

Towards a 'Proverbs 31 Man?' Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Masculinities in Kenya

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Abstract

The 'Proverbs 31 woman' has been the focus of considerable scholarly reflection. Whereas some celebrate the 'Proverbs 31 woman' as the embodiment of femininity, others challenge this interpretation as it infers an underlying patriarchy and a socialisation of women to sacrifice themselves. In either case, the dominant focus has been on the woman. However, there has been a notable development in the study of religion and masculinities in Africa in general, and in Pentecostalism in particular. There is a growing appreciation of how Pentecostalism seeks to transform masculinities in Africa and to promote the emergence of "a new man for a new era."³ This article explores how Pentecostalism in Kenya seeks to reconfigure masculinities, going on to describe how selected preachers are challenging boys and men to adopt more life-giving masculinities. Utilising the concept of the 'Proverbs 31 man',⁴ the article describes how Pentecostal preachers envisage transformed boys and men in the Kenyan contexts. The article contends that despite some challenges, Pentecostalism does offer some promise of redemptive or transformative masculinities in Africa.

Introduction

Reflections on religion and gender in Africa continue to increase in number and complexity. Scholars from diverse fields have expended considerable intellectual energy in an effort to understand the impact of religion on gender justice, that is, the radical and unapologetic recognition of the fundamental equality between women and men in

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³Ezra Chitando, "'A New Man for a New Era'? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and HIV," *Missionalia* 35(3) (2007): 112 – 127.

⁴This is a creative play on the 'Proverbs 31 woman' as the Bible does not have such a title as 'Proverbs 31 Man'

religion and society. They seek to address the following questions: What is the relationship between religion and gender? Does religion promote or threaten gender justice? Can the interface between religion and gender be understood in a blanket way, or do scholars need to assess specific aspects of religion to determine their particular impact on gender? These and related questions have generated a sizeable body of literature that has brought a definite shape to the field. In particular, the publications of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians have contributed towards the identity of the discipline in Africa.⁵

While this article is located within the discourse on religion and gender in Africa, it does so with particular reference to Kenyan Pentecostalism and masculinity. The Pentecostalism which is referred to in this article is specific to neo-Pentecostal churches. Where mainline churches are cited, the reference is within the traditional missionary founded churches. The focus on Pentecostalism is deliberate, as there is heated debate and controversy regarding the potential of Pentecostalism to promote gender justice. Pentecostalism has been regarded with ambivalence in relation to gender justice.⁶ There are questions as to whether Pentecostalism has a potential to encourage men to accept women as equals in all aspects of life. In the first section, the article provides an overview of the literature on Pentecostalism and gender in Africa and this is followed by a description of Pentecostalism and masculinity in Kenya. The third section explores the interface between Pentecostalism and masculinity in Kenya through the prism of the "Proverbs 31 man." In conclusion, the article argues that developments in Pentecostalism and masculinity provide new insights into the discourse on religion and gender in Africa.

Data for this article was collected as part of a larger study that was done in 2016 mainly in Nairobi County with follow-up cases in Kisumu County, Kenya, on the role of Pentecostalism in gender roles. The study employed mainly participant observation to collect data on the contextualisation of the bible to men and women's roles within the Church and the community. This article therefore selectively uses data that addresses gender roles adapted by men and women in a way that it reconfigures the norm, through the lens of "Proverbs 31 man."

⁵ Ezra Chitando, *Troubled but not Destroyed: African Theology in Dialogue with HIV and AIDS*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2009.

⁶A. Eriksen, "Sarah's Sinfulness: Egalitarianism, Denied Difference, and Gender in Pentecostal Christianity," *Current Anthropology* 55(10) (2014): 262-270.

An Overview of Literature on Pentecostalism and Gender in Africa

The discourse of Pentecostalism and gender has received considerable scholarly attention. The initial studies focused on gender dynamics in African Initiated Churches (AICs).⁷ However, more recent studies on gender have paid close attention to Pentecostalism/neo-Pentecostalism and gender issues.⁸ As one of the fastest growing branches of Christianity, Pentecostalism has had an influential role on gender perspectives.⁹ Van Klinken indicates that the tricky question around Pentecostalism and gender is whether there are efforts within these communities to address and facilitate Western notions of gender equality.¹⁰ In the same breath, Mwaura, while looking at the role of African Initiated Churches and Pentecostals, alludes to the liberating power of these groups and subsequently their ability to rattle the “male ideology that has seen women as clients in churches just as they were in shrines in traditional society.”¹¹ Mwaura points out that is the historical context of the Bible that depicts women as helpers which has shaped African Christianity. These accounts are relevant in studying the position of women within Pentecostalism. However, there seems to be a one-sided perspective that only centres on women and their subservient positions. There is a limited exposition of what men ought to do, or are doing to counter the gender inequality. There seem to be gaps in literature that address both written and oral histories that explain the persistence of gender equalities and inequalities in Pentecostal churches in Africa. This gap is further seen in the dominance of literature on queer

⁷ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Born of Water and the Spirit: Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity in Africa,” in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. O. Kalu (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005): 339-357.

