Spirit media: charismatics, traditionalists, and mediation practices in Ghana

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Christ Temple

Holy Spirit ritual and the born-again subject

Introduction

‘Welcome to Solution Centre’ I read in coloured, animated graphics projected on the screen in the Christ Temple. In front of it, the pastor on stage motivates people to lift up their voice and pray to God. About three hundred praying voices fill the auditorium. It is my first day in Accra, Thursday 7 March 2002, and I have come to a Power Point supported prayer meeting. After three praise and worship songs backed with drums, trumpets, and guitars, pastor Dan starts preaching loudly in the mike. Hidden behind the large loudspeakers, a technician sits at a laptop to lard the pastor’s stage performance with attractively designed Power Point slides.

Suddenly a power cut puts an end to both the beamer and the mike. Pastor Dan resorts to calling the people to prayer in preparation for the anointing. Walking among the congregation, he loudly prays in tongues - rabachakabaratu reemmmparamuratarabuka - until the light returns and the sermon continues. Five minutes later the light goes off again. Now he carries on without mike. Standing on one of the front row seats he shouts on top of his voice:

When we anoint you, what you receive is the power of the Holy Ghost, divine deliverance. The anointing humbles the Devil. We anoint you with physical olive oil, but the Spirit comes upon you. It is physical smearing of oil, yet what comes upon you is the Spirit of God.

Then people are called to come forward for the climax, the anointing. From behind people start queuing and I doubt whether to go or not. When the end of the queue has reached my row, I stand up and join the queue. Three pastors stand in front of the stage with cups of olive oil. When it is their turn, people lift

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1 Samuel 16:13, 14, 16</th>
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<td><strong>To anoint means to:</strong></td>
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<td>destroy the yoke</td>
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<td>receive the power of God</td>
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It helps you to:

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Then people are called to come forward for the climax, the anointing. From behind people start queuing and I doubt whether to go or not. When the end of the queue has reached my row, I stand up and join the queue. Three pastors stand in front of the stage with cups of olive oil. When it is their turn, people lift
up their hands and close their eyes. The pastor dips his right hand in the oil, places it on the head of the person, and starts praying for God’s power to come upon him or her. Most people fall backwards and are caught by the ushers behind them. It takes a mere twenty seconds before the person is pushed away again and returns to his/her seat, one after the other. Despite this ‘assembly line production,’ I start feeling nervous the closer I get to the pastor. When it is my turn, I go forward, stand in front of the pastor and do what I have seen the others do. I lift up my hands and close my eyes and feel the oily hand on my forehead. The strong pressure of the hand pushes me backward a bit and I surrender myself to the firm hands of the woman behind me holding my upper arms. The pastor screams ‘may this anointing bring the power of the Holy Ghost upon you’ and before I realise I am pushed away already and walk back to my seat. People look at me. What do they see? A new person full of freshness and newness? Divine touch? I haven’t experienced it. I smell the olive oil in my hair and feel a drip running down my forehead. I quickly wipe it away with my hanky and wonder whether this would be sacrilege.

This anointing session presents a stark contrast to the intellectualist public image and message of Otabil examined in the previous chapter. Despite Otabil’s critique on the Pentecostal overreliance on the power of the Holy Spirit and his emphasis on rational thinking and knowledge, his church offers ample opportunity for mediating the effective power of the Holy Spirit to those who long for it.1 This chapter discusses such practices of spiritual mediation that remain largely hidden from the public image of the ICGC. The anointing session also highlights that charismatic religious practice centres on the body. This holds for the application of oil and falling down in reception of the power of God as much as for listening to a sermon. Religious practice involves the performance of encoded, learned bodily behaviour, of discipline and what I have proposed to call format. At the same time, charismatic religious practice, as I was taught by pastors, believers, and publications, centers on the spontaneous, personal experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. This chapter deals with the tension between disciplinary structure and the sense of unmediated flow in practices of mediating Holy Spirit power in the Christ Temple. It thus builds on the similar tension between the perceived supernatural origin of charisma and its strategic marketing analysed in the previous chapter. That chapter established the constitution of religious authority through a convergence of charisma and marketing techniques. This chapter deals with the constitution of religious subjectivity through a convergence of spiritual and disciplinary power in the human body.

In the ICGC, a constant tension exists between the supposedly fluid nature and spontaneous experience of ‘Holy Ghost power’ and the disciplinary, institutionalised format that not only moulds people into ‘good Christians,’ but also evokes such spiritual experience. In its constitution the church addresses the tension between the free operation and manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the constraints of organization and government:

As the representative of Christ on earth, the Holy Spirit is the Person responsible for leading and guiding the Church. Where the Holy Spirit is, the Bible says
there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:17). This liberty grants us the opportunity not to be limited by our narrow expectations and the constraints of our environment. It also affords us the opportunity to allow for the freedom of the operations and diverse manifestations of God’s Spirit among us. At the same time the ICGC is aware of the scriptural command to do everything in order and decency (1 Cor. 14:40). The balance and harmony of these two scriptural provisions require a keen sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as well as a decent and orderly administration and execution of the vision given by our Lord. [...] ICGC is aware that we shall never get so organised that the Holy Spirit is blocked out from operating, but we also know that organization helps eliminate confusion so that we can display quality and excellence in all we do (4, emphasis mine, MdW).

