UNIJERPS
Unizik Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies VOL.19 (4);
January-June, 2025 https://unijerps.org
2023 Impact Factor: **6.834;** 2022 ***Impact Factor***: 5.156; ***2021 Impact Factor: 5.641;***
2020 Impact Factor: 5.355. *Indexing and Impact Factor URL: http://sjifactor.com/passport.php?id=21363*

CONSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION WITHIN THE AFRICAN CHURCH, NIGERIA (1922-2014): A CATALYST FOR GROWTH

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ABSTRACT
Constitutional evolution within The African Church Nigeria (1922-2014): A catalyst for growth has been dynamic since its formation in 1922 which marks its enactment year. Highlighting its transformation, and implications for development, it sheds light on the church's idiosyncrasy for having a constitution that is dissimilar from where the church seceded, (Anglican Church) The church's constitutional transformations, from its inception to the present day, have been shaped and driven by church's quest for self-governance, autonomy, and contextual relevance. From its inception in1922, the church navigated the complexities of colonialism, independence, and post- colonialism, leading to constitutional evolution. The research analyzes the key milestones in the evolution, including the 1922 constitutional enactment year which establishes its foundational structures and governance framework, 1960, 1979, 1992, 1998 and 2014 were Amendment years. The study reveals that the church's constitutional evolution has facilitated its growth and expansion, enabled it to adapt to changing contexts, and increased participation and inclusivity. The research is premised on legitimacy theory propounded by (Suchman, 1995) which suggests that organizations seek to maintain legitimacy by conforming to societal expectations and norms. This theory is relevant for understanding how TACN has sought to maintain legitimacy over the years by adopting new practices and structures, including its constitutional evolution. The findings of this research have implications for the continued growth and development of TACN as well as for others religious organizations seeking to navigate the complexities of governance and policymakers and coupled with conclusion and recommendations.

Keyword: Constitutional evolution, The African Church Nigeria, Growth and Development, Autonomy, and Contextualization

Introduction
A constitution is a set of fundamental principles or established precedents according to which a state or other organization is governed. These rules together make up and constitute what the entity is. Constitution is not only part of humankind; it is equally peculiar to humanity. When God created the world, the first set of human beings were instructed not to eat out of the fruit of a particular tree of the garden. This served as the constitution of their time to checkmate and regulate the behavioral activities of individuals. Austin Ranney (1991) observes that it is almost impossible in any societies, organization, state and the country

where there is more than a person to live together without having anything to regulate their relationship with one another. The above submission attests to the fact that constitution has been a concomitant of almost every sphere of human activity from time immemorial. However, the term constitution comes through French from the Latin word "*constitutio*", used for regulation and orders, such as the imperial enactment (*constituiones principisi edicta,mandata,decreta,rescripta*) (constitution from the beginning of the council authorizes order and principle) later the term was widely used in Canon law for an important determination especially a decree issued by the Pope now referred to as an apostolic constitution.

Anifowose (1999) posits that a constitution may be detailed written document as in the U.S.A, Nigeria and most modern states of the world. It is inconceivable that any state, government or organization could exist without a written or unwritten constitution, defining the relationship between the leaders and the followers. On the other hands, Francis (Adigwe, 1974) opines that, constitution is an established body of fundamental laws, rules, principles and conventions that show and explain how country or any organization is to be governed. On the role of constitution in the society, a source reveals that constitution is a concept that is intended to forge harmony and tranquility, so that there will be cordial interpersonal relationship and of course, peace and stability in the society. Constitution is guided by the philosophy that inculcates right morality for stable and interpersonal human relations among people of different ethnic background and cultures. The phenomenon, regardless of type; is aimed at helping or educating people on what are expected from them ethically and to be aware of their limitations under the law. This is particularly true of the constitution of The African Church Nigeria. Having left the Anglican Church in 1901 and retaining all the doctrines of where it seceded in agitation for egalitarianism and emancipation in ecclesiastical government, it differs in constitutional matters.