P. N. Mwaura, “Gender and Power in African Christianity: African Instituted Churches and Pentecostal Churches,” in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. O. Kalu (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005):410-445.

⁸ G. Deacon, and D. Parsitau, “Empowered to Submit: Pentecostal Women in Nairobi,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 19 (2017): 1–17.

A.S. Van Klinken, “God’s World is Not an Animal Farm – Or Is It? The Catachrestic Translation of Gender Equality in African Pentecostalism,” *Religion and Gender* 3, 2 (2013): 240-258.

R.M. Gabaitse, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Marginalization of Women,” *Scriptura* 114 (2015): 1-12.

⁹ Van Klinken, “God’s World is Not an Animal Farm,” 240-258.

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Born of Water and the Spirit”: Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity in Africa,” in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. O. Kalu (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005):339-357.

¹⁰ Van Klinken, “God’s World is Not an Animal Farm,” 240-258.

¹¹ Mwaura, “Gender and Power in African Christianity,” 410-445.

sexualities and homosexuality, with little attention given to heterosexual relations. This article attempts to address this gap.

Commendable efforts have been made by scholars of Pentecostalism to map out various gender dynamics and its implications on women empowerment. Chitando notes the pioneering role of African women scholars of religion and theologians in bringing into focus the status of women within the different religions on the continent.¹² While anchoring their perspective on the preaching and teachings that maintain patriarchal views of the position of women, Deacon and Parsitau see Pentecostal churches in Kenya as largely male dominated, encouraging a view of women in roles of subservience and domestic service.¹³ Women are, however, depicted as cunning and in the words of Deacon and Parsitau, “women access gains and mitigate losses through men without challenging male dominance.”¹⁴ The two scholars group women into different categories – wives, single women and single mothers. The latter are shown as a stigmatized lot, and through them, Pentecostal church leaders in Nairobi have found means through which to address their challenges by founding churches that speak to their needs. An example given is the Single Ladies Interdenominational Ministries (SLIM) founded and run by Prophetess Elizabeth Wahome. Such ministries, according to Deacon and Parsitau, appropriate biblical stories to address the need for platforms on which marginalised women can find voice and empowerment.

From a different perspective, Kaunda, Phiri and Gabaitse explore the role of the Holy Spirit among the Pentecostals and African Instituted Churches.¹⁵ Their article explores the African pneumatological perspective and questions raised by women theologians on the link between women's experience of the Holy Spirit and their roles in AIC. They also reflect on whether this perspective plays a role in empowering women to seek gender justice in Church and society. On the other hand, Gabaitse is concerned about how the appropriation of the biblical texts through a very literal translation is used to endorse the marginalisation of women. Kaunda and Phiri argue that there is a belief within these

¹² Ezra Chitando, “Religion and Masculinities in Africa: Their impact on HIV infection and gender based violence,” in *Men in the pulpit, Women in the pew? Addressing gender inequality in Africa*, ed. H. J. Hendriks *et al* (Stellenbosch: EFSA, 2013): 71-82.

¹³ Deacon and Parsitau, “Empowered to Submit,” 1–17.

¹⁴ Deacon and Parsitau, “Empowered to Submit,” 1–17.

¹⁵ Chammah J. Kaunda and Isabel A. Phiri, “African Instituted Churches pneumatology and gender justice in the work of GC Oosthuizen: An African Feminist Pneumatological Perspective,” *Scriptura* 115 (2016): 1-12.

Gabaitse, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” 1-12.

churches that the Holy Spirit does not discriminate, and based on this belief, women could be seen as equal to men with regards to the Spirit. This view seems to find backing in the works of Asamoah-Gyadu and Kalu.¹⁶ The notion of equality between men and women at spiritual level allows for greater power and authority for leadership among both men and women within Pentecostal churches.¹⁷ Men or women within these churches seem to hold this power and authority and participate in the dreams, visions, prophecy, teachings, exorcism and healing abilities of those transformed by the Holy Spirit. The women who take this power and authority can be seen to challenge male dominance and patriarchal decisions that subjugate women to submissive roles.

