

**Chammah J. Kaunda (ed.), *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: “Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit.”***

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**<sup>1</sup>SHORT BIO**

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Moral discourses pertaining to gender and sexuality in Africa are certainly shaped by various religious norms and cultural beliefs, and for more than a decade, Pentecostalism has emerged as a primary area of research focus on this subject.<sup>1</sup> The particular book under review fits within the ever-expanding body of literature on the intersections between African Pentecostalism, gender, and sexuality. The introductory chapter by Chammah J. Kaunda and Sokfa F. John centres Pentecostal and Charismatic spirituality as the lifeblood that sustains “beliefs, attitudes, moralities and legalities surrounding sexualities in Africa today.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Adriaan van Klinken, “Homosexuality, politics and Pentecostal nationalism in Zambia,” *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no.3 (2014): 259-81; Marian Burchardt, “Challenging Pentecostal moralism: Erotic geographies, religion and sexual practices among township youth in Cape Town,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 13, no.6 (2011): 669-83; Barbara Bompani and S. Terreni Brown, “A ‘religious revolution?’ Print media, sexuality, and religious discourse in Uganda,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no.1 (2015): 110-26; Sarojini Nadar and Johnathan Jodamus, “‘Sanctifying Sex:’ Exploring ‘Indecent’ Sexual Imagery in Pentecostal Liturgical Practices,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 32, no.1 (2019): 1-20.

<sup>2</sup> Chammah J. Kaunda and Sokfa F. John, “Introduction: African Pentecostalism, Genders, Sexualities and Spirituality,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 2.

Included in this introduction, is a helpful overview of the book on pages 11 to 16, which sets the stage for the various essays that follow.

The title of this book immediately evokes a sense of plurality, indicative of the vastness of scholarly work on the subject matter with the concepts “genders,” “sexualities,” and “spiritualities” rendered in the plural, and then with an interesting location for this study, namely “African Pentecostalism.” My interests were sparked by the two areas of focus: The body and the Bible, as reflected in the subtitle, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” My own work at the intersections of the biblical New Testament and gender studies over the last decade and a half has focused on the multiple ways in which biblical texts, particularly the Pauline Letters regulate bodies and praxis, both ancient and contemporary.<sup>3</sup> The subtitle of the book is taken from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:19. Paul and his writings have continued to regulate norms for daily living,<sup>4</sup> not least gender and sexuality. His writings have, of course come under much needed gender-critical critique and scrutiny by biblical and gender studies scholars alike.<sup>5</sup>

From the outset and by only reading the cover and title of this book, I was already intrigued by what was on offer, given my research interests. So, while I offer some reflections on the essays in general, in the latter part of this review I will focus specifically on the ways in which the Bible is engaged by the authors in this volume.

In the introduction to the book, Kaunda, the editor and one of the contributors, Sokfa John state that “[t]he aim of this volume is to examine some of the perspectives and practices around sexualities found in African Pentecostalism.”<sup>6</sup> The two forewords in the book focus their

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<sup>3</sup> Johnathan Jodamus, “Gendered Ideology and Power in 1 Corinthians,” *Journal of Early Christian History* 6, no.1 (2016): 1-30; Johnathan Jodamus, “Paul, the ‘Real’ Man: Constructions and Representations of Masculinity in 1 Corinthians,” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 23, no.2 (2017): 68-94.

<sup>4</sup> See Gillian Townsley, *The Straight Mind in Corinth: Queer Readings Across 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Johnathan Jodamus, “Muted scholarship in 1 Corinthians: A gender-critical enquiry,” *Scriptura* 118 (2019): 1-19.

<sup>6</sup> Chammah and John, “Introduction,” 2.

attention on this aim, each tending to promise different things. The foreword by Madipoane Masenya<sup>7</sup> claims that the essays in the first part

call for the affirmation of sexuality within the church and public spaces; challenge the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinities; critique gender-based violence perpetuated through the use of the Bible and African traditions and cultures; question the problematic position of the African Pentecostal-Charismatic church as a guardian of national morality, among others.

She also summarises the second part well, as focusing “on the theme of marriage, family and singleness exploring the approaches Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians use to legitimate and promote sexuality expressed in the context of heterosexual marriage.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, she suggests that in the last section of the book “the authors challenge current normative perspectives within African Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality, by exposing the readers to non-normative and non-conforming traditions, genders and sexualities.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Where is the body?**

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu,<sup>10</sup> in the second foreword, goes beyond the confines of a foreword, and offers a deep philosophical and theological analysis of the various effects of the spirit/body split within traditional Pentecostal “religion” as he terms it. He even titles his reflections in the foreword, “Of the Human Body and Spirit/Spirits in the Study of Pentecostal Religion.”<sup>11</sup> He admits that he chose not to comment on the essays themselves but instead to comment on the subtitle of the book, which seemingly draws from an essay that he had written a decade prior. His deep and insightful reflections could have constituted an essay in its own right in the book, rather than a foreword, and caused me to wonder whether the liberty that he took in meandering down the path of embodiment reflections, was not his way of pointing to the paucity of any

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<sup>7</sup> Madipoane Masenya, “Foreword,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), v-vi.

