The Homosexual as the Antithesis of ‘Biblical Manhood’? Heteronormativity and Masculinity Politics in Zambian Pentecostal Sermons

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Abstract

This article offers a critical analysis of a series of sermons entitled Fatherhood in the 21st Century preached in a Zambian Pentecostal church, in which homosexuality is an explicit theme. The sermons are discussed in relation to the broader controversy on homosexuality in African Christianity. While it is often suggested that African Christian leaders actively oppose same-sex relationships in order to profile themselves in local and global contexts, the case study reveals an additional factor. Homosexuality is also used in the politics of gender, particularly masculinity, within the church. The references to homosexuality in the sermons create a counter-image of the promoted ideal of “biblical manhood”. A stereotypical homosexual is constructed, who embodies two of the main features of Zambian men: their preoccupation with sexuality and their indifference towards the male role they are to play. This article reveals the heteronormative politics and theology underpinning “biblical manhood” and points to the problematic consequences thereof in relation to HIV&AIDS. It also suggests how to interrogate and rethink “biblical manhood” from the perspective of queer theology.

Introduction

African Christian leaders are becoming known for their aversion to homosexuality and their opposition to same-sex relationships. While it is true that homosexuality causes disagreement and heated debates in Christian circles all over the world, this seems to be particularly the case in Africa. Atypical example is the opposition to the ordination of openly gay clergy in the American Episcopalian (= Anglican) church by a number of Anglican bishops from Africa. One could also think of the

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2 I cannot enter into the complex debate about the definition of homosexuality, but in this article it refers broadly to the orientation of sexual attraction towards others of the same sex, and the sexual identities (such as gay and lesbian) based on this orientation.
support given by various Christian leaders in Uganda, for the proposed *Anti-Homosexual Bill.* Although both examples actually are quite complex cases because of the critical role played by conservative Christian groups from the USA, they leave the impression that African Christian leaders, in the words of Marc Epprecht, “have taken up the cudgels against gay rights”. This impression cannot be effaced either by the highly respected Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, who frequently denounces the current homophobia in Africa and is a strong advocate for gay rights, or by a number of progressive African theologians who have begun to discuss homosexuality from a liberationist perspective.

It is not difficult to recognise that African Christian leaders generally disapprove of homosexuality. A more interesting issue is why they disapprove, and various explanations have been offered in this regard. One of these explanations points to postcolonial African identity politics, where African identity is defined over and against the “morally degraded” West. As part of this, homosexuality is understood as un-African and as a Western invention. Another suggested reason is that African churches believe themselves to be custodians of the “true Christian heritage” that is to be preserved from the secularising Western world. Additionally, the African controversy centred on homosexuality is interpreted as an expression of power politics in world Christianity: due to the explosive numerical growth of Christianity in the Global South, African church leaders want to gain influence based on their numbers. In the case of the Anglican Communion, for example, this may be a

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3 This bill, submitted by Member of Parliament, David Bahati, strengthens laws against homosexuality including the institution of the death penalty for people who are found guilty of “aggravated homosexuality”.


6 Notably these are mostly women theologians, such as Mercy Oduyo, Nyambura Njoroge, Isabel Phiri, Esther Mombo and Sarojini Nadar. For an elaborate discussion, see Adriaan van Klinken and Masiiwa Gunda, “Taking Up the Cudgels Against Gay Rights? Trends and Trajectories in African Christian Theologies on Homosexuality,” *Journal of Homosexuality* (2012, forthcoming).


plausible explanation. Yet another explanation points to interreligious relations: African Christians would raise their voice publicly in order to not be associated with liberal Western attitudes to homosexuality by their local Muslim neighbours. The various reasons suggested here, all relate to the external profiling of African churches and church leaders in their local contexts, and in terms of the dynamics of globalisation and world Christianity in the postcolonial era. Certainly, this helps us to understand the enormous controversy surrounding homosexuality in African Christianity. However, the fact that contemporary African Christian leaders frequently address, and publicly disapprove of, homosexuality may also serve political purposes within their communities. In this article, I highlight the gender-political dimension of a certain rhetoric on homosexuality.