Previous studies on ecclesiastical constitution by few scholars have been from historical perspectives of ecclesiastical constitution, relations between constitution and society as well as church growth in relation to its constitution with little reference to the constitutional development within The African Church Nigeria (Opele, & Adigun, 2023). Although, all the Ethiopian Churches have leadership problems, particularly in the area of succession! They also organize and create disparate offices of their choices that are totally different from their mother church. But The African Church, Nigeria is slightly dissimilar. Though, it retains the liturgical and hierarchical structure of her parent church that is, Anglican Church, in terms of constitutional matters, it differs remarkably from her parent church. This is as a result of Episcopal form of Church government that is operational in

the Anglican which is totally differ from the diarchical form of administration that it obtains in The African Church, Nigeria. Besides, scholars who have written volumes on The African Church Nigeria did not pay adequate attention to its constitutional role and development since its enactment in1922 and coupled with its significant constitutional transformations over the years. However, despite these changes, the church continues to face challenges related to its governance structure, decision-making processes and overall effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the historical development of The African Church Nigeria's constitution from 1922 that marks the enactment year and 2014, that marks the last constitutional amendment of the above-mentioned church.
2. To analyze the instructional factors that has influenced the church's constitutional evolution
3. To investigate the impact of contextual factors, on the church's constitutional evolution
4. Toevaluatetheeffectivenessofthechurch'sgovernancestructureanddecision-making processes
5. To identify lessons and best practices that can inform the development of effective governance and decision-making structures within The African Church Nigeria and other similar organizations.
6. To equally consider its constitutional idiosyncrasy and rationale behind the rejection of their mother's church constitution of the Anglican Church.

Review of related Literature

According to (Frederica Melbourne, 1920) the secular constitution was developed in the18th centuryandservedtoempowerandlimitinstitutionsofgovernment.[vii]Intunewiththeabove, (Cheryl Saunders, 2011) submits that the rule contained in a constitution becomes supreme or Fundamental law overriding all other laws and government actions. She equally recalls that, once a constitution is understood, the legitimacy becomes important. In view of the above, (J P. Greene, 1975) adds that the perspective on the constitution has transformed over time as a result of different circumstances and events. He further states that, the Englishmen saw constitution as a precedent, set by common law to protect the natural rights of man. The action of the government or non-governmental organization constituted the actual constitution. In the same vein, Leonard Levy and Mahoney further explain that the belief of the colonists about the constitution was to protect and solidify the natural rights of the people. The natural rights were inalienable, indefeasible rights inherent in all people by virtue of their humanity (Opele, Omole, Adebayo, 2019). Also basis rights of life, liberty and property were very important to the colonists. They

were believed to be endowed to all human beings along with the gift of life. Bernard Bailyn in support of Leonard states that, government and non-governmental organization should not encroach upon the rights of who they govern. Therefore, it was necessary to outline and solidify them within the government and non-governmental organization. He further states that, the colonists 'concept of constitution in its normal working would specify and protect the indisputable rights of man. These rights were believed to be the basis for a good and just government or any organization. According to (J. Wilhelm, 1908) the word constitution denotes in general the make-up of a body either physical or moral used in reference to civil or religious societies. In support of the above, the Catholic Encyclopedia explains that the word in the singular form signifies the fundamental laws determining their governing, legislature and executive organization. In view of the above, W. S. Perry submits that, the ecclesial constitution in its plural denotes the enactments, ordinances and laws issued by the supreme authority to further the object of the society.

In legal language the term *constitutions* denote only ecclesial ordinances and civil ordinances being termed *leges*, (laws). The *constitutions* ecclesiastic has in common with the *leges civiles* (the rules and principles of law derived from the customs and legislation of Rome). In contrary to the above, (J. W. Wilhelm, 1908) submits that, the binding power was derived from the authority of their framers, but both the Divine law and Natural law differ from each other as the ecclesial differs from civil society, like in their origin, objects and sanctions. The civil laws are enactment of a power directly human and only Divine in its first cause while their primary object is the furtherance of temporal welfare, sanctions and temporal penalties (Awogbami, Opele & Adeyemi, 2021). In corroboration with the above submission. Wilhelm (1908) further adds that ecclesiastical constitution on the other hand, emanates from an authority directly of Divine institution that its ultimate objective is to promote the salvation of souls in the kingdom of God on earth that consists of spiritual penalties as sanctions. In the total complex of laws bearing on matters spiritual, ecclesiastical constitution stands midway between the Divine and the natural law. (W.S Perry, 2010) lends credence by saying that, Divine law is contained in the scriptures interpreted by the livings and authoritative tradition like the Ten Commandments, the constitution of the ecclesial and the administration of the sacraments. From the stand point of (Perry, 2010 & Wilhelm, 1908) further states that, Natural law rests on the dictates of human reasoning like the law of self-preservation, obedience to the authority and Divine worship. However, both the Divine and the natural laws are the ordinances that emanated from the General Council and the apostolic see. These are the *constitutiones* ecclesiastic in the strictest sense of the term. In line with the above, (Wilhelm, 1908)

