

The Church versus the Spirit: The Impact of Christianity on the Treatment of Women in Africa¹

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Abstract

Research in Uganda and Burundi suggests that Christianity affects the status of women differently at the level of the family as opposed to that of the institutional church. European colonial missionaries discounted African women's religious leadership, relegated them to "helper" positions, and lowered women's status. At the same time, Christianity experienced as a personal, spiritual manifestation of other-worldly charisma influences individuals to behave in ways that raise women's welfare. One way in which Christianity benefits women is by constraining the behavior of men: "Saved" men stop drinking and womanizing, stop wasting family resource on personal consumption, and work cooperatively with their wives to care for their families. On a broader level, under the influence of Christianized values, both men and women challenge customs that treat women as property, educate daughters as well as sons, reject the traditional sexual division of labor, and in other ways promote the welfare of women. An economic theory of the sexual division of labor is expanded to account for both patriarchal family practices and the marginalization of women in the institutionalized church. The idea of spiritual capital is used to explain how spiritual, woman-affirming practices can persist despite patriarchal institutions.

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Introduction

A controversy currently bubbling in American intellectual circles concerns whether religion is beneficial or harmful in human life. Christopher Hitchens neatly lays out one side of the debate in the title of his book, *God is not great: How religion poisons everything*. Other combatants include Richard Dawkins (*The God delusion*), Sam Harris, and Victor Stenger. On the other side is sociologist Rodney Stark, whose books propose that Christianity in particular is responsible for the elimination of social ills such as slavery (*For the glory of God: How monotheism led to reformation, science, witch-hunts, and the end of slavery*) and provides the basis for Western scientific progress and economic development (*The victory of reason: How Christianity led to freedom, capitalism, and Western success*). Dinesh D'Souza offers another defense in *What's so great about Christianity*.

In this paper, I attempt to sort out one of the factors key in determining whether religion's impact will be for good or ill by focusing on the treatment of women in developing countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. Women in less-developed, historically non-Christian countries suffer from a multitude of culturally-sanctioned practices such as polygamy, forced marriage of prepubescent girls or widows, the shunning and oppression of widows, isolation and veiling, genital mutilation, domestic violence, sexual assault, lack of access to education, and male

usurping of household resources for personal consumption in alcohol, tobacco, and womanizing. Girls might be sold or kidnapped into marriage, expected to bear large numbers of children, forced to turn to prostitution in order to survive or pay school fees, or suffer abandonment when their husbands lose interest in them sexually. In some societies female infanticide is common.

As Miriam Adeney (2002) writes, Christian missions in Africa have conflicting outcomes on women's welfare. Fieldwork in Africa, reported here, yields stories on the positive side, illustrating Christianity's transformation of abusive family practices prevalent in East Africa. Unfortunately, it is far from the case that all Christian women there enjoy decent treatment. Even marriage to a Christian minister is no guarantee of freedom from mistreatment, as interviews reveal that even women married to Christian pastors may experience physical abuse from their husbands, including marital rape (Tracy, 2008; Tumuheirwe, 2008).

One factor that my data suggests makes a difference in whether Christianity provides good or bad outcomes is captured in the title of this paper, "The church versus the spirit." Of course I do not really think that the church and the spirit are opposed in all or even most ways. What I want to invoke with this title, however, is the contrast between "the church" as a worldly, material, and power-laden institution, as opposed to Christianity experienced as a personal, spiritual manifestation of other-worldly charisma with immediate implications for this-worldly treatment of others. Ironically, there was little conflict between "church" and "spirit" in primitive Christianity. In contrast to its modern meaning, the Greek word, *ekklesia*, used throughout the New Testament and translated into English as "church", did not refer to either a building or institutional hierarchy. Rather the New Testament church was the gathered body of those who professed belief in Christ and a personal manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Translating *ekklesia* as *assembly* more properly captures the original meaning. What the institutional church

has that the spiritual *ekklesia* does not is hierarchy, power, professional leadership, and concerns about authority over other people. When the church is defined or understood to be an institution of power, both the institution and its theology tends to marginalize women. On the level of spiritual experience, however, Christianity has a positive impact, one that has raises up both women and men.

From egalitarian body of Christ to hierarchical institution

Three hundred years after its founding, the Christian movement changed from a loosely-joined community of small groups meeting in private homes into to an arm of the Roman Empire's civil service. Many contemporary congregational and denominational practices, especially those that have proved disadvantageous to women, are not those of the New Testament but rather are rooted directly in Roman practices. Although some of these changes were underway prior to the Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity, his promotion of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire around 324 C.E. institutionalized them (Viola, 2002, 107). Prior to Constantine, Christians met not in ornate buildings but in individual believers' homes. There was no professional clergy to direct the service as "master of ceremonies," because there was no clergy, professional or otherwise. Further, there was no service as such. Rather than giving obedience to a set-apart priestly class, "every believer recognized that he or she was a priest unto God" (100). The professionally prepared sermon as focal point of the gathering did not exist. Instead, early Christian communal life as described in the New Testament was "marked by incredible variety" (70). Their assemblies were highly participatory and dominated by charismatic worship, teaching and prophesying. As the Apostle Paul instructed, "When you come together, *everyone* has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these things must be done for the strengthening

of the church...Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (1 Corinthians 14: 26, 29 - 31 NIV. Emphasis mine.) The “Lord’s Supper” was a communal meal resembled a pot-luck supper that was shared by all present. Only later did it become a sacred and mysterious ritual that could be administered only to the initiated by a rigorously trained, formally certified, paid male who mysteriously represented Christ (Viola, 106; Bartchy, 1992). Further, there is good evidence that women and certainly slaves, of whom there were great numbers in the Christian community, participated in leadership, teaching, speaking, and worship equally with the free-born men (Torjesen 1993, 5; Bartchy, 1984, 1992; Otranto, 2004). New Testament teachings forbade believers to status seek or exercise authority or privilege over other people (Bartchy, 1984; Viola, 2002, 157; Miles 2006). In contrast, concerns about one’s position in the status and power hierarchy became of paramount importance in Constantine’s newly-institutional church.

