabwe.”

<sup>64</sup> J. A. F. Stoner, R E Freeman, and D R Gilbert, “Management Prentice-Hall of India,” *New Delhi*, 2001.

<sup>65</sup> COCZ (Church of Christ in Zimbabwe), *The Constitution of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe* (Somabhula: Somabhula Conference Centre, 2015).

<sup>66</sup> Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert, “Management Prentice-Hall of India.”

<sup>67</sup> COCZ (Church of Christ in Zimbabwe), *The Constitution of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe*.

<sup>68</sup> Gift Masengwe and Francisca H Chimhanda, “Postmodernism, Identity and Mission Continuity in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020): 1–10; Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Masengwe and Magwidi, “Africanising the Four-Self-Leadership Formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>69</sup> Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert, “Management Prentice-Hall of India.”

<sup>70</sup> Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert, “Management Prentice-Hall of India.”

<sup>71</sup> Pieter Johannes Smit et al., *Management Principles: A Contemporary Edition for Africa* (Juta and Company Ltd, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Masengwe and Magwidi, “Africanising the Four-Self-Leadership Formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; H Berkhof, “An Introduction to the Study of the Christian Faith,” *Berdman's, Grand Rapids*, 1979.

<sup>73</sup> Enock M Jirrie, *How to Uproot Church Problems* (Enock M. Jirrie, 1972); Smit et al., *Management Principles: A Contemporary Edition for Africa*.

<sup>74</sup> Masengwe and Chimhanda, “Postmodernism, Identity and Mission Continuity in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Berkhof, “An Introduction to the Study of the Christian Faith.”

<sup>75</sup> Berkhof, “An Introduction to the Study of the Christian Faith”; Sullivan, “Unconstitutional Conditions.”

<sup>76</sup> Sullivan, “Unconstitutional Conditions.”

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Roy Chimbuya, Pastor. Harare Christian Church, 21 Nov. 2020, 9:46 pm.

*A religious denomination is a subgroup within a religion that operates under a common name, tradition, and identity. The term refers to the various Christian denominations. It is also used to describe the four major branches of Judaism: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essences, and Zealots.*<sup>78</sup>

Discussions established that constitutions help address problems of leadership abuse and poor institutional administration. Newer, younger, energetic, and educated leaders contribute immensely to church life. Church rules thus are beneficial and sustainable for both new leaders and older cadres because they cohere future generations rather than separate them.

Participants further supported that ‘the constitution is important for smooth administration in the COCZ’.<sup>79</sup> Elites personalizing mission properties in the COCZ denied the essence of constitutions because they prefer ‘autocracy’ to ‘democracy’.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, missionaries, it was revealed, used regulations to do church business which is why they acted professionally.<sup>81</sup> This denies the argument that phenomenal growth in the COCZ history (1896 – 2014) happened without rules. It was actually the flouting of rules that led to problems in the COCZ.<sup>82</sup> Denial Church constitutions ‘fatalistically mystified involvement of God in changing things’<sup>83</sup> as ‘the divine was believed to be mechanically involved in solving church problems’.<sup>84</sup> This nullifies the agency of human beings to tend to worldly institutions as God was seen in every move (Gen. 1 & 2).

Participants further indicated that ‘conflicts in the COCZ emerged from imagined and existential threats towards the elders rather than group protection or their affinities to past experiences’.<sup>85</sup> These include religious affinities, access and control of mission stations,<sup>86</sup> control of foreign income, control of conference proceedings,<sup>87</sup> ownership and domestication of the church constitution,<sup>88</sup> and control of the SCC project.<sup>89</sup> Zimbabwe has diverse people groups classified under Shona and Nguni, and a few Europeans and Asians.<sup>90</sup> Diversity in COCZ did not generate mistrust and tension but resources and unrepentant behaviour.<sup>91</sup> Church elites have been identified as major movers of COCZ conflicts,<sup>92</sup> using mission stations to provide religious, moral, and financial benefits to

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Godfrey Ndriwenyu, Pastor. Mganwini Church of Christ, Bulawayo, 15 Nov. 2020, 4:56 am; 21 Nov. 2020, 8:57 pm.

<sup>79</sup> Interviews with Fortune Mate, Pastor. Colen Brander Avenue Church of Christ, 14 Dec. 2020, 11:02 pm; Mordicai Chikwanda, Pastor. Tshovani Church of Christ, Chiredzi, 21 Nov. 2020, 8:03 pm; Smallmatter Zulu, Pastor. Inner City Christian Church, 15 Nov. 2020, 7:54 am

<sup>80</sup> Masengwe, Machingura, and Magwidi, “An Excavation on Church Governance: The Question of Autonomy in the Light of the Disempowered African Church Converts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ).”