Church discourse constantly reinforces and mobilises dichotomies between charisma and institution, Holy Spirit and structure, spontaneity and ritual, inner and outer person, body and spirit to shape born-again Christians. I wish to stress, however, that as much as these categories are relevant for the people concerned and appear as oppositions in their analysis, we cannot take them as analytical dichotomies. Having their origins in Protestantism such oppositions have become inherent to Western concepts of religion (Asad 1993; Meyer 2004a) and personhood. Maia Green (1996) has argued that the anthropological theory of embodiment has tended to conflate dominant discourse and practice, thus reproducing and universalising symbolic constructions of the body and dichotomies (body-mind, experience-representation), which are in fact locally and historically specific. Moreover, they are part of a religious language of authentication. It is important, then, to distinguish between dominant discourse and practice. Charismatic doctrine privileges the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the spontaneous manifestations of Holy Spirit power as authentic religious experience. It rejects, or at least mistrusts organisational and ritual structures for standing in the way of the free flow of Holy Spirit power. Religious practice, however, collapses these dichotomies. Their poles turn out to be inseparable and shape the born-again Christian in mutual entanglement. The experience of spirit flow does not come out of the blue, but is mediated by institutions, structures and rituals. At the same time it needs to be authenticated as spontaneous and immediate. This tension, again, is what I have identified in the introduction as the problem of mediation.

Let us return for a moment to Weber’s theory of charisma. Weber’s concern with organisational forms led him to emphasise the routinisation of charisma. Starting from a logical opposition between the flowing, spontaneous, and emotional character of charisma and fixed, institutionalised forms of authority and behaviour, Weber concluded that non-spontaneous, ritualised behaviour would destroy or at least counteract charisma. The routinisation of charisma, Weber predicted, would eventually lead to institutionalisation and the death of charisma. In his study of the charismatic Jamama movement, Johannes Fabian rejects this view and argues that ritualisation is not the same as routinisation, as would follow from Weber’s premises, but should rather be understood as counteracting routinisation (1971:181). Responding to Fabian’s suggestion to locate charisma in rhetoric and performance, Thomas Csordas moves the discussion of charisma further to the terrain of embodiment and self processes. In his
study of the American Catholic Charismatic Renewal he argues that ritualization of
practice and radicalization of charisma are two dimensions of the same process as rit-
ual practice came to be understood as a necessity for greater access to divine power
(1997:100). Further, and this is especially relevant, Csordas discusses how charisma, as
it becomes radicalised, is increasingly inscribed on the body and ritual practices,
including rhetoric, become techniques of the body. This emphasis on bodily perform-
ance can provide us with a theoretical link between notions of spiritual power and
institutional power (ibid.: 139).

In the previous chapter I have discussed the emphasis in Otabil’s message and
in charismatic-Pentecostal theology more generally on ‘transformation.’ This chapter
elaborates on the transformation of a person into a Christian subject. I argue that the
charismatic-Pentecostal transformation of the person is effected, ideally that is, in two
mutually constitutive ways, by two forms of religious power. In charismatic doctrine,
the unrestricted personal experience of Holy Ghost power transforms a person ‘from
within’ and eventually manifests ‘on the outside,’ in appearance and behaviour. At the
same time, the institutionalised power of the church organisation (based on reason,
supervision, control, format) transforms a person through particular bodily regimes
which prompt an experience of inner transformation. In conjunction with these two
forms of effective power, becoming a born-again Christian or an ICGC member
involves two kinds of knowledge and modes of learning (cf. Marks 1999).2
Representational knowledge is gained through a symbolic/discursive mode and tied
up with institutionalised power; embodied knowledge is gained through a mimetic
mode and tied up, as we shall see, with the experience of spiritual power. Church
membership requires submitting oneself to religious teaching and instruction, as for
instance in the obligatory and highly formalised ‘discipleship classes,’ sermons and
explanation of doctrines, but also to the numerous forms one has to fill in order to
progress through the membership trajectory. One thus learns through discourse that
being a born-again Christian entails a very personal, immediate relationship with
Jesus, a deep inner transformation, and a spontaneous ‘baptism’ by the Holy Spirit. As
a new convert (or an anthropologist), however, one also observes and mimics
(whether consciously or unconsciously) how and when to sit, take notes, stand, raise
one’s arms, kneel, fall down, jump, pray in tongues, dance and clap to the music, and
how to ‘trample on the Devil’ with one’s feet or stretch out one’s hand to ‘receive a
miracle.’ Through mimetic performance, then, one learns through the body and grad-
ually internalises a shared and prescribed format of bodily behaviour that makes one
part of, and indeed able to participate in the religious community.3 The personal
reception of the Holy Spirit that one experiences through proper participation in col-
lective worship seems to be less spontaneous than is taught. A tension thus exists
between on the one hand the personal experience and expression of spirit power, that
is much valued and encouraged in charismatic Pentecostalism and, on the other hand,
the bodily reproduction of a rather fixed mode of worship. The same tension exists
between conversion as a spontaneous spirit-induced act and the bureaucratic organi-
sation and membership procedures, that have come with the growth of the ICGC into
a mass church.

This chapter examines practices of mediating spiritual power that constitute
religious subjectivity through at first sight contradictory, yet inextricably merged processes of charismatic flow and ritual format. The first part looks at the relationship between body, space, and spirit in religious performance in the Christ Temple with a focus on the apparent contradiction between the promotion of personal experience of spiritual power and the performance ‘script’ that makes such experience possible. It also discusses the tension between Otabil’s rather rational teaching services and other, more ‘spiritual’ activities that also draw many non-members to the church. The second part looks at the ICGC’s supervisory and bureaucratic practices of binding people and shaping members. Again, the focus is on the paradoxical relation between the spiritual experience of being born again and the church’s elaborate technologies of governance.

Space, spirit, and body in Christ Temple

In the previous chapter I have described how Otabil’s charisma, and hence his religious authority, derives in part from a particular style of performance in particularly designed spaces, the relatively ‘public’ church stage and his private office. In this section I look more closely at the role of space and performance in the transmission of this charisma, of spiritual power, to the church congregation, and hence, in the constitution of religious subjectivity. The space in question is the ICGC’s Christ Temple, and in particular the ‘auditorium.’ After introducing the Christ Temple, I will discuss religious performance in the auditorium and show that the previously addressed distinction between ‘message’ and ‘miracle’ churches also exists within the ICGC and constitutes a major tension. The teaching services on Sundays and Tuesdays and the ‘Solution Centre’ and prayer meeting on Thursdays and Fridays respectively present us with two modes of mediating the Holy Spirit that are very different in performance.