Torjesen traces women’s expulsion from formal leadership within the Christian movement to the ancient “gender ideology that divided society into two domains, the *polis* (city), a male domain, and the *oikos* (household), a female domain,” as well as to Greco-Roman notions about the “honor” of women (Torjesen, 1993, 6). That is, when Christian assemblies took place in the feminine realm of the household, women were deeply involved in all functions and activities of the *ekklesia*. Then Constantine shifted the site of religious observance from private homes to the basilica, buildings modeled on the Roman courthouse (Viola, 113). The new Constantinian church’s emphasis on hierarchy and public honor was immediately obvious in the structure and placement of seats within the basilica: Elders and deacons sat in a semi-circle in

front of an altar, with the bishop literally enthroned in their midst. The congregation was not seated at all but left to stand facing them (115, 127-8).

With all facing forward in deference to high-ranking males, the body of Christ became a different kind of communal event. The participatory, non-hierarchical, spirit-led and sometimes chaotic *ekklesia* became an audience viewing the performance of professional worshippers (the choir, 116) and listening to a professional speech (the sermon). Many of the men acknowledged today as the “Church Fathers” were originally famous orators, whose status in the ancient world was akin to that of modern rock stars. Constantine created a paid clergy and gave them a highly privileged civil status (158-9).

The locus of the Christian movement left the domestic sphere and the communal life of the Body became a public function. It is here that Torjesen’s ideological distinction between *oikos* and *polis* comes into play. In Greco-Roman thought, a woman who took on the masculine role of participation in public life were considered to have renounced the feminine virtues of silence, reticence, modesty and most significantly, chastity. By definition, a “public woman” was a woman available to the public, i.e., unchaste or a prostitute (Torjesen 40, 143, 152). With this stigma, women’s roles in Constantine’s professionalized church were radically diminished from their functions in the participatory *ekklesia*.

The church and the sexual division of labor

The domestically-specialized woman

Torjesen’s conclusion that women’s marginalization in the life of the church was due to the division between *oikos* and *polis* is an astute one. Women were generally absent in the public sphere prior to industrial development, however, due to more than concerns about their sexual reputations. Rather, women’s alienation from public life is only one part of the sexual division of labor universal in

the pre-industrial world. The “sexual division of labor” refers to the pattern of men and women performing different work. Economist Gary Becker explains it by the fact that in agricultural economies, households were on many levels self-sufficient entities requiring a great deal of labor to meet even basic needs. In these autarkic households children served as a valuable input to production. For these “technological” reasons fertility was high, and couples often had more children than they might have chosen otherwise simply because they needed the labor and security afforded by children.

Becker writes that under these conditions, women specialize in child bearing and in those productive activities that can be undertaken simultaneously with pregnancy, nursing, or child care. Men specialize in what was left over, that is, the work that women could not reasonably or safely do while pregnant or with children present (Becker 1981). Men will also do work that is normally assigned to women when it is done for pay outside of the household – cooking for instance.

The resulting “domestic specialization” of women explains male dominance over women in the family. As a husband’s human capital (skills and abilities that lead to productive output) are less bound to his wife than hers to him, a man has far less to lose in the breakup of a marriage. Men’s extra-household role gives him more direct control over family resources than his wife, and greater access to cash and other extra-household resources, including influence. In turn, this gives the man more power in the relationship.²

Becker’s argument on the impact of domestic specialization explains more than intra-household hierarchy, however. In other work, I apply his analysis to the universal pattern of men dominating public life, pointing out that prior to the Industrial Revolution extra-household, public activities – in the marketplace, the military, or politics – were literally “none of women’s

² This line of reasoning is analogous to economic analyses of “firm-specific” versus general human capital. See also Margaret F. Brinig and Douglas W. Allen, “‘These boots are made for walking’: Why most divorce filers are women,” *American Law and Economics Association*, 2000, [Volume 2, number 1], pp 126-69.

business” (Miles 2007). Activities that required the extra-household coordination of the labor of other adults, such as in the marketplace, political arena, in production of “male” crops, and professional endeavors, fell into the male sphere, simply because the demands of women’s work in such environments left them with no time – or real need – for such activities. In less-developed countries this continues to be the case today. For example, where the plow is not used, as is the case in much of sub-Saharan Africa, farming is “women’s work”. Consequently, “Most African women spend sixteen to eighteen hours daily working to provide their families with food, shelter, water, clothing, medicine, and education. They have very little time to seriously reflect on their relationship with other people....” (Nasimiyu-Wasike, 1991, 76-77). Paulme ([1960] 1964) also observes that African women’s “lack of participation in public life is as much about absorption in their own tasks as anything else” (cited in Cornwall, 205, 3). Thus a woman rarely played part in power-laden public institutions because in traditional circumstances she had little time or reason to participate in them.

The high expense of education in traditional economies (noted by Becker), further compounds women’s indifference to public affairs. In less developed economies, few women know enough about political issues to hold political office, or even to vote. Historically, it was unthinkable that a woman should have a working knowledge of war and the military, important components of political power (hence Henry VIII’s obsessive quest for a male heir). Analogously, since it has no direct impact on their work, although women may produce at home many of the items used, in pre-industrial economies they tend to have little interest in manufacture outside of it.

Men's part in the sexual division of labor and power-laden institutions

The reason why activities that require status and power become men's work can be seen clearly in activities such as war. On the most benign level, the domestic specialization of women means that when performed outside of the household, even "women's work" becomes male. Thus, while women do most of the cooking, until relatively recently professional chefs were male. As another example of male specialization in tasks that require power over others, consider the fact that certain crops in Africa, including most cash crops, are considered "male."

Understanding why some crops are considered to be "male" as opposed to female can be puzzling, especially as women seem to provide the bulk of labor in tending and harvesting crops in both categories. Anthropologist Jane Guyer points out that male crops require "interdigitation" or coordinator of labor of many people. In growing yams, a male crop, men clear the ground; women make the planting mounds; both men and women plant the seed yams; women weed; men stake and train the vines; both sexes harvest; women wash and carry; men build storage barns (Guyer, 1991, 104). Similarly, cash crops tend to be multi-seasonal (i.e., the plants on which tea, coffee or cocoa are grown take time to mature but then persist for years), require a lot of labor (tea, cocoa, cotton), and must be stored and transported. Only a "man of importance" can mobilize the large number of workers – wives, children, dependent clients – required to plant and bring these crops to market (105). Women's crops, in contrast, are produced in a single season and require less coordination of the labor of others. Thus men control cash crops because cash crops require extra-household activities of labor coordination and marketing.