<sup>81</sup> Colen Brander Avenue Church of Christ (CBACC), *Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Congregation of the Colenbrander Avenue Church of Christ Held in the Church on 25 June 1965* (Bulawayo: CBACC, 1965).

<sup>82</sup> Jirrie, *How to Uproot Church Problems*.

<sup>83</sup> Mordicai Chikwanda, Pastor. Tshovani Church of Christ, Chiredzi, 21 Nov. 2020, 8:03 pm; Smallmatter Zulu, Pastor. Inner City Christian Church, 15 Nov. 2020, 7:54 am.

<sup>84</sup> Godfrey Ndriwenyu, Pastor. Mganwini Church of Christ, Bulawayo, 15 Nov. 2020, 4:56 am; 21 Nov. 2020, 8:57 pm

<sup>85</sup> Interviews with Mordicai Chikwanda, Pastor. Tshovani Church of Christ, Chiredzi, 21 Nov. 2020, 8:03 pm; Smallmatter Zulu, Pastor. Inner City Christian Church, 15 Nov. 2020, 7:54 am; Godfrey Ndriwenyu, Pastor. Mganwini Church of Christ, Bulawayo, 15 Nov. 2020, 4:56 am; 21 Nov. 2020, 8:57 pm.

<sup>86</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>87</sup> Masengwe and Magwidi, “Africanising the Four-Self-Leadership Formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>88</sup> Masengwe and Chimhanda, “Towards an Authentic Transformation of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>89</sup> Masengwe and Chimhanda, “Postmodernism, Identity and Mission Continuity in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>90</sup> World Population Review (WPR). 2019. *Zimbabwe Population Review 2019*.

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/zimbabwe-population/> (viewed 25 Feb. 2021).

<sup>91</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Masengwe and Magwidi, “Africanising the Four-Self-Leadership Formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>92</sup> Masengwe, Machingura, and Magwidi, “An Excavation on Church Governance: The Question of Autonomy in the Light of the Disempowered African Church Converts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ).”

managers and administrators.<sup>93</sup> This has created conflicts between mission minders and residents who claimed ownership of institutions they built with state subsidies and community resources on their land.

Post-baseline studies in the COCZ established that 70% of conflicts were generated by resource control rather than religious inclinations. It has also been claimed that the histories of fissions between American and New Zealand missionaries were revived to widen/worsen bad relations between church groups.<sup>94</sup> Some participants argued that the constitution exposed the illegitimacy of ‘criminals’ claiming to own mission properties.<sup>95</sup>

The legacy of Sir Garfield Todd defies dysfunctional uses of conflicts in the church.<sup>96</sup> Conflict challenged the artificial public image that lacked truthfulness by members who backtracked into their traditional ways when in private.<sup>97</sup> Constitutional reform brought hope for change, especially when mission minders claimed to own church properties rather than to be accountable and responsible to the denomination.<sup>98</sup> This denied mission station transition because of greediness.<sup>99</sup>

### Undressing Economic Determinism in Church of Christ Conflicts

Study results indicate that mission churches suffer from the exhaustion of foreign Christian ideologies, failing to self-affirm on indigenization, inculturation, incarnation, and evangelization.<sup>100</sup> Church leaders reinforced colonial binaries by denying cultural dynamism that accommodates cultural primacy that alienates.<sup>101</sup> Elites attempted to advance white privilege on liberated people in a proverbial interlocking trajectory of COCZ cultures.<sup>102</sup> Privilege used attachment to a former white missionary. It benefitted families of individuals who were connected to former missionaries. This led to conflict over mission station ownership and management.<sup>103</sup>

COCZ conflicts were not based on universal objectives, accountability, and transparency but on privilege and personal benefits. Elites eventually sponsored revolts and sabotage of the constitution and the SCC thinking they would undermine their control of mission stations. One participant stated:

Who else was there to witness the real break-up at Somabhula when the constitution was voted for? I remember Togs brought in buses full of elderly people from Gutu and Chiredzi. *Vakafa Havana chavakaona, ndachema zvangu* [I confess, the dead never witnessed these mysteries].<sup>104</sup>

Thus economic determinism fueled the conflict in the COCZ.

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<sup>93</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>94</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “‘Robert’s Rules of Order’ on Religious Conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>95</sup> Mordicai Chikwanda, Pastor. Tshovani Church of Christ, Chiredzi, 21 Nov. 2020, 8:03 pm; Smallmatter Zulu, Pastor. Inner City Christian Church, 15 Nov. 2020, 7:54 am.

<sup>96</sup> Gift Masengwe and Bekithemba Dube, “The Legacy of Sir Reginald Stephen Garfield Todd in Zimbabwean Public Life History,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021).

<sup>97</sup> Gift Masengwe, “The Church of Christ in Zimbabwe: Identity- and Mission-Continuity [in Diversity]” (UNISA, 2020).