<sup>8</sup> Masenya, “Foreword,” v.

<sup>9</sup> Masenya, “Foreword,” v.

<sup>10</sup> Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Foreword,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), vii-xi.

<sup>11</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, “Foreword,” vii.

critical or meaningful engagement with the theme of embodiment which the subtitle of the book, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” seems to promise, but not delivers on. This then begs the question, To what extent is the stated objective “to broaden current considerations on religion and sexualities with a focus on Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in various parts of the continent,”<sup>12</sup> met by the 22 essays offered in this book?

## What about the Bible?

The essays certainly broaden current considerations on religion and gender,<sup>13</sup> but I would argue that in as far as the contributions on sexualities are concerned,<sup>14</sup> many essays, while providing new material from specific case studies, have neglected to provide an incisive analysis or new theoretical accounts of the data that are presented. As a result, the theoretical and methodological framings of the essays are slightly deficient and perhaps even flawed. This is particularly the case with the essays that focus on biblical themes and analysis, where sweeping generalisations of biblical texts are made, with little consideration for

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<sup>12</sup> Chammah and John, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>13</sup> See Rosinah M. Gabaitse, “Pentecostalism and the Construction of Masculinities,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 67-80; Sonene Nyawo, “Interaction Between Societal Constructions on Women Fertility and African Pentecostalism: A Seedbed for Gender-Based Violence in Swaziland,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 81-99; Jackie Mapulanga-Hulston and Maureen M. Chikoya, “Zambian Pentecostalism, Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights of Victims,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 101-17.

<sup>14</sup> See Lovemore Togarasei, “Problematising the Use of the Bible in the Human Sexuality and Pentecostal Spirituality Debate,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 19-34; Tapiwa P. Mapuranga, “Moving Forward in Reverse Gear? Sexuality, Dress and Public Spaces in Harare,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 35-49; Molly Manyonganise, “Publicizing the ‘Private’: New Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe and the Discourses on Sexuality,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 51-65; Mutale M. Kaunda and Josephine Y. Towani, “An Appraisal of Pentecostal Children’s Understanding of Sex and Sexuality,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 193-212.

contextual (ancient and contemporary), theoretical, and methodological rigour, or the vast theoretical innovations on gender, sex, and sexuality. While each of the essays which focus on the Bible, follows the observation that David Ngong makes in his essay about the relationship that Pentecostals have with the “Bible as the Word of God that should be followed rather than interpreted,”<sup>15</sup> the critique of such beliefs is not followed through with scholarly alternatives or deep and sustained hermeneutical work. Instead, authors such as Togarasei invoke contentious understandings of *the* biblical position<sup>16</sup> as if it is something nicely packaged and in-tact, transcultural, and not limited to idiosyncratic and nuanced ancient settings.<sup>17</sup> This position is also echoed by other scholars who tend to draw on the Bible in almost “proof-texting” ways, reinscribing the very positions that they are critiquing in terms of Pentecostal over-reliance on the Bible.<sup>18</sup> While some of the contributors do an adequate review of how key biblical texts are used in different contexts by Pentecostal Christians, even commendably dialoguing with matters of gender and sexuality, a more thorough engagement with gender theories (rather than superficial engagements) would have provided the necessary impetus that is somewhat lacking and would have acted as a bridge between the ancient texts and the ways in which contemporary Pentecostal churches and society regulate sexualities.

## What about the Plurality of Pentecostals and Africa?

As already noted, following from the important work done by scholars such as Sylvia Tamale,<sup>19</sup> an important contribution that the book makes,

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<sup>15</sup> David T. Ngong, “The Ideal Does Not Exist on Earth: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in African Pentecostalism,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 163.

<sup>16</sup> See Togarasei, “Problematizing the Use of the Bible,” 21.