explains that, Episcopal constitution are issued by bishops either individually or collectively in synods like the constitution of the ten provincial and three plenary council of Baltimore which have adopted the ancient constitution of the universal church to the peculiar national and political situations (Adewole, Okrigwe, Opele & Omotoso, 2021). The ecclesiastical constitution contains the fundamental principles that govern its operations. The bye laws establish the specific rules of guidance by which the church is to function. In a similar thought of the above submission, a source explains that, church is a body of believers organized for worshipping God, evangelizing the lost souls and discipline believers when a church develops a constitution. It helps to clarify its purpose, provides the foundation for building an effective church, and defines its structure. In agreement with the above, J.S. Mill submits that the ecclesiastical constitution gives members and potential members a better understanding of what the ecclesial entails and how it functions. To understand the value of a written document that clearly describes the basic framework of the church makes drafting the constitution a much easier and more rewarding experience.

Church Growth in Relation to Constitution

According to John Mundy and Tierney, church growth can be observed through its western constitutional thought. They further explain the need to consider both the ecclesiology and political theory, ideas about the church as well as idea about the state. McClain lends credence by saying that, the interplay between ecclesiastical and secular theories of government from the twelfth to the seventeenth century shows how ideas revived from the ancient past Roman law. Brian Tierney explains that, Aristotelian political philosophy and the teaching of the church fathers interacted with the realities of medieval society to produce distinctively new doctrines of constitutional government in the church and state. He further adds that, the constitutional government moves from the Roman and Canon laws of the twelfth century to various thirteenth and seventeenth centuries' theories of consent. In the same vein, Magna Carta submits that the fifteenth century conciliarism and some aspects of seventeenth constitutional thought have a significant growth on the church. In corroboration with the above, Karl Baus submits that, religious law is being referred to as ethical and moral codes taught by religious traditions. Examples include Christian canon law, Islamic sharia, Jewish halakha and Hindus law. He further states that, the two most prominent systems, canon law and sharia differ from other religious law because, canon law is the codification of Catholic, Anglican and other orthodox laws as in civil law, while sharia derives most of its laws from juristic precedent and reasoning by analogy (as in common law tradition). In addition, Anderson Leigh submits that, Christian ethical teaching is in tune with the spirit of the law, legalism (theology). He further adds that

within the framework of Christianity there are several possible definitions for religious law. One is Mosaic Law (Old Testament) is also known as Divine law or biblical law, the most famous example is the Ten Commandment. In agreement with the above, Scott explains that, common law is the body of laws and regulations made and adopted by ecclesiastical authority for the government of the Christian nations and its members. He further adds that, ecclesiastical law is responsible for the internal governing of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern and oriental orthodox churches, the Anglican Church and The African Church, Nigeria as well. He further recalls that, the way church law is legislated, interpreted and at times adjudicated varies widely among the earlier mentioned Christian denominations. He further reiterates that, in all canon law was the rule adopted by a church council (from Greek Kanon κανων, Hebrew *kaneh*) for rule, standard or measure: these canons formed the foundation of church growth till today.

The Constitutional Evolution Within TACN: (1922-2014)

The African Church, Nigeria, whose constitution is under review, seceded from the St. Paul's Breadfruit (Ang.) Church Lagos in 1901. The African Church, Nigeria failed to implement the constitution of where it seceded. Similarly, the need became imperative to have what will guide the church apart from the Bible. However, events that led to the constitutional formation in 1922 and its constitutional development are explicitly considered

