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**The Politics of “Biblical Manhood”:
A Critical Study of Masculinity Politics and Biblical
Hermeneutics in a Zambian Pentecostal Church**

*‘We, men, are the head, but you have to live up to it!
We like to be the head, but we don’t like to live up to the responsibility.
That’s our problem!’
Joshua H.K. Banda*

Introduction

The above quotation is a statement made by Bishop Joshua H.K. Banda, who is a prominent Zambian Christian leader and the senior pastor of Northmead Assembly of God (NAOG), a Pentecostal church in Lusaka (Zambia). It expresses Banda’s concern about men and the way men perform their roles, and it shows how he employs the notion of male headship to remind men of the related responsibilities. The statement is an illustration of the way Banda and his church seek to realise change in men and to transform masculinities. The quotation is from one of the sermons in the series *Fatherhood in the 21st Century*. In this series, delivered in 2008, Banda explores the vision of what he calls “biblical fatherhood” or “biblical manhood”. The series demonstrate an enormous concern about the “distortion” of manhood perceived in society, for example in phenomena such as violence against women, men’s sexual performances, homosexuality, alcoholism, and an overall irresponsibility of men in matters concerning marriage and family life. Referring to these realities, Banda says: ‘We have to restore a vision of biblical manhood.’¹ What, then, is the meaning of this vision? How does “biblical manhood” according to Banda look like and how does he use the Bible to develop this ideal? What is the political agenda of the efforts to restore this vision?

My interest in these questions is informed by the debate on religion and masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa. The transformation of socially dominant forms of masculinity is widely considered an urgent issue for

¹ J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

African societies today. These masculinities are associated with issues such as HIV and AIDS, sexual abuse, conflict and war, violence against women and children, etcetera.² Against this background UNAIDS, the United Nations programme on HIV and AIDS, has underlined the need 'to challenge harmful concepts of masculinity' and that socially engaged scholars have called to 'target men for a change.'³ This illustrates the widely recognised urgency of the transformation of masculinities in contemporary Africa.⁴ In other words, the HIV epidemic and other social and development issues have given rise to masculinity politics: efforts to actively change perceptions of masculinity and men's position in gender relations.⁵ In present day Africa, numerous development agencies and faith-based organisations do not only have programmes for women's empowerment, but increasingly also do work with men to sensitise them and change popular attitudes and perceptions. Against this background, Robert Morrell, a prominent scholar of African masculinities, has emphasised the analytical task of scholars 'to identify what forces operate to effect change in masculinities, when, where and how

² The relation between men and masculinities and these social issues is explored in a growing body of literature. For example, see A. Simpson, *Boys to Men in the Shadow of AIDS. Masculinities and HIV Risk in Zambia*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009; E. Uchendu (ed.), *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*, Dakar: Codesria 2008; T. Shefer and others (eds.), *From Boys to Men. Social Constructions of Masculinity in Contemporary Society*, Lansdowne: UCT Press 2007; G. Barker and C. Ricardo, *Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence*, Washington: World Bank 2005; D. Gibson and A. Hardon (eds.), *Rethinking Masculinities. Violence and AIDS*, Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis 2005; L. Ouzgane and R. Morrell (eds.), *African Masculinities. Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005; R. Morrell (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg and London: Univ. of Natal Press and Zed Books 2001.

³ UNAIDS, *Men and AIDS: A Gendered Approach*, Geneva: UNAIDS 2000; J. Bujra, 'Targeting Men for a Change: AIDS Discourse and Activism in Africa' in F. Cleaver (ed.), *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, London: Zed Books 2002, 209-234.

⁴ To be clear, I use the terms 'political' and 'politics' in the broad sense of the words. It does not refer to civil governments but to the processes initiated by all kind of organized groups of people in order to achieve certain goals in society.

⁵ Connell describes masculinity politics as 'those mobilizations and struggles where the meaning of masculine gender is at issue, and, with it, men's position in gender relations. In such politics masculinity is made a principal theme, not taken for granted as background.' (R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (2 ed.), Berkely/Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press 2005, 205.)

such changes occur, and what their effects are.⁶ In the present article I engage with this task, focusing on the role of religion, particularly Christianity, as a force to operate change in masculinities. I will not explore this in general, but drawing from a specific case study conducted in NAOG in 2008 and 2009. How does this church address, redefine and seek to transform masculinities, and how the Bible is used in this transformation process?

By presenting a case study on the masculinity politics in a local Zambian Pentecostal church, the present article hopes to contribute to the debate on masculinities in the context of African Christianity. A number of African scholars in religion and theology, Ezra Chitando being the most prominent one, have recently engaged with issues concerning masculinity, specifically in relation to the HIV epidemic.⁷ They critically analyse the effects of dominant versions of masculinity in African societies and their effects on the well-being of women and children. They also provide visions for alternative masculinities. Though Chitando has underlined the need for African churches 'to rethink their mission towards men' and has raised the question whether churches are 'challenging conventional forms of masculinity'⁸, as far as I know detailed studies on masculinities in local churches have hardly been conducted. I hope that this article, written by a European researcher trained in the cross-cultural study of world Christianity, may help to fill this gap. Drawing from the case study I will also raise some fundamental questions to the further

⁶ R. Morrell, 'The Times of Change. Men and Masculinity in South Africa' in R. Morrell (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg and London: Univ. of Natal Press and Zed Books Ltd 2001, 7.