Gabaitse shows that there is evidence of inconsistencies in the way biblical texts are contextually interpreted in order to give men a dominant position over women.¹⁸ She notes that the texts that speak to women's marginalisation are largely used literally without critical contextualisation of the settings in which they were written. She says,

[I]t does not matter that these texts were used within the Graeco-Roman imperial and patriarchal environments, they are applied as if they were laws that dictate and prescribe gender relations and status of women in the 21st Century.¹⁹

She also juxtaposes examples of texts from different biblical chapters to explain how text proofing is used as a way of supporting views that help male preachers justify the secondary position of women in the Church and in society. Beyond this, Gabaitse explores the application of the Trinity as a resource that is used by men to advocate for hierarchies between men and women, with men occupying a higher status than women and children. Her contention, therefore, is that the true spirit of Pentecostalism does not endorse the marginalisation and exclusion of women since the Holy Spirit enables a new and radical gender ideology.

The advent of Pentecostalism shows signs of progressiveness especially with women leadership in Pentecostal churches while this was (and still is) impossible in some of the traditional mainline churches (for instance the Catholic and Anglican churches). Masenya explains that Christians

¹⁶Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Leiden: Brill, (2004).

O. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2008).

¹⁷Kaunda and Phiri, "African Insituted Churches pneumatology," 1-12.

Mwaura, "Gender and Power in African Christianity," 410-445.

¹⁸Gabaitse, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 1-12.

¹⁹Gabaitse, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 1-12.

born of water and the spirit, within Pentecostal churches, irrespective of gender, receive the blessings promised to all believers.²⁰ Musa Dube acknowledges the democratic style of worship that encourages men and women to take part, but cites studies that show that women are still far behind in numbers of the ordained, even though they are free to assume ordained ministry.²¹ In earlier literature, this observation had been explored by Mwaura who emphasised that the “founding of churches by women in African is an act of independency and self-determination to express a certain measure of ministerial freedom and equality denied to them by the mainline churches.”²² Accordingly, women are now able to become Bishops, pastors, evangelists, prophets, prayer leaders, heads of Church organisations and departments. Pentecostalism in this case becomes a catalyst of change providing an avenue for growth of talents among men and women. This, says Gabaitse, accounts for the attraction of women to Pentecostalism because of the inherent freedom to be involved in ministry.²³

While this literature on Pentecostalism and gender seems to entirely focus on the place of women in churches, and specifically what relegates them to a secondary position vis-à-vis their efforts to transform the patriarchal, cultural and any other circumstantial bonds that oppress them, there is an evident gap on the place of men in this transformation. This kind of theology, as Van Klinken and Smit show, opens up the need to understand the gendered nature of men, of Jesus Christ, and the implications for the construction of gender in Christianity.²⁴ However, the challenge with some of the existing literature on gendered nature of men is the tendency to give more attention to queer sexualities and homosexual orientations, and specifically gay sexualities with less of a focus on inequality within heterosexual relations.²⁵ Although, further scholarship is required at the intersections of Pentecostalism and masculinities, Zorodzai Dube examines the phenomenon of spiritual

²⁰ M. Masenya, “The sword that heals! The Bible and African women in African/South African Pentecostal Churches,” in *On being Church: African women’s voices and visions*, ed. Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (WCC: Geneva, 2005): 47–59.

²¹ M. Dube, “Between the Spirit and the Word: Reading the Gendered African Pentecostal Bible,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 70(1) (2014): 1-7.

²² Mwaura, “Gender and Power in African Christianity,” 422.

²³ Gabaitse, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” 2.

²⁴ A.S. Van Klinken, and P.B. Smit, “Jesus Traditions and Masculinities in the World Christianity,” *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, 42(1) (2013): 1-15.

²⁵ Kaunda and Phiri, “African Instituted Churches pneumatology,”

Van Klinken and Smit, “Jesus Traditions and Masculinities,”

Van Klinken, A.S. “God’s World is Not an Animal Farm,”

fatherhood as an expression and extension of indigenous patriarchal norms.²⁶ Dube contends that the changing social and economic environment has necessitated and justified the emergence of a spiritual fatherhood within the African household.