This article presents a case study of a series of sermons in which homosexuality is discussed, amongst other subjects. The sermons were preached by Bishop Joshua H.K. Banda, the senior pastor of Northmead Assembly of God in Lusaka. The focus on Banda is interesting because he is a leading figure in the rapidly growing Pentecostal movement in Zambia. As the chairperson of the General Constitutional Principles Committee, installed by the Zambian government, and of the governmental National AIDS Council, he has considerable political influence. As a regular commentator in the media he is also a public figure. According to the church’s website, “the Bishop has become a notable and influential voice on national issues in Zambia.” The church’s TV program The Liberating Truth, presenting Banda’s weekly sermons, is broadcast in Zambia and in the wider Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

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The case study approach is particularly valuable because it enables a detailed analysis and interpretation of discourses on homosexuality in their specific socio-cultural and religious contexts. Recently some ground-breaking work has been undertaken on Christian arguments in the public debate on homosexuality in African societies. Recently some groundbreaking work has been undertaken on Christian arguments in the public debate on homosexuality in African societies. Less is known about how homosexuality is discussed within church communities. A gender-critical and theological analysis of the above mentioned sermons shows that in this specific case study, the issue of homosexuality is employed as part of the church’s gender politics, specifically with regard to men and masculinity. In the following sections of this article, I will explore the way in which homosexuality is discussed and I will critically analyse the underlying arguments and theological lines of thought. In the final section, I will show how the heteronormative ideal of “biblical manhood”, promoted in these sermons, can be questioned and re-examined from the perspective of ‘queer theology’. I am writing this article as a European scholar in the study of world Christianity who has a particular interest in the discourses and politics on gender and (homo)sexuality in African Christian contexts. Being aware of the potential pitfalls in this field of study from the perspective of postcolonial criticism, in this article I intend to present a careful analysis of an African Pentecostal discourse on masculinity and homosexuality, and I build on the work of certain African theologians to formulate my critical questions.

Homosexuality in the Theme of “Fatherhood in the 21st Century”

In the year 2008, Bishop Joshua Banda took the initiative to preach in his church a series of six sermons on the theme Fatherhood in the 21st Century (FTC). This idea was inspired by his concerns regarding men

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13 Masiwa Ragies Gunda, The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Political, Cultural and Christian Arguments in the Homosexual Public Debate with Special Reference to the Use of the Bible (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2010).

14 In this article, ‘masculinity’ refers both to the ideological construction of male gender identity (what it means to be a man) and to the social position of men in gender relations. Because men are not a homogenous group, masculinity is understood as a plural phenomenon: various masculinities co-exist in a given context.

15 The term ‘heteronormativity’ refers to any ideas about sexuality in which heterosexuality is considered the normal or natural sexual orientation and in which homosexuality, subsequently, is considered abnormal and unnatural.

16 ‘Queer theology’ has recently emerged as a new engagement with issues of gender and sexuality in theology, in line with secular Queer Theory and poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. For an introduction, see Patrick Cheng, Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology, (New York: Seabury Books 2011).
and hegemonic forms of masculinity in contemporary Zambia. According to Banda, there is a “distortion of manhood” in society, which expresses itself in phenomena such as violence against women, alcoholism, men’s uncontrolled sexual behaviour and men’s overall irresponsibility in the marital and family setting. He considers this “crisis of masculinity” as a key factor in the major socio-economic problems of Zambia, and of Africa more generally, such as the HIV epidemic, the high numbers of street children, the poverty levels and failing political leadership. In view of these concerns, Banda felt that as a church, “We have to restore a vision of biblical manhood”. Therefore, he preached this series and although the series title refers to fatherhood, it actually deals with the broader issue of manhood. Also, through other activities he and his church try to change men and transform their perceptions of masculinity. Interestingly, while preaching on masculinity, Banda also addressed the theme of homosexuality.