⁷ See E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma (eds.), *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Geneva: WCC Publications (forthcoming); E. Chitando, 'Religious Ethics, HIV and AIDS and Masculinities in Southern Africa' in R. Nicolson (ed.), *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*, Scottsville: Univ. of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2008, 45-63; E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma, 'Challenging Masculinities: Religious Studies, Men and HIV in Africa' in *Journal of Constructive Theology* 14:1 (2008), 55-69; E. Chitando, 'A New Man for a New Era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and the HIV Epidemic' in *Missionalia* 35:3 (2007). For a discussion of this development, see A. S. Van Klinken, 'Transforming Masculinities Towards Gender Justice in an Era of HIV and AIDS: Charting the Pathways' in B. Haddad (ed.), *A Cartography of HIV and AIDS in Religion and Theology*, Pietermaritzburg: Univ. of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2011 (forthcoming).

⁸ E. Chitando, *Acting in Hope. African Churches and HIV/AIDS 2*, Geneva: WCC 2007, 40-41.

study of, and scholarly engagement with, masculinities in African Christian contexts.

Theoretically, my framework is based on some of the basic insights in the emerging sub-discipline of the study of men, masculinities and religion. These are that masculinity is a category of gender and thus is socially constructed, that masculinity is constructed in various forms (hence the plural masculinities), and that masculinities are involved in ongoing processes of change and therefore can also be actively transformed.⁹ My analysis is informed by the understanding of men's studies in religion as a critical activity. This means, in the words of Björn Krondorfer, that 'bringing gender consciousness to the analysis and interpretation of men in relation to all aspects of religion is indispensable' and that there must be 'critical sensitivity and scholarly discipline in the context of gender-unjust systems.'¹⁰ With gender-unjust systems Krondorfer refers, among others, to patriarchy, androcentrism, heterosexism and homophobia. In my understanding, the critical edge implies that the study of men, masculinities and religion has a particular analytical sensitivity to the gender and sexual politics of religious discourses on men and masculinity, i.e. to the way men and masculinity are defined in relation to women and femininity and in terms of sexuality. In the context of the present article, the specific interest is how the Bible is used in these discursive politics on masculinity.

The article starts with a brief introduction to NAOG Church. Then it outlines some of the concerns about men and popular male behaviours in the church, as these inform the church's efforts to transform masculinities. This is followed by a section on the alternative masculinity that is promoted in the church, the ideal of "biblical manhood". The next section draws attention to the role of the Bible in the definition of this ideal. After that, the major political objectives of the promotion of "biblical manhood" are identified. The article concludes with some critical

⁹ For an introduction to these insights and the sub-discipline in general, see B. Krondorfer, 'Introduction' in B. Krondorfer (ed.), *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism. A Critical Reader*, London: SCM Press 2009, xi-xxi; S. B. Boyd, 'Trajectories in Men's Studies in Religion: Theories, Methodologies, and Issues' in *Journal of Men's Studies* 7:2 (1999), 265-268; S. B. Boyd, W. M. Longwood and M. W. Muesse, 'Men, Masculinity and the Study of Religion' in S. B. Boyd, W. M. Longwood and M. W. Muesse (eds.), *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press 1996, xviii-xxii.

¹⁰ Krondorfer, *Introduction*, xvii.

questions concerning (the study of) masculinity politics in African Christianity that appear from the case study.

The Case of Northmead Assembly of God Church

NAOG Church is one of the most prominent Pentecostal churches in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. The congregation has about two thousand members, with the majority being young, relatively highly educated and middle class. The church is associated with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Zambia, which is a fellowship of classic Pentecostal churches originating from North American Assemblies of God missions.¹¹ The church's senior pastor is Bishop Joshua H.K. Banda, who is reckoned among the most prominent Christian leaders of the country.¹² Through the TV program *The Liberating Truth* which broadcasts his weekly sermons, Banda reaches people all over Zambia and in the wider region. As the charismatic leader of the church, Banda sets the vision and strategy of the church.

One of the issues Banda is passionate about is the topic of fatherhood or manhood. This is demonstrated, for example, in the series of sermons entitled *Fatherhood in the 21st Century* that was delivered in 2008. However, Banda not only preaches on this topic but actively works with men in the church to raise them in what he calls "biblical manhood". This is done through the church's men's ministry called *Men of Truth*, but also through the ministries targeting youths, singles and married couples. Also the premarital counselling is a crucial instrument to teach men (and women) on their specific roles in marriage, the family, the church and the community. In the present article, I focus on the above mentioned series of sermons, specifically on its concept of "biblical manhood". A preliminary remark concerns the terminology of fatherhood and manhood. The term 'fatherhood' is used in the title of the series. In the sermons itself Banda tends to use the concepts of fatherhood and manhood interchangeably, though he considers the latter to be more comprehensive and to include the former. He frequently states that 'fatherhood is rooted in biblical manhood'. Therefore I take the term

¹¹ Cf. A. H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*, Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press 2001, 169.

¹² Cf. A. M. Cheyeka, 'Towards a History of the Charismatic Churches in Post-Colonial Zambia' in J. B. Gewald, M. Hinfelaar and G. Macola (eds.), *One Zambia, Many Histories. Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia*, Leiden: Brill 2008, 150.

“biblical manhood” as the central concept, though taking into account that apparently manhood in this perception is directly associated with fatherhood. Focussing now on the sermon series, first I will explore the reason for Banda to preach so explicitly on this theme. Why he is so passionate about this topic and what is his concern?

The Concern: A “Distortion” of Manhood in Society

In the first sermon of the series, Banda states that he wants ‘to discuss afresh from a biblical angle what fatherhood really means in our society.’¹³ This is needed because of the ‘violation of Gods order’ and the ‘abdication of [men’s] leadership’¹⁴ he observes in society.¹⁵ According to Banda, the true meaning of manhood has been distorted as a result of certain developments and perceptions. What are these misperceptions and realities? Several specific issues are mentioned in the sermons.

