

# The Church and the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Intricate Role of Masculinities of the Clergymen

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## Abstract

This article seeks to determine how the masculinities of clergymen influenced the church's responses to Covid-19. In Malawi, about 70% of confirmed Covid-19 cases were men, and about 83% of those who died were men. Pastors influence the church's response to the world. There are many responses from the Churches to the need for prevention and care during Covid-19. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research on the church's responses to Covid-19 in the global south and how the masculinities of clergymen played a role in the church's reactions during Covid-19. The article, thus, focuses on clergymen's masculinities of power and authority in influencing the church's responses to Covid-19. This article builds on grounded theory and qualitative methods. The article is based on data from two evangelical and two mainline churches in the four cities of Malawi. The study found that the masculinities of clergymen had little influence on the responses of evangelical churches during Covid-19. However, the masculinities of clergymen significantly impacted the responses of mainline churches within the confines of Sunday services but not outside it. We found that African realities, such as African beliefs in healing, among others, limited the role of masculinities of clergymen in evangelical churches during and after Sunday services. This article discusses ways of solidifying the roles of clergymen in the church responses.

## Keywords:

Covid-19,  
Masculinities,  
Evangelical,  
Mainline,  
Contextual Theology,  
Grounded Theory

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## Introduction

Covid-19 is one of the pandemics that have negatively affected humanity around the world. Numerous scholars have written about the link between religion, masculinities, HIV and AIDS, and Covid-19 (Kaunda, 2021; Sibanda *et al.*, 2022). Many studies on these subjects deal with masculinities as either a vice or virtue in relation to individual groups such as women, older people, children and the general public.

Clergypersons drove the church's responses during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are trusted sources of information on issues that affect humanity (Aluko, 2020, p.168). Thus, a core task of clergymen and clergywomen is influencing social and religious change. Their roles and responsibilities extend to offering help and assistance to save people from the ills that beset them. The lived-in experiences of people during the Covid-19 epidemic reveal that Covid-19 inflicted insurmountable suffering on humanity. Churches and clergy were fundamental during this period for Christians, who looked to them for messages of hope and healing. Masculinities are not sex-specific (Manyonganise, 2022, p.237), although they refer to personality traits traditionally ascribed to men. Church leaders in Malawi and Africa are primarily men because of the dominant spiritualities and worldviews that promote the leadership of men in churches and theological training (Fiedler, 2009, p.124). This article seeks to investigate the role of masculinities of clergymen in church responses to Covid-19 in Malawi cities. The article is premised on the understanding that masculinities are vital in church responses to Covid-19.

There is a growing body of literature on the church's responses to pandemics and women (Kaunda *et al.*, 2022 Manyonganise, 2022). For example, there are studies on church responses to Covid-19 in South Africa (Jaja *et al.*, 2020), Nigeria (Aluko, 2022), and other countries, but there are limited studies on the subject based on Malawi (Sibanda *et al.*, 2022). This article is within the discourse on the role of masculinities of leaders in driving church response during pandemics in Malawi. The work of Lindgren and others is essential in this discourse (Lindgren *et al.*, 2013). Based on religious groupings in Zomba, the study found that hierarchical

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government systems solidify the masculinities of church leaders in the church's responses to HIV and AIDS (Lindgren *et al.*, 2013).

Some members of *The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians* (hereafter the Circle) have written on the role of authority and power in church responses in Africa (Phiri, 2007; Chilapula, 2022). Their main argument is that African church responses are limited because they exclude women from positions solidifying church power and authority. These scholars argue that women in ministry solidify masculinities of power and control in the church through ordination. Some works have shown that ordination solidifies the masculinities of clergywomen and that though this is the case, clergywomen struggle to steer church responses within communities (Chilapula, 2022, p.97).

Women in the Circle have named masculinities as a barrier to contributing to women's and children's suffering (Siwila, 2022, pp.49-53). Furthermore, they argue that negative masculine traits and attributes contribute to ill health among women and children (Mukuka, 2021). These perspectives are only relevant to this article as a background to what exists on the subject of masculinities, health and religion. We also highlight the views to show this article's departure from the dominant arguments by the Circle on the subject of masculinities, health and religion. Its focus is on demonstrating how the masculinities of clergymen are crucial to church responses during Covid-19.

