

## CHAPTER 2

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### **The “Man of God”**

#### Understanding Biblical Influence on Contemporary Mega-Church Prophets in Zimbabwe

#### **Abstract**

Different names are used to refer to various religious functionaries across the World Religions. In Zimbabwean Christianity, there is a group of Christian officials who are currently popularly known as “men of God.” This article argues that this title is one of the many influences of the Bible on contemporary Christianity, since its use is dependent on its biblical usage, especially regarding the extra-ordinary and miraculous events surrounding Elijah and Elisha. The title is used eighty times in the Christian Bible and seventy-nine of these are in the Old Testament. In our analysis of both its Old Testament and contemporary usage, the title is used to acknowledge the qualitative difference between all human beings and the few men (and women) who are specially chosen to be God’s representatives. These specially chosen functionaries are more than simply human, and do more than simple human beings do. “Man of God” is understood as a continuation of biblical traditions.

#### **Introduction**

The advent of prophets in Zimbabwean Christianity can be traced back to the early decades of the twentieth century, during the period that African Initiated Churches were founded and planted across Zimbabwe. The most prominent among these prophets were Samuel Mutendi of the Zion Christian Church, Johanne Marange of the African Apostolic Church as well as Johanne Masowe of the Apostolic Sabbath Church of God (Daneel 1971:339, Mukonyora 1998:191-207, Gunda 2012:335-36). Since then, every generation of African Christians, with special reference to Zimbabwean Christians, has seen its own prophets. Some of these prophets have continued in the heritage of these pioneering prophets of AICs while others have added on to the heritage, especially when one focuses on Zimbabwean Pentecostal prophets. This latter

brand of prophets in Zimbabwe was locally popularized by Ezekiel Guti, founder and leader of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, Forward in Faith (ZAOGA FIF). However, the current discussions surrounding prophets and prophecy in Zimbabwe are largely inspired by another brand of Pentecostal prophets, the mega-church prophets. Among this class are Emmanuel Makandiwa and Uebert Angel, founders of the United Family International Church and the Spirit Embassy respectively.

There is so much that has captured the imagination of Zimbabweans when one looks at these two leading figures among the mega-church prophets currently operating in Zimbabwe: from their lavish and materially extravagant lifestyles, including the latest and very expensive cars such as a Lamborghini and Bentley for Angels and a Mercedes S600 for Makandiwa. These prophets also claim to possess spiritual healing powers that few can rival, and to being able to bless followers materially, including the so-called “miracle money”<sup>1</sup> where followers find money in their pockets and bank accounts (*Daily news*, 06 February 2013; *Newsday*, 16 January 2013; *Newsday*, 08 January 2013; <http://nehandaradio.com/category/news/page/5/>; *The Herald*, 05 January 2013; *Newsday*, 30 January 2013; *The Standard*, 06 January 2013) that cannot be accounted for through normal accounting procedures. Makandiwa has also come up with his “miracle weight loss”<sup>2</sup> where the prophet commands fat to burn and people instantly lose weight (*The Sunday Mail*, 13 February 2013). Makandiwa has also been associated with miracle babies where it is reported that the United Family International Church leader assisted a couple to conceive and give birth after three days (*The Herald*, 21 Febru-

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- 1 Miracle money remains unexplained! There are claims, however, of people finding money in their pockets, which they did not have previously. Such claims are also made regarding bank account balances, where accounts are believed to be credited with money that cannot be accounted for through normal accounting procedures. In a meeting with the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Makandiwa and Angel appeared to suggest that all they do is recover lost money and return it to its rightful owners, which seems to contradict the initial claims surrounding miracle money.
  - 2 Miracle weight loss is among the claims being made by the mega-church superstar prophets. People who have allegedly battled weight problems are prayed for and their excess fats are commanded by word of mouth to burn instantly. Interestingly, in one of the videos, it appears that only women lose weight and only from their waist downwards since only skirts were visibly oversized while their tops remained of the right size.

ary 2013). All these are interesting facets of this new brand of prophets in Zimbabwe; however, this study focuses on another aspect which has a bearing on all the claims we have just highlighted above. These prophets are among the few religious functionaries in Zimbabwe who use the title “man of God” extensively and exclusively either through self-propagating or by accepting the title when it is used by their followers. This study therefore traces the biblical roots of the phrase “man of God” and investigates how the biblical texts on “man of God” have influenced the self-understanding and claims being made by Zimbabwean prophets.