<sup>98</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “‘Robert’s Rules of Order’ on Religious Conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Masengwe and Chimhanda, “Postmodernism, Identity and Mission Continuity in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Jirrie, *How to Uproot Church Problems*.

<sup>99</sup> Masengwe and Magwidi, “Africanising the Four-Self-Leadership Formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>100</sup> Masengwe, “The Church of Christ in Zimbabwe: Identity- and Mission-Continuity [in Diversity].”

<sup>101</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Columbia University Press, 2019).

<sup>102</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>103</sup> Masengwe and Chimhanda, “Towards an Authentic Transformation of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe”; Masengwe, Machingura, and Magwidi, “An Excavation on Church Governance: The Question of Autonomy in the Light of the Disempowered African Church Converts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ).”

<sup>104</sup> Smallmatter Zulu, Pastor. Inner City Christian Church, 15 Nov. 2020, 7:54 am.

## Positive Functions of Conflicts in the Church

Conflicts challenge both incumbents and contestants. How the church is organized affects and revives religious group norms and their political relations. Economic determinism leads to religious and spiritual demerits. Such conflicts cause dysfunctional relations that need elimination. Chivasa & Machingura calls conflict an ‘opportunity’, to remove ‘stagnation, docility, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness.’<sup>105</sup> This conflict in the COCZ has led to new opinions on how the church can be reconciled. A participant advised that in reconciliation talks: ‘Our leadership needs to meet in a neutral zone under an unbiased adjudicator’.<sup>106</sup> In fact, ‘an arbitrator from both camps and timelines are needed because we are not divorced, but we were just separated.’<sup>107</sup> Participants debated the contribution of laws in establishing merits and demerits of arguments ‘to understand where the problem lies’.<sup>108</sup> Another also stated:

It is not the Constitution that parted our ways. Constitution *yangova gwayi rechibairo* [The Constitution is a sacrificial lamb]. Spiritual deliverance and speaking in tongues are unsettling for leaders who used *chivanhu* [cultural practices] to acquire power in the church.<sup>109</sup>

## SUMMARY

This article argues that there is a need to use alternative conflict resolution mechanisms inclusive of engaging ecumenical partners and not courts or politicians. Courts should be the last resort when all mechanisms have failed. This can have a wide-ranging impact on how mission stations are run.<sup>110</sup> The process of handling conflicts in the COCZ has been proffered using ‘Robert’s Rules of Order’.<sup>111</sup> This article, therefore, recommends that the COCZ embraces constitutions to reduce leadership abuse and manipulation; laws are guided by the church’s doctrines; members are taught the language of law; and that the church embraces constitutional benefits on decision-making.

## CONCLUSION

Church conflicts emanate from resource control rather than the abrogation of religious values. Resource scarcity, poor leadership, and group affinities in the COCZ led to conflicts. Conflicts are common for the functioning of organisations. Many denominations in Zimbabwe had transformation challenges along with postmodernist changes, such as the Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Apostolics. Greediness and selfishness advanced by capitalism initiated all these conflicts. Conflicts however awakened members to the need for universal principles (and international best practices) on the management of churches. Conflicts have challenged people, organizations, and human relations as new centres of power were created. This study deeply appreciates the cornerstones of conflict transformation that come with universalizing the process. This improves the church’s engagement in mission and ministry today.

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The COCZ has a history of verbal agreements, especially in members that involved missionaries and African ministers. Power distribution unfortunately was not consistent from church to church. It has been discovered that while missionaries verbalized issues with African workers, they had written

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<sup>105</sup> Chivasa and Machingura, “‘One Person’s Meat Is Another’s Poison’: Conflict Management in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe.” 73.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Fortune Mate, Pastor. Colen Brander Avenue Church of Christ, 14 Dec. 2020, 11:02 pm

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Godfrey Ndirwenyu, Pastor. Mganwini Church of Christ, Bulawayo, 15 Nov. 2020, 4:56 am; 21 Nov. 2020, 8:57 pm.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Tungamirai Musendekwa, Pastor. Waterfalls Church of Christ, 15 Nov. 2020, 6:48 am.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Reuben Sithole, Pastor. Mazvihwa Church of Christ, 15 Nov. 2020, 6:53 am

<sup>110</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “Critical Entitlement Theory on Post-Missionary Paternalism in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

<sup>111</sup> Masengwe and Dube, “‘Robert’s Rules of Order’ on Religious Conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe.”

constitutions that helped them in demarcating worship and life. This has led to the pattern of absolutism in the interpretation of scripture because there was no consensus between followers and leaders. This study acknowledges the contributions of pastors for the discussions to protect the church, its leadership and membership from abuse as the church turns professional.

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There are no financial or personal relationships that inappropriately influenced the authors to write this article.

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### DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors

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