Fig. 3.1 Christ Temple building and premises.
and audience participation, but are both spatially and bodily organised according to a ‘script’ that involves both the service leader and the worshippers.

From classroom to Christ Temple
Whereas at present the prestigious, 4000-seater Christ Temple cannot even accommodate the number of people attending a regular Sunday service, the first meeting of the International Central Gospel Church, on the 26th of February 1984, was held in a small classroom with just about twenty people. Because charismatics see the Spirit of God at work in, with, through, above, and beyond all events, all space is sacred space and all time is sacred time (Johns 1999:75). Any space can thus be turned into a worship space and any time can be worship time. It is not attributes, icons, or incense that make a space sacred, but the congregation of believers in the name of Christ. Taking inspiration from bible verse Matthew 18: 20, ‘For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, I am there in the midst of them,’ charismatic groups all over the world are using class rooms, private homes, theatre halls, stadiums and open spaces to come together, worship and establish a relationship with the spiritual. To accommodate its rapidly growing membership, the ICGC rented a garage and later a cinema hall, before moving to a scout hall in Central Accra, the Baiden Powell Memorial Hall, where it worshipped for ten years. Yet, even though a consecrated church building is not necessary to mediate between the congregation and God, as it is in the Catholic tradition for example, having an own church building is important for charismatics. Not only for practical reasons of not having to rent somebody else’s place, but also as a symbol of success and as a sign of God’s anointing upon the church. In 1996 the ICGC completed its own, huge church building at Abossey-Okay, the Christ Temple (fig. 3.1).

The story that circulates among church members about the struggles over the land on which it was built, point to the spiritual dimensions of building. Jenny, who has been a committed member for over ten years, told me the story as follows:

When Otabil stayed at Dansoman, any time he drove past this land, something very deep inside him told him that this is where he should build his church. This land was government land, earmarked for a mosque and a church. The mosque was there already, so then the ICGC bought this whole land. But when we wanted to start building, E.T. Mensah, the minister of Youth and Sports also claimed the land. They put down sign posts that this was property of the ministry so everybody should keep off. When we wanted to get the building permit, he made sure that we wouldn’t get it. Then one day, when E.T. Mensah was out of the country for a few days, we went to the A.M.A. [Accra Metropolitan Assembly] office and just that day the people were on strike. It was God who arranged it like that. Because then we used our money to pay our own workers. When E.T. Mensah came back there was nothing he could do again. But he came on TV to say that he wondered whom ‘this man Otabil’ bought the land from and where he got the permit to build. So he should stop building. But long ago, in 1985, during a revival held at this place, Reinhard...
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Fig. 3.2 Advertising Christianity and advertising education.

Fig. 3.3 Fence between Christ Temple compound and Odaw drain.
Fig. 3.4 Flag poles in front of the Christ Temple.

Fig. 3.5 Main entrance to the Christ Temple decorated for the occasion of the Come Fly with the Eagles conference 2003.
3. Christ Temple

Bonnke prophesied that one day there will rise a very big church at this very spot. So God had already ordained it! Who is E.T. Mensah to come on TV and say he should stop building?4

By referring back to Bonnke's prophecy, Jenny claimed a kind of ‘divine building permit,’ the authority of which outweighed any human permit or prohibition. For her, building the Christ Temple involved not only a bureaucratic (and a financial), but also a spiritual struggle.

Anytime I visited the Christ Temple I was struck by the contrast between the church compound (fig. 3.1) and the surrounding area. On 15 March I wrote in my diary:

By trotro to the Christ Temple – the ramshackle, endlessly repaired trotro ploughs the bumpy dirt road through Zongo,5 the poor Muslim area, past the open sewers clogged with refuse. I get down at Ayigbe Town, looking at the portraits of J.A. Kufuor, Kofi Anan, Mike Tyson and Jesus Christ on the wall of an artist's workshop. Together with a stream of people coming for the second service, I cross the narrow bridge to the Christ Temple, attempting not to breathe the 'lavender' of the stinking drain beneath. Chuckling to myself about the Accra term for this notorious nauseating stench, I look at the cows ‘grazing’ on waste and the children defecating alongside the drain, and suddenly find myself praying for them. Across the bridge, behind the fence, the well-kept green lawn, neatly parked shiny cars, and the impressive Christ Temple welcome us to the world of ICGC.

Every corner of the spacious compound is planned. It has neatly paved lanes and shaded parking spaces, mowed and all year green lawns with a few well-kept trees, a refreshment kiosk called Altar Snacks, and a row of seven flag poles, one flying a Ghanaian flag, the others used during visits of international guest speakers (fig. 3.4). The main entrance to the building (fig. 3.5) has a ‘front desk,’ the Vision Bookshop, an announcement board, and a small hall that can be rented for wedding ceremonies or burial services. At the back of the church building are the offices. Behind it is a baptismal font with a nicely designed waterfall and a half-open ‘multi purpose hall.’

This setting stands in stark contrast to the surrounding areas, from which the compound is separated by a fence (fig. 3.3), but also, to the west, by the busy Ring Road and the large Odaw drain that carries the city's waste water (and solid waste) to the Korle lagoon and the sea (fig. 3.6). A bridge over this drain connects the world of Christ Temple to that of Zongo, the poor Muslim area, and Abossey-Okay, widely known as the place to buy spare parts. One staff member complained that 'this place is surrounded by unhygienic practices. People defecate and urinate, the gutters in Zongo, the meat market at the back of the mosque.' Whereas to the west of the Christ Temple the cramped, narrow streets of Abossey-Okay lined with seemingly disorderly piles of spare parts and tyres make driving a car almost impossible, to the east lies a wide, desolate space (figs. 3.6, 3.7). Although all kinds of buildings have been planned here, nobody dares to build because it is clay ground and thus it has not been devel-
oped yet. The ICGC uses part of it as a parking lot for the hundreds of cars every Sunday. Just behind these bare hills is the recently appeared slum popularly known as ‘Sodom and Gomorrah,’ where a mass of squatters – many say prostitutes and armed robbers – live in make-shift shelters amidst waste and, according to the season, mud or dust (fig. 3.8).