A first major issue addressed in the sermons is men’s sexual behaviour. According to Banda, in Zambian society today ‘manhood is defined in sexual terms. ... The term “manhood” is equivalent to describing the male sexual organ.’¹⁶ Consequently men think that they are unable to control their sexual desires and tend to view women primarily as sexual objects. In the sermons Banda seeks to correct this, referring to the Christian moral values concerning sexuality and to the reality of HIV and AIDS. Therefore he preaches that ‘manhood is not just defining yourself as a sex machine.’¹⁷

A second issue frequently mentioned in the sermons to illustrate the “distortion of manhood” is violence against women. Referring to the statistics of domestic violence Banda points out that the majority of perpetrators are men and he states that ‘this is a very serious issue.’¹⁸ Elaborating on this issue in another sermon, he says: ‘Men beat their wives while the biblical order says us to protect them.’¹⁹ This comment already illustrates how the Bible is used: there is appealed to the Bible, in

¹³ J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 1* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

¹⁴ J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 2* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

¹⁵ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 1*.

¹⁶ J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 3* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

¹⁷ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4*.

¹⁸ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 1*.

¹⁹ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 3*.

this case a so-called "biblical order", to correct certain wrongs and to provide an alternative ideal.

Related to men's violence against women is a third issue, which concerns the more general tendency of men to dominate over women. Banda critically addresses this 'pattern of male domination' that in his opinion is characteristic of Zambian traditional cultures and is still common in society today. Though he upholds the idea of male headship in marriage, he emphasizes that this should not be understood in terms of domination. According to Banda, male domination 'stinks in the nostrils of God. It is a distortion of Gods order. It implies that the woman is less than the man, but that's not biblical.'²⁰

Fourth, homosexuality is explicitly discussed and is considered symbolic of the serious distortion of manhood in modern days. Banda refers to homosexuality as a subversive and perverting phenomenon that is 'a diversion from the role that God has presented to men.'²¹ The attention paid to this subject was informed by the international news bulletins of these days that were filled with items such as the possible legalization of same-sex marriages in the USA and the attendance of American gay bishop Gene Robinson at the Anglican Lambeth conference. However, Banda's concern with the issue of homosexuality is also informed by local developments, as he observes a gay and lesbian rights lobby in the Zambian media.²²

Fifth, in the sermon series a more general issue is addressed, being men's irresponsibility in several areas of life. According to Banda, 'men misapply the role of fatherhood in our society.'²³ He speaks of an "immature masculinity" in the sense that men do not take the responsibilities that come with manhood, for example the responsibility to provide for the family.²⁴

An issue that is not mentioned in the series *Fatherhood in the 21st Century* but that certainly is a major concern in the church is alcoholism. It was frequently addressed in another series, entitled *Cultivating a Lifestyle of Truth*. Saying that 'the majority of our men spend their time on

²⁰ J.H.K. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 6* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka.

²¹ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 2*.

²² Interview with J. H.K. Banda, Lusaka: November 6, 2008.

²³ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4*.

²⁴ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 3*.

the bottle', Banda here calls upon the 'men of Africa' to leave 'the days of drunkenness' behind and to 'restore the dignity in the African home'.²⁵ The issues mentioned above are referred to as illustrations and indications of the "distortion of manhood" that Banda observes in Zambian society. He relates the misbehaviors of men and the misperceptions of masculinity to some of the major problems postcolonial Zambia is faced with, such as the HIV epidemic and high poverty levels. How, then, Banda seeks to "restore" manhood in order to overcome the negative aspects and consequences of dominant forms of masculinity?

The Alternative Ideal: "Biblical Manhood"

In the sermons, Banda not only addresses all kind of critical issues related to men and masculinity, but also presents an alternative ideal of "biblical manhood". To define this ideal he makes use of the definition provided by the North American Baptist author John Piper. In the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Piper defines "biblical manhood" as follows: 'At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships.'²⁶ Quoting this, Banda says that he found it 'a powerful definition' of what fatherhood and manhood should be.²⁷ In his sermons he elaborates on the definition in a detailed way, by discussing its major notions in relation to the Bible and actual realities. This illustrates that local discourses on gender, in this case sermons on masculinity delivered in a Zambian Pentecostal church, in our current era of globalisation and world Christianity, are related to and influenced by discourses from other regions and other confessional backgrounds and thus become increasingly hybrid. However, taking into account that Banda translates and applies the definition of Piper vis-à-vis African realities, it is also clear that his talk about bibli-

²⁵ Banda, *Cultivating a Lifestyle of Truth – part 3*.

²⁶ J. Piper, 'A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible' in J. Piper and W. Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton: Crossway Books 1991, 36. Corresponding to this is Piper's definition of "biblical womanhood": 'At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to women's differing relationships.'

²⁷ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4*.

cal manhood is a context-specific African Christian discourse on masculinity.