<sup>17</sup> See Togarasei, “Problematizing the Use of the Bible,” 19-34.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example: Mapuranga, “Moving Forward,” 35-49; Gabaitse, “Pentecostalism and the Construction of Masculinities,” 67-80; Sonene Nyawo, “Interaction Between Societal Constructions,” 81-99; Chammah J. Kaunda, Nelly Mwale, Joseph Chita, and Mutale M. Kaunda, “‘Clean the Nation Spiritually:’ The Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs (MNGRA) and the National Sexual Moral Order in Zambia,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Sylvia Tamale notes that “African religious and cultural plurality spawns many contradictions and some absurdities. So one can only imagine the complexity involved in exploring varied African sexualities within such shifting paradigms and crosscurrents

is to foreground the multiple perspectives on the discourse around gender, spirituality, and sexuality by intentionally rendering these terms in the plural – genders, sexualities, and spiritualities. Plurality is therefore a hallmark of the collection, but it seems that this consideration did not extend to Africa and Pentecostalism which remains largely singular and unnuanced, except by the case studies which are localised in context. This left me slightly uncomfortable as I read through many of the essays which seem to make sweeping generalisations about “African culture” and also rely heavily on binary constructions of a “West” or “Global North” that is largely unconcerned with matters of the Spirit, or even a “West” that is seemingly more progressive with regard to gender and sexuality.<sup>20</sup> This overreliance on binary constructions tended to undo the nuance and the scholarly refinement that was seemingly being called upon by the pluralising of the terms in the title. Africa, the “colossal continent” often gets lost in stereotyping through singular and stagnant constructions. The same is true for Pentecostalism, where the distinctions between classical and contemporary forms of Pentecostalism are blurred through the collapsing of definitions under the umbrella of shared pneumatological visions. This course reductionism proposed in the introduction seems to unfortunately find its way into many of the essays too.<sup>21</sup>

It is regrettable that, despite the claim in the introduction by Kaunda and John that they were also working with Wariboko’s nuanced definition of African Pentecostalism, that this does not come through in many of the essays.<sup>22</sup> Nimi Wariboko’s delineation of African Pentecostalism could have assisted many of the authors to add more depth to the characterisation of their case studies as well as the literature within which they were framing their discussions:

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of discourses” (Sylvia Tamale, “Exploring the contours of African sexualities: Religion, law and power,” *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14, no.1 [2014], 151).

<sup>20</sup> See the essays by Tapiwa P. Mapuranga, “Moving Forward,” 48; Molly Manyonganise, “Publicizing the ‘Private,’” 54; Chammah J. Kaunda *et al.*, “Clean the Nation Spiritually,” 124.

<sup>21</sup> Chammah and John, “Introduction,” 4; Molly Manyonganise, “Publicizing the ‘Private,’” 57; Rosinah M. Gabaitse, “A New Man in Christ?:” Pentecostalism and the Construction of Masculinities,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 67; Sonene Nyawo, “Interaction Between Societal Constructions,” 87; Mapulanga-Hulston and Chikoya, “Zambian Pentecostalism,” 104; Ngong, “The Ideal Does Not Exist on Earth,” 151.

<sup>22</sup> Chammah and John, “Introduction,” 3.

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African Pentecostalism is an assemblage of practices, ideas, and theologies – and interpretations of reality – whose tangled roots burrow deep into the three segments of African temporality...the “spirit” of African Pentecostalism does not signify a distilled essence, changeless core, irreducible substrate, or perfection of being but is deployed for the sake of highlighting specific observations, contemplations, and questions that point to something of broader significance for understanding the multidirectional openness of African Pentecostal social life without presuming a constrictive universalizing framework.<sup>23</sup>

While many of the essays in the book have not exactly succeeded in avoiding a “constrictive universalizing framework,” Kaunda has succeeded in bringing together a range of voices, representing varying academic levels including early career researchers and established academics hailing from nine African countries – Ghana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Congo, and Swaziland, as well as one contribution from Australia, representing Oceania and another from Alabama, representing North America. The newer voices offering refreshing new and eager perspectives, are sometimes unfortunately obscured through inadequate theoretical and methodological rigour and poor scholarly register. That being said, the more established scholars such as Asonzeh Ukah offer a deep and insightful analysis that brings much needed scholarly innovation and balance to some of the reflections by early-career scholars who tend to eagerly reach for critique while neglecting thick description.

Overall, notwithstanding the limitations of the volume, it was most refreshing to have a book that is shifting the paradigms of research on Pentecostalism in Africa and that is drawing on insider perspectives, rather than the often-unacknowledged colonial gazes that characterise much of the global Pentecostal studies. The Andersons and Hollenwegers<sup>24</sup> – arguably the doyens of research on Pentecostalism – will have to reckon and engage with the material provided here by those on the continent.

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<sup>23</sup> Chammah and John, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>24</sup> Isaac K. Mbabazi, “Congolese Pentecostalism, Gender and Sexual Orientation,” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: ‘Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,’* ed. Chammah J. Kaunda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 358, n.47.

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