In the experience of many ICGC members, the Christ Temple compound is an island of cleanliness, orderliness, and morality in central Accra’s sea of chaos, dirt, and immoral behaviour, a separate city (or even a country) in a city. A city that makes one feel proud to belong to and want to be committed to. A place of beauty and prestige, where one wants to have one’s photograph taken (figs. 3.9, 3.10). A city that, in contrast to Accra, is clearly structured and well-organised, and functions properly. Initially the idea was indeed to build ‘ICGC city,’ as Jenny told me.

All this land was for the church and the plan was to build a nursery, a crèche, a primary school, a JSS, a secondary, a university, hotels, a hospital, and all that. But the land has been taken back again.

The university has been built and there are plans for a bank, but the other institutions of ‘ICGC city’ are still future dreams. Still, the idea points to a process whereby churches, supported by their own system of taxation, the principle of tithing (see below), take over more and more responsibilities from the state, from providing education, healthcare, social security and facilities for entertainment and cultural production to the structuring and maintenance of urban space.

Like many charismatic-Pentecostal church buildings around the globe, the Christ Temple gives the impression of a theatre or concert hall. Also, the designation ‘auditorium’ for the main church hall indicates a correspondence

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**Fig. 3.6 Aerial photo of Christ Temple and surroundings.**

**Fig. 3.7 Wasteland to the east of the Christ Temple.**
with American ‘auditorium churches’ (Kilde 2002). Although ‘auditorium’ emphasises its function as a space for hearing (the Word of God), it is designed in such a way that from every seat one can not only hear, but also see the person on stage. In the Christ Temple, the audience, at least the people who fit inside, faces the stage. Two aisles through the length of the hall and one through the width of it divide the audience in main hall in six ‘blocks.’ The front row consists of ‘antique style,’ upholstered arm chairs for Christ Temple pastors or other VIPs. The two middle seats are one grade classier again and are reserved for Otabil and his wife. The mass of seats are plastic with iron frames, while in the back of the hall there are wooden benches. There is more seating on the balcony, that can be reached through two stair cases in the back. Outside the building, extra seating is provided under canopies, visually connected to the stage through closed-circuit TV screens and AltarMedia’s film equipment (fig. 3.11). The Power Point operator ensures the projection of song texts and sermon outlines onto the projector screen for viewing and use by the congregation (fig. 3.12).

The aural connection between both the inside and the outside audience and the stage is provided by the sound equipment taken care of by the audio technicians of the Production and Programming Ministry: hand-held wireless microphones used by
pastors, speakers, and lead singers, small, almost invisible microphones suspending from the ceiling over the stage to amplify the choir, and loudspeakers fixed at several points in the auditorium. Still, pastor Donkor regrets, ‘the sound is not good in the back of the auditorium, because we did not get any specialists on acoustics when we were building.’ Because the Christ Temple is quite isolated from the residential areas around it, there have never been any complaints about noise emanating from the church, despite the sometimes rather high decibel levels. The many wide open doors on both sides of the hall, allow the call for prayer emanating from the next door mosque in to mingle with the sound experience of Tuesday evening’s teaching service and the wind to blow inside the auditorium. Rarely, one smells a tinge of the stinking gutter or of burning waste.

The architecture of a church building or worship space is closely related to the performative and entertainment aspects of a church service, and to the relationship it establishes between preacher and audience. Jeanne Kilde (2002) examines the transformation of Protestant architecture in America and links it to changes in worship style and religious mission. She argues that in evangelical Protestantism the dialogue between preacher and audience is central, whereby clerical power lies in dramatic performance and the congregation’s religiosity lies in consumerism as much as in piety. This is facilitated by new auditorium churches, that are built like a theatre with

Fig. 3.10 Mr. & Mrs. Nyaku posing at the Christ Temple compound.

Fig. 3.11 Preparation of outside seating and screens before service starts.
a prominent stage and rows of pews radiating up a sloped floor. Even though in ICGC’s Christ Temple the audience does not sit in circular pews and the floor is level, the spatial design does indeed serve a specific kind of religious performance, authority, and subjectivity. It is the performative dialogue between preacher and audience that mediates Holy Spirit power and in the process establishes Christian subjects and charismatic authority.

Sunday worship service
Religious events and church services in the ICGC are indeed very much like theatrical performances in which the audience also has a clearly defined part to play. During services and special events the auditorium of the Christ Temple is not only packed with a dancing, singing, and clapping crowd, the officiating pastor too is entertaining the audience as an experienced comedian or storyteller, evoking laughter and applause with good jokes and stories and making use of theatrical body movements and storytelling techniques. Entering the auditorium already reminds us of a theatre visit: ‘greeters’ welcome you at the entrance and a team of ‘ushers’ in the hall guide you to your seat, filling up the rows one by one. The format of the two-hour Sunday service has several stages and at each stage the communication between the performer and the audience plays a different role in the mediation between the physical and the spiritual world, in the establishment of a relationship between the individual believer and Jesus Christ, and in the generation of a feeling of communality.

The first half an hour is filled with ‘praise and worship,’ led by the praise and worship song team on stage with backing of the church band. The first few songs have a fast and stirring beat and are aimed at lifting up the people and invoking the

Fig. 3.12 Christ Temple Praise & Worship Team performing on stage.
Holy Spirit in the auditorium. The entire congregation participates by clapping, dancing and singing along with the song texts projected on the screen. This is followed by a few slower songs, during which people lift up their hands in surrender to the Lord and either sing along or start praying aloud or even crying. Then a few up-beat songs bring back the spirit and excitement again to get people ready for the Word of God and for giving a large ‘seed’ to the church. During the first offering, the church choir, the Jazz group Charisma, or the church band Zamah performs, but here the people sit down and listen motionless, even though the music can be quite danceable too. This is the time for the ushers, who stand still and supervise during worship, to perform their well rehearsed ‘choreography’ of collecting and taking away the money with remarkable efficiency.