Pentecostalism and Masculinity in Kenya

Some of the studies on masculinities within communities have tended to focus on platforms where norms of manliness privilege men. Masculine attitudes, sensitivities, behaviours, dynamics of power, and privileges that men have, have all had implications on societal progress or otherwise.²⁷ Other studies have centred on the role of Pentecostalism in creating a “big man syndrome”, and thus, in the words of McCauley, mainstreaming a model of “unchallengeable big men.”²⁸ This perspective of Pentecostalism centres on leadership, and how leaders are viewed within the pews and in society, and specifically from a political vantage point. McCauley sees these Pentecostal leaders equated to “Political big men, a term that resonates with the superstar pastors, mega churches and extremely rich Pentecostal benefactors.”²⁹

This is particularly true in the Kenyan context. The Pentecostal Church leaders carry with them some form of aura and power that equates them to “big men of God”. They are treated with respect in their congregations and beyond. Examples of such Pentecostal leaders include Bishop J.B. Masinde, the senior Pastor and founder of Deliverance Church in Umoja, Nairobi; Bishop Rev. Dr. Arthur Gitonga the founder of Redeemed Gospel Church in Huruma, Nairobi; Bishop Mark Kariuki the Founder and General Overseer of the Deliverance Churches of Kenya; Prophet Dr. Edward David Owuor of Ministries of Repentance and Holiness; Bishop Allan Kiuna of Jubilee Christian Church; and, Apostle Dr. James Maina Ng’ang’a of Neno Evangelism Centre, to name a few. These are “big names” in Kenya’s Pentecostal ministry. They are known to be rich, to live well and to encourage their followers to support them in this mission.

²⁶ Z. Dube, “Patriarchy Reinvented? ‘Spiritual Parenting’ in African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39(1) (2018): 1-6.

²⁷ I. Chimaraoke, R. Tikkanen and K. Baron, “Men, Masculinities and Community Development in Kenyan Slums,” *Community Development*, 2014. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2013>.

²⁸ J.F. McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule? Pentecostalism and Patronage in Ghana,” *African Affairs* 112 (446) (2012): 1–21.

²⁹ McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?”, 2.

This model of church leadership mirrors the outlook of the Pentecostal church in Kenya. From their tele-evangelistic approaches to the spread of the 'Word of God', there is an understanding that a man should work towards prosperity and recognition. They should be "somebody" in the societies they live in. Consequently, leaders who embody this power and prestige have the authority to command their congregations, and specifically men, to work without fear to accomplish in life and fend for their families. Chitando (2013) in this context explains that Christianity is a major force in the construction of masculinities across Africa.³⁰ In the said churches, the preaching has the potential to move men towards realising the "power within". They challenge men to move beyond their zones of comfort and be led by the Holy Spirit to do "much more than they can imagine."

Masculinity, based on this model, constitutes both a promise and a threat. On the side of promise, the young Pentecostal man seeks to overcome the so-called "crisis of masculinity," namely, men falling behind women in academic, family and other endeavours in life. To this extent, therefore, men are mobilised to strive to achieve in the various pursuits of life. Pentecostal preachers seek to move men out of their comfort zones and to become the heads that certain interpretations of the Bible uphold. Men are encouraged (and shamed) to take up leadership and bring prosperity to themselves and their families. Here, the model of the man as the "breadwinner" is reaffirmed. In one sense, this relieves women of the pressure that they face in harsh economic contexts. The danger, however, is that this is modified version of patriarchy. Although couched in theological jargon, patriarchy is still alive and well. This version insists that men must not relinquish or share power: they must continue to be the dominant ones!

Whiles some studies on masculinity in Kenya have centred on the effects of men's violence against women, fatherhood practices, sexual and political behaviour, such studies have been quick to pose the negative challenges posed by these forms of masculinities to development.³¹ There are also emergent studies on men battering as a new form of domestic violence. Gathogo explains the shocking encounters of the latter form of violence in the Kenyan context.³² He indicates that this form of violence implies the "state of the nation – where the 'strong' feel

³⁰ Chitando, "Religion and Masculinities in Africa," 71-82.

³¹ Chimaraoke, Tikkanen and Baron, Men, "Masculinities and Community Development in Kenyan Slums," *Community Development*, 2014. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2013>

³² J. Gathogo, "Men battering as the new form of domestic violence? A pastoral care perspective from the Kenyan context," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 71(3) (2015): 1-9.

obliged to completely destroy the 'weaker' ones."³³ In an effort to dislodge some of these notions, Pentecostalism has been a form of a liberating resource that is meant to empower men and build their personalities as respectable men before their wives. There is an indication that socio-economic challenges are a driving force towards the misuse of masculinities. Men in communities that experience hardships such as poverty are likely to feel more insecure than those from more privileged circumstances.³⁴ Similarly, traditional notions of masculinity such as men being breadwinners, heterosexuality (and homophobia) and the dominance of women (sexism) are at the core of men's construction of masculinity and their role on community development.