Liberation of women is a significant health issue that deals with broad health issues, including physical, social and psychological problems (Siwila, 2022). Many African theologians have shown the link between masculinity, women's health and religion (Kaunda, 2022, p.35). Mercy Amba Oduyoye discusses masculinities in the context of how men in the Old Testament and New Testament used their power to liberate women (Phiri, 2004, p.35). An example is how Joseph protected Mary from harm (Matthew 1, verse 19).<sup>1</sup> In Zambia, Lilian Cheelo Siwila has offered a more detailed study on masculinities, religion and Gender Based Violence (Siwila,

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<sup>1</sup> Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly (NIV).

2022). Here she shows how men use different masculinities to mobilize power and authority that maintain the oppression of women (Siwila, 2022; Semple, 2008). In Malawi, Isabel Apawo Phiri has done extensive studies on the intersection of masculinity, health and religion. She links masculinity to the oppression of women in highlighting the ‘silencing of Mvano women’ in Nkhoma Synod through male leaders who were appointed as *Mkhalapakati* (“the one who sits in between”) (Phiri, 2007, p.97). Clergymen of this church used their authority and power to monitor what women discussed at ‘women only’ weekly meetings (Phiri, 2007, p.99).

Isabel Apawo Phiri also highlights ‘headship’ in the heterosexual marriage relationship as a masculinity that fuels HIV infection on the marriage bed. The masculinity attribute of ‘headship’ is a form of authority and power that reinforces women’s abuse in marriage and family settings. In Malawi, paternal uncles in patrilineal societies and maternal uncles in matrilineal societies are pivotal in making decisions relating to health options their families should follow (Banda, 2006). Phiri argues that Evangelical theology that emphasizes ‘headship’ in a heterosexual marriage relationship should promote men’s responsibility and faithfulness in a marriage relationship to protect women from infection during HIV and AIDS (Phiri, 2004; Fiedler, 2021, p.23). The attribute of ‘headship’ is a concept of masculinity not only in Evangelical theology but also in traditional culture (Norwegian Church Aid, 2011, p.40). Chimwemwe Kalalo discusses the link between women’s experiences in the Anglican Church and HIV and AIDS in Southern Malawi. She points out that masculinities subjected women to sexual behaviours, predisposing them to HIV and AIDS (Kalalo, 2020, pp.31, 42). This form of power is linked to husbands as ‘heads’ of marriages. In this case, the concept of the husband as someone to care for his family is not honoured (Ephesians 5, verse 25; Fiedler *et al.*, 2016, p.138). Chimwemwe Kalalo also found that masculinities negatively impacted men’s care for children living with disability (Kalalo, 202, pp.137-138).

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## Methodology

This article is qualitative and descriptive in nature. It relies on grounded theory, where local concepts are utilised to develop arguments. It uses a three-stage iterant approach to processing data. Firstly, we collected data and translated it into a thick description from the perspective of the local people. We then subjected it to personal reflections and broader scholarship. Finally, we utilized a descriptive approach to develop our arguments to convey grounded theology on the influence of the masculinities of clergymen in the church's responses to Covid-19.

This article is based on four churches: two Evangelical churches and two mainline churches in selected urban areas. Two are from Mzuzu City in the Northern region (Sibande, 2018). One is in the Central Region, and one is based in the City of Zomba in the Southern Region. The identity of the churches has been concealed for ethical reasons, as some of the information is sensitive. We selected these churches using convenient sampling. The authors had connections to the churches either as members or because friends and relatives were members. This selection enabled us to collect information efficiently and with less suspicion from church members and authorities. All the churches have services on Sunday. We collected data through participant observation during church services. We collected information by listening to sermons of clergymen and announcements by church leaders during the services. We also had conversations with church members before and after the services, gathering additional information on issues we could not fully comprehend through participant observation. We then discussed what we collected with a small group of four church members to get a local interpretation of our findings. This was easy to do as the pastors of the churches gave consent to our research. We also interacted with the four pastors of the churches to get more information on their role in influencing their members' adherence to Covid-19 preventive and containment measures. We generated local concepts on the subject of our article based on the local people's understanding. We attended at least five Sunday Services of each congregation. We did not have a

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pre-determined number of interviewees but stopped collecting data when our data reached saturation point.