According to the definition of Piper cited by Banda, manhood is defined by a sense of responsibility. In his sermons Banda expands on this notion, presenting it as a primary characteristic of "biblical manhood". More specifically, this responsibility of men is said to be a primary responsibility: it does not exclude the responsibility of women in certain areas, but men have a unique and principal responsibility.²⁸ Banda's argument here is based theologically on his understanding of the figures of Adam and Jesus Christ. Referring to Adam who was put by God in the garden to cultivate it (Gen. 2,15), he says: 'What we see in the Bible is that the perfect man, Adam, prior to the fall, was placed at a location where he had to be responsible.'²⁹ That men have a primary responsibility is further underlined, according to Banda, by the fact that God calls Adam to account after "the Fall" (Gen. 3,9). God's question to Adam, 'Where are you?' is generalised in one of the sermons and applied to all men, when it is said: 'In God's economy question number one is: Men, where are you?'³⁰ In Banda's theological argument, the responsibility put by God on Adam has been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who answered God's question, 'Adam, where are you?'³¹ Explaining this, Banda says: 'Jesus Christ, when it was time to take his responsibility, he took responsibility. Then he said to his parents: I have a task. ... Being a man is about taking up your responsibility, and that is what Christ did.'³²

The notion of male responsibility is applied to several areas of men's life. In the definition of Piper cited by Banda, it concerns the responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women. In the sermons, these male roles of leadership, providing and protection in the marital and family setting are

²⁸ See J.H.K. Banda, *Cultivating a Lifestyle of Truth – part 5* (DVD), NAOG, Lusaka. Cf. J. Piper and W. Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton: Crossway Books 1991: 'The word "responsibility" is chosen to imply that man will be uniquely called to account for his leadership, provision and protection in relation to women. (...) This does not mean the woman has no responsibility, as we will see. It simply means that man bears a unique and primary one.'

²⁹ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 3*.

³⁰ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 2*.

³¹ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 1*.

³² Interview with J.H.K. Banda, Lusaka: July 28, 2009.

strongly underlined. Addressing men who hang around in bars while their wives are working, Banda declares that ‘it is a shame’ because a man has the responsibility to provide. ‘It is not just African, it is a biblical view: the principal income is for the man. That’s the biblical order. He is the provider and protector of the homestead.’³³ However, Banda does not limit male responsibility to the context of marriage. At the individual level, Banda applies it to the way men deal with sexuality. Preaching about HIV and sexuality, he emphasizes the need of self-control, stating: ‘We men need to keep our boundaries, our responsibilities.’³⁴ With regard to the level of the community and society, in a meeting of the men’s ministry I found men being called ‘to commit their manhood to society’.³⁵ In line with this, Banda calls men to take responsibility for “the mess” in which the country is and to show leadership.³⁶ He further defines this leadership by making clear that according to the “biblical order”, male leadership is not authority oriented or autocratic. ‘It is to serve rather than to dictate’, Banda says, and it ‘mobilizes the strength of others.’³⁷

Another central concept that appears to be crucial in Banda’s definition of “biblical manhood” is the notion of headship. Where responsibility is a general concept applied to all areas of men’s lives, headship specifically applies to men’s position and roles in marriage and the family. Again, the teaching on male headship is informed by the Bible. At every wedding ceremony in the church, Ephesians 5 is read: ‘Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.’ (Eph. 5,22-23, NIV). In his sermons on Fatherhood in the 21st Century, Banda refers to this verse and then concludes that ‘biblical manhood clearly shows that the role of headship has been given to men.’³⁸ In his opinion, this “principle of male headship” is also indicated in Genesis 2, because in this story Adam is created first and receives the instructions for life while Eve is given to him as a helper.³⁹ Concretely, headship is understood by Banda in terms of men

³³ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 3*.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Meeting of *Men of Truth*, NAOG, Lusaka: November 9, 2008.

³⁶ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 2*.

³⁷ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 3*.

³⁸ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 5*.

³⁹ Cf. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 2*.

having the responsibility to provide leadership in their marriage and family, to provide in the income of the home and to guide their family spiritually. In other words, it refers to men's roles as the provider, the prophet, the priest and the protector of the family.⁴⁰ As mentioned above, Banda emphasizes that headship should not be understood in terms of domination, as would be the case in Zambian traditional culture. Biblically, he says, male headship needs to be reconciled and balanced with the notion of the equality of men and women. The notion of equality is derived from Genesis 1,26-27, reading that God created humankind as male and female in God's image.⁴¹ In two sermons in the series, Banda elaborates on the relation between the principle of male headship and the notion of equality of men and women. He "balances" both notions a) by applying the notion of headship strictly to the context of marriage: in the public sphere women and men are equal, but in marriage women have to submit to their husbands; b) by redefining the meaning of headship from domination and superiority to love, service and sacrifice. The latter is done by qualifying headship christologically, in line with the above verse in Ephesians where the relation of the husband-head to his wife is understood in analogy to the love of Christ for the church. Hence, Banda preaches that men should model their headship after Christ and thus must love, protect and take care of their wives.⁴² Likewise, male leadership is defined in terms of service and sacrifice to the benefit of others.

With the major concepts of responsibility and headship, and the related notions such as leadership, protection, providing and self-control that have been touched on above, the contours of the ideal of "biblical man-

⁴⁰ Cf. *Premarital Counselling General Guide*, Marriage Ministry NAOG (unpublished material).

⁴¹ Banda understands this equality as an 'equality of personhood'. Cf. Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4*.

⁴² See *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4* and part 6. South African biblical scholar Madipoane Masenya observes with regard to "African – South African Pentecostal hermeneutics", that it emphasizes the headship of the husband over his wife without relating this with the husband's responsibility to love his wife just as his own body (see M. Masenya, 'Trapped between Two "Canons": African-South African Christian Women in the HIV/AIDS Era' in I. A. Phiri, B. Haddad and M. Masenya (eds.), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications 2003, 120). Evidently, this argument does not apply for the Pentecostal hermeneutics of NAOG. In this church, the notion of headship is clearly related with responsibilities and with the command of love.

hood” are outlined. Evidently, this ideal aims to raise men who behave morally upright, are accountable and take responsibility for themselves and for others, and who use their power constructively to the benefit of their wives, families, the community and society at large. The claim that this is the “biblical” ideal of manhood is made, of course, to legitimate it. But how precisely the Bible is used by Banda in his definition of this alternative masculinity?