Constitutionalformation,1922

At the beginning, The African Church, Nigeria was under one administration before the schism of 1907. The African Church, Bethel was the first church founded as a demonstration of the dissatisfaction with authoritarianism, dictatorship and religious imperialism of the white missionaries. The secessionists were all lay members of the St. Paul's Breadfruit (Ang.) Church, Lagos. The second church to be established was Jehovah Jireh African Church, in 1902, which later metamorphosed to The African Church Salem. Those that established The African Church Salem were mainly members of St. Jude's (Ang.) Church, Ebute-Meta, Lagos. Those who seceded were in solidarity for Rev. J. S. Williams that was expelled because he dedicated The African Church Bethel. The authority under Bishop I. O. Oluwole of the C.M.S found Rev J. S. Williams guilty of performing the dedication without authorization which was counted as disloyalty and treachery against him. However, the two African Church Bethel and Salem, filed a case for expelling Rev. J. S. Williams in court against the C.M.S authority. Unfortunately, the case was in favour of the C.M.S to the extent that the C.M.S was even declared the owner of all church property. Still, J. K. Coker and Rev. J. S. Williams were dissatisfied with the judgment because they were representing the interest of those who seceded. They went as far as London to seek redress on the case, but to no avail. Rev. S. A. Coker was not left out in this

struggle by joining hands with Elder J. K. Coker and Rev. J. S. Williams by accompanying them when they visited Salisbury, the headquarters of C.M.S in London. Rev. S. A. Coker did not seek the consent of the lay president, Mr. A. W. Thomas, before embarking on such trip. On his arrival, and because of other matters not connected with him like misappropriation and mismanagement of fund, he was queried. He too leveled some accusations of wrong doings against some high church officials before leaving the church. The exit of Rev. S.A. Coker in 1904 also led to the termination of appointment of his assistant, Rev. D. C. Coates, who was accused of disloyalty by receiving instructions from Superintendent S. A. Coker. The sacking of Rev. D. C. Coates divided The African Church Bethel into two factions in 1904.

According to Dada, The African Church Bethel was retained under the hegemony of A. W. Thomas and Rev.D.J.A.Oguntolu. On the other side, J.K.Coker, Supt, S.A. Coker,and Revd. D. C. Coates, with their supporters, moved out to establish another church known as Zion African Church in Lagos Island. Within The African Church Nigeria, two organizations were run for thirteen good years, The African Church Bethel and The African Church Salem in which Zion African Church later merged with to form a viable denomination. Dada further notes that the two organizations operated differently as if the other did not exist. They both agreed on their aversion to dictatorship and authoritarianism of the Bishop as in the C.M.S, but could not agree on power sharing between the clergy and the laity. The African Church Bethel operated on the congregational form of church government. The African Church Bethel suppressed the power of its clergy in which the Lay President was seen as the symbol of authority and ruling in the parish council, general committee and also approving money for payment. In contrary, The African Church Salem operated on the Episcopal form of church government, with little difference to that of the C.M.S. However, in The African Church Salem, the clergy was the chairman of every church matter, like Parish Council and General Committee. Also, the secretary to the organization was a clergyman as it is practiced in the Anglican Church. The little difference was that laity controlled the monetary aspect, which meant that the clergy had no final say on their finances. The clergy in The African Church, Salem was not equally granted total authority like the Bishop of Anglican Church for the fear of authoritarianism and dictatorship. Chief Fredrick Ephraim Williams was instrumental to the reunification of the two organizations through his letter of appeal to the two factions of The African Church (Bethel and Salem) on 11th December, 1916, asking them to both sink their differences and come together again as one big family in Christ. Unfortunately, F. E. Williams died shortly after the letter in 1918. It was in consideration of his letter of appeal for togetherness that negotiation began, which eventually led to their unification of the two factions (Bethel and Salem)

with the adoption of the name The African Church, Incorporated. The African Church, Bethel and The African Church, Salem finally agreed to come together through their representatives and fashioned out a constitution for The African Church, Nigeria in November 24, 1922. The two factions shifted grounds on how they had been running the affairs of the church because The African Church Bethel operated on the congregational form of church government, but The African Church Salem operated on Episcopal form of church government. After the two factions had agreed to bury and sink their differences, the need became imperative for the two factions to strike a balance on how the church would be smoothly run without any hitch or further schism. This marked the year of constitutional formation. Parts of issues addressed by the 1922 constitution are autonomy and self-governance.