This article is based on how congregants responded to the church's response strategies that clergymen reinforced during the Covid-19 pandemic. We learnt about peoples' responses by studying the acts and sayings of clergymen and congregants, which pointed to the relationship between church responses, masculinities of clergymen and adherence of congregants to Covid-19. We did not use questionnaires to avoid stifling information from our research participants. We also did not use questionnaires because the tool would not suit our data type. Instead, we documented information in notebooks during and after church services. This included conversations with ordinary members and clergymen. We then reflected on the information and picked out key themes. After this, we had a broad question on the theme that guided our focus group discussions with local church members. The focus group members were selected using convenient sampling and comprised of church leaders.

### **Interpretative Approach**

This article is based on the five standard features African women theologians utilise: Suspicion, subjectivity, storytelling, scrutiny and the 'so what' question (Nadar, 2009, p.140). African women theologians read experiences from the vantage point of low-income people. In the poor category, women and people suffering injustices are the subjects of discussion. In this article, we apply this paradigm to the context of those under threat of contracting Covid-19. These are clergymen and congregants of the two churches: Evangelical and Mainline. This article utilizes suspicion as an essential aspect of inquiry. 'Suspicion' is a significant category of interpretation among African women theologians. These women read 'behind' existing arrangements by taking interviewees' experiences seriously (Fiedler *et al.*, 2016). This article, therefore, presents the theology of health, masculinities and the church's responses based on the experiences and contexts of congregants and clergymen of the Evangelical and mainline churches where the study was conducted. Therefore, the article is suspicious of the masculinities

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of clergymen and is poised to centre its discussion on whether they influenced the churches' responses to Covid-19.

This article also attests to subjectivity as a reasonable means of knowing. The approach utilizes the context and experience of interviewees as critical components of interpretation; as such, it is premised on the understanding that there is no one interpretation of how the masculinities of clergymen influence the church's response to Covid-19. This article, therefore, only presents one of many possible interpretations of this issue. It applies aspects of contextual theologies and specifically utilizes two key elements: experience and context. We interpret the experiences of participants in the study within a given context. We have specified the spiritual context of the interviewees as those from Evangelical Churches and Mainline Churches in the cities of Malawi. Therefore, interpretations and conclusions are not generalized to the responses of all Evangelical and mainline churches in Malawi, the whole of Africa and the wider world.

The other component that drives the interpretations and conclusions of this article is storytelling. This is done by narrating clergymen's and congregants' experiences with the church's responses to the pandemic. This component of storytelling is key in the scholarship of contextual theologies. What the congregants experience and how they experience it is theology to them. This perspective is vital in contextual studies by African women theologians (Fiedler *et al.*, 2016, pp.130, 144; Bevans, 1994). In this way, interpretations and conclusions on the role of masculinities of clergymen in the church responses arise from the experiences of congregants and clergymen who participated in this research.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Power and authority of clergy and church's responses to Covid-19*

Results of the study show that the churches' teachings, spiritualities and polity solidified the power and authority of clergymen. This was derived from narratives showing church members not following Covid-19 care and prevention guidelines, regardless of the sermons, actions and sayings of the clergy that

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supported the Covid-19 responses or guidelines from the government. In the Evangelical Churches, we observed limited correspondence between the church's responses and the power and authority of clergymen during the pandemic. The social and economic levels of church members influenced adherence to authority and the power of clergymen in driving church responses to Covid-19.

An Evangelical church with more educated members was more receptive to the power and authority of clergymen than a church with less educated members. Few educated members were in both Evangelical congregations, and most did not adhere to Covid-19 regulations. The Evangelical congregation with more educated members was in a city with dominant matrilineal ethnic groups. The congregation with less educated members was in a city with dominant patrilineal ethnic groups. This means that the adherence to masculinities of power and authority in these churches was influenced by the education of members rather than the dominant ethnic composition of the church. If the reverse were true, masculinities of power and authority would have been more resisted by church members in a city with a dominant matrilineal composition.