### **“Man of God” in the Bible: statistical analysis**

The phrase “man of God” occurs eighty times in the Christian Bible. Of the eighty times that this phrase is used, only once is it used in the New Testament, precisely in 1 Tim. 6:11. The New Testament text (1 Tim. 6:11) seems not to have found favour with the Zimbabwean ‘men of God’ due to the insinuations of the text especially the preceding verses. The text, especially 1 Timothy 6:9-10, outlines what the “man of God” should guard against by saying

<sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. <sup>11</sup> But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness (1 Tim. 6:9-10 <sup>RSV</sup>).

As the only text in the New Testament that talks about the “man of God”; the text, unfortunately, is in bad taste for many “men of God” whose messages predominantly focus on the prosperity gospel (Machingura, 2011:212). It is our contention therefore that the use of the title ‘man of God’ for contemporary religious functionaries in Zimbabwe is not overly dependent on this New Testament understanding, especially since those using it seem to also be the gospel of prosperity preachers.

While the phrase “man of God” is only used once in the New Testament, it is predominantly used in the Old Testament. Interestingly, it is the Old Testament portrayal of the “man of God” that appears to be the basis upon which some individuals in Zimbabwe claim to be “men of God”. The distribution of the phrase “man of God” is interesting to observe. Following the canonical arrangement of the books, the phrase

appears for the first time in Deut. 33:1 with reference to Moses. Interestingly, this is the only time that this phrase is used in the Pentateuch, a section of the Old Testament that is largely concerned with the law of the Lord. It then appears again once in Joshua (14:6) and twice in Judges (13:6, 8). In Joshua the reference is once again to Moses while in Judges it is used with reference to the angel of God who announced the birth of Samson. In short, the phrase “man of God” is used four times in the first seven books of the Old Testament. There are five references to “man of God” in 1 Samuel (2:27; 9:6, 7, 8, 10) and it occurs seven times in 1 and 2 Chronicles (1 Chr.23:14, 2 Chr.8:14; 11:2; 25:7, 9; 30:16). In these texts, it is used to refer to Moses, David and some prophets. It also occurs once in Ezra (3:2) and twice in Nehemiah (12:24, 36) where it is used with reference to Moses and David respectively. There is also reference to Moses the “man of God” in Psalm 90:1 as well as Igdaliah the “man of God” in Jeremiah 35:4. These uses amount to twenty-one uses out of the seventy-nine occurrences in the Old Testament, the remaining occurrences are limited to the books of Kings where the phrase occurs fifty-eight times.

In these fifty-eight occurrences, there is reference to Shemaiah, a prophet (1Kgs. 12:22), while the phrase occurs frequently in 1 Kgs.13 (vss. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 19, 21, 23, 26, 29, 31) as well as in 2 Kgs. 23: 16 and 17 where it is used to designate the unnamed man of God who came from Judah. This unnamed “man of God” is credited with making prophecies against Bethel and foretelling the coming of King Josiah centuries later (Crenshaw 1971:41-2, Cogan and Tadmor 1988:299-300). There is also reference to another unnamed man of God in 1 Kgs. 20:28. The title “Man of God” appears in several texts (1Kgs.17:18, 24; 2Kgs.1:9, 10, 11, 12, 13) as a designation of Elijah and as a designation of Elisha in 2 Kgs. 4: 7, 9, 16, 21, 22, 25, 27, 40, 42; 5: 8, 14, 15, 20; 6: 6, 9, 10, 15; 7: 2, 17, 18, 19; 8: 2, 4, 7, 8, 11; 13: 19. While the “man of God” who came from Judah is only identified through this phrase, however, the manner in which this phrase is used for Elijah and Elisha coupled with the popularity of these figures in Christian communities means our investigation of the influence of the biblical “man of God” on contemporary men of God should largely focus on these two individuals. Of the fifty-eight times that the phrase occurs in Kings, on thirty-four occasions it is with reference to either Elijah or Elisha, and it is often qualified by extraordinary demonstrations of miraculous power.