In four of the six sermons in the series, homosexuality is discussed (but not always at very great length). In doing so, frequent reference is made to recent developments and topical issues regarding homosexuality that appeared in the daily news at that time. One of them was the controversy regarding the first openly gay bishop in the Anglican Communion, Gene Robinson (USA) and his participation in the Lambeth Conference that year (2008). Robinson was denied an invitation to attend this decennial assembly of all Anglican bishops, but he decided to go to the conference venue anyway. The following Sunday, Banda commented:

Gene Robinson appeared at the gathering of our Anglican brothers and sisters. They made it very clear in a categorical manner that homosexuality is a perversion. But I heard that this bishop of the USA was saying that he was unashamedly homosexual and unashamedly Christian: it is a blasphemy. This Word does say that. It is a shame.

Note the strong objection Banda makes by labelling Robinson’s statement a blasphemy – a term that is usually preserved for the most serious sin committed directly against God. Moreover, note the reference to the Anglicans who denied Robinson access as “brothers and sisters”. Later, Banda explained that he wanted to support the

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19 FTC – 4. In the footnotes, FTC refers to Fatherhood in the 21st Century and the number indicates the particular sermon in the series.
Anglican Church in Zambia that had taken a stand against Robinson, as well as the Anglican Mainstream, a global coalition committed to “the Scriptural Truths”. Banda’s comment on Robinson shows that the controversy on homosexuality in the Anglican Communion is not an internal Anglican debate, but creates trans-denominational allies in global Christianity across the lines of those who would respect, and those who would offend “true Christianity”.

In another sermon, Banda brings up another topical issue: the legalisation of same-sex marriage in some countries. He specifically refers to developments in California at that time, where the first same-sex couples had just been married after a decision of the Supreme Court to allow these marriages. Banda presents this as an example of the “departure from God’s Word” taking place in global society. He demonstrates an awareness of the role global politics has played in regard to homosexuality, saying that “they want us to talk about men having sex with men, women having sex with women, they want us to talk about transgender – and they call these societies progressive.” The “they” in this quote seems to refer to the liberal West (ignoring that South Africa is among the few countries worldwide that have legalised same-sex marriage). Banda has a clear message for the Western world when he says:

As Africa, we have a voice for the nations. Institutions coming to our countries with money to sponsor ...[practices] which are not original to us must be refused and rejected in the name of Jesus. Now they want to sponsor research that should begin to find out how many men are having sex with men. But what are we doing after the research? They will say, it is happening so let’s do it more. But when it happens, let’s stop it.

This quote reflects the postcolonial African discourse in which homosexuality is presented as a Western invention, where African identity is constructed vis-à-vis (and is to be saved from) a morally degrading West, and where Africa becomes a moral guide to the world, particularly to the former colonising regions that still hold strong political and economic power both on the continent and globally. On this point, it is also noteworthy that Banda, in one of his sermons, directly alludes to the political and public debate in Zambia about the country’s

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21 FTC – 2.

22 FTC – 6.
constitutional review process. Thanks to the “sodomy laws” that Zambia has inherited from its former coloniser, Britain, same-sex sexual activity (or “unnatural offences”, as the Penal Code has it) is illegal in the country. Banda’s concern is that this may change under the influence of a Western human rights lobby. So in his sermons, he frequently states that Zambia should continue to be a Christian nation by Constitution. 23 Specifically referring to homosexuality he says: “I am glad that our law has it as a crime, and that should remain so!” 24

The above paragraph shows that public and political issues, both at a national and global level, inspire Banda to address the topic of homosexuality. In his discussion of the topic, one can recognise some of the factors identified above which explain how and why homosexuality has become a major issue in African Christianity. Banda fits into his argument the African postcolonial identity politics on homosexuality and he joins the fight to save “true Christianity” from a secular and liberal Western world. His efforts to protect Zambia’s status as a Christian nation, where there is no space for homosexual activity, can be understood in relation to these two factors. However, there is much more to say about Banda’s discussion of homosexuality in Fatherhood in the 21st Century. The above quotes do not yet make clear why homosexuality is discussed precisely in a series of sermons on masculinity.