To this end, some Pentecostal churches have been instrumental in the use of Proverbs 31, to encourage men to respect women who are breadwinners. In such circumstances, there is a tendency to maintain the hierarchy of men over women, even where women are the breadwinners. This form of relationship is evident in some ministries such as Prophet Owuor's Holiness and Repentance Ministries. The woman is an embodiment of strength, is a hard worker, clothed with strength and dignity. Her husband praises her and she is not puffed-up by this praise. She remains obedient and respectful. We look here at two case studies to illustrate this. In both cases the women are members of the Holiness and Repentance Ministries. In the first scenario the woman is married to a practising Muslim man. Her husband has a low paying job and as they live in one of the Kenyan cities, she is forced to take on work to subsidise the husband's limited monthly pay. At the time of the interview she was managing a guesthouse. She indicated that she earned more than her husband but did not regard this as a challenge because she respected him unconditionally. She also said that from the teachings they received from "the man of God", Prophet, she had also been able to educate her husband on virtues that would maintain a strong marriage.

The second case is of a woman who, together with her husband, is a follower of Prophet Owuor. They have three children and live in the suburbs of Kisumu City, Kenya. The husband is jobless and she is the breadwinner and does house work to provide for the family. At the time of the discussion with one of the authors, she explained that two years previously her marriage was on the verge of collapse. The husband had taken a second wife and she had been given an open invitation to quit

³³ Gathogo, "Men battering as the new form of domestic violence?", 5.

³⁴ Chimaraoke, Tikkanen and Baron, "Men, Masculinities and Community Development in Kenyan Slums," *Community Development*, 2014. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2013>

the marriage if she was not comfortable with the husband's new connubial arrangement. She then talked to a friend who advised her to seek divine intervention from Prophet Owuor. At her first visit with the man of God, she was prayed for and asked to bring her husband with her on the next visit. Luckily, the husband agreed to join her and after Prophet Owuor prayed for the couple whereupon her husband sent away his second wife and the family norm was restored. According to her, since then their relationship has been great. She is the breadwinner and the husband takes care of their children while she is away. However, this has not meant any change in the way the Church had taught her to respect her husband. She indicated that she would always be home in time to ensure that the house was in order and the family had food and peace.

These indications speak to the changing nature of gender roles in an environment where men are seemingly losing their positions as breadwinners, on one hand, and the interventions of women in such circumstances, on the other. Religion, in these circumstances, becomes an intervening force that allows men within a patriarchal society to swallow their ego and allow their wives to provide for the family. We contend that Pentecostalism has moved men from hegemonic masculinities to a new world where they can see themselves as co-workers with their wives. In this vein, Sweetman argues that, "The ways in which women and men respond to changes in the sexual division of labour - including patterns of employment and income-generation - are directly connected to their sense of themselves as gendered human beings."³⁵ He further highlights that "opportunities for men to fulfill the role of sole economic provider, bringing in enough cash to support the family, are diminishing as changing global patterns of employment favour insecure, low-paid, part-time jobs for a female workforce."³⁶ These circumstances then require a reconfiguration of masculinities and how men who are unable to find jobs see themselves. Women seem to be playing the role of the 'Proverbs 31 woman' – in the context of Pentecostalism – as hardworking yet one who honours and respects her husband. The Gospel has in turn "tamed" the men not to fight, but to support their wives.

Apostle Ng'ang'a, of the Neno Evangelism Centre, uses anointed oil to "open up people's spiritual and economic yokes." He advises suffering men who are struggling with economic challenges to focus on the Word

³⁵ C. Sweetman, Editorial. *Men and Masculinities*: Oxfam Focus on Gender, ed. C. Sweetman (Oxfam: GB, 1997).