## “Man of God” in the Bible: Characterizations

The title “man of God” is one among many titles that are applied to a select group of individuals alongside and as interchangeable to “prophet”, “seer” and “prophets”, especially in the story of the lost donkeys of Saul where Samuel (1 Sam. 9:6-10) is described as prophet, seer and man of God (Lamb 2010:176). From this background it is apparent that the title “man of God” is not a general designation for all created beings but rather an exclusive title for the few “men (possibly women also)” who stand in a very intimate and close relationship with God. Indeed, “the man of God is a specially set aside individual who is essentially a manifestation of the divine hence protected by the divine and in instances where such divinity is not respected, the divine reserves the right to avenge” (Gunda 2012:345). This makes sense when one considers that in the entire Pentateuch; only Moses is labelled man of God. A closer analysis of Deut. 33:1 shows that “the superscription uses the phrase ‘the man of God’ to refer to Moses as does Joshua 14:6 and Ps. 90. The same title is frequently used of “prophets or messengers of God” (Driver 1973:389). Texts that refer to Moses as “man of God” clearly show that there is some qualitative difference between Moses and all other Israelites. Moses is different, he relates differently with God and he accesses God differently from all other created beings. It is this difference between Moses and ordinary men and women that mark him out as man of God.

“Man of God” is an outstanding individual, an “*Übermensch*” (Glover 2006:452) suggesting an individual who is literally “above men”. This is a title that places some mortals above other mortals, especially because of the things that they can accomplish. Chapter 33 of Deuteronomy is labelled the Blessing of Moses and it consists of a series of benedictions pronounced upon the different tribes of Israel (even though Simeon is not recognized) (Driver 1973:385). Moses stands as the founding father blessing his descendants, and this comes after he had received the law from Yahweh and had passed on the same to the Israelites. The law that is interchangeably called the Law of the Lord or the Law of Moses is central in understanding why Moses is qualified as “man of God”. No other individual had been this close to God! Being “above men”, “Moses thereby gives to each tribe his own gift of divine understanding and power, and at the same time the diverse gifts and characteristics of each tribe are recognized and affirmed to be gifts of God” (Clements

1998:534). This is similarly important that the blessings given by Moses are as good as blessings given by God because the man of God stands for God, his actions are God's actions.

This understanding of "man of God" is equally attested in the Elijah and Elisha narratives. The outstanding nature of Elijah is suggested in insinuations that "supports the suspicion that where Elijah, life or speech are, YHWH is never far away" (Glover 2006:450). Yahweh, the God of Israel, is always hovering around the "man of God", suggesting that proximity to the "man of God" is essentially proximity to Yahweh. This creates the impression that Elijah "will stride the earth like some Yahwistic *übermensch*, unperturbed by the droughts and distances of earth. He is the prophet who 'stands before the Lord.' The words of Elijah and YHWH share a common authority and ability to shape the future" (Glover 2006:452, 453). The things that constrain men and women cannot constrain the man of God who is essentially standing under the shadow of God, sharing in the authority of God, which gives him the power to command the "jar of meal not to be emptied and the jug of oil not to fail until the day that the lord sends rain on the earth (1 Kgs. 17:14-24)" (Gunda 2012:346). The "man of God" represents life because God is life. As Glover observes, there is much symbiosis between Yahweh and "man of God" that it is difficult if not impossible to separate their effects on the community. "If the speech of Elijah and YHWH has a similar effect, so also does their presence. The story begins with an apparent association between YHWH and certain substances of nourishment—above all water. Their abundance (e.g. in the widow's house, 17.14-16) points to the presence of God. Their scarcity (e.g. the drought, 17.1-7) is suggestive of divine absence" (Glover 2006:453 cf. Gunda 2011:146). This is particularly important in searching for the effects of these narratives on contemporary manifestations, the "man of God" represents abundance wherever the "man of God" is present and the same applies to God.