Becker points out that under the historic sexual division of labor, women vary little in their productive capacity. For example, although the differences between having one child and

having thirteen seems enormous to us today, in a broader sense there is little deviation in the number of children the average woman bears. Pre-industrial technology also limited the external yield to an individual woman's superior thrift, household management or agricultural skills. In sub-Saharan Africa, where women produce most of the food through subsistence farming, proof of this relative lack of variation can be seen in the factors that determine a woman's brideprice. Unlike dowry, which can be thought of as the bride's share of her parents' estate and which usually goes to the couple themselves (or at least to the groom), brideprice or marriage payments are paid by the groom and/or his family to the parents of the bride. Customarily, the brideprice paid for girls did vary, but an individual's brideprice was determined more by the girl's father's status than by characteristics of the girl herself. Thus until recently, as an elderly and knowledgeable informant in Uganda states, when choosing a bride, all that was cared about was that, "she wasn't a fornicator [i.e., was a virgin] and that she could dig [farm]" (Arinaitwe and Miles 2007).

In contrast, men vary a great deal in their productive capacities, as seen in the difference between a "captain of industry" and a beggar (Becker 1981). Becker draws on this observation to explain the prevalence of polygyny.³ When the differences between men are great, and those between women small, a woman can be more productive with part of a superior man than with all of an inferior one. Thus the "big men" in these cultures have many wives.

The greater range of variation among men accounts for the male status and political hierarchy as well as the sexual one. S. Scott Bartchy writes that while patriarchy is usually thought of as the subordination of women to men, it is actually the dominance of a few men over

³ One man with more than one wife. Polygyny is more commonly, although less accurately, known as "polygamy." Eighty five percent of all cultures have been known to practice polygyny, including nearly all African tribes.

everyone else. Combining his observation with Becker's analysis, patriarchy in Bartchy's broader sense may be seen to occur when a man can be more productive under the patronage of a superior man than by himself. Such dominance takes the form of despotism, feudalism, slavery, patron/client relationships – or church hierarchy. Thus in the face of the grinding poverty of ancient Rome, many men found it better to be a slave in even a moderately wealthy household than a poor freeman (Bartchy, 2003). In many Roman cities in the first century as much as one third of the population was enslaved. Another third were former slaves. Free men took on the subordinate role of client to wealthier, more powerful, or better connected individuals (DeSilva, 2000). (For a more contemporary example of client/patron relationships driven by the honor/shame ethic, see the movie, *The Godfather*.)

Tasks that require coordination, even at the fairly simple level of producing yams, requires at least a rudiment of power, prestige and social status. If an individual wishes to have influence beyond his household, he needs even more power and status. In less developed countries (LCDs) with weak rule of law, violence may be the main method by which to gain power (Mukonyora 2007, 17). This role is almost exclusively male. Ideal male characteristics in such environments might include aggression, physical and military prowess, a broad base knowledge, which might be zealously guarded ("knowledge is power"), sensitivity to slights or threats to status, and the ability to command the obedience and loyalty of others. High social status, power, being a "team player" and the ability to influence others are qualities more important to men than to women. The societies that grow from these individual struggles for power tend to be strongly hierarchical, as in subsistence economies power is necessarily a zero-sum game. The driving need to maintaining status requires exacting revenge for insults and slights, contributing to the often dysfunction "honor/shame" cultures of the less developed world.

Since most men cannot achieve success as the “big” or “important” man, their well-being requires them to recognize social ranking and be willing to accept their rank. Thus the economic realities of undeveloped, poor economies results in both women’s subordination to men in family, society, government, and the church, and in the subordination of most men as well (Miles 2006, 2007; Mikkola and Miles 2007).

The economic and technical forces that drove pre-industrial societies shaped not only households but the personality qualities demanded in individuals. Almost by definition, subsistence economies create an incentive for strong, ruthless and self-centered male competitiveness. Such ruthlessness requires that their possessor see all inferior partners – women, children, subordinate men – as existing only to serve him, the “big” man. Thus in ancient Rome, the only people with any rights were members of the small, wealthy and powerful citizen class. The unitary model of the family, which assumes that the male household head altruistically works for the welfare of all family members (Becker 1991; Menzies and Hay, 2006) is thus inappropriate in such settings. In subsistence economies, entering into marriage and becoming parents are motivated by the needs of production, not by “love” in a romantic Western sense. Even today many people in such cultures consider the family as existing to serve the male householders rather than the other way around.⁴

As Torjesen argues, as the Christian church moved from *oikos* to *polis*, the Roman preoccupation with men’s honor and women’s shame/sexual reputation must have been a huge part of women’s alienation from participation and leadership in the new church. But looking at

⁴ For example, it seems to be taken as truism by many African that a polygamist father may refuse to provide money for school fees for his children – after all, he is a polygamist in order to have many children to promote his interests, not theirs. Similarly, in such cultures, when the choice is between a new shirt (or alcohol) for the father or shoes for the children, a man’s self-centered choice may be unremarkable.

the sexual division of labor, it becomes apparent that women would have become alienated from participation even if sexual reputation were not a concern. Constantine's version of Christianity was led by professional orators and philosophers cum professional preachers and theologians, paid as civil servants, and vying for higher office and prestige amongst each other. Women rarely worked for pay or as professionals in the ancient world; they were not educated for public roles so there were few or no women orators or philosophers in the Roman Empire; they had no use for public honors. So there were soon no women leaders in the churches either. Once Christianity was co-opted by the Roman Empire, it came quickly to resemble Roman culture in its emphasis on hierarchy, power, and authority. And men, rather than women, who traditionally pursued and occupied the power-laden positions within the church.⁵

The spirit

Economics is defined as the study of the allocations of resources under conditions of scarcity. Rational-choice theory also suggests that those trade-offs tend to be made rationally. Families struggling with scarcity usually find that the unequal provision of resources to boys, even to the point of killing new-born girls, is *rational* or *efficient*. The ancient Romans killed so many female infants that in some parts of the Empire there were only 7 women for every 10 men – a ratio similar to what is being reported in parts of Asia today. The problem for social scientists today is not explaining why some parts of the world engage in practices that we find barbaric. The problem is explaining why barbarism isn't universal. Polygyny is a rational practice in terms of economic theory – so how do we explain why the practice has been banned in Europe and the United States?

⁵ I show elsewhere how the movement of production out of the household that was part of the Industrial Revolution resulted in the “women's movement” and an equalizing of power on many levels in the developed world.