In mainline churches, it was impossible to ascertain the influence of ethnic composition and education levels of mainline congregations on adherence to the masculinities of clergymen in steering church responses during Covid-19. The church's polity is the critical element that promoted the reception of masculinities of power and authority of clergymen in this church. In these congregations, the polity of the congregations allowed clergymen to reinforce adherence of congregants to government regulations on care and prevention during Covid-19.

In the mainline congregations, we observed correspondence between church responses during Covid-19 and the masculinities of clergymen. In both congregations, the pastors adhered to Covid-19 regulations within the confines of the Sunday services. We followed up with members of mainline congregations to see if there was consistency between adherence to masculinities of clergymen in church responses during Covid-19 within the Sunday services and in their everyday life. Many members did not follow clergymen's advice in observing Covid-19



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protocols outside Sunday Services. Many reasons led to members' non-compliance with the guidance of clergymen on church responses during Covid-19 outside the confines of the Sunday service. For the Evangelical congregations, we investigated why members ignored Covid-19 responses within the congregation. We have observed that in Evangelical Congregations, adherence to the power and authority of clergymen is reduced because of the polity and teachings of the churches. We observed that in mainline congregations, adherence to the masculinities of clergymen was done only within the confines of the church services.

Mainline churches were the first established in Malawi, dating back to the colonial era. They came to Malawi in response to David Livingstone's plea (Ross and Fiedler, 2020, pp.23-30). Their form of government is either Episcopal or Presbyterian. In these churches, power and authority rest at the top. Therefore, attributes of power and authority for clergymen are essential in steering the church's responses in their communities. Mainline churches are hierarchical and are better placed to influence church members' adherence to the masculinities of clergymen during Covid-19 because clergymen make final decisions in the running of the church. It was also easier for clergymen of these mainline congregations to force congregants to follow biomedical approaches to Covid-19 care and prevention during Sunday Services.

We observed that clergymen and all leaders that led the Sunday services wore face masks during Sunday services. Church members also wore masks. One congregation used plastic chairs placed 1m apart during church services. There were ushers during worship services to force members to sit according to how the chairs were arranged. A bucket of water and soap were at the entrance, where everyone entering the church building washed their hands. Someone was at the door to ensure that those entering the church wore masks. Choir members wore masks. These churches seem more responsive to the masculinities of power and authority of clergymen. The church members followed what the clergymen taught and put in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19. In a study on the response of Faith-Based Organizations to HIV and AIDS, the authors found a similar finding

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to what we describe here. They discovered that “churches with well-defined hierarchical structures were better positioned to disseminate information and care activities throughout the organizations than those with more diffuse hierarchy” (Lindgren *et al.*, 2013, pp.137-138).

Church governing bodies made these laws, which solidified clergymen’s power and authority to protect church members from infection. As a result, these churches were safe during Covid-19. We also found that as much as clergymen in mainline churches influenced members during the Sunday services, they did not affect members after church services. As stated earlier, we made a follow-up on why mainline church members did not adhere to the masculinities of clergymen in the church responses during Covid-19 after church services. Members of Evangelical congregations also shared some of the reasons, but since Evangelical members did not comply with the masculinities of authority and power of clergymen in their response to Covid-19, we did not include them in this investigation.

#### *Clergymen and double standards*

Congregants were confused with the double approach by clergymen in following Covid-19 rules after the church service. Some clergymen would wear masks when in church but not outside it. This was the same for clergymen in Evangelical churches. Clergymen and church members of mainline churches abandoned Covid-19 regulations outside the church service, especially when they attended funerals, weddings or when they went to the markets.

#### *In the name of proving spiritual strength*

We learnt that some church members and clergymen wanted to prove their faith in God. As mature Christians, they were expected to exhibit spiritual toughness to diseases because they were supposed to have strong faith in God to heal diseases. “A clergyman of this [mainline] congregation recounted an experience with church members who visited him and his family at his home. The leader of the delegation requested him and his wife to remove their masks so they could see their faces” (Clergy, 2020).