³⁶ Sweetman, *Men and Masculinities*, 4.

of God which he says will break the chains of slavery, and facilitate economic prosperity and fulfilment of desires. Quite often in his preaching he reminds his congregation that he was a very poor man who was discouraged by his low earning hand-cart pushing business. He claims that life for him was difficult but he kept reminding God of His promises through the power of the Holy Spirit. He advocates for financial and health healing by using fresh olive oil to anoint the congregants and ask them to carry on the anointment with handkerchiefs to those in their families who may need liberation. He asks women whose husbands have refused to accompany them to Church to purchase oil-anointed handkerchiefs for them. His biblical citations are mostly on the famous Prophets in the Old Testament like Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elisha, Elijah and the prophecies they made on the liberating Gospel. The texts are well selected to suit the contexts of suffering men and how they can be liberated from worldly challenges. He is very quick to remind his congregants that their lives are miracles and that every challenged man should be encouraged by the challenges that he has gone through. He says that he worked hard towards prosperity through the power of the Holy Spirit. He expresses the power in virtues of obedience, honesty and hard work. He cites biblical verses of men who were physically challenged, such as the man with leprosy, and his obedience to go and wash seven times. He says men who would like to prosper should emulate this. Obedience, he insists, is a key to becoming a good follower of Jesus, because an obedient man respects both the Word and his family.

The theme of anointing and restoration runs through most of these Pentecostal churches. In Deliverance Church, Umoja, Bishop J.B Masinde encourages men to view themselves as Kings, not just in their outlook but in their hearts. He reminds them that it does not take a day for a King to be a King and that requires a whole process of nurturing. He asks of these men to change their beliefs and not compare themselves to other people. He uses biblical stories to emphasise his point. In one of such stories, he illustrates the life of King David who, although seemingly insignificant in the eyes of his father and brothers, was recognised by God as a king. These and more selections on how Kings were chosen in the Old Testament, is a way of encouraging men not to look down on themselves but to work and wait on God's promises. He is quick to point out that most of those chosen and anointed by God were obedient to the directives of God. The anointing oil that promises restoration and rebirth is used as a form of mediation that gives men a sense of possibility. Bishop J.B, as he is popularly known, is not ashamed to narrate how his anointing changed him and his family life, and influenced the role that he played as a man in protecting his family

even in times of poverty, and how God's anointing has been a source of provision for him to change communities around him. In the middle of his preaching, he calls on his wife, Persiah Muthoni and greets her lovingly, telling the congregation that he has come a long way with the "First Lady." He says, "this should be the story of every man who wants to touch people, change and transform lives and communities."

This concept of manhood is, as Van Klinken argues, defined by responsibility. Being responsible over one's life and the lives of others is believed to be what God purposes a man to do.³⁷ Bishop J.B. reminds the congregants using 1 Timothy 1:18, to keep in mind the prophetic word that was spoken over Timothy's life – that he should fight the good fight and that the desire to exist should be directed towards fighting a good fight and working hard to change family and community's lives. He contrasts this with a proud Goliath who relies on his physical appearance, instead of his faith. He emphasises the value of faith in the lives of believers. They are discouraged from being fearful which is seen as a hindrance to receiving God's blessings. David is seen as an embodiment of courage and faith as he 'fights the good fight'. David becomes a representation of an anointed man who takes charge of his life and fights through the power of anointing. Using this narrative, Bishop J.B. encourages his followers to testify to the saving grace of God's work and work without fear, and remind themselves that their labour is not in vain. As Masinde welcomes men to commit to Christ and their families, he reminds them that their past will always remind them of their terrible past, but "God is not unjust to forget the labour of their love."

Bishop Rev. Dr. Gitonga, the founding father of the Redeemed Gospel Churches in Kenya, focuses on the purity of men - men and boys who walk not in the counsel of ungodly. He reminds them that their first love and first commitment is to the work of God. He reminds men that they should pursue righteousness and walk, talk, sleep and dream like a saint. The holiness of God, he says, should sustain men's lives. He explains that men should be reminded that judgment is not a group activity. They should individually repent and focus on keeping themselves holy. This message of repentance and holiness is the cornerstone of Prophet Owuor's word which encourages both men and women to keep themselves holy. Prophet Owuor always reminds his followers that they should dress to please God by covering their bodies. He says that the holiness of God is the only thing that cannot change, and that cleanliness is next to Holiness and Godliness.

³⁷ A.S. Van Klinken, "Men in the Remaking: Conversion Narratives and Born-Again Masculinity in Zambia," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42 (2012): 215-239.