The idea of “spiritual capital” derived from that of “social capital” (as laid out by James Coleman, 1988, and Robert Putnam, 2001) and “human capital.” “Spiritual capital” refers to those aspects of social and human capital that derive from religious, spiritual, or moral beliefs. It is those personal and institutional resources that enable the adherents of a religious or moral system to live in accordance with the values of a religious system *despite* the fact that these values demand behavior that is at odds with the prevailing economic and social structure. Spiritual capital helps explain why people sometimes behave better than they “have to.” In the language of the New Testament, spiritual capital enables people to live “in the spirit” rather than “in the flesh”.⁶ Spiritual capital enables individuals, groups, and whole societies to maintain norms and values that transcend ordinary economic incentives, such as refusing to hold slaves even when doing so proves profitable or staying to care for the victims of plague when everyone else is running away.⁷ As Rodney Stark has shown, although this kind of spiritually-motivated behavior means sacrificing one’s self interest, it can yield tremendous benefits for groups and entire societies in the long run (1996).

The New Testament *ekklesia* differed from the Romanized church because the founders of Christianity made it clear that believers were supposed to be living under a different set of standards than they had in the past. First-century men strove for honor, prestige, dominance,

⁶ One problem with the “spiritual capital” approach is that its use of the term “spiritual” is designed to encompass an overly broad range of behaviors and practices. I once read a magazine article on women’s use of time included behaviors such as gardening, reading, or going to the movies as “spiritual” pursuits. English speakers often use “spiritual” to mean the opposite of physical or material, but such a definition is impossible to operationalize. In order for “spiritual capital” to have a beneficial effect, content must matter. After all, it is not as if the Romans did not hold spiritual values or have morals: The obedience of all members of family to the patrician was the height of Roman morality. In the New Testament, however, the Spirit refers solely to God’s spirit. This is a much narrower range of “spiritual goods.”

power, and wealth – things that were in short supply. But Jesus, the apostles Paul and Peter, and others whose teaching are captured in the New Testament taught that Christians should not have to strive for those things of the flesh, because God Himself would take care of them if they lived by faith in Him. The New Testament authors denounce patriarchy, hierarchy, and any other system or philosophy that allows someone to use other people for one's own selfish purposes. Instead they call for Christians to place their trust in the infinite resources available to those who live by the spirit (Miles 2006b).

Women and the Spirit in ancient Rome

Despite Christianity's eventual co-optation as a “church of power” (a term used by Stark, 2006), the spiritual and ethical values of early Christianity had a profound effect over time, transforming the structure and interpersonal patterns within the ancient family. Christianity forbade the exposure of infants, raised the age of marriage for girls, raised the status of women in general, disallowed the sexual double standard (requiring fidelity from husbands as well as wives), outlawed polygamy, opposed and ultimately eliminated slavery, put slaves and women into leadership positions in the church, allowed marital separation in the interest of peace but discouraged divorce, and encouraged people, including widows, to remain single if they so chose. A significant factor in the explosive growth of the early Christian movement was that it treated women so well (Stark 1999).

Women and the Spirit in Latin America

Studies of the contemporary impact of Protestant Christianity in Latin America show that conversion frees men from the burden of acquiring and maintaining worldly status. Elimination of “machismo” has significant benefits for both the men and their families. Maintaining social

status and business connection in such cultures often requires heavy drinking with neighborhood bars. Extra-marital sexual liaisons on the man's part are also commonplace, to the point that it is unremarkable for a man to maintain two families at the same time, or to abandon his legal family in favor of a paramour when he grows bored with his wife sexually. As a result, men may spend most of their income on alcohol, tobacco, gambling, status clothing, visiting prostitutes, or supporting a second family. Conversion to conservative Protestantism requires men to give up such behaviors, resulting in a decline in drunkenness, extra-marital liaisons, and domestic violence.⁸ As men spend less money on alcohol and contribute to the household food budget, the entire family enjoys better nutrition. Fathers come to work together with their wives for the well-being of their children. Anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco writes, "The machismo role and the male role defined by evangelicalism are almost diametrical opposites. Aggression, violence, pride, self-indulgence, and an individualistic orientation in the public sphere are replaced by peace seeking, humility, self-restraint, and a collective orientation and identity with the church and the home." Note that the characteristics of machismo are those of the patriarchal "ideal" man, while the values with which they are replaced map neatly onto the "fruit of the spirit" listed in the New Testament (Galatians 5:22-23).

Brusco sees these changes in male behavior as having greater impact in advancing the feminine agenda than more aggressive programs promoting women's rights. This transformation can be costly for men, as a man who stops drinking and frequenting bars may lose significant business connections. She further suggests that despite their teachings on wifely submission, conservative Christian teachings affirm that women are men's moral equals. Such teachings give women the confidence "quietly but firmly to challenge her husband's conduct." Evangelical

^{8 8} Conversion to Catholicism in South American seems to produce less of this affect, perhaps because Catholicism does not confront alcohol consumption the way that conservative Protestantism does.

teachings promote belief in women's basic competence and worth, "... fostering a more egalitarian model of household politics" (Brusco, 1995).

Although "machismo" is a Spanish word generally applied in Latin cultures, the general pattern it describes – high rates of male drunkenness, incidents of domestic violence, paternal disengagement from childrearing, withholding money from family for personal consumption, and a strong sexual "double-standard" in which wives are unable to control their husbands' sexual behavior – is typical male behavior in patriarchal cultures from the ancient Greeks to contemporary Africa, Russia, and Asia.

The Impact of Christianity in Africa

Brigitta Larsson's anthropological study in Tanzania (central east Africa) also found that Christianity brought notable benefits to women. As in Brusco's study, some of these benefits come about because of reforms in the behavior of men, notably a decline of drunkenness, abuse, and divorce of childless women. Other benefits occurred in cultural changes directly related to women: "The newfound freedoms included the freedom not to be married to a rich old polygamist, the freedom not to have to abandon twin babies, the freedom to be valued sufficiently to be taught in school, and the freedom not to marry at all but to be independent (1991; cited in Adeney, 2002, p. 221). Miriam Adeney's review article, "Do missions raise or lower the status of women?" cites Larsson and acknowledges the benefit of Christianity's teachings that women are "persons of eternal value." On the other hand, she points out that the Christianity brought to Africa by Europeans in the nineteenth century did little to raise the status of women on an institutional level. Some of the problems were simple ignorance on the part of the Europeans, who projected the new Victorian ideals of feminine domesticity on hard-working, subsistence-farming African women, teaching girls to embroider instead of giving them a real

education. Of greatest concern to her, however, was the tendency of male missionaries to do real damage by sidelining women leaders, especially as the Christian movement became institutionalized in Africa. She writes, "The bureaucratization of a religious movement seems to consolidate and quantitatively reduce numbers of opportunities for leaders. When a movement is pioneering and stretching, every worker counts. But when an organization is consolidating, women become decorative assistants (218)."