The Use of the Bible in the Ideal of “Biblical Manhood”

It is significant that Banda, expanding on his ideal of “biblical manhood”, hardly refers to prominent male figures in the Bible. The powerful Samson nor the wise Solomon, prophets such as Elijah and Elisha nor disciples as Peter and John, the adulterous David nor the faithfully committed Joseph are referred to as examples or contra-examples of manhood. Apparently, the concept of “biblical manhood” does not refer to the lives of men with all their complexities, vulnerabilities and ambiguities, as they are described in biblical stories. When this strategy would have been followed, it would appear that actually there is a wide variety of masculinities in the Bible.⁴³ Banda opts for a different strategy when he engages the Bible in his quest for a vision of manhood. He presents a normative and monolithic ideal of what manhood should be. Though he calls this ideal “biblical manhood” it is derived from only a few parts of the Bible: Genesis 1-3 and some of the Pauline epistles. Rather than focusing on the many male figures in the Bible, he has selected two biblical archetypes of manhood: Adam and Jesus Christ. And when he talks about Jesus Christ in the sermons under discussion, is it not so much about the life of the male figure Jesus of Nazareth as narrated in the Gospels but about the theological concept of Christ as the second Adam as introduced by Paul. The theme of the first and the second Adam is employed by Banda to build a biblical-theological framework in which the “restoration of manhood” is envisioned and can take place.

From the previous section, it has already become clear that Banda’s ideal of “biblical manhood” is strongly informed by an ideology of gender based at the theological account of creation. He derives the idea of men’s primary responsibility, leadership and headship, as well as the idea of

⁴³ For example, see S.D. Moore and J.C. Anderson (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2003.

male and female equality, from the creation stories in Genesis 1-3. Furthermore, in the sermons, Banda repeatedly states that 'biblical manhood is rooted in creation'. "Creation" here refers to the original state of humankind as intended by God; it is the 'order of God' that has been distorted and violated by human beings and which, therefore, has to be restored. This is expressed, for example, in the following quotation:

Biblical manhood is deeply rooted in God's creation. Now creation, the way it was prior to the fall, was a perfect order which has become violated. Where we are struggling with is the state of men after the fall into an Adamic nature. If we want to recapture a vision of true biblical manhood, we must not look to Adam after the fall but we must look at the picture prior.⁴⁴

According to Banda, creation before "the fall" provides us with a vision, a blueprint, of "true biblical manhood". The pre-fall figure of Adam is the embodiment of this manhood: he was assigned with a primary responsibility and put in a position of leadership and headship. However, according to Banda's theology, the "perfect order" of creation has been violated and distorted in "the Fall" that is described in Genesis 3. Significantly, the Fall is explained as a failure of Adam's leadership role.⁴⁵ In Banda's opinion, this failure is paradigmatic for mankind in general, meaning that manhood has become fundamentally distorted and men generally struggle with their "Adamic nature". To overcome this reality, according to Banda we have to look back at the picture prior to the fall. This provides him with a vision of "biblical manhood".

Banda realises that this vision can be recaptured but not simply can be realised by men. To solve this problem he employs the Pauline notion of Jesus Christ as the Second Adam (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). From this notion he argues that Christ is the one who has restored manhood as intended by God. As mentioned above, Christ is considered the one who answered God's question to Adam, 'Where are you?' According to Banda, in Christ God has realised a 're-innovation of masculinity', mean-

⁴⁴ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 3*.

⁴⁵ In contrast with traditional Christian interpretations for "the fall", Banda does not blame Eve but Adam for what happened in the Paradise as described in Genesis 3. According to Banda, it was Adam's failure because he should have prevented Eve from taking the fruit. In his opinion, God's question 'Adam, where are you' indicates that God holds Adam accountable for what happened. The fact that God calls Adam to account is interpreted as an indication of the leadership role that God had given to him. (Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 2*).

ing that ‘what God desires in fatherhood is truly restored’.⁴⁶ Consequently, apart from the pre-fall Adam, also Jesus Christ is presented by Banda as a model or archetype of “biblical manhood”. Jesus Christ is considered exemplary to men because of his servant leadership and sacrificial love. In the sermons, Christ is not only presented as the one who has restored the ideal of manhood, but also as the one who liberates men from their “Adamic nature” and transforms them into “biblical manhood”. For example, see this quotation:

The second Adam can break the mindset and that curse that makes men think that they must act like animals out there, unable to control their sexual desires. We are better than that, we are higher than that, and we are more elevated than that because God gave us a provision in the second Adam. I want men here today to agree in their hearts and to understand that this Jesus can set you free!⁴⁷

With his application of the Pauline theme of the first and the second Adam, Banda stands in the tradition of Pentecostal theology.⁴⁸ However, he further develops this theme in a highly innovative way. Classically, the Adam-symbolism frames the creation, fall and redemption or re-creation of humankind in general, but Banda applies it to mankind in particular. He develops the theme into a theological framework for the “restoration” of manhood or, in more academic terms, the transformation of masculinities.

The fact that “biblical manhood” is defined within such a framework demonstrates how the Bible functions in the definition of an alternative masculinity in the church. A normative theological frame is built from a literal, uncritical reading of the creation stories and a systematic interpretation of some New Testament texts. In this frame the “true” meaning of manhood (as well as womanhood) is fixed in the “order of crea-

⁴⁶ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4*.

⁴⁷ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 1*.