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Toughness is an attribute of masculinity for a ‘real man’ in both church and society. As a mature clergyman, this was the time to show that he was tough spiritually. Spiritual strength is vital in exercising power and authority over church members. “One Sunday, a clergyman left the church service, removed his mask and shook hands vigorously with some church members. On another Sunday, church members either removed the masks or put them under their chin after the service.” The action of the clergyman had a ripple effect. This act of double standards by clergymen and church members within the mainline church is a testimony that they only wore masks to show obedience to the clergymen within the boundaries of the church. This is linked to why some church members were not vaccinated. Vaccinations were something that a church member did outside the church service; the clergymen’s authority and power were not always respected outside the church. In both the Evangelical churches and the mainline churches, there were testimonies where clergymen went for vaccinations only after they got infected with Covid-19. Some clergymen resisted vaccination to appear tough spiritually. The masculinity of strength undermined adherence to masculinities of power and authority of clergymen during Covid-19 because congregants emphasised the masculinity of strength more than that of authority and power.

*Herbal medicines are more potent than biomedical approaches*

The belief in herbal medicines undermined the masculinities of power and authority of clergymen outside the Sunday services. Many church members trusted herbal medication more than the biomedical approaches promoted in the church responses during Covid-19. According to one church member, she started using these herbal remedies that became popular amongst people at this time. These remedies included the use of lemons, ginger and blue gum trees. She had every member of her family take the mixtures. The use of herbal medicines was the only treatment before modern drugs and has continued even after modern medicines (Morris, 2016:164). Christians did not condemn these herbal medicines because they were considered not syncretistic (Harawa, 2003:70).

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*Sacrificing physical health to answer to other critical needs*

Some members did not adhere to the masculinities of authority and power of clergymen used in steering church responses during Covid-19 because of other realities of life that were considered more important than avoiding Covid-19 infection. Church members were more concerned about meeting their daily needs than protecting themselves from Covid-19. One Church member said: “I do not have time to even worry about the virus as long as I have food for my family and a place to sleep.” The balance between health and survival was even more critical during Covid-19 times. The restriction of mobility, often coupled with unemployment, put many Christians in the dilemma of abandoning Covid-19 regulations promoted by their clergymen within the Sunday services for them to survive. On the other hand, these mainline city congregations did not put any strategy to cushion their members from economic problems. This is opposed to the many charity initiatives these churches put in place to support orphans and widows that lost their loved ones to HIV and AIDS.

*Sacrificing physical health to be accepted socially*

Clergymen and church members disregarded the masculinities of power and authority of clergymen in steering the church’s responses during Covid-19. They had many other identities that required them to do this depending on their roles in society based on their identities. Some clergymen also abandoned the practices they used to promote church responses during Sunday services. For example, one clergyman was at a relative’s wedding and was not wearing a mask, yet he would wear a mask during church services. Similarly, a member of a mainline church was a teacher; she did not wear a mask at school. We observed that some children were coughing. She commented that the school could not afford to send away children to safeguard the income base of the school. But the key reason she did not wear a mask was that every teacher in the school did not wear one; if she did, she would be the odd one out.

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*Sacrificing physical health for political gains*

Political factors restricted the power and authority of clergymen. Just before the 2020 Presidential Elections (Ross *et al.*, 2022, p.40), Covid-19 had already claimed the lives of some Malawians. Political crowds were hotbeds for infection, and some church members who objected to Covid-19 prevention guidelines argued that there was no need to demand churches and Christians adhere to the regulations while politicians did not. However, clergymen in these mainline city churches were also proactive during the elections. This put their members at risk of contracting the virus as they emulated their pastors who attended political meetings without wearing masks.

The revelation that mainline churches' clergymen's masculinity did not influence church members outside the church calls for further reflection on how clergymen can encourage members to adhere to their authority and power in their responses during Covid-19 after church services. We argue that the theological curriculum should include public theology that will empower clergymen to understand the role of masculinities of power and authority in the church's responses during pandemics. Much of public theology is in politics (Mvula, 2023). In this article, we argue that there should be public theology that will relate masculinities of power and authority and religion to community health. Covid-19 and HIV and AIDS are among many illnesses the church has faced and may continue to face. Masculinities of the clergy are essential in guiding an effective church response during pandemics. Theological institutions and departments should include a programme or a course on community health, religion and masculinities in their curriculum. This course will help clergy strategically use their power and authority to influence church responses during pandemics.