First Constitutional Amendment, 1960

The constitutional transformation occurred again in the year under review with the approval of the amendments on the church's governance structure, and better decision-making process. The meeting was held at African Bethlehem Church Ebute-Meta, Lagos on May 5, 1960.

Second constitutional amendments, 1979

The 1979 constitutional amendment approval meeting was held at The African Church Christ Cathedral Calabar on May 11, 1979. By the year 1979, the number of the well-educated clergy had significantly increased. These developments gave the clergy the courage not to relent in their agitation for further review of the constitution of The African Church, Nigeria with regard to saddling the clergy with more authority and leadership of the church.

Third Constitutional Amendment, 1992

The 1992 constitutional amendment was agreed upon by the clergy and laity in February 27, 1992 at Saviour's African Church, Ekotedo, Ibadan, Nigeria. What led to the constitutional amendment of 1992 was the fracas of 1987 when The African Church, Nigeria divided into two factions that is Lagos and Ibadan – over the post of the Lay President. The refusal of the two factions to concede victory to each other took the church a journey of five years before the reunificationin1992.The schism broke out as a result power tussle which prompted the church to amend the constitution that both the appointment of the Primate and Lay President of the church could come from any region in Nigeria.

Fourth Constitutional Amendments, 1998

By May 8, 1998, another constitutional amendment was made at the General Conference of The African Church, Nigeria held at Ile-Ife, Osun-State. The concerned groups never relented in their efforts for more authority for the clergy as to be actively involved in the expansion of the church. Furthermore, if the constitution of The African Church Nigeria had met the standard and yearnings of both the clergy and the laity by the year 1992, there would not have been any further agitation for inclusivity in decision-makings, e.g granting of

more power to the Primate, but must still be answerable to the General Committee for the faithful discharge of his duty. He shall be the custodian of the church seal. He shall appoint his own chaplain and office staff.

Fifth Constitutional Amendment, 2014

May 8, 1998 was another constitutional amendment at the General Conference of The African Church, Nigeria held at Ile-Ife, Osun-State. However, the agitation for further review of the1998 constitution warranted the inclusion of new nomenclatures and significant new administrative structure for the church Like, Archbishops, Provinces Canons, and Diocese. This has made the administration easier and efficient than before for the church officers.

Constitutional power of the Lay President/Deputy Lay President

The constitution of The African Church, Nigeria regards the Lay President as the chief administrative officer of the church. It further empowers him/her to assist the Primate on the discharge of his duties on temporal matters, like settling of disputes among members and on landed properties of the church. The constitution equally acknowledges the Lay President as the chairman of the finance committee of the church. In his absence, the Deputy Lay President shall stand in for him. In the absence of the two of them, the committee shall appoint its chairperson. The chairman and the General Secretary shall be responsible for the agenda and convening of the meetings, the constitution further empowers the Lay President in the following areas:

> *The preparation of the annual church budget for which a budget committee may be set up, to also find ways and means of improving the financial capacity of the church. The proper auditing of the church accounts.*
> *Recommending to the General Committee levies and assessments, etc. on the Diocese as may be deemed necessary. In addition, the Constitution recognizes Lay President in-council to the extent of entrusting certain power in it, like referring of certain issues to the council for solution or a way out thereafter, the recommendations on the matter shall be presented to the General Committee for approval.*

The Lay President shall have the power

to call for and examine the accounts of any church, parish, school, college, archdeaconry or diocese, the conference, the Endowment Committee, the pensions, Widow's Fund and the accounts of any group of the church and submit reports to the General Committee of The African Church, Nigeria. The chairman of the Executive Committee is the Primate and, in his absence, the most senior bishop is to preside over the meeting. But in a matter that concerns the Primate, the Lay President always presides over the meeting instead of being presided over by the most senior bishop. In this situation, the Lay President might decide to arrogate full authority to himself. It is observed that some of the laity officers are ignorant of the offices being occupied. On the part of the Lay President, the constitution explains that the officer is to assist the Primate, particularly in the temporal matters. It has been alleged that the egocentrism of some of these officers after assuming the post of authority, in the recent past, has resulted to spiritual and administrative stagnation. If it were to be their personal claims the fund would have been quickly released. This is due to constitutional in exactitude on who takes charge of the total authority of the church. Although, the docility of the caliber of ministers in The African Church, Nigeria, particularly between the first twenty years of the existence of the church contributed greatly to the laity hijacking the authority of the church from the religious functionaries.