Burundian minister Yvette Ndayirukiye's observations support Adeney's concerns. She writes that prior to the arrival of European missionaries in Burundi, women were subjected to men in the patriarchal household but held high positions in religious affairs. The traditional religious system was a "structural, strong and unifying factor" among the three ethnic groups that made up the Burundi and Rwanda territories. The missionaries, however, rejected "this equality of women and men in religious leadership roles," failing "to recognize the significant roles played by women." In the Christian church, religious women became housekeepers and gardeners to the priests, bishops, and white women missionaries. In other words, the imposition of the Western authority structure in Burundi resulted in the disempowerment of women.

At the same time, Christianity significantly improved the status of women on other levels. Reporting on interviews she conducted, Ndayirukiye writes:

"Women were set free from [the] cultural bondage that they had lived [in] for long. The power of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of women's liberation...They were encouraged to attend fellowship and prayer groups with men....Many girls joined [attended] school....especially...children of brethren.... Wives of born-again brethren were no longer bothered [mistreated by their husbands] and other women wanted to be

like them. They experience[d] a sense of love and harmony between their husbands and children. They love[d] and respect[ed] one another. For those women who were already beyond school age, they were encouraged to attend adult literacy group in order to learn how to write and read at least scriptures.

"At home, men showed much love for their wives up to the extent of calling them sisters in Christ Jesus[. W]ives inherited property from their husbands...then passed [it] ... to the children[. T]hey owned land as men."

This last item is of great significance in sub-Saharan Africa, where under customary law wives were far more likely to be inherited *as* property rather than inherit it themselves (Miles 2007).

Raising the status of women by constraining the behavior of men

Videotaped interviews conducted in Uganda in 2006 under my direction by Arinaitwe Bright also demonstrate the effect of Christian values on customary African family practices. Some findings are similar to those of Brusco and Larsson: Christianity raises the status of women and the provision of resources to children by constraining the behavior of men. Such constraint is of great practical consequence in LCDs: "Because men now typically control the purse strings, it appears that the poorest families in the world typically spend approximately ten times as much (20 percent of their income on average) on a combination of alcohol, prostitutes, candy, sugary drinks, and lavish feasts than they do on educating their children" (Kristoff and DuWann, 2009).

The benefit of changing men goes beyond the practical to the spiritual welfare of women as well. Interviews with "saved" African men show a similar process at work in Christian communities in SSA. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to collect data as is so obvious to Africans

that “salvation” requires a wholesale behavioral change. Consider the following interview results from a middle-aged Ugandan man:

Question: What does it mean to be saved?

Response: It is giving up of certain behaviors in our lives that do not please God.

Generally, being saved is a good feeling though at the start it was very difficult. At one time, I had mixed feelings of whether I should stay in salvation or give it up. The pressure to go back to the things I used to do namely drinking alcohol, [going with] women, etc. was a lot. Partly, I attribute this to my failure to break my company which I had before I was saved. You know just letting go of friends whom you had for a long time wasn't easy for me. But, my pastor told me that I had to choose between keeping them and risk backsliding in my Christian walk or give them up for the sake of salvation.

When I got saved at 34, my wife told me that it was a prayer answered on her side. She wasn't saved when I married her, but later on, she gave her life to Jesus Christ and embarked on praying for me to do the same. When she got saved, her greatest hindrance in salvation walk was me as I could come home drunk, quarreling with her all the time, etc.

One evening, I passed by a crusade organized by a Pentecostal Church in my neighborhood. My interest was not to get saved but to enjoy the music from the beautiful young ladies who were singing. Besides, they had announced that after all that, there would be a Jesus film! I saw that as a great way to spend that evening! I didn't know that I was going to get saved that evening!

Shortly before the Jesus film, some men testified of how bad they were doing in terms of behaviors, finances, family affairs, etc, before they were saved. They were testifying of how things changed and were getting better and better when they got saved. They talked about Hell and Heaven as being real places. I pondered on all those issues in light of myself and I don't know how I ended on the platform. All I can remember is the Pastor was leading me in a confession prayer; and I was saved.

As I speak, my wife and I are happy, business is doing well because we plan and work together. My wife and I started a primary and kindergarten school though we are not learned. We employed a head teacher and teachers to run the day-to-day affairs of the school. I just sit on the management board to discuss management issues.

My wife runs a retail shop and, together though not educated, we are slowly but steadily developing in all areas of our lives. This is because we no longer waste our money in unprofitable things. We plan for every money we get and the results are encouraging.

Challenging culture

Beyond the beneficial impact of taming men, a series of interviews conducted in Uganda in 2006-2007 suggest that there are direct benefits to women and girls as well. African Christians recognize the need to challenge customary cultural practices regarding, son preference, brideprice, the education of girls, and attitudes toward male dominance/female submission.

Son preference

Because families received brideprice when a girl married, there is no strong daughter aversion in sub-Saharan Africa. There is a strong son preference, however. Some of this has to do with the patriarchal culture: If a man was bested in an argument or fight, he regains his status if he has “boys” to send to avenge him. Similarly, families feel safer if they have sons at home to protect them from quarrelsome neighbors. Women also want brothers and nephews who can intervene in disputes between them and their husbands, as sons could not fight their own fathers (Arinaitwe, 2006; Birungi 2007). Customarily a woman’s failure to “produce” (bear) boys often motivates a man’s family to insist that he divorce her or take additional wives:

Question: What did you dislike in your polygamous background?

Response: The hatred and imbalance of love between the children. The very reason that my father married the second wife was that my mother was producing girls. He wanted boy children. That automatically generated a lot of hatred. My mother and she [second wife] hated [each other’s] children (Hellen Akatukunda, 2007).

“As Christians,” however, as Ugandan Mercy Agaba says,

we have to move out of culture in working out what God wants us to do. You have to live as Christ, not as people who are following culture...[Customarily, i]f you are a man and you just get only girls [children], you don’t feel comfortable. You would prefer to have 3 boys rather than 3 girls. But from a Christian context, we should now change our thinking. We believe children are gifts from God, whether boys or girls (Agaba 2007).

Eunice Maari’s parents were converted to Christianity during the East African revival in 1935-40. Speaking of her mother, who was born in 1923, she said:

As they got more children, the family was big, 11 children. There were two boys, and the rest were girls. Of course, my mother was not liked by some relatives of the husband's side. So they would say, come, we'll take you to [a witch doctor] who will change the sex [of the children she was having], because you are having only girls. But she resisted, and told them that girls are also children of God, and if he wants, I know that some day he will give me boys. So God in whom she trusted gave her two boys (Maari 2007).