After this comes the main ‘act’ of the service and the only part that makes up the church’s media broadcast, the one-hour sermon by Otabil. He appears on stage in an elegant and elaborate African lace gown and delivers the Word of God as a lecturer and an entertainer, commanding attention and enacting authority with his characteristic style described in chapter 2. The audience listens carefully and takes notes of the bible references and the important points of the sermon, helped by a Power Point projection of the sermon outline. Although he always remains on the platform and does not engage in any direct interaction with individuals in the audience, Otabil keeps his audience active and awake by having them look up passages in the bible, repeat words or phrases after him, or say things to each other, by inserting jokes, enacting little sketches, and skilfully making use of variation in his voice. Preaching on victory over sin one Sunday, for example, he said ‘God has given us power over sin. One wife, not three. Ladies, tell every man “one wife is enough for you.” And men, tell the ladies “one man is enough for you”.’ Amused, the people in the audience raised their fingers and urged their neighbours to be faithful.

The closest contact is after the sermon, when Otabil makes an ‘altar call’ and calls all those who have not yet given their lives to Christ and want to do so now forward. The spontaneously converted assemble at Otabil’s feet and he calls upon the entire congregation to join him in prayer for them. While they are led outside by the ‘welcomers,’ the ‘project offering’ is taken. People sit down, take out their money when the basket passes, check their notes with the Power Point presentation that is repeated on the screen, or just listen to the music provided by the band. Then first-time visitors are asked to stand up to be welcomed by Otabil, church members sitting close to them greet them with a handshake and ushers hand out invitations for the newcomers reception afterwards. Before service closes, Otabil asks everybody to stand up and hold hands and speaks his benediction over the congregation, always ending with his ‘signature phrase’ ‘in Jesus Christ you are more than a conqueror.’

A Sunday service thus gives the impression that, other than many charismatic churches, the ICGC is a rather ‘rational’ church, where the Holy Spirit enters people mainly through the head. Although Otabil indeed focuses on the message, on education, and presents himself in the first place as a teacher, the church also offers more spiritually and emotionally inclined activities, where the Holy Spirit is communicated rather through the body.
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Solution Centre and prayer meeting

To meet popular demand and compete with other churches, the ICGC runs the ‘Solution Centre’ every Thursday morning, the healing and prophecy meeting introduced at the beginning of this chapter. It was started by prophet Yaw Annor, who left to pastor the ICGC branch at Adenta, and is now led by pastor Kisii and pastor Dan. This is ‘Miracle Time’ for people from within and outside the church to come with all kinds of problems and be healed or find a solution. The introduction given by pastor Dan on 4 April 2002, with the interjections by the audience, is typical.

This afternoon I want to announce to you that there is victory in the Lord for you. You came here to partake of your blessing. – Yes! – you came here to receive your victory, you came here to be blessed of God. You came here to be exalted. This is not the place that we pull people down. This is not the place that Satan is able to target the children of God. This is the place to tell Satan in the face that ‘get thee behind me, because greater is he who is in me than you who is in hell.’ Tell Satan: Satan, – Satan-, get thee – get thee -, behind me – behind me – In the name of Jesus, I walk over you and nothing of the enemies, shall by any means, hurt me. Victory is mine, for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord, in the house of the Lord, in the name of the Lord. Give him a shout! –Yeeewaaaah! – Hallelujah! – Hallelujah! –

The atmosphere set here is very much unlike that on Sundays. The use of the auditorium space is entirely different too. Whereas Otabil’s performance is characterised by distance, pastor Dan hardly remains on the platform but, after a short sermon, comes down and walks among the congregation while prophetically calling individuals or groups forward.

There is a lady called Gifty. You have been going through some attacks for some time now. You are only afraid that something dangerous is going to happen to you. I am going to just pray for that Gifty right now, to minister to that Gifty, in Jesus name.

Or:

I can see some numbers, it starts with 3785, I don’t know whether it is a credit card number or a visa application number, but if this is your number, come forward and great things are going to happen to you. Whose number is 3785?

Or, once:

There is a lady here who is doing some kind of research for a doctorate. I don’t know where she is from, but if you are that lady, I want you to come forward, I want to pray for you.

Whereas Otabil never touches, not even makes eye contact with individuals in the
audience, pastor Dan engages them in intimate, physical contact. Laying his hands on their heads or on sick body parts and shouting in their ears and in the mike, he casts out any demons that may be causing their sickness or failure in business or marriage, commands the power of the Holy Ghost to come upon them, and prophesies victory in the form of a visa, a villa, a pregnancy, a husband, or a dissertation.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I take authority over any spirit of fear. We have arrested you in the past days and the past years. Today every assignment of demons in the aid of fear against your life is uprooted by the blood of Jesus. I speak you totally free, right now, you should not die before your time, because the hand of the Lord shall be upon you. Nothing can revert what God ordained. Receive the power of the Holy Ghost, right now in the name of Jesus. I invert every work of the enemy, I ban it right now in Jesus name. For you shall not die, you shall live and declare God. Holy Ghost, be free, NOW! NOW! NOW! In Jesus’ name. Be free now. I bind the works of the Devil. Masakalapakatula marrabakatalapuru. You’re free! You’re free! YOU’RE FREE! Don’t be afraid, I shall fight your battles for you and I shall be with you to protect your life. Your enemies shall bow before you and I shall defend you in every area of your life. Don’t think of the past, because I am doing something new in your life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sometimes anointing oil is applied on the body, either by the pastor or the believer herself, to create ‘points of contact’ with the Holy Spirit. Upon the pastor’s touch, prayer and prophecy, many people fall backward, or start shaking or spinning. A team of ushers attends to them, by standing behind them, catching them when they fall, tying a cloth around their waist, covering them with a cloth when they lie on the floor, or guiding them back to their seats when they walk like drunk, drunk in the spirit. The drama of the performance is intensified by music or sound effects by the band. Sometimes also people who are not directly ministered to do suddenly ‘explode in the spirit,’ usually after fervent prayer with the whole body. After intensive and solitary, but not silent prayer, often in tongues, while shaking the head, rapidly moving hands or fists up and down, or stamping with the feet, a person suddenly jumps up, cries ‘Jesus!’ or just ‘aaaaaaahh’ and falls backwards onto the chairs, sometimes pushing others down at the same time.