**Homosexuality and the “Distortion of Fatherhood”**

The first sermon of Fatherhood in the 21st Century was preached on Father’s Day. At the beginning of the sermon, Banda explains that this celebration day provides an opportunity to highlight the crucial role of fathers in their families and to emphasise the importance of fatherhood, not only in the family, but also in the broader society. The latter already indicates that “fatherhood” is not only understood in the biological sense: Banda also speaks about male figures with a father role in the church or in society. He then points out that it is urgent to discuss fatherhood because “the present day and time is marked by fatherlessness.” 25 In the rest of the sermon, he elaborates further on this, exploring his two major concerns about fatherhood in society. These concerns are “the violation of God’s order” and the “abdication of

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23 In 1991, President Frederick Chiluba declared Zambia to be a Christian nation. This declaration was included in the preamble of the 1996 Constitution.

24 FTC – 1.

25 FTC – 1.
leadership”. Under the first sub-theme, homosexuality and, in particular, same-sex marriage is discussed.

According to Banda, countries that legalise same-sex marriage are shamefully subverting and perverting fatherhood as it is intended by God in the order of creation. His argument is twofold. First, he argues that same-sex relationships are exclusively based on sex:

The distortion here is as a result of the fact that these relationships, gay and lesbian relationships, where you have a man and a man or a woman and a woman, are purely defined by sexual orientation. Why it is a sin, same sex marriage, is because a man and a man are not engaging in sex as God says you should engage in sex. They are doing it the wrong way. And God judged that in Sodom and Gomorra. ... It is a diversion from the role that God has presented. Because marriage, even a normal liberal marriage between a man and a wife, is not purely defined by sex. It is defined by companionship, by love, by showing that two can become one. But the only reason why a man and a man are trying to come together is that because of their sexual orientation they claim they are only attracted to men. So that is a relationship purely defined by sex and it is against God’s order.26

Banda’s reference to two men “doing it the wrong way” might be an allusion to anal sexual intercourse, but his argument about same-sex relationships that are purely defined by sex is broader. He presents a simplistic version of the widespread perception in some Christian circles in Africa (and beyond), that homosexual relationships are unnatural and immoral and, thus, a perversion.27 Banda’s argument is simplistic because he ignores the basic conceptual distinction between sex as ‘sexual orientation’ and sex as ‘sexual activity’. When two men or two women enter into a relationship because of their sexual orientation, why would that necessarily mean that they only want to enjoy sexual activity and do not share love and companionship in that relationship?

In addition to the above argument, Banda raises a second question to show “the violation of God’s order” in homosexual relationships. In his line of thought, man and woman have different roles according to the order of creation. So, therefore, gender roles are defined by biological sex. Giving a stereotypical representation of gay and lesbian relationships, Banda argues that one of the partners will always take up a male role, and the other a female, including the corresponding gender behaviour. As he portrays it:

26 FTC – 1.
You will find that in these unions, man-man or woman-woman, one of
them must take a role that is supposed to conform for instance to a
father: one will dress like a man, and the other one will have layers of
lipstick, add some very distinct eyelashes there, do their hair in a
certain way, and they go to a modelling school to learn how to swing;
and the women likewise will do the same.²⁸

In various sermons, Banda expresses his astonishment that in a same-
sex relationship, as he sees it, one of the partners does not behave as
he or she is supposed to do, but tries to perform an alternative role. For
him, it is an obvious “distortion of God’s order” when a man or a woman
deliberately ignores the role he or she is to play according to his or her
biological sex.

The interesting thing is that the above objections against homosexuality
are part of Banda’s argument on fatherhood and on manhood. For him,
homosexual relationships exemplify the departure from God’s Word in
global society, which also has distorted the true meaning of fatherhood.
The increasing pressure of a Western liberal sexual rights agenda leads
Banda into a reflection on fatherhood:

They want us to talk about men having sex with men, women having
sex with women, they want us to talk about transgender – and they
call these societies progressive, the champions of so-called rights in
these areas. So I say to you: it is necessary for us to discuss afresh
from a biblical angle what fatherhood really means in our society.²⁹

Clearly, for Banda homosexuality is an issue between “us” and “them”,
the Christian nation of Zambia and an imagined progressive
West.³⁰ However, a closer look at the sermons reveals that
homosexuality is not only discussed to mark the difference to a liberal
‘Other’. There is also another factor, closer to home.