Question: [To a man with one son and one daughter] What if you hadn't had a boy?

Response: You can't have 20 children searching for a boy. All children are equal and can all be useful to you. They can do the same things. Sex is determined by man. If you want to look for another wife because this one is producing girls, you are making a mistake, genetically (Tumwebarize 2007).

Brideprice

The requirement that men pay brideprice in order to marry can impose an obstacle to marriage. Brideprice varies by region but is often a significant sum of money. In Uganda, for example, an educated woman's brideprice may be more than the average person's yearly income. Many people claim that women like the practice, arguing that brides like to see evidence of how much their groom values them, or that having paid a high price for her, he will treat her well. Others, however, dislike the negotiations and delays that payment may cause and increasingly recognize that money paid to the bride's parents is money that is no longer available to the couple. Paying for a woman also suggests that women can be purchased. Bridal payments in fact underlie other detrimental practices, such as widow inheritance, in which women are treated as property (Miles 2007).

When she married, Agaba's Christian parents did not ask for a specific price but told her future husband that he need only bring whatever gift he had. Agaba recognized that, had her parents chosen to demand a high brideprice, she was bound to obey them ("The Bible says so") and marry the man they chose, but that, "I would not have loved someone I wouldn't love in order to get big dowry." Fortunately, as the daughter of Christians, "God gives me a way out." Regarding asking for bridewealth for her own daughters, she said:

"I say it from my heart, that I would not put conditions on this man who loves my daughter, to pay something before taking her. I wouldn't. Because I don't really like it. If you have a gift and you want to [show your] appreciat[ion], bring it. Decide what you have to bring and just make your own decision. But it is not a matter of negotiating. "You must give me this much, to take my daughter." It is like my daughter is a commodity and I am selling her. I value my daughter more than any other. There is nothing actually that you can pay me in exchange for my daughter. Just appreciate her, huh? (Agaba 2007).

Ugandan Christian University Deputy Vice-Chancellor John Ssenyonyi agrees: "Brideprice is being wiped out with Christianity, because of the perspective we have about why we are bringing up children. Traditionally, one brought up daughters because you would get cows, money, a car, a washing machine. My interest is not in what am I going to get from a child getting married. That is not the point. I want my child to be happy, to bring up her own children. That changes the whole aspect of brideprice" (John Ssenyonyi 2007).

Eunice Maari summarizes a dominant East African Revival attitude toward brideprice neatly: "Children of God were not supposed to be sold" (2007).

Education of Girls

In Africa as in the rest of the world, when education is expensive, it is made available first to boys. The traditional sexual division of labor made it more likely that educating boys would produce a return on the investment. This is slowly changing:

Especially important was the education of the girl children. That came with the missionaries...Boy children were always regarded to be more privileged. In education, boys were favored. Compared to others the girl child was often left behind. In Christian families, girls tended to fare better. They received equal education with the boy (John Ssenyonyi 2007).

There was also a strong traditional belief that when you raised or educated girls, you were educating them for another family, as married daughters left their family of origin to care for their husband's parents. The Christian shift in the ways of looking at children affects this belief as well:

Culturally, you are making girls grow up for other people. That's our background, where we came from. That's how we have always believed. But personally, I am a girl. I am married. But the things I do for my in-laws, I do the same for my mother and father. My sisters-in-law also care for both their in-laws and their parents. It should not be this other way. They are still your children, even if they grow up and go away. Even the men the girls marry, they are still your children (Agaba 2007).

Challenging the sexual division of labor

In Africa there were very strong norms against men doing what was considered to be women's work. Mukonyora writes of the humiliation suffered by men in Zimbabwe when

colonialists forced them into domestic service jobs that required them to do “women’s work” (2007, 45, 53). From interviews conducted in Uganda, however, it appears that these strong sex norms are breaking down.

Question: What are your responsibilities in the home as a man?

Response: There are no clear cut responsibilities. At one time, my wife was taking care of the rent. I didn’t have a job. Right now, I take care of it. Sometimes I am away, she has to take care of kids. Sometimes she is away, I take care of the kids. The same thing applies [to household work]. Of course she does more cooking than I do. Sometimes she was so committed at her job, I did most of the stuff in the home. Right now I am away a lot....(Emmanuel Akatukunda, 2007).

Question: Who lays [makes] the bed?

Response: It depends on whoever is the last up. Whoever is the last up lays the bed. We both sweep and mop the room.

Such sharing of domestic chores can be quite counter-cultural. Customarily, people customarily believed that a man should not be too nice to his wife. If he was, she might be suspected of practicing witchcraft to entrap him (one such potion is called “Dog-follow-me”). Mercy Agaba recounts, “One time in the Christian fellowship group, a man talked about people saying his wife bewitched him because he washed the children, clothes, because he carried the children in church. He said, ‘If my wife has bewitched me to love her, then let her bewitch me the more. All I need to do now is to love God and my wife and family members. It takes a man to understand’” (Agaba, 2007).

Question: How do you think the community will look at you, if they know you make her breakfast?

Response: Well, the community does not have to influence me in my home. All I want in my home is happiness. If I have to go with the community, I would not be happy in my home. When you do something good for your wife, you are happy. Like she does something good to you, you are happy and she is also happy and you are happy together. What does the community have to say about my happiness? I think of the most important thing is that I am comfortable and happy in my home (Tumwebarize 2007).

Of course, the gendered nature of household roles is breaking down in part due to urbanization and the increasing employment of women outside the home. However, as we found in the United States, the fact that employment makes it difficult for women to perform their traditional work in the household did not necessarily mean that their husbands automatically stepped in to do it. Eunice Maari's recollection of her parent's marriage shows that this transformation predates urbanization:

Being a man, you would expect my father to leave all of the work to my mother. But he used to chop firewood. He would also go to collect water for her when she was not feeling well. I would see them work together, so how I grew, seeing them I appreciated. So when I saw other families where a man was supposed to go drink, and visit friends, sit and wait for food, not even go and get any, I was so surprised. ...As I grew up, I learned that Christ would change a man. Especially with revival, people were working together by then.

Speaking of his attitudes toward his marriage, Akatukunda also said:

It is Christ that makes a difference. So I wouldn't even expect it from someone who doesn't know Christ. There are some people out there who not even Christians who are living good lives together, but to me the motivation is Christ.