These themes of hard work, devotion, holiness, honesty, forgiveness and sacrifice mirror transformed masculinities that explain a radically converted African man. According to Van Klinken radically converted men display “recurring themes... they stopped drinking, smoking, and having affairs, and ... they have become more serious about life.”³⁸ Van Klinken links these changes in behaviour and lifestyle to “religious ideals promoted in Pentecostal circles.”³⁹ These views have recently been echoed by Burchardt, Lindhardt and Marskens.⁴⁰ Burchardt, while examining role of religion in social constructions of heterosexual masculinity in South Africa within the context of civil society driven programs, notes that becoming a ‘transformed man’ employs the same narrative structure that Pentecostals use to encode and communicate their experiences of salvation – born again, changed, redeemed.⁴¹

Pentecostalism and Masculinity in Kenya: Towards a “Proverbs 31 Man”

The foregoing sections have highlighted the changing face of masculinity in Kenyan Pentecostalism. The earlier concerns that Pentecostalism sponsors “soft but nonetheless dominant” masculinities need to be re-examined in the wake of the shifts of emphasis in newer Pentecostal churches in Africa.⁴² Whereas Chitando’s study focused on an older Pentecostal church, namely, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) FIF (Forward in Faith), younger Pentecostal churches are more nuanced in their approach towards masculinity. If the woman in Proverbs 31 is all about sacrificing herself in order for her to be praised by her man there is a role adjustment in the quest for the ‘Proverbs 31 man.’^{43,44} In a creative biblical hermeneutics of Pentecostal preachers, the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ must match his partner’s industry and sacrifice.

³⁸ Van Klinken, “Men in the Remaking,”

³⁹ Van Klinken, “Men in the Remaking,” 223.

⁴⁰ M. Burchardt, “Saved from hegemonic masculinity? Charismatic Christianity and men’s responsabilization in South Africa,” *Current Sociology* (2017) DOI:10.1177/0011392117702429.

M. Lindhardt, “Men of God: Neo-Pentecostalism and masculinities in urban Tanzania,” *Religion* 45 no. 2 (2015), 252-272.

M. Maskens, “The Pentecostal reworking of male identities in Brussels: producing moral masculinities,” *Etnográfica* 19 (2) (2015): 323-345.

⁴¹ Burchardt, “Saved from hegemonic masculinity?”, 8.

⁴² Chitando, “‘A New Man for a New Era’?”.

⁴³ Masenya, M. (ngwan’a Mphahlele). *How Worthy is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31: 10-31 in African-South Africa*. New York: Peter Lang, (2004).

⁴⁴ Ezra Chitando, “‘The Good Wife’: A Phenomenological Re-Reading of Proverbs 31: 10-31 in the Context of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe,” *Scriptura* 86 (2004): 151-159.

Kenyan Pentecostal preachers insist that men must forsake patriarchal privileges and replace them with responsibility.

The text of Proverbs 31: 10-31 has been quite popular among Pentecostals. Essentially, it is a celebration of a woman's (wife's) industry and how she works hard for her family. She is put forward as a convincing example of industry and excellence. Crucially, the gaze is consistently and exclusively on the woman and only makes passing reference to the man. In a real sense, the man (husband) is, 'missing in action'. Interpreters are left to speculate on the character of the man. In this article, we have not probed into the intricacies of this poem, its authorship, key message and interpretation across different epochs and spaces. Instead, our main focus has been on how it has been appropriated by some contemporary Pentecostal preachers in Kenya. We also show that there are similarities between some scholarly readings and the interpretations adopted by certain Pentecostal preachers that asserts, for example, that the passage promotes a successful, working marriage.⁴⁵

For the Pentecostal preachers, the 'Proverbs 31 man' does not wait to be served by his wife (although the scholarly interpretation by Biwul challenges the interpretation that the male character was sitting idly at the gate).⁴⁶ Like his partner, he demonstrates remarkable industry and sacrifice and does not bask in the glory of his gender. He does not take his leadership for granted. Furthermore, he does not subscribe to traditional/indigenous/inherited versions of what it means to be a man. The message for boys, young and older men is that masculinity is not a given. They must fight for the right to be addressed as men. Pentecostal preachers in Kenya frame this discourse by evoking the ideal 'Proverbs 31 man.' Such a man does not surrender in the face of a harsh socio-economic environment. If anything, such an environment inspires him to defy the odds and attain his status as a man.