This kind of emotional and expressive prayer is also performed at the weekly prayer meeting on Friday evening. This is one and a half hour of prayers, divided into slots of about ten minutes for each topic, after which the leading pastor (Kisii or Dan) hisses in the mike and everybody becomes quiet, whether praying in tongues or in English. The prayer topics generally follow from the macro (national) level to the personal level (for the nation; for the ministers of the church, that their anointing may be released; for the departments of the church; for the members of the church; to receive money before the weekend; to receive strength from the Lord; to bind every spirit of opposition; to bind the Devil; that every condition that does not belong to your life will leave) and in the course of the session people’s prayers and body movements become more passionate. People walk up and down,
heavily gesticulating, or clapping to the rhythm of their tongues. Some even run, using the space in front of the podium. Others go on their knees, clench themselves to the chair in front, or lie or even roll on the floor. Some get emotional and start crying; a few even faint and are carried away by the ushers, laid down, and covered with a cloth.

During Solution Centre and prayer meetings spiritual mediation happens mostly through touch and what Laura Marks (1999) has called ‘haptic sound.’ It is not the symbolic quality of sound (the meaning of words spoken or sung), but its physical quality (uttering meaningless sounds, the sheer volume of shouting, the rhythm of music) that makes the Spirit flow. Marks’ suggestion of ‘haptic sound’ at once reminded me of charismatic practice. Having stood in the middle of a crowd of people praying in tongues, having felt the indecipherable shouting of a prophet on my eardrums, and having had my body moved by the stirring beat of a ‘gospel-life’ performance, I have indeed experienced the physical, tactile quality of sound. On 18 September 2002 I attended a prayer meeting in the Holy Pentecostal Church and wrote in my diary:

About two hundred people are walking around in the hall, clapping, moving their arms, stamping, and fervently praying in tongues. I join the praying people and start walking around and moving about a bit. Listening to the sound and moving my hands up and down, I discover a beat, a kind of rhythm in the apparent cacophony. The ‘tongues’ of the people are backed by the almost Buddhist sounding prayer by the guy behind the mike. The backing sound of the keyboard is hardly distinguishable from the human voices, but integrates them into a cadence. It is not difficult to imagine that this kind of sound can bring people into trance or possession.

I argue that it is primarily touch, including the tactility of sound, that most effectively mediates the personal experience of the Holy Spirit during such activities. Similarly, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the individual believer manifests itself in the body or in bodily sound: involuntary spinning, shaking, jumping, falling down, crying, screaming or speaking in tongues are all signs of the touch of the Spirit.

At the same time, however, wild body movements can also be signs of ‘evil attacks.’ Sometimes these are hardly distinguishable from Holy Spirit manifestations, but they may also be very different from the usual expressions. For some time (September 2002) there was a woman who attended Solution Centre every week, but showed very deviant behaviour and was soon ‘diagnosed’ as being possessed by the Devil. Her screams and wild movements came too early, when the rest of the congregation was still listening to the sermon, and in a way that I had never seen in the Christ Temple before. She was alone, sat on the floor in between the chairs, her back and limbs moving convulsively and her face contracting spasmodically, her eyes wide open, but very much absent. Her cry was terrifying and filled the auditorium space, but nobody paid attention. Initially, the ushers ignore her too, but later, at the appropriate time when other people went wild too, they
brought her forward and prayed over her together with a group of others. Nothing happened to change her situation. Two weeks later she was back; I immediately recognised her cry. She wore the same plain red dress she wore the other time. After all the people received their deliverance, she was brought forward, where she lay prostrate on the floor. Her case needed some more spiritual power and pastor Kisii asked the whole church to join him in prayer for her by stretching their hands towards her. They prayed to 'free her from the bondage of Satan.' Pastor Kisii prayed through the microphone and walked up and down. He turned to her, but he did not touch her. After some time of fervent prayer he stopped and the woman was brought back to her seat. It didn't work. She looked like a zombie, made no contact whatsoever with anybody and passively allowed herself to be led. When the service came to an end and everybody got up to leave, she remained seated for some time, staring at nothing, totally closed off to what happened around her. Nobody minded her. Ten minutes later, I saw her walking away, alone. The next week, she wore her red dress again and sat on the floor, first curled up and silent, soon screaming and with a jolting body and grimacing face, as if heavily struggling. Totally closed off again, she did not respond to the pastor’s calls to hold somebody’s hand, lift up hands, or repeat phrases. Nor did she take part in the communion when the trays with bread and wine went round. She ignored everybody and was left to herself.