*Masculinities of power and strength of Evangelical clergymen and adherence to Covid-19 responses*

For the two Evangelical congregations, clergymen and a few leaders who were governing body members wore masks. The majority of congregants did

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not. This was more so in a congregation with less educated members than in one with more educated members. Choir members did not wear masks. Congregants did not adhere to announcements made during the service that supported the wearing of masks. There were no strategies to force congregants to put on masks; for example, there was none at the entrance to ensure that those entering the church wore masks. The congregations did not have a special seating arrangement to reinforce social distancing. There was no particular arrangement of chairs to ensure social distancing. Therefore, the correlation between clergymen's masculinities of power and authority in adhering to the church's response during Covid-19 within the congregation was dismal. It is unclear whether the few church leaders adhered to the church's responses based on their clergymen's masculinities of power and authority. Within the broader theological discussion, what we observed here supported the theory that often, the theology taught is disconnected from theology done (Fiedler, 1995). In these churches, there were often teachings and announcements by clergymen in support of Covid-19 responses, but the behaviours of the church members were in contrast to such messages. The teachings of these congregationalist-type churches gave much more power to church members (Longwe, 2011, pp.17-18) and undermined members' adherence to masculinities of power and authority in steering the church's responses during Covid-19.

Evangelical churches came to Malawi, starting with the influence of Joseph Booth (Booth, 1897). They all had the following important aspects of church polity and doctrine: voluntary association often expressed through believers' baptism. Church members' individual choice based on personal conscience is emphasized. The Church government is mainly congregationalist, where the highest authority and power are with the local congregation (Longwe, 2011:40). This made it almost impossible for masculinities of power and authority to promote a uniform church response during Covid-19.

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*Lamulo liposa mphamvu/Law is more powerful than the power*

Evangelical churches are congregational and emphasise church members' freedom of conscience as a guide to their spiritualities. This aspect, combined with investing more power in the church members than clergymen, undermined pastors' power and authority to reinforce a church's response that promoted adherence to biological approaches to the Covid-19 pandemic. The church with more educated members was safer than the one with less educated members. This made Evangelical congregations unsafe during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pastor of one of the Evangelical congregations said: "We cannot change the seating plan to enable adherence to social distancing; we cannot prohibit members who do not want to wear masks during the service. If we force them, we will lose members." This was a clear testimony that the church's central beliefs undermined clergymen's power and authority to force members to adhere to Covid-19 measures.

The clergymen of these Evangelical churches opted to keep members at the expense of protecting those members from the Covid-19 pandemic for several reasons. One of the reasons was to protect their financial security. A critical concept of masculinity for a 'real African man' is to bring income into the family. Clergymen of Evangelical churches were reluctant to use power to make congregants adhere to Covid-19 measures because of the fear of losing church members. If pastors lost them, their income base through giving would be reduced.

The other reason clergymen of evangelical churches chose not to use their masculinities of authority and power to force members to adopt Covid-19 prevention measures was to protect their leadership in church and society. Pastors with a large following are held in high esteem in Africa and the world as influential church leaders. If members stopped attending church, people would question their power and authority as leaders. This dilemma made some pastors refrain from making bold decisions forcing congregants to adhere to biomedical approaches to Covid-19.

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*There is strength in unity*

The power and authority of clergymen in Evangelical churches to influence Church responses during Covid-19 were also limited by divisions on ideas of biomedical approaches to the pandemic by church members. These divisions were fueled by the church doctrine, which emphasizes making decisions based on individual consciences. Divisions among members meant that there were many ideologies church members adhered to. This means that these different ideologies undermined the role of masculinities of power and authority of clergymen because clergymen did not force members to adhere to ideas that contradicted their personal beliefs. Because of the many ideologies church members adhered to, forcing them to behave uniformly was difficult. Clergymen also had different views on Covid-19 responses, especially on vaccinations. Some clergymen, for example, taught that vaccinations were a government ploy to assassinate adversaries; some taught that the disease itself reflected the coming of the Beast as proclaimed in the book of Revelation, that taking the vaccine to fight against the virus was to indirectly accept the mark of the Beast in Revelation 13 with the number 666. Social media fueled some of these teachings.