A number of values characterises the 'Proverbs 31 man' as articulated by Pentecostal preachers in Kenya. First, he is hard working. Like his partner, the 'Proverbs 31 woman,' the 'Proverbs 31 man' is exceedingly industrious. He is not limited by the diminishing economic opportunities because he is a child of God. The God served by the 'Proverbs 31 man'

⁴⁵ R. Gallaher Branch, "Proverbs 31:10-31: 'A passage containing wisdom principles for a successful marriage,'" *Koers – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 77(2) (2012), Art. #49, 9 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koers.v77i2.49>

⁴⁶ J. K. T. Biwul, "What is He Doing at the Gate? Understanding Proverbs 31:23 and Its Implications for Responsible Manhood in the Context of Contemporary African Society," *Old Testament Essays* 29 (2016): 33-66.

is one who is known for “creating a way where there is no way!” Second, the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ is extremely devoted to the progress of his family. Pentecostal preachers persistently remind men that as new creations in Christ, they must forsake their previous lives. The idea of conversion, so ably articulated by Van Klinken, Burchardt and Maskens in the preceding section, is central to appreciating the status of male converts within Pentecostalism. The ‘past’ that the male convert to Pentecostalism forsakes, is a life of debauchery, financial indiscipline, gambling and all forms of wastefulness. The ‘Proverbs 31 man’ does not waste the family’s resources on women, but prioritises the success of his nuclear family.

Third, the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ is disciplined and measured in everything he does. Pentecostalism seeks to socialise men anew. Whereas society projects the ‘real man’ as one who dominates, always insists on having his way and makes all the decisions, the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ works in close collaboration with his ‘Proverbs 31 woman.’ Therefore, the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ is one who is compatible and pliant. If one of the most dominant critiques of the celebration of the ‘Proverbs 31 woman’ is that it reinforces women’s domesticity, the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ is meant to join his partner at home. The life of the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ “...is no longer outside but inside the home, close to his family.”⁴⁷

Fourth, the ‘Proverbs 31 man’ is secure. He is not in competition with his partner. He does not feel the need to belittle the achievements of his partner, or to prevent her from soaring to greater heights. As the two case studies presented in this article have shown, Pentecostal preachers in Kenya (and, indeed, elsewhere) have invested heavily in supporting women to be enterprising. In many contexts, to be a ‘Proverbs 31 woman’ is to become the quintessential Pentecostal married woman. However, successful women are mostly experienced as a threat to their partners’ manhood. Thus, some Pentecostal preachers are realising the need to mobilise men to support their partners. A ‘Proverbs 31 man’ subscribes to the notion of “equal complementarity” where both men and women take on any role that ensures the flourishing of the family and the community. As Masenya argues, complementarity in (a heterosexual) marriage should rule out competition, or any suggestion that a man is destabilised by the success of his partner.⁴⁸ Pentecostal preachers in Kenya (and elsewhere) have sought to reassure men that the success of

⁴⁷ Maskens, “The Pentecostal reworking of male identities in Brussels,” 330.

⁴⁸ Masenya, M. (ngwan’a Mphahlele). “Brief Notes: Searching for Affirming Notions of (African) Manhood in the Paean in Praise of the *’Éšet Hayil?* One African Woman’s Response to Joel K. T. Biwul’s Article, ‘What is He Doing at the Gate?’” *Old Testament Essays* 29(2) (2016.): 360-369. 364

women does not imply that the men have failed in life. Rather, men should actively support their partners in all their endeavours in life.

However, we concede that the complementarity that is being promoted still falls short of radical equality. The notion that the 'Proverbs 31 man' retains his 'headship' and status as 'the first among equals' continues to lurk beneath the surface. Pentecostal preachers appear to suggest there must be a trade-off between the language of respect, silence and submission of the woman and the 'Proverbs 31 man's' transformation. The notion of submission and silencing of industrious women remains problematic.

Conclusion

"A good wife, who can find?" is being systematically appropriated to go together with, "A good husband, who can find?" In contexts dominated by men who invest in drinking beer and sexual conquest while permanently waiting to be served by women, some Pentecostal preachers are mobilising men to uphold the value of responsibility. They are calling for male converts to Pentecostalism (and men in general) to complement the sacrifices being made by women in their families in particular and in larger society in general. Although there are some inherent contradictions and tensions in the call for the 'Proverbs 31 man,' we acknowledge its potential to trouble hegemonic masculinities and to multiply transformative masculinities in Kenya, in Africa and globally. Men who are caring, supportive, non-violent, hard-working, supportive and appreciative of their partners are a vital resource in the overall struggle for gender justice. The 'Proverbs 31 man' evoked by some Kenyan Pentecostal preachers, represents this yearning for men of quality⁴⁹ who are not afraid of equality.

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⁴⁹ *Cultivating men of quality* is the slogan of Padare, a men's movement for gender justice in Zimbabwe

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