⁴⁸ According to Ogbu Kalu, in African Pentecostalism the figures of the first and the second Adam have ‘enormous spiritual and political powers.’ (see O. U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism. an Introduction*, New York: Oxford Univ. Press 2008, 221.) Elaborating this theological perception, Kalu says: ‘He [Adam] had the authority to name all of God’s creation and govern the garden. But he lost all of his authority. God sent a second Adam through Jesus Christ, and Christians, as his disciples, have a divine mandate to work with the triune God to recover the chair that Adam lost.’ This theological line of thought is similar to what is preached by Banda. However, there is one crucial difference: Banda does not apply it generally to Christians as the disciples of Jesus Christ, but specifically to men who want to recover “the chair” of Adam’s manhood.

tion".⁴⁹ It is for this reason that Banda does not speak of a transformation but a restoration of manhood. Transformation would be open-ended, but restoration suggests that there is already a blueprint which only needs to be recaptured. In spite of this rhetoric strategy, it is clear that Banda has a political aim with the promotion of "biblical manhood" and, indeed, seeks to transform masculinities in order to overcome certain problems and challenges.

The Politics of "Biblical Manhood"

The case of NAOG is presented in this paper as a case of masculinity politics in a religious community. Evidently, the sermon series *Fatherhood in the 21st Century* is part of the masculinity politics developed in the church under the visionary leadership of Banda. But what, exactly, is the political agenda behind the above outlined ideal of "biblical manhood"? In my opinion, this agenda includes several objectives, some of them being progressive – as they want to effect change in masculinities – and some of them being rather conservative – as they seek to maintain the current order.

A major objective of the church's propagation of "biblical manhood" is to overcome some of the biggest problems Zambian society is faced with. These are, for example, the devastating HIV epidemic, the high poverty levels, the many cases of domestic and sexual violence against women, the growing number of street kids, and alcoholism. As outlined above, in his sermons Banda frequently expresses his concern about these issues. Even more, he explains these phenomena from the "distortion of manhood" and the overall irresponsibility of men that he observes in society. According to Banda, if men would take up their responsibilities as heads of the home and leaders in the nation, things would be different. Therefore, he critically addresses popular attitudes and perceptions among men. And for that reason he presents an alternative ideal of masculinity, characterised by responsibility, leadership, service and self-control. Ezra Chitando has emphasized the need for African churches, especially in view of HIV and AIDS, to target men and to challenge dominant masculinities. In his opinion, 'Churches need to engage with men in order to transform dangerous ideas about manhood in Africa', and he suggests that the pulpit should be appropriated in this

⁴⁹ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century* – part 3.

struggle to transform masculinities.⁵⁰ As far as this engagement is concerned, NAOG meets the criterion of what Chitando calls “AIDS competent churches”. The church engages in a transformation of masculinities, and the promoted ideal certainly makes a difference in view of the HIV epidemic and other critical social problems. With regard to these issues, the masculinity politics of the church can be considered as progressive and constructive, as it aims to change men and masculinities for the better of men themselves but also for women, children, families, communities and for society at large.

The concept of “biblical manhood” is also promoted in the church to play gender politics, i.e. to effect the configuration of gender relations in Zambian society today. These gender politics, however, are rather ambiguous. The sermons frequently refer to the changes in gender relations that occur in society, for instance the increasing level of women’s education and women’s formal employment. Indeed, in NAOG, being a middle-class church, I found many women to be relatively highly educated and pursuing a professional career. Marital counsellors told me that this raises problems in marriages: the wife may be higher educated and may earn a larger income than the husband, and hence they sometimes begin to question and challenge the roles of the husband as the head and leader of the home. In his preaching on “biblical manhood”, Banda deals with these issues. On the one hand, he emphasizes the equality of men and women. Hence he underlines the importance of women’s education and employment and of women’s contribution to the income of the home. On the other hand, however, he underlines the “biblical order” that the man is the head of the home. Hence he strongly denounces the ‘extreme feminist views’ that reject the “principle of male headship” and thus oppose God’s order.⁵¹ Two complete sermons are devoted to balancing and reconciling the modern (but according to Banda, biblical) notion of gender equality with the traditional (but according to Banda, biblical) idea of male headship. As outlined above, he does so by redefining headship from domination and superiority into responsibility, leadership, and service. Furthermore, he insists on partnership, companionship and love in the marital relationship. Thus, Banda reaffirms but softens the patriarchal notion of male headship while at the same time allowing for a greater equality between men and

⁵⁰ Cf. Chitando, *Acting in Hope. African Churches and HIV/AIDS* 2, 46-47.

⁵¹ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 6*.

women. Talking about masculinities and globalization, R.W. Connell says that men, in response to global discourses on feminism, women's rights and gender equality, respond, among others, by reaffirming the local gender hierarchy. In his opinion, 'a kind of masculine "fundamentalism" is a common pattern in gender politics.'⁵² Indeed, this conservative "fundamentalism" can be observed in Banda's rhetoric on male headship. However, the politics of "biblical manhood" is not just to reaffirm the local gender hierarchy. In my opinion it is more ambiguous, as this hierarchy is reaffirmed and challenged and undermined by Banda at the same time. It is reaffirmed by the talk about male headship, it is challenged by redefining headship from domination to responsibility, and it is undermined by the recognition of (a sense of) gender equality. As a result, the gender politics of "biblical manhood", which wants to respect a fixed "biblical order" and to allow for change, appears to be rather ambiguous and complex.

Apart from gender politics, also sexual politics is played with the concept of "biblical manhood". With this I mean that Banda in the sermons reaffirms the heterosexual standard and plays an anti-homosexual politics. As much as his talk about gender equality is a response to modern feminist discourses, his discussion of homosexuality is a response to globalising liberal discourses on sexuality as a human rights issue. In a sermon, Banda explicitly interferes with state politics when he argues that the legal ban on homosexuality in Zambian law should remain in force. With his anti-homosexual rhetoric Banda joins the choir of African religious leaders who have taken up the cudgels against gay and lesbian rights in order to address corrupting Western moral influences.⁵³ Banda's theological argument against homosexuality is derived from his framework of creation. Homosexuality is incompatible with biblical manhood as it is rooted in creation, he says, because 'in creation God made them male and female. It is Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. In creation we see a man and a woman in their respective roles.'⁵⁴ The latter comment on man's role serves Banda's agenda to

⁵² R.W. Connell, *Masculinities and Masculinity Politics in World Society*, Lecture delivered at the Institute for Research on Women (Rutgers University). November 25, 2003. See <http://irw.rutgers.edu/lectures/connellecture.pdf>.

