
This fine book, the second title in *The Anthropology of Christianity* series, is a history and ethnography of the Zimbabwean Friday Masowe Church (Masowe weChishanu Church), famous for its refusal to use the Bible. Its members are ‘the Christians who don’t read the Bible’ (2), believing it to be an inert object whose absurd veneration by other Christians distracts them from the true business of establishing a vibrant relationship with God.

This book seeks to make sense of this phenomenon by treating it as an extreme form of Protestantism. Rather like the Quakers, the Friday Masowe Church strives to elude, or at least minimize, material mediation in the search for a direct relationship with God. In their terms, they seek a faith which is ‘live and direct’, a phrase which echoes through the book and which Engelke seeks to locate anthropologically, theologically and performatively.

The book makes good use of what we might term the ‘material turn’ in the humanities and social sciences. In response to the longstanding dominance of the written word as the privileged site of analysis, there have been burgeoning debates on the materiality of text and culture. These new approaches recognize that the materiality of texts and objects has to be factored into any work of interpretation. The meanings of this materiality are not self-evident. How objects are made to mean is a complex issue in its own right, requiring an anthropological grasp of the strategies through which people, objects and words are aligned in different contexts. The rubric that Engelke uses for these processes is that of ‘semiotic ideology’.

Religion is an excellent field through which to approach these questions as it poses the problems in acute and clear form. Since the sacred has always to be mediated, the material form of such mediation becomes of particular analytical moment. In the case of the Friday Masowe Church, this problem takes a fascinating form. How does one manage the material forms of mediation to make them seem immaterial? How does one ‘make worship biblical without the Bible’ (188)? This is a question of broad relevance for all religions that tend to be media-savvy while studiously underplaying or denying the self-conscious fashioning of such media in favour of a position that seeks to portray the sacred as being as unmediated as possible.

The book provides a fine-grained and sustained account of these processes, examining an account of the founder himself; the historiographies that the church produces of itself; and how ordinary members practice *mutemo* (an unwritten body of law/knowledge governing religious life in the church). The latter half of the book comprises a wonderful ethnography of the expressive and healing forms of the church and the aesthetic effects these create.

The book provides a sustained and rich sense of how the effect of immateriality is managed. The church-generated histories and memories of the church founder Johane Masowe (born Shoniwa Masedza) and the prophets who followed him consciously pay little attention to the actual body and relics of the prophet, eschewing any attempt to turn such objects into distracting items of veneration. Engelke relates how he unwittingly committed something of an ecclesiastical solecism when he presented members of the church with the only known picture of their founder. Engelke had located the image in the National Archives and had assumed church members would be interested. The photo
evoked puzzlement: 'The picture was nice to have, said one of my friends, but what could an apostolic do with it? It was just a picture!' (110).

How members understand and implement mutemo similarly strives towards the immaterial. The unwritten form of these ideas works against the idea of fixed dogma: ‘mutemo is a process of becoming that can never be complete. This apostolic “law” is also a “knowledge” that unfolds’ (246).

The analysis of the services themselves examines how an impression of a ‘live and direct’ faith is enacted. Engelke examines ritual language (deep Shona and a sprinkling of invented words known as ‘ancient Hebrew’) and linguistic styles of prophecy which interestingly are uttered very softly (since the Holy Spirit does not shout) and depends on ‘human megaphones’ to amplify the message. A chapter on the use of song and singing is particularly fine and examines the way in which hymns (known as maverse) and the voices that sing them form a privileged way to make God present. The chapter examines the different roles that maverse play in services and how they enable rank-and-file participation. This emphasis on the full range of the religious sensorium is important and opens up interesting insights into possible histories of sound.

The penultimate chapter of the book examines three objects—pebbles, water and honey—that feature in the healing practices of the church. Engelke gives a masterly reading of how these objects are made to appear immaterial. One strategy is by referring to the objects as muteuro or prayers. Holy medicines hence appear to be words rather than objects. In other cases, the objects, like pebbles, are so commonplace that they appear almost semiotically void. At the same time, these objects are also carefully defined in opposition to the objects used by traditional healers and spirit mediums against which the apostolics define themselves. However, the management of meaning is not always smooth and holy honey provides a proverbial sticking point, being mistaken by some as an object in its own right rather than a passive medium for God’s presence.

In its method, much of the book depends on a collage of mini-biographies of various players in the church. These are embedded in a detailed picture of the meeting ground of the church (in Chitungwiza, the township of Harare) to which the book constantly returns. Entitled Juranifiri Santa (the place of healing), this site is where thousands of members, clad in simple and identical white robes, gather in the open air, rain and shine. Unencumbered by buildings or altars, its boundaries and ‘walls’ are created by the thousands of white-clad bodies and voices in song. Between the biographies and the layered sense of this meeting place, the book recreates the religious experience of this group for the reader in a way that is ‘live and direct’.

The research for the book stretched across seven years from 1993 to 1999, a period of transition for Zimbabwe and hence for the church itself. The conclusion provides a brief update after 2000 when the prophet of Juranifiri Santa, Godfrey Nzira, drew the church into ZANU-PF politics, much to the consternation of old-timers. Having entered a dangerous game, Nzira soon burnt his own fingers and was charged with nine counts of rape, possibly a trumped-up charge because he had fallen into disfavour with ZANU-PF leaders. As Engelke makes clear elsewhere in the book, the church itself is in transition with some elders wondering whether they should be starting to write down their history. Another debate is whether they should be making and selling cassettes of their ever-popular hymns. This book is a snapshot of a church at a particular moment, and these questions of transitions hovering at the edge of the text cannot be fully answered. One is left hoping for a part