The Homosexual as a Counter-Image

The primary concern inspiring Banda to preach the series Fatherhood in
the 21ˢᵗ Century is not with homosexuality and same-sex marriage, but
with men and perceptions about manhood in contemporary Zambia. As I
have explored elsewhere, in these sermons Banda addresses issues of
male sexuality, HIV&AIDS, alcoholism, domestic and sexual violence,

²⁸ FTC – 2.
²⁹ FTC – 2.
³⁰ It is characteristic of this type of discourse that the West tends to be represented as a
homogenous and liberal bloc. That there are conservative factions within Western
countries is hardly noted. Cf. Gunda, The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe, 193.
male dominance over women and a general irresponsibility of men in marriage, the family and society. He explains these critical issues as resulting from the distortion of manhood he observes in society. Through the series he aimed to address this “from the spiritual side” and to teach men about the “biblical ideal of manhood”.

Now it seems that Banda’s discussion of homosexuality in the sermons serves to address some of his major concerns about men and manhood in Zambia. His argument that homosexual relationships are purely defined by sex enables him to explain the true meaning of marriage: “God's order of marriage is not defined purely by sex, because marriage is a much higher order than that. Sex is a gift in marriage, but it is not the thing that defines marriage. Hear me!” Moreover, Banda further develops this theme with a specific focus on men. In one of the sermons, he addresses the “impairment of manhood” such as expressed in the popular belief that men are unable to control their sexuality and, therefore, have to visit prostitutes when they are away from home. He then states: “Gentlemen, you can survive without sex. God's presentation of marriage is much bigger and wider: it is about love, companionship, and commitment; sex is just one thing that God has put in there.” The same argument about the place of sex in marriage is repeated, however, now it does not refer to homosexuals, but to Zambian men. In another sermon, he critically observes that “in our society manhood is defined in sexual terms…. The term manhood is equivalent to describing the male sexual organ.” Coming back to this theme in a later sermon, Banda states:

I have said that some of our cultures where manhood is expressed only by one’s sexual organ, they are totally distorted, because human manhood is not just defining yourself as a sex machine. That’s why I have insisted that this whole thing that we have been describing, where a man and a man or a woman and a woman are trying to live together and even have a civil union, that is such a betrayal and such a departure from God’s order! Because that kind of relationship is defined in sexual terms only. But marriage is not purely defined by sexual orientation, marriage is a communion, it is companionship, it is a love affair. And love is better than sex. Somebody says: ‘Is that

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33 FTC – 1.
34 FTC – 2.
35 FTC – 3.
true?’ Yes! But some of you have sex without love. Men who rape women. Sex without love. So sex is nothing in this regard, compared to something greater called love .. [that] is at the centre of a relationship.36

This quote clearly shows how Banda’s argument about homosexuality is smoothly incorporated in his argument regarding male sexuality and how it is used to address men in the church and to challenge popular notions of manhood in Zambia.

Banda’s second objection against homosexual relationships, concerning the transgression of gender roles, is also integrated into his argument about men and manhood in Zambia. According to Banda, man and woman have received distinct roles in God’s order of creation. This divine order is offended in homosexual relationships because, in Banda’s opinion, one of the partners will perform the role and behaviour incongruent with the person’s biological sex role. For that reason he considers same-sex marriage “a diversion from the roles that God has presented.”37 In an elaborate version of the argument, he says:

Marriage is not a human custom, but a divine institution ordered by God. In marriage, man and woman have gotten a very clear role, there is a distinctive sexual identity which defines who we are as men and women created by God. We act in light of who we are and why we are here. We act in light of what God desires, so that we can mirror his holiness. This thing about same sex marriage [is that it] does not mirror God’s holiness, it is an affront in the face of a holy and just and merciful God, it is an affront and our society must reject it. We must find joy and gladness and fulfilment in maintaining God’s order.38