The Lay President is almost, in most cases, highly influential and wealthy to support the church financially. This act of magnanimity has overshadowed many to the extent that their negative attitudes towards the authority of the clergy are not being noticed or considered as hindrance to the church. The Lay President also has influence on whatever crucial decisions taken or to be taken on any issue concerning the member of the holy orders like transfer and promotion of ministers. Some noticeable developments in the constitution, like granting the College of bishops the authority to carry out some minister promotion exercises that were being conducted mainly by the laity at the inception of the church, although, the integration played a significant role in the constitutional development in the history of The African Church, Nigeria.

Implications of the Constitutional Evolution for Administration in TACN

Positive implications: Church expansion

The speedy expansion of The African Church, Nigeria to other parts of the nation occurred as a result of its constitutional amendments between 1922 and 1998. People like Chief Founder, late Chief J. K. Coker, late Primate J. S. Williams; and late Ven. D. O. Asabia among others, greatly supported the expansion of The African Church, Nigeria right from its inception in 1901. Between 1907 and 1908, The African Church, Nigeria opened up new areas, gathering to itself new converts, most especially, Christians denied baptism by the CMS authority because they were polygamists. According to S.

A. Dada, The African Church Bethel moved eastwards towards Ijebu area, Delta, Warri and riverine areas, such as Buguma, Uyo and Calabar. The African Church Salem on its parts succeeded best in the Abeokuta area, later moved northwards along the railway line up to Offa and Ilorin; it also moved eastwards inland towards Ondo, Ekitiland, Akoko and Yagba area of Kabba Province. The aggressive and holistic evangelistic campaign embarked upon by The African Church, Nigeria in its early stage to reach out to other areas could be traced back to the event of AD30, the Pentecost day. When the first Christian expansion began, the followers of Christ were baptized at the upper room with the Holy Ghost fire and commissioned to spread the good news to the uttermost part of the world.

The story about church expansion is centered on Jesus; as His good news is being spread, the church expands. Every church is after expansion, which is of twofold. One is about the outward expansion that entails travelling, founding of churches and organizing. The second has to do with the spiritual growth or spiritual expansion of the church. Those who are chiefly interested in the fascinating story of the outward expansion are concerned with the number of men, places, building of new churches and gradual expansion that is visible like increase in the number of dioceses, archdeaconries and parishes. Those who are interested in the inward outcome or the church spiritual expansion, that is, number of born-again members are always few. However, what should be the ultimate concern of every Christian should be how the member or converts increases. The constitution of The African Church, Nigeria does not restrict the work of evangelism to the clergy alone. The laity has equally been very useful in the propagation of evangelism by some who have been converting their residence to temporary worship places where the branch of The African Church, Nigeria does not exist. Members living around such places are not prevented by the constitution from establishing a new branch. This is due to the constitutional flexibility of The African Church, Nigeria. Discipline

Discipline

Discipline has to do with the practice of censoring church members when they are perceived to have sinned in hope that the offender will repent and be reconciled to God and the church. It is also intended to protect other church members from the influence of sin. Excommunication is usually considered a last resort if a person does not repent of his/her sin. The constitution of TACN, in an attempt to bring sanity to Christendom embraces discipline (Rufai et al., 2022). The following are the specific offences or accusation for which any bishop, priest, deacon, or any member of the church can be presented for trial in the ecclesiastical court: A conviction by a court of competent jurisdiction for felony or other allied offences/conduct considered unacceptable by a Christian Minister; Sexual immorality or seduction of member's wife; Conduct considered

scandalous or unbecoming of a minister of God; Heresy or false doctrine or schism, Apostasy from the Christian faith, Violation of any constitutional provisions of The African Church, Nigeria Disobedience, that is, willful contravention of the regulations either of the General Committee of the Conference of The African Church, Nigeria or the bylaws of any other church body. Neglect of the duties of office; Refusal or failure to obey a directive given by the General Committee or the Conference or the Standing Committee whether directly or by virtue of the provisions of the constitution of The African Church, Nigeria; and any other misconduct defined as such by the General Conference or General Committee of The African Church, Nigeria.