Evangelical churches need to empower clergymen so that they utilize power and authority to influence adherence to church responses during pandemics. This is possible if the churches adopt strategies to help clergymen solidify power and authority over church members. However, this does not sanction abuse of power because the power and authority in this context are not for dominating congregants but to influence all members, including men, to adhere to Church responses during pandemics such as Covid-19. Here we contribute to Studies on the role of masculinities of power and authority apart from the dominant scholarship that links masculinities of authority and power to abuse of power.

The authority and power of clergymen in mainline churches have a role in church responses within the confines of the church. Therefore, theological training should include public health courses or programmes that link the masculinities of clergymen and clergywomen to the church's responses during pandemics outside



the confines of church services. Masculinity attributes of power and authority of clergymen in mainline congregations promoted adherence to church responses within the confines of the church because the polity of this church solidifies masculinities of power and authority of clergymen and clergywomen. This is different from Evangelical congregations, where the congregationalist concept of the church limits the masculinities of power and authority of clergywomen and clergymen with its belief in individual conscience that influenced church members to disregard masculinities of clergymen of authority and power in steering church responses during Covid-19 within the Sunday services and outside it.

Further, the masculinities of power and authority of clergymen of Evangelical churches have limited influence on the church response during the Covid-19 pandemic because of the church's teachings. One such education is on individual conscience as a critical element in deciding whether to adhere to the church's responses to Covid-19. Since church teachings limit the influence of the church response to Covid-19, there is a need to transform teachings that limit church responses in dealing with health issues.

The polity of the churches is the other aspect that limited the masculinities of authority and power of clergymen in Evangelical congregations. While Evangelical churches are touted for liberating women through church polity, the power and authority of clergymen in this church did not promote the church response to Covid-19. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was an attempt to make by-laws that would enhance the adherence of congregants to the church responses to Covid-19. However, the frameworks were limited to the number of people attending the Sunday services. These decisions enhanced the power and authority of pastors. If the by-laws included all other practices that the mainline churches deployed, Evangelical clergymen would have influenced the adherence of their members to masculinities of authority and power that steered the church responses to Covid-19.

Evangelical church members have the right to their beliefs, but if their right to beliefs limits the right to life, they should be suspended to protect life. Evangelical

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churches failed to restrict teachings and policies that limited masculinities of power and authority in influencing congregants to adhere to the church responses. This puts members at risk of contracting the virus. The government needed to have a vibrant monitoring framework that would have forced members of congregations to follow Government Covid-19 responses.

## **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated that masculinities of power and authority of clergymen had little influence on the church response to Covid-19 in Evangelical churches. However, this was different in mainline congregations. On the other hand, the masculinities of clergymen in mainline churches had little influence outside the confines of Sunday services because both clergymen and congregants placed more importance on African realities than on the dangers that Covid-19 placed on their lives. The article has also established that African realities of the clergymen and their congregants: the lack of coherent teachings on how the pandemic was spread and caused death and illness, the African beliefs on African ways of healing and health as more potent than the scientific approaches to recovery, the ability of the churches to adhere to the government regulations on Covid-19 prevention and care approaches, the political activism that undermined Covid-19 regulations, the desire to be accepted by the societies pushed congregants and clergymen to abscond from Covid-19 prevention and care approaches. Given this, the article proposes that Evangelical churches adopt strategies that will help solidify the masculinities of clergymen in church responses during pandemics. In addition, the government should have dynamic monitoring systems to ensure that churches adhere to the fundamental human rights of protecting lives even during pandemics. Further, theological institutions that train clergy should include courses on masculinities, health and religion within relevant programmes to enhance the skills of clergymen in steering the church's responses during pandemics.

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## Declaration of Conflict of Interest

We have no conflict of interest to declare.

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