The latter statement, about the joy, gladness and fulfilment in maintaining God’s order by performing distinctive roles as men and women, is very meaningful in relation to the sermon series as a whole. Banda’s major concern in the sermons is that men – the presumed heterosexual men in his church and in wider Zambia – do not fulfil the role they are supposed to play. Highlighting the “distortion of manhood” in the first sermon, Banda not only is pointing to the “violation of God’s order” as expressed in homosexual relationships, but also to the “abdication of leadership” by men. He clearly states that the distortion of manhood “comes as a result of the fact that men, the male factor in marriage and the male factor in society, have actually withdrawn from
performing their role.” Referring to Genesis 2 where Adam is put by God in the Garden to work it and take care of it, Banda argues that men have received the role of leadership in marriage and in society. However, he then points out that men have abused their role of leadership by engaging in domination and oppression, both in the marital and family setting and at the level of political leadership. That is why society, in his opinion, is marked by fatherlessness. Throughout the sermons, Banda reminds men of the crucial role they have to play according to God’s order. In doing so, he develops an idea of “biblical manhood” that is in contrast with the case of homosexual relationships:

Biblical fatherhood has in mind that a man, as God aimed him, in a family takes his role as a father, and a woman, as God has fashioned her, takes the role as a mother in the home, and the two become the package that bring into this life, by procreation, a family through the offspring. And nothing else exists besides that. And why should those who take up a so-called alternative life style still take on the role of a mother and a father if they are [of the] same sex, and then go into adoption of children? We can adopt children in families and that’s fine, but not in this fashion. Why do they want a different role when it is [the] same sex? ... There is no substitute for fatherhood. It is rooted in biblical manhood, and biblical manhood is rooted in creation. And 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.

Clearly, the homosexual, who mixes up the divinely ordained gender roles, is presented here as a counter-image of “biblical manhood”. This was even done very literally, when Banda during one of the sermons tried to demonstrate how a stereotypical ‘feminine’ gay man would behave, generating laughter from the audience. He then commented: “You know, I can’t do it, that’s why I remain a man.”

It can be concluded that in Fatherhood in the 21st Century, homosexuality is mainly discussed to depict how manhood can be distorted from its divine design. As Banda understands homosexuality, it represents two of his main concerns regarding men in contemporary Zambia: their preoccupation with sexuality and their indifference to the male role they are to play. The homosexual is presented as a counter-example of “biblical manhood”, in order to challenge men in the

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39 FTC – 1.
40 FTC – 4.
41 FTC – 1.
audience to live sexually straight and morally upright lives by fulfilling their divinely ordained role as fathers in their families and in society.

“Biblical Manhood” as a Heteronormative Ideal

The aim of the series *Fatherhood in the 21st Century* is to bring about change in men and in popular forms of masculinity, as a response to the HIV epidemic and other social challenges. To achieve this aim, Banda addresses various critical issues related to men and masculinity, and he develops an alternative ideal of manhood. In doing so, he exemplifies the contribution that Pentecostal Christianity makes to promote more constructive forms of masculinity in Africa, which can help in the struggle against HIV and gender-based violence.42 Writing from the context of Zimbabwe, Ezra Chitando has critically commented that the Pentecostal efforts to transform masculinities, although laudable and helpful, are limited because they uphold the idea of male supremacy. “The Pentecostal approach is still rooted in the paradigm of the male as the leader .... [and is] not willing to challenge the myth of male headship.”43 According to Chitando, Pentecostalism has to take a more radical distance from patriarchal cultural ideas about manhood, in order to nurture masculinities that can be redemptive and liberating in view of HIV and gender-based violence.