Church Stability

Church stability has to do with the state of the church being resistance to change and not prone to wild fluctuation in emotion. The African Church, Nigeria has witnessed two series of schism in its history. The first was between 1909 and 1922. The second was from 1987 to 1992. However, all these past experiences of prepared The African Church, Nigeria against any further schism. The church election and power sharing that divided the church on two occasions taught the church the need for sensitization on church offices and on constitutional limitations of individuals before occupying any post (Alarape et al., 2016). Some of the respondents were of the opinion that the stability of the church would have been impossible if not for the active involvement of the laity in the church government through its constitutional provisions. In the Anglican Church, Episcopal form of church government is operational, which gives no room to the laity to dominate the affairs of the church. But in the constitution of The African Church, Nigeria, the church operates on diarchic form of church government which is pleasant to the lay officers of the church, as they are parts of the decision-making body of the church.

The constitutional flexibility of The African Church, Nigeria towards the acceptability of the traditional chieftaincy titles contributes to its stability. The support received from the adherents of African Traditional Religion further helps in the stability of the church where it would have been persecuted for the propagation of the gospel. The CMS missionaries were persecuted for not accommodating them (Opele & Tomori, 2024). The inability of the drafters of the constitution of The African Church, Nigeria at the inception to make a clear distinction between Christianity and syncretism of religion, led to the acceptance of The African Church, Nigeria by the rural people through its flexible constitution which has earned the church more stability. In addition, the constitution has been a source of inspiration to tackle the modern challenges in The African Church, Nigeria. This has brought stability to the church. Again, the sensitization of the church officers on the constitutional limitations surrounding the offices they occupy has

equally fostered the stability of the church.

Negative Implications:

Constitutional Ambiguity

The constitution of the church under review is full of ambiguity, that is, a word that is being opened to more than one interpretation. The constitution regards the Primate as the spiritual and overall head of the church; on the other hand; it also recognizes the Lay President as the laity head of the church, the administrative officer of the denomination and the chairman of the finance committee of the church. This has been aggravating arrogation of power in most cases in the handling of ecclesiastical matters. Furthermore, the constitution that acknowledges clergy as the vicar is equally responsible for the power behind the warden as the administrative officer of the church and the chairman of church finance committee. The constitution also indicates that both the vicar and the warden are responsible to the Parish Council for the faithful discharge of their duties. The interpretation of the constitution as regards this portion is that both the vicar and warden are equal, whereas it is this same constitution that says that every committee of the church is under the control of the vicar. This is also applicable to the office of the Primate, Bishops, Archdeacon and the Priests. Failure on the part of both the officers concerned to display maturity in the handling of ecclesiastical matters leads to arrogation of power on who takes charge of the totality of the church. Part of the result of the constitutional ambiguity in The African Church, Nigeria is administrative ineffectiveness that is, failure to hold a particular person responsible for the leadership role.

In addition, clash of interests, has always reflects to the extent that the church government has remained stagnant many times. Superiority clashes over who takes total charge of the church between the vicar and people's warden have impacted negatively on the peace that the church would have been enjoying. Some of the members that could not withstand all the ugly situations caused by the constitutional ambiguity had defected to other denominations

Finally, between the Primate and Lay President, leadership tussle has always been noticed on who takes charge of the total authority of the church. Ambiguity in the constitution of the church has been crippling the growth that the church should have recorded. On three occasions, as a result of constitutional ambiguity, the church administration was totally grounded.

Elaborate administrative structure

This has in no small measure been affecting issues that needed urgent attention through the different committees of the church. Issues that need to be urgently addressed suffer being dragged. The elaborate administration of The African Church has further impacted the following on the church: waste of time and waste of resources.

Waste of Time: This has to do with the devotion of time to the same matters that

have already been passed. Almost every member of the General Committee belongs to the Executive Committee and the Primate Advisory Board. These different committees, in most cases, consider the same issue, wasting time on calling different committees differently.