The status of women, submission and family heads

In some African tribes, a wife is expected to kneel before her husband to greet him, serve him food, or wash his feet. The expression, "I speak twice, you speak once," captures the relative roles of husbands and wives. Wives were expected to obey their husbands instantly and silently. In some churches, biblical statements that wives should submit to their husbands are used to reinforce without tempering this traditional and excessive African cultural expectation of wifely submission. That is, the biblical passage on wifely submission will be quoted without the foregoing verse, which says that this submission should be mutual. Similarly, the verses appointing the husband as "head" of his wife may be stressed, but the definition of head as one who loves and sacrifices as Christ loved and sacrificed is forgotten. This is important because in Africa, submission means to be very low, "a doormat," says Emmanuel Akatukunda, a pastor who runs a ministry training itinerate preachers. "Some people are misguided. They think that woman submitted is going low, low. This is not Biblical. They need to be told. They think the woman submitted is inferior, the man is superior like a superman" (Emmanuel Akatukunda, 2007).

Some Christians, however, in examining cultural influences in light of a new biblical understanding, are rethinking these expectations:

Question: What about what Paul says about the husband being the head of his wife?

Response: What comes into my mind in talking about the leadership of the husband is that....he is the leader, not a dictator. Any place of work, or a country, has leadership. Without leadership, they are dead. ..But it starts to have a distorted understanding in the secular world. To be the head is not to have privileges. That is how secular world tends to look at it. 'Oh, I am the head, I get these privileges.' Read these verses. It says the man is the head of wife the way Christ is head of church. What does it mean? It means to be willing to forgo comfort. Christ gave his life for the church. If this is a privilege, it is a very costly one. It is scary, being asked to step into role the way Christ is head of the church. Read verse 21 – submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. The wife submits, but the husband loves. There is no love that never submits. Your love will compel you to submit to your wife. There is no way to talk about the headship of man without understanding importance of [male] submission (John Ssenyonyi 2007).

Similarly Joab Tumwebarize, headmaster of a prestigious secondary school, said: You see, when Bible says that a woman is a helper, what is she to help you? It means you are doing something, and you can't manage alone. She comes in to help you. And therefore someone who comes to help you in a time of need is as important as you are. You have failed. And now she is helping you, she is an equal partner in this business. If man is head of family, well he is head of family. Does that mean the woman is not? She has nothing to contribute? She can give you ideas. She can give you advice. She is your helper in that matter. And therefore you must see each other as very important in the home.

Similarly, Hellen Akatukunda, school teacher and wife of Emmanuel, talks about submission not as an obligation, but something the individual does from her heart, in imitation of Christ. Hellen rejected the idea of submission “because some pastors, they preach woman must be below your husband.” In African culture, submission is “just doing something in obedience to the law. It is a must that you should kneel down to show respect.” But she came to realize that within the Christian context, submission had a different meaning. “Christ did it first, even up to death on the Cross. When I saw that Christ did it first, I saw that it was good.... It was difficult to understand it at first, but I learned that submission is a decision that you make. It is almost like a ministry that you do to your husband. That has really set my heart free. It freed me from the thinking that submission was slavery.”

Hellen tells of how she had been traveling when she came to this understanding of submission. When she reached home, curious to learn how her husband would react to her insight, she decided to greet him by kneeling before him. Emmanuel responded by immediately kneeling down and embracing her. “When a husband loves the wife,” Hellen said, “he will have to be close to her, because submission and love are close to each other. It is not possible to love when he is up high and she is kneeling” (Hellen Akatukunda 2007).

That this attitude plays out in day-to-day life is seen in an interview with Penninah Ssajjabbi, whose husband became “saved” several years into their marriage:

He says, “Penninah, I am sorry I delayed [was late].” That is a miracle to me. For Edward to say “I’m sorry,” that takes the grace of God. He wasn’t that kind of man. He wanted me to say I was sorry even if I wasn’t in the wrong. He was someone who wanted me to

come and kneel and repent of things I had not done. But the Lord has changed him, and he is a different man....

When my husband got saved, that was the very first “sorry” I got from him as a husband. I felt like shedding tears. He couldn’t say he was sorry before he got saved. He was never in the wrong. He was a man (Ssajjabbi 2007).

Uganda Christian University Deputy Vice-Chancellor John Ssenyonyi summarizes:

Women get a new status in the Christian dispensation. Women not highly regarded previously. As a matter of fact, traditionally, women were like property. She was bought: the dower would end up almost like she was being bought. But then Christianity came in, you start talking about Christian relationships, Christian marriage, you find that women have a completely new status. In my village Church marriage had high status. People were proud of their wedding rings. They had a status with their husbands that no one else had. Without Christian marriage, a man is looking around for second, third wives. Their status definitely did change (2007).

Christian versus “Saved”

Ugandans, at least, distinguish between being a nominal Christian and being “saved” or “born again.” Most Ugandans are formally Christian and may attend church each Sunday without “giving their lives to the Lord.” For these individuals, their Christianity may be motivated by a desire for social respectability and status. Reluctance to go the next step to “saved” may be related to the expectation that salvation involves a through-going life change: “[Salvation] is giving up of certain behaviors in our lives that do not please God”.

African women, however, testify to the beneficial changes that occur in their own lives when their husbands become born again:

Things have changed, things have changed. With the Lord in his life, things have changed. I now put on a dress and he admires me. He comes and greets me. The hug I used to cry for, he gives me. He cares for us, he has time for us. When he got saved, he put all his money in one account. We sit together, plan together. Income is shared together. He is the one who budgets. I trust him. We have no problem. He is completely changed. He used to pretend to be a quiet man, but now he is not. He cooks for us. [A man cooking is] not common among the Makiga [their tribe]. But my husband cooks because he is saved. I am very free to go out and preach the word of God. My husband keeps the children, cares for them, bathes them, prepares breakfast, packs for them as they go to school, corrects them. He really cares. He is a different man. I now have my dream husband, the one I had in my mind. The Lord has given him to me. He even prays. He even repents (Ssajjabbi 2007).

Similarly, Enid Origumisirinza, whose husband drank, abused Valium, womanized and kept a mistress before “giving his life to the Lord,” says of her husband:

He told me later, because he didn’t like what he was doing yet he was doing it, he had hated himself so much, he wanted to kill people to “make history.” He wanted to buy a gun and go into the marketplace and kill lots of people, then himself. That was his plan. The devil comes to steal and to destroy. But do you know what he used that money for [after he got saved]? He used that money to buy us clothes. So when he was coming back from Kampala, he bought things, and he didn’t even have a bag. He borrowed a

suitcase from my sister. Bought shoes for children, clothes for me. And when we were meeting him, we were all very happy. When he saw how the children were glad to receive the things, he really cried. He said, this is what I have missed, a relationship with my children.