In short, the title "man of God" is used to describe some outstanding individuals who are believed to have a special relationship with God. It is mostly used to refer to individuals who are sometimes called "prophets", "seers", and "visionaries." The title is used interchangeably with these other titles, especially in 1 Samuel 9. In the narrative of 1 Kings 13 as well as the Elijah-Elisha narratives, the title appears to be simply an equivalent of prophet. The man of God is associated with extraordinary

demonstration of miraculous power, which is seen as the result of being a direct representative of God (Gunda 2012:340). Being in the presence of the “man of God” is understood as being in the presence of God since the “man of God” possesses and uses the power of God.

## **The Influence of the “Man of God” Texts on Contemporary Prophets**

While the authenticity and veracity of the Bible is roundly questioned in academic circles, African manifestations of Christianity (barring a few exceptions that disregard the Bible as being “stale food” such as the Johane Masowe groups (Engelke 2004)) has been thoroughly and extensively “biblical.” Most African Christians take their Bible seriously as the be-all in terms of deciding what they should do as Christians, if not in their actual daily lives then at least in public discussions. Biblical examples and injunctions are therefore actively sought to justify and rationalize what to do, how to do it, when to do it and why to do it. In such contexts, it should not be surprising therefore that contemporary claimants to the title “man of God” present themselves as descendants of the line of the specially chosen few who stood before God and who shared in God’s authority. In one incident Makandiwa was quoted in the print media confirming his election in one of his sermons when he said that (*The Herald*, 03 January 2013):

The Lord told me “Tell Zimbabweans to change their focus. Everyone is saying diamonds, diamonds, but I see another precious mineral for Zimbabwe ... gold will be picked up from the ground. Mysteriously gold will be appearing everywhere. As I was praying I saw a wind blowing and I saw gold coming to the surface. People are going to be picking up gold without any drilling. You know what they say about the water table? One has to dig first before accessing water, but with this one there is no drilling needed. Those people who have been looked down upon will be picking up gold like they are picking up stones. The Lord told me ‘This is for my people’,” said the UFIC spiritual father to wild applause.

The sermon on the night was premised on 2 Kings 7 where the lives of the Israelites were transformed from poverty to plenty in one day following the declaration of Elisha, the “man of God”. Makandiwa’s statement confirms what most of the Pentecostal Christians’ understanding of the Bible and the pastors involved in ministry as ‘mouthpieces and God’s representatives’. The contemporary claimants reject the idea of “the end

of inspiration” as contradicting the dictates of the Bible, the Word of God. In the Bible, it is clear that “after his dramatic victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah is portrayed as spiraling into a suicidal depression, in the midst of which Yahweh informs him that he has chosen his successor” (Lamb 2010:172). In short, the understanding is that God intended to always have a representative or representatives among human beings, hence the choice of a successor for Elijah is not only specific, it is also representative. In reaching this observation we are indebted to earlier observations by Robert Carroll (1969:401) when he states: “The institution of prophecy was to be a continuous and permanent office constantly supplying the people of Israel with a covenant mediator who would recreate the role of Moses for the nation.” This understanding is critical in trying to understand the contemporary manifestations of Christian prophets both among AICs as well as among the Pentecostal movements.