Where Chitando points to patriarchy as a common, fundamental characteristic of Pentecostal and hegemonic masculinities, the case study reveals one more deeply rooted shared pattern: the normative heterosexuality of masculinities, and the subsequent homophobia. While Banda’s sermons on “biblical manhood” are relatively balanced in terms of patriarchy – they present an example of “soft patriarchy”44 – they are profoundly heterosexist.45 The heterosexism is revealed, first, through a theology that considers heterosexuality as the normative and only acceptable form of human sexuality. Banda develops his ideal of “biblical manhood” theologically on the basis of the creation accounts. Elaborating on his frequent statement that “biblical manhood” is rooted in creation, he says: “In creation, God made them male and female. It is

43 Chitando, “A New Man for a New Era?”, 122 & 124.
44 Van Klinken, “Theology, Gender Ideology and Masculinity Politics”, 12.
Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. In creation we see a man and a woman in their respective roles. For Banda, the notion of gender difference means that only a man and a woman can complement each other in marriage and become “one body”. Second, the heterosexism is manifested in the stereotypical representation of homosexuality, in the cliché jokes about gay men as being feminine, and in the statement that homosexual activity should remain illegal, implying that people in same-sex relationships are criminalised. In all this, Banda is reinforcing hegemonic masculinity rather than transforming it. This is particularly problematic in the HIV era. Referring to Zambia, among other nations, the United Nations programme on HIV&AIDS (UNAIDS) points out that men who have sex with men experience extremely high HIV prevalence and face major barriers to access HIV related health services, due to homophobia, discrimination and criminalisation. Being concerned about this, Kenyan theologian and director of the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa, Nyambura Njoroge, challenges church leaders to make a “U-turn” in their theologising in the HIV context and to re-examine their views on homosexuality. It seems unrealistic – but it is not impossible – that Banda will make such a U-turn sooner or later.

Queering “Biblical Manhood”

A recently emerging theological perspective on sexuality and gender is called ‘queer theology’. Queer theology is characterised, first, by a critical, deconstructive edge: it employs a hermeneutics of suspicion “questioning the (hetero) sexual underlying of theological reflections” in relation to other categories such as gender, race, and class. This article exemplifies this approach, as I have critically revealed how in Banda’s sermons the homosexual is presented as ‘the Other’ as part of a heteronormative politics of masculinity, and how the promoted ideal of “biblical manhood” is rooted in a heteronormative understanding of gender based on the creation accounts. Queer theology, second, also has a constructive edge. In the words of Argentinean theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, it “needs to be a dissenting praxis, a praxis for

46 FTC – 4.
transformation of structures of oppression which have been normalized by ideologies in power, in alliance with Christian theology.”

Being aware of the Western dominance in the regimes of knowledge and power in our globalising world, I feel that it is problematic for me as a European scholar to contribute to the transformation of theologies such as those presented by Banda. It is up to African theologians to decide whether and how to develop a queer theology that recognises sexual diversity in contemporary African societies. However, because I, whilst conducting research in his church, have developed sympathy for Banda and I also have a certain respect for his efforts to transform masculinities in the context of HIV, I would like to put forward one theological suggestion, as my contribution to an intercultural theological dialogue.

For Banda, “biblical manhood” is rooted in creation. The creation accounts are the theological basis of his understanding of gender and masculinity and of his rejection of homosexuality. However, in the sermons Banda employs an additional notion: the theology of Jesus Christ as the second Adam (cf. 1 Cor. 15). In his opinion, Jesus Christ has come as the second Adam to restore the ideal of manhood that was impaired by the failure of the first Adam. Now, the term ‘restoration’ has a rather conservative connotation. But in one of the sermons, Banda speaks about Jesus Christ as God’s “innovation of masculinity”, which entails a notion of renewal or – theologically speaking – re-creation. When this line of thought is further developed, the meaning of manhood is not rooted in a fixed heteronormative order of creation, but is open for change, for progress, for new understandings and sensitivities. Reflecting on masculinity from a Christological perspective, one should also take into account that in Christ “there is no longer male and female” (Gal. 3:28). Feminist theologians, including African women theologians, have taken this as an argument for gender equality.

In a queer theological interpretation, this verse destabilises the heterosexual male/female dichotomy and thus opens up space for a plurality of sexual and gender identities “in Christ”. In this space, Banda can

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51 FTC – 4.


continue to preach on “biblical manhood”, but with less patriarchal, homophobic and heterosexist undertones.

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