Since that year, he prays more than me. He doesn't want us to say anything bad in the house. He pays for fees for the children. Christ changed him completely and completely.

Both of these women, interestingly, attribute their husbands' conversions to their own spiritual rebirth:

"I wanted my dream husband, but got the opposite. I joined a fellowship and started growing up spiritually. I renewed my salvation and fellowship in the Lord. Before I was always talking [at her husband]. I thought maybe I could affect him. My fellowship told me to go on my knees and pray. I read *The Power of a Praying Wife*, which says, "shut up and pray." So I stopped the talking and prayed for my husband for four years. (Ssajjabbi 2007).

The Church versus the Spirit

The impact of revival theology

Ndayirukiye, reporting on interviews she conducted in Burundi, writes that it was the Christian revivals there in the 1930s and 40s that "set [women] free from cultural bondage that they had lived for long...." Maari, wife of a retired Anglican bishop, similarly confirms the changes that came with revival:

Christianity was brought in by missionaries, mainly from Britain. My parents were born in pagan homes. My father passed away 2004. Mom still living. She is 84 years old now. Before Christianity, missionaries found our fathers and mothers practicing their hidden life, sacrificing even human beings, animals, and so on. They tell me before Christianity, the girl child would be just taken as not very important. They thought the male child would be able to take over family, be head of family. A girl would just be married. Her work was to be a factory of children, to give childbirth, work, grow food, and look after children and home. Man was supposed to protect the family and to do things that were hard, like fighting, and leadership and headship of the family. Girls would be given into marriage when they were still young; mainly the [parents] wanted to get riches from these young girls. If one had many girls, you know you would be rich, get many cows and become really wealthy.

Question: How many cows did Bishop pay for you?

No, the bishop, he never paid any cows. Because it was a modern, a Christian marriage. So he never had to look for any cows. But even the girl would marry a very old man, would not even know who that man was, until the child was taken to the home. He would pay many cows, because they [the girl's parents] would know that man could afford them. When Christianity came, that made all the difference (2007).

The East African revival started in the southern Uganda/northern Rwandan area. As Maari tells it, the revival was a lay movement carried out by Africans, rather than an organized effort of the European missionaries. She said that many ministers in the Anglican Church at that point functioned as civil servants and were themselves only nominal Christians. (Indeed, another

of my Ugandan sources says that some bishops and priests today are motivated more by social status and income than by Christian devotion).

The hallmark of revival was confession of sins. Maari tells how, “Other people were attracted to see people repenting. People would gather around, curious to see what was being repented of, stealing, killing people even. They repented of many things and received peace and great joy.”

Question: Would they go back and do things again?

No. Many changed their lives. When Christ entered in their lives, they were completely changed. My parents told me, when they got their testimony, never did those things again. They got joy, fellowship with each other in love, giving out things for those who were lacking in things, sharing life, whatever the cost.

John Ssenyonyi identified three key elements of revival:

Three things stand out in revival that had a lot of impact on family life. As Christians we walk in the light. These things are: (1) transparency, even in marriage. Be transparent to one another. Do not have things that you are concealing. (2) Have that element of brokenness. When told about something, there is a tendency for men to think, I am right, and where I stand is the right place. Instead, listen to the advice your wife gives you about how to spend money, how to raise children. In brokenness, learn that you don't have to stand on your own ways, but rather be willing to listen to another, be counseled. This allows us to come down instead of exalting oneself and saying, I am the one who knows, I am the one that is running the show here. (3) The third is repentance. When you

are really in a situation of sin it is impossible to have genuine repentance without brokenness. Make a total U-turn. I will not continue in the way I have been walking.

Transparency, brokenness and repentance are spiritual values that conflict directly with status seeking, hierarchy, and maintenance of honor. To the extent that the formal church values status and hierarchy, it conflicts with the spirit as well. Thus within the church, spousal abuse, while not encouraged, may be possible. An example of the impact of this difference can be seen in an observation mentioned in the introduction. Theology professor Steven Tracy visited Congo in 2007 to teach on Christian marriage, sexuality, the value and dignity of women, and healing from sexual abuse. He writes, “From the first day on pastors publicly challenged our teaching and declared Scripture to teach that a husband is a woman’s lord and she must literally bow down before him (supported by a citation of Psalm 45:11).⁹” When marriage is defined in terms of hierarchy, without challenging traditions such as kneeling, it is not surprising that Tracy found high rates of abuse, even by the pastors. Fortunately, by the end of his workshop, the men came forward with a document apologizing for “abusing their wives, for dishonoring women, for not loving and serving their wives as husbands are commanded to, and for dominating and not respecting women in their churches”

Conclusions

Denying that people are entitled to use others to serve their own purposes, the early Jesus movement challenged the ancient patriarchy in which it was embedded. In a similar way, Christianity belief today challenges customary African practices, many of which are detrimental to women. Patriarchal values such as aggression, dominance, unwillingness to admit mistake or

⁹ “The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord.”

wrong doing, and pride are replaced with transparency, mutual submission, a willingness to defy cultural definitions of shame, and the ability to say, “I’m sorry.” Men give up self-indulgence and waste in order to work with their wives to care for children and build up the household.

The virtues promulgated by the spiritual side of Christianity – community, self-sacrificing love, and egalitarianism – are often not those espoused by the church as a formal institution. Citing the economic reasons for the traditional sexual division of labor, I showed why public institutions in the pre-industrial world almost always become hierarchical, dominated by men, and indifferent or hostile to female leadership.

Despite the dichotomy I set up in the title of this paper, ‘the church versus the spirit’, I do not mean that the Christian churches were never helpful to Africa women. I do suggest, however, that there is little about the institutional aspects of the church that are beneficial in themselves. To the extent that it reinforces and reflects the male imperative for power, the church is co-opted and becomes just another arm of patriarchy. In contrast, ethical behaviors, including self-sacrificing love motivated by personal religious experience and commitment, enables the adherents of a religious or moral system to live in accordance with its values *despite* the fact that these values may demand behavior that is at odds with the prevailing economic and social structure. Based on interviews in Africa, it appears that the practice of such values have so far proven to be to the benefit of men as well as women on several dimensions.

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