Waste of Resources: This relates to the amount spent to sponsor each delegate to meetings by the church and even by some self-sponsored delegates who do not have any meaningful responsibility/duty at the meetings. The members of General Committee, Executive Committee, Primate Advisory Board and General Conference are almost the same people. All these meetings attract much spending, especially when hold in venues far away from the headquarters. One would have felt that since most of these members are selected across committees, speedy passage on any matter would exist, but, at times, the reverse is the case. Therefore, these numerous committees should be reduced, since it is the same issues being deliberated upon. This will reduce the unnecessary financial burden on travelling, accommodation and feeding of each delegate at meetings. The Executive Committee, which should have been considered as the engine room of The African Church, Nigeria, like the standing committee of the Anglican Church. It is constitutionally incapacitated owing to the limitation of powers to implement any decision without reporting to the General Committee, thereafter, to the General Conference for final approval before the implementation of such a decision

Conclusion

The African Church Nigeria's constitutional evolution from 1922-2014 has been a catalyst for growth and development. The church's ability to adapt to changing contexts, assert its autonomy, and democratize its governance structure has enabled it to remain relevant and effective in its mission to the propagation of the Gospel and serve humanity. The autonomy, self-governance, contextual relevance, church expansion, membership drive, church stability and discipline cannot be overruled. However, issues like constitutional ambiguity, infringement on the authority of the Primate, problem of hierarchical order and church constitutional challenges have negative effects on the development of The African Church, Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for policy

1. The church should adopt good side of Episcopal form of church government, if the Church truly wants to remain relevant in the comity of churches.
2. The Bible should equally be considered very useful on the respect to be accorded those in authority. Therefore, the office of the Primate should be respected by all.
3. The church constitution should be explicit enough on the obligations and limitations of church officers on any ecclesiastical matters. This will curb the level of infringement on the authority of the clergy and allow

smooth running of the church government.

4. A church that does not respect individual liberty, particularly on the constituted authority and where egocentrism is the order of the day instead of the interest of the church and well-being of others cannot progress. It is on the above that recommendation is made that; both the clergy and church officers should shun egocentrism while altruism should be embraced as parts of the way forward for the church. However, the fragility and sensitivity of the church as a divine institution should be considered seriously. It is therefore recommended that running of church affairs secularly should be discontinued while the review of the constitution of TACN should be done quinquennially.
5. On membership drive, its constitutional flexibility assists to increase the number of members. But, there is need for the church to embark on human capacity-building in order to retain its members, and to further guarantee the church stability.
6. The church constitution that has been helpful towards the church stability might not be relevant to tackle the challenges and expectation of members at this time. It is therefore recommended that the church should prepare a clearer constitution that befits the church of 21st century which will also stand the test of time.
7. The paucity of the copies of the constitution of The African Church, Nigeria has constituted parts of the abnormalities happening in the church, like the people's warden placing himself above the clergy in some Parishes. Most of the congregants equally see the warden as the one in charge of the church. But, if the constitution is made available to every member, they will be familiar with the constitutional provisions and limitations of individuals.
8. On challenges within the church over the constitution, despite all the proposed penalties for the defaulters, discipline has not been well rooted in the church for the fear of not to losing members. The constitutional flexibility that allows the admission of everyone without censoring them, on the other hand, it contributes to part of the constitutional challenges within the church. Therefore, discipline should not be for the clergy alone, as observed in the research, but for everyone.
9. For peace and speedy development in the church, the promotion exercise of the clergy should be taken with good care and transparency, as it has affected the unity of the church in the recent past. The aggrieved party believed that the promotion exercise was not fair enough, like the consecration of eight bishops some years back which was truncated by the court order through the support of the Lay President who also claimed not to have been well carried along during the exercise. It is indispensable to manage the people and carry the expected church

officers alongside with whatever decisions to be taken due to the sensitivity and fragility of the church.

10. The sensitization of the church officers on constitutional limitations fosters stability. But there is still need for those officers at the corridor of power to really understand their constitutional obligations and limitations. Therefore, research seminars, symposiums and debates on the constitution of the church should be regularly organized.
11. All the clergy in the church must have copies of the constitution, and also be conversant with the constitutional provisions towards the development of The African Church, Nigeria.
12. On the hierarchical order of the church, that place some lay officers of the church above the bishops. It is therefore, recommended that the hierarchical order of the clergy should be separated from the laity hierarchy. Also, no matter the height of the office of the laity, such an office must not be above the clergy as this will bring dignity to the work of God and even encourage many people to join the ministry of the church
13. There should be enough consultation before the movement of any minister, but in most cases, reverse is always the case. This has on many occasions resulted to the truncation of such exercise.

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