Apart from illustrating the bodily manifestation of spiritual power (in this case ‘discerned’ as ‘evil’), this exceptional and pathetic case also points to the hidden ‘script’ behind religious activities in the Christ Temple. While the church’s prayer meetings and weekly Solution Centre are much more experientially oriented than the Sunday service, these too are performed according to a fixed arrangement of activities and behaviour. When people are praying aloud in tongues, at first hearing it seems purely spontaneous and unruly, and this is exactly what it is understood to be in charismatic doctrine, a spontaneous manifestation of the sudden presence of the Holy Spirit within an individual. As one pastor explained it, ‘at such a moment, the Spirit is speaking through us according to the will of God.’ But in practice, it is the pastor who indicates when to start and when to stop praying. It happens at specified moments, for specified lengths of time. Moreover, it is something you can learn by practicing, the same kind of sounds keep coming back, and some people are clearly more advanced in it than others, using more variation, like ‘rapatulashakalukaram,’ than those at the level of ‘rabababababababa.’ Some people told me that as children they were taught how to speak in tongues by saying ‘I love Jesus’ quicker and quicker and quicker until the words became unintelligible. Indeed, as Pastor Donkor told me, ‘you need a specific style of praying for it to be effective.’ Praying, then, including the bodily movements that make it powerful, is something you have to learn, requires training and experience. Another common practice is the laying on of hands on the head of the believer by the pastor, upon which many people fall down. This is interpreted to be a response to the touch of the Holy Spirit, but it also happens within a format of body posture and timing, which inexperienced newcomers are helped to acquire by the ushers, who for example lift up a person’s hands when s/he doesn’t do this by him/herself, or by
just mimicking others. In the above described case, the ushers initially tried to accommodate the strangely behaving woman into the Solution Centre script. When after several sessions, it turned out that this didn’t work, she was further ignored. This points to the limits of religious power, then, in enforcing certain scripts or formats.

While activities like the Solution Centre and the prayer meeting are very successful in terms of attendance, Otabil is rather uncomfortable with them. He does never participate and never even announces them in church, unlike Tuesday evening’s teaching service. Yet, he tacitly acknowledges them. A tension thus exists between the church’s ‘intellectual’ public image and the more ‘spiritual,’ emotional activities in the church, that are purposely not included in its public image. Otabil consciously tries to distance himself from the widespread charismatic concern with witchcraft and evil spirits and he frequently criticises, and sometimes even ridicules practices common to ‘miracle-oriented’ churches, such as speaking in tongues, deliverance from evil spirits, anointing, or miraculous healing. In his message ‘Principles for effective living,’ for instance, he says ‘the proof of the anointing is not shaking, jumping or falling, but the products that can be verified on earth and attributed to you.’ Similarly, in ‘Talent, work and profit’ he teaches that ‘it is not a matter of praying for change; you must work towards change.’ During a teaching service (2 April 2002) he directly criticised ‘miracle-Christianity.’

Some of us only believe in the spiritual power of the Bible and use it to fight the devil. But there is also power in the words written, power to fight underdevelopment. … A systematic process of prosperity runs through the Bible, but most of us don’t see it and see only the spectacular miracles. … Owing somebody money because you have invested and your business is not going well due to circumstances, that is a respectable way of owing. But not owing money because you have bought a microwave, and then come to the pastor to cast out the demon of poverty. We have to fight not the demon of poverty, but the culture of poverty.

As pointed out in chapter 2, Otabil presents himself as standing above fighting demons, almost as if not wanting to engage in the unsophisticated concerns of the plebs. He does not (and cannot afford to) totally dismiss these concerns and admits that ‘yes, we must pray against evil spirits and there may be witches around that we need to ward of,’ but he is not called to do those things, he serves the higher purpose of making people think and act. ‘Listen to me!,’ he told his audience during the 1999 conference ‘Lift up your head, Africa,’ ‘I did not come and tell you that I will lay hands on you and all your problems will be solved. There is a time to lay hands on people and there is a time to make them think, and today is that time’ (quoted in Gifford 2004:124).

We can thus roughly divide the weekly church events in those that primarily engage the intellect and are mostly led by Otabil (sometimes by pastor Donkor), that is Sunday worship service and Tuesday teaching service, and those that centre around sensual and especially tactile experience, that is the Solution Centre and the prayer meetings. These different religious practices present us with different ways of
mediating spiritual power, but also with almost opposing views on how the spiritual materialises, or becomes manifest. Where it is mediated by the message, the anointing of the Holy Spirit is expected to show in a person’s effective performance, in productivity. Otabil argues that the way a Christian proves that he is spiritual is by producing material things (‘Principles of effective living’), and thus by being in control of oneself. Where the spirit is mediated primarily by touch and haptic sound, it is rather a loss of self-control that is taken to indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit: speaking in tongues and involuntary and unrestrained bodily movements. Both modes involve the mediation of spiritual power and, as I will elaborate below, specific bodily regimes. Hence it would be problematic to call one ‘spiritual’ or ‘bodily’ and the other ‘rational.’ The difference rather lies in the bodily forms through which ‘the spiritual’ manifests. During annual church events we see these different modes of mediating the spirit coming together.

Annual conferences
Every year the ICCG organises two big international conferences, the ‘Greater Works Conference,’ preceded by a ‘spiritual emphasis month’ with daily prayer meetings in church, and the ‘Destiny Summit’ (formerly called the ‘Pan-African Believers’ Summit’). Marketed as ICGC ‘products’ with TV and radio commercials, flyers (fig. 3.13), and banners throughout Accra, these conferences draw a wide audience far beyond church membership. They feature national and international charismatic stars, all from Otabil’s personal network, and offer a combination of praise and worship, music, prayer, sermons, prophesy, and anointing. The messages take up a central place and audio and video tapes of the sermons given by the guest speakers are sold as spin-off products, together with ‘summit souvenir stickers.’ But at least as impor-
tant for the thousands of worshippers is the totalising experience of ‘divine energy,’ of
being renewed by Holy Ghost power.

Visiting evangelists bring with them much more emotional, exuberant styles of
ministry and worship, involving more expressive bodily performance than is usual
during the regular ICGC services. During the 2001 Greater Works Conference (30 July),
for example, Rev. Ebenezer Charquay preached on Mark 11:1-10, where Jesus released
a donkey tied to a tree, and used this story to turn up the energy in his audience.