As noted earlier, the biblical “man of God” is essentially more than simply a human being, he or she is divine-human being because he embodies an amalgamation of his mortal nature and the immortal nature of God, sharing in the fate of humanity yet exercising the power and authority of God. The performance of miracles and other such paranormal activities is understood in the context of their divinity. All things that God can do can be done by the “man of God” hence the idea that where the man of God is, God cannot be far away (Glover 2006:450). It is not surprising that, such ‘men of God’ attract big crowds as in the case of Makandiwa whose followers stampede in order to have access to the front seats in the auditorium where they will be closer to the ‘man of God’ (<http://www.intozimbabwe.com/top-news/zimbabwe/3016-18-injured-in-stampede-to-see-prophet-makandiwa.html>). In another incident, the Spirit Embassy Ministries Church founder, Uebert Angel had to abandon his food from a fast food outlet in Gweru and flee from members of the public, who had thronged the premises and started jostling to greet the “man of God” (*The Chronicle*, 24 October 2012). The popular preacher Uebert Angel and his body guards had to dash into their vehicles and flee, leaving their food which was still being prepared after members of the public swarmed the food outlet and started jostling to greet the Harare-based preacher-cum prophet. Those who managed to evade the human wall made by Prophet Angel’s bodyguards would kneel on the tarmac before greeting him. One of the few who had the chance to shake hands with Prophet Angel claimed that they were “blessed” as a



result of shaking hands with the “man of God” (*The Chronicle*, 24 October 2012). The man who appeared to have entered into a trance soon after shaking hands with Prophet Angel said “Thank God, I am now a new man. I am blessed to have been greeted by this great man of God”.

The people who flock around the “man of God” or who seek the presence of the “man of God” are in essence seeking the presence of God. In the case of Zimbabwe, prominent musicians like Leonard Karikoga Zhakata, gospel diva Joyce Simeti, Mahendere Brothers, Peter Moyo, Sulumani Chimbetu, Diva Mafunga and Biggie Tembo (Jnr) among many others have deserted their old churches to join thousands of people attending Makandiwa’s church ([newsdzezimbabwe.com](http://newsdzezimbabwe.com)). Followers of the popular “men of God” have gone to the extent of putting stickers that identify them with their “men of God” on their cars, office chairs (where they usually sit) and their Bibles. It is now common in Harare to see private cars owned by for most of Makandiwa’s followers with stickers with the UFIC logo with words like “*Ndiri mwana wemuporofita* – I am a child of the prophet”. It is also interesting that, followers of the “man of God” as in the case of Makandiwa and Angel are very conservative, defensive and sometimes resort to abusive or threatening language whenever their “men of God” are criticized. Christine Vuta, who christened herself ‘*mwana wamuprofita* or child of the prophet’ did not take lightly to people who criticized Makandiwa and Angel on the ‘miracle baby of three days and miracle money episodes’ by saying:

I write as an ordinary member of United Family International Church (UFIC). I challenge the critics of my spiritual fathers to pray that they be granted the spirit of discernment so that they know the spirit behind these men of God. If you are [a] genuine Christian; then you will see that these servants of God are led by the spirit of truth. They are vessels (men of God) that the Lord has chosen to bring about spiritual revival in Zimbabwe. I have heard careless statements like ‘Makandiwa is neither God nor Jesus’. True but he has heeded the call by Jesus which he told his disciples in John 14:12. Why should people have problems when greater miracles are performed, for instance, instant weight loss and gold appearing in peoples’ hands? (*The Sunday Mail*, 24 February-2 March 2013).

Vuta, just like many followers of these Pentecostal mega-churches, regards what the “men of God” miraculously do as fulfillment of the ‘word of God’. Takura Mukwati (*The Herald*, 10 July 2012; *The Herald*, 26 Feb-

ruary 2013), a pastor in the UFIC, was quoted in *The Herald* threatening those who criticized Makandiwa by saying:

Born of a prophet, in this article, I am going to answer a bit of this question. A prophet is a man of insight to the will and purposes of God (Amos 3 v 7). A prophet is a man who sits in the cabinet with the Almighty and can hear the discussions of heaven and can bring them to men. Our father in the Lord Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, in United Family International Church, is a typical example of a prophet of that calibre whom the Lord has given to us as a gift. He is amongst the Prophets who are the eyes and minds of God, members of the heavenly cabinet. That is why there is always a violent reaction from the heavens when his prophets (Makandiwa included) are touched, embarrassed, harassed, persecuted or killed. Touching a prophet is a shortcut to the grave according to Psalms 105: 14-15, graves of sicknesses, poverty, misfortunes, even spiritual and physical death.