⁵³ See for example M. Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*, Scottsville: Univ. of KwazuluNatal Press 2008, 32 & 161.

⁵⁴ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century – part 4*.

remind men in the church of their “God-given” responsibilities. What matters here is that these apparently can only be fulfilled in a heterosexual relationship. While arguing that homosexuals are opposing God’s order, Banda calls upon men in the church to ‘find joy and gladness and fulfilment in maintaining this order’ by accepting the roles and position God intends for them.⁵⁵ Clearly, Banda’s concept of “biblical manhood” is a heteronormative ideal, reaffirms the heterosexual standard and refuses to recognize any right of sexual minorities. Where a scholar as Musa Dube has underlined the need to break the taboo on homosexuality in African religious contexts⁵⁶, especially in view of HIV and AIDS, Banda (who in his sermons breaks many taboos) does not only leave this taboo but even reinforces it.

It can be concluded that Northmead Assemblies of God engages in a transformation of masculinities in order to overcome several critical social problems Zambia is faced with. The church aims to raise “a new generation of men” that make a positive difference in the family, the community and the country at large.⁵⁷ Therefore, an alternative ideal of masculinity is defined that is nuanced patriarchal and unequivocally heteronormative. In this ideal, men are the responsible heads in their heterosexual marriages, loving and faithful husbands to their wives, and servant leaders in their families and in society. The gender ideology behind this ideal of masculinity is based biblically on an uncritical and normative reading of the Genesis account of creation.

Masculinity Politics and the Bible:

Some Concluding Questions

As indicated in the introduction, some questions arise from this case study that are critical to the further study of, and engagement with masculinities in African Christianity. The issue of African Christian masculinities has recently been explored by a number of African theologians and scholars of religion. The initiative came from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, which invited a number of male

⁵⁵ Banda, *Fatherhood in the 21st Century* – part 6.

⁵⁶ See M. W. Dube, ‘Service for/on Homosexuals’ in M. W. Dube (ed.), *Africa Praying. A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*, Geneva: WCC 2003, 210. See also M. W. Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible. Selected Essays*, Scranton and London: Univ. of Scranton Press 2008, 33, 47.

⁵⁷ The phrase of ‘a new generation of men’ was used at a youth meeting in the church.

scholars for its 2007 continental conference to dialogue about the quest for "Liberating Masculinities".⁵⁸ This quest has emerged from the work of African women theologians in the area of gender and HIV.⁵⁹ It is informed, however, by the longer engagement of women theologians with issues of gender, their opposition to patriarchy and their struggle for gender equality.⁶⁰ This tradition directly impacts on the way the current issue of masculinity is approached: the problems concerning masculinities are analysed in terms of patriarchy, and alternative visions for masculinity are defined in terms of gender equality. The political strategy is to 'liberate men from patriarchy' and to transform masculinities towards gender justice.⁶¹ A church as NAOG engages with masculinities in a completely different way, and in my opinion it is from the differences between these two approaches that some critical questions emerge. I will illustrate this with a publication of Ezra Chitando on masculinities and HIV in the Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe.

In his article Chitando first praises the Pentecostal movement for its effort to transform masculinities. According to his assessment, the movement is successful in promoting responsibility among men and in

⁵⁸ Cf. I. A. Phiri, 'Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989-2008)', *International Review of Mission* 98/1 (2009), 116.

⁵⁹ African women theologians, organized in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, have made issues of gender and HIV a priority topic. See I. A. Phiri, 'African Women of Faith Speak Out in an HIV/AIDS Era' in I. A. Phiri, B. Haddad and M. Masenya (eds.), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications 2003, 3-22. For a discussion of their work, see M. W. Dube, 'HIV and AIDS Research and Writing in the Circle of African Concerned African Women Theologians 2002-2006' in E. Chitando and N. Hadebe (eds.), *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2009, 173-196; M. W. Dube, 'In the Circle of Life: African Women Theologians' Engagement with HIV and AIDS' in E. Chitando and N. Hadebe (eds.), *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2009, 197-236.

⁶⁰ For an introduction to African women's theology, for example see P. N. Mwaura, 'Gender Mainstreaming in African Theology. an African Women's Perspective' in *Voices from the Third World* 24:1 (2001), 165-179; N. J. Njoroge and M. W. Dube (eds.), *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications 2001; M. A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press 2001; M. A. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1995.