If in times past, Elijah's deeds were a confirmation of the spoken word of God; contemporary "men of God" see themselves or are seen by their followers as being legitimized through the written word of God while at the same time they authenticate the word of God. Josephine Chuma (*Daily news*, 07 August 2012) adds her voice by claiming that:

Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa is a real man of God. He does not claim to have powers but he has got the power of God. He has been anointed by God to deliver people who believe in God from the evil works of the devil. Those who believe have been made to prosper in all aspects of their lives including health, finances, education only to name a few. The anointing upon Prophet Makandiwa involves a multiplicity of blessings which includes wisdom, favour, honour and protection from evil forces and misfortunes.

And in most cases the authentication of their inextricable connection to the divine is through the performance of miracles as witnessed at Makandiwa and Angel's Church services (*Daily news*, 26 June 2011; *Newsday*, 10 August 2012). According to Pastor Ndhlovu of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (interviewed, 19 February 2013), the danger that we have today is that of people who think we can relive the world of the Old Testament "men of God". For him, the calibre of prophets we have are 'fake, hucksters and empire builders' who hide behind the Bible to milk unsuspecting people. Antonia Sigauke (interviewed, 18 February 2013) posed the following questions in response to threats that are usually churned out by followers of the Zimbabwean "men of God":

Why should prophets not be questioned? When they become prophets, do they cease to be human beings and become infallible? This is setting a dangerous precedent of not subjecting the prophets to the test of scripture and soundness according to the word of God. Why should the prophets be afraid of being questioned? Why is it some of them get arrested for committing heinous crimes like: rape, theft and murder?

Critics of the contemporary “men of God” find it very difficult to reconcile the influence of the “man of God” texts on the contemporary Zimbabwean prophets, especially when it comes to their flashy lifestyles in the context of the poverty of their followers. Yet followers of such “men of God” see it differently. Not only does the man of God read the text of the Bible, he acts it out in his own words and the followers become the recipients of the benefits of the presence of the divine, which is characterized by the abundance of health, wealth and well-being (Glover 2006:453). The followers and those in the presence of the man of God; “witness to the inexhaustible jar of meal and jug of oil in their own lives” (1 Kgs.17) (Gunda 2012:346). This text is re-enacted week in, week out until the followers start proclaiming to themselves, to the man of God and to others who stand outside: ‘Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth’(1 Kgs.17:24). Such texts are read to show what God did through a chosen vessel, in a way that convinces the followers and listeners of the authenticity of what the contemporary prophet is going to do in the name of God. Elijah and the contemporary prophet are similar, they are specially chosen by God and they need each other. The Biblical narrative legitimizes the current prophet but the current prophet makes an unbelievable Biblical narrative believable by re-enacting it” (Gunda 2012:346). The motto for the contemporary man of God is simple, the unbelievable is godly! (Gunda 2011:147). The same motto has become the slogan for the majority of followers in these mega churches where the ‘men of God’ are regarded as ‘friends of God’ who know the mind of God.

### **Concluding Observations**

Among the many titles that are being appropriated by contemporary prophets in Zimbabwe is the title “man of God”. While it has always been used by Christians, it appears that its use was given a new lease of life by Pentecostal religious functionaries. Within Zimbabwe, the role of

Guti in popularizing this title cannot be overstated. However, the rise of a class of mega-church superstar prophets at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century in Zimbabwe made this title even more popular. Ordinary Christians excite their prophet into prophesying by consistently urging him on using the title “man of God.” It is a title that acknowledges that some men and women are in a better position to commune with God than others. These privileged individuals can become bridges that help others cross flooded rivers between their sinful lives and the holy lives demanded by God.

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