⁶¹ Cf. E. Chitando, *Troubled but Not Destroyed*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2009, 92-93, 96-97; Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible. Selected Essays*, 139-140; M. A. Oduyoye, 'Acting to Construct Africa: The Agency by Women' in R. Van Eijk and J. Van Lin (eds.), *Africans Reconstructing Africa*, Nijmegen: Theologische Faculteit KU-Nijmegen 1997, 38.

encouraging men to become “a new creation”. This ‘offers a lot of promise in the struggle against the HIV epidemic’ and it results in ‘masculinities that do not threaten the wellbeing of women, children and men’.⁶² As appears from the above sections, this praise can also be attributed to NAOG. The ideal of “biblical manhood” certainly seeks to promote responsibility and encourages men to change. Having acknowledged these positive aspects, however, Chitando becomes far more critical. He criticises the Pentecostal strategy to transform masculinities because it ‘is still rooted in the paradigm of the male as the leader’ and does not challenge ‘the myth of male headship’.⁶³ According to Chitando, Pentecostalism reinforces patriarchal masculinity rather than that it promotes gender equality, while the latter in his opinion is a precondition to combat HIV as well as violence against women. Indeed, the case of NAOG supports Chitando’s observation that the Pentecostal movement upholds patriarchal notions of masculinity, such as male headship and leadership. However, Chitando does not acknowledge that the Pentecostal success in promoting responsibility among men may be closely related with these notions of headship and leadership. The sermons of Banda show that male responsibility is considered so crucial precisely because men, in this ideology, are assigned with a special role in “God’s order”, that is the role to be responsible heads in their families and servant leaders in society. Where Chitando underlines the need to give up “the myth of male headship” and to leave the paradigm of the male as the leader, the ideal of “biblical manhood” and its potential to constructively transform masculinities in view of HIV and gender-based violence etcetera, is based exactly on this patriarchal basis. When this is true, the question to Chitando and other scholars is, whether it is politically effective and necessary to envision a transformation of masculinities beyond patriarchy. Notions such as male headship and leadership may empower men for domination over women – and therefore a critical sensitivity is required –, but they also may motivate men to change and thus enable a transformation of masculinities. Within religious contexts that uphold a patriarchal gender ideology, it could be politically effective to employ these notions constructively rather than simply viewing them as part of the problem.

⁶² Chitando, *A New Man for a New Era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and the HIV Epidemic*, 121, 124.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 122 and 124.

Some of the scholars may respond to this, saying it is necessary to reject patriarchal notions of masculinity like these, because gender equality is a biblical, theological or human rights demand. According to Sarojini Nadar, for example, 'a theology of headship and submission is simply yet another way of promoting violence (in its varied forms) through the insidious myth that men as the stronger sex need to protect women.'⁶⁴ In line with other African women theologians she argues that the concept of male headship does not respect the notion that man and woman are equally created in the image of God.⁶⁵ This raises the question, however, how scholars should deal with churches and church leaders such as Banda, who have a different understanding of the notion of gender equality, and who want to uphold "the principle of male headship" because they consider it as biblical. African women theologians have developed a critical biblical hermeneutics, from which they re-read the Genesis creation stories and engage critically with Pauline texts on female submission and male headship.⁶⁶ Engaging with this tradition, Chitando is able to call male headship a myth that is to be rejected. But Banda, like many other African church leaders, is hardly able to do so, because his hermeneutics does not allow for such a critical way of dealing with the Bible. He, at best, is able to re-interpret the notion, dissociating it from its connotation of power and domination and redefining it

⁶⁴ S. Nadar, 'Who's Afraid of the Mighty Men's Conference? Palatable Patriarchy and Violence Against Wo/men in South Africa' in E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma, *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Geneva: WCC Publications 2010 (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ Cf. F. L. Moyo, 'Sex, Gender, Power and HIV/AIDS in Malawi: Threats and Challenges to Women being Church' in I. A. Phiri and S. Nadar (eds.), *On being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*, Geneva: WCC 2005, 133. Mercy Oduyoye underlined the need of a feminist deconstruction of male headship as early as 1979 (cf. M. A. Oduyoye, 'The Roots of African Christian Feminism' in J. S. Pobee and C. F. Hallencreutz (eds.), *Variations in Christian Theology in Africa*, Nairobi: Uzima Press 1979, 42).

⁶⁶ E.g. A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, 'Genesis 1-2 and some Elements of Diversion from the Original Meaning of the Creation of Man and Woman' in M. N. Getui, K. Holter and V. Zinkuratire (eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton Publ. 2001, 175-180; R. N. Uchem, *Overcoming Women's Subordination. an Igbo African and Christian Perspective: Envisioning an Inclusive Theology with Reference to Women*, Enugu: Snaap Press 2001, 172-190; I. A. Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM 1997, 155; B. J. Ekeya, 'Woman's Place in Creation' in M. A. Oduyoye and M. R. A. Kanyoro (eds.), *Talitha, Qumi! Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians*, Ibadan: Daystar Press 1990, 89-103

in terms of responsibility, service and love. Because of a different understanding of the Bible, he develops a different politics to transform masculinities. Is there a way for scholars to acknowledge and appreciate such an effort to transform masculinities within an ideological framework of patriarchy? It is easy to criticise churches for their ‘hermeneutical immobility’⁶⁷, but the case of NAOG shows that churches can be creative even though they maintain a rather traditional and normative reading of the Bible.

To be clear, I do not raise these questions in order to defend the patriarchal and heteronormative ideal of masculinity as promoted by Banda in NAOG. During the case study, especially when listening to and re-reading the sermons, I have often felt discomfort with the rhetoric on male headship as well as with the verbal bashing of homosexuals. However, as mentioned in the introduction, I consider it an urgent analytical task to identify what forces operate to effect change in masculinities and to evaluate these forces and their effects in a nuanced way. The findings of the case study presented in this article indicate that the concept of “biblical manhood” has the potential to change men and transform masculinities in a way that is helpful in view of HIV and issues as gender violence. Indeed, the appearance and effects of this alternative masculinity are ambiguous. But exactly in its ambiguity, the presented case raises some critical questions about our understanding and evaluation of religious masculinity politics and about our theological and political vision for the transformation of masculinities in the context of African Christianity and beyond.

⁶⁷ S. Nadar, 'On being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions' in I. A. Phiri and S. Nadar (eds.), *On being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions*, Geneva: World Council of Churches 2005, 21-22.