A donkey tied to a tree can only make circular motion. That is wilderness. But
circular motion is not the principle of the Kingdom of God. That is upward
motion! There is potential fruitfulness and anointments, but people still go
round in circles. Giving the donkey the opportunity is making him free in
order to enjoy fruitfulness. There is a divine demand upon every life here!
When tied to the tree, he could see the fruits of figs and olives, but could not
participate in it. There are aspirations, dreams in this place. The feet are the
medium of possession: wherever you feet shall thread, I shall give that place to
you. God puts it all at our feet, it is yours. … Your day has come, your day of
deliverance has come, the donkeys are coming!!

He then stirred the audience to participate in a physical game of ‘commanding pos-
session.’ After the pastor shouted ‘donkey one,’ the audience repeated ‘donkey one’
while raising the left hand; on ‘donkey two,’ they raised their right hand; on ‘donkey
three,’ they stamped with the left foot; and on ‘donkey four’ with the right foot. On
‘donkey five,’ the whole crowd jumped up and shouted ‘hallelujah!!’ and then they
started all over again. The whole congregation participated in frenzied stamping,
jumping and shouting, spiritually commanding material possession.

This strong emphasis on the faith gospel of ‘name it, claim it and take it,’ and
the physical performance of this ‘taking’ does not only come from visiting preachers.
During the ‘spiritual emphasis month’ preceding the Greater Works Conference the
ICGC greatly stimulates spiritual empowerment and spiritual claims to health and
wealth. All members, except sick, pregnant, or otherwise weak people, are supposed
to fast for a month, from morning to evening, and be in church every evening for one
hour of prayer.11 These evening sessions are very similar to the regular Friday prayer
meetings, with every day devoted to another prayer topic, divided into about seven-
teen subtopics, on which to pray for three minutes each. On 17 July 2001 the people
were led in prayer as follows:

As we pray we are building our faith and trust in the Lord. With God all things
are possible. The Lord is about to do great work, to release his grace unto you.
You will succeed not in your own strength, but in the strength of the Lord.
Make sure that, whether you pray in Hispanic or in the language of the Holy
Spirit, you position yourself in such a way that the Spirit can enter you, fill you,
and empower you. As you start praying in the language of the Holy Spirit, God
is seeking to empower you. Pray in the Spirit!

Destroy every dependent trouble as it arises in your life. That we will not
fall victim to it, but overcome everything that the enemy has set for you. Destroy it! Destroy it! Destroy it! Destroy it! Destroy it! Destroy the power of the enemy, the power of Satan, the power of witches.

Take authority over all the fears of the future and receive deliverance, as God leads you into tomorrow. Fear is slavery. Break it under your feet. You are free if God sets you free, you can never be bonded. Shed yourself from fear, take authority over it. Who tells you you can’t possess? Who tells you you can’t be delivered? Who tells you you can’t be rich?

Make a prophesy into your future that your future shall be great. Your future shall be marvelous. You shall rise, you shall be great!

Ask the Lord to bless the work of your hands and cause it to increase. That blessings of God make us rich.

The physical performance accompanying this kind of prayer is very much like that described above.

Although these daily prayer sessions are usually not led by Otabil, during the Greater Works Conference, for members the climax of this month of fasting and intensive prayer, Otabil himself goes more ‘spiritual’ too, putting more emphasis on faith and miracle. On 31 July 2001 he led the ‘anointing service’ concluding the conference. Stirring up his audience, Otabil told them ‘Whatever you are desiring tonight, God will answer it. He can do in a moment what you have been desiring for years. Supernatural things are going to happen tonight!’ This is something he would never say during Sunday services. After this he led them in a ‘transaction’ with God: a money offering for spiritual anointing. ‘Give before you receive. Establish a point of contact. Give an offering from your heart, not out of routine. Create a divine connection to be anointed.’ While the ushers handed out special envelopes (fig. 3.14), Otabil asked the people to put their money offering in it, hold it in their right hand, lift it up and pray over it.

God bless me, God release me and let power explode. The Devil will have nothing to hold on to; enlarge my coast. You have given me much, but I want more; let your hand be on me, mark me for success. Give me competitive advantage; keep me from evil, spiritual forces and powers; keep me from grief and pain. Amen.

While the offertory basket went round he kept on encouraging the givers:
This is a matter of destiny, trust in God for the supernatural release into your life. It is going to take only a moment, but in that moment there is going to be a contact. Thank you Jesus, glory is in your hands. You have released your gift; that is one part of the transaction. God is also going to release something you. Stretch your hands towards the offering and pray that the fire of God shall receive it. Let light destroy darkness. Let expectations be met.

After this containers with oil passed round and everybody dipped his/her right hand into it, raised it, and prayed ‘for a release of your power with the application of this oil. Let there be a release of divine energy.’ Everybody put the hand with oil on the head, subsequently on the mouth, on the ears, on the feet, and on the hands, on all bodily ‘points of contact,’ while they repeated phrase by phrase Otabil’s long and very un-Otabil-like prayer, of which I quote the latter part.


Again, the ‘release of divine energy’ went together with screaming, jumping, emotional singing or crying, spinning and falling down. Otabil shouted too. During such special events, then, the discourse and terminology Otabil uses, the way he stirs up his audience, his use of olive oil, indeed, his whole performance style is much more like mainstream charismatic, ‘faith gospel’ churches than what we see of him on regular Sundays and on TV. The format of charismatic conferences requires certain styles and discourses and Otabil masters this format very well.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, in contrast to the many charismatic churches that attract followers primarily with miracles, healing, and deliverance, the emphasis of the ICGC is clearly on ‘the message’ and Otabil is publicly known and appreciated for his focus on human development, his political consciousness, and his concern with the African plight. However, as the above discussion makes clear, this public image is only one side of the coin. During more ‘spiritual’ activities, such as the Solution Centre, prayer meetings, the ‘spiritual emphasis month,’ anointing services, and various ‘Christian entertainment’ programmes (briefly discussed in chapter 1), there is much more room for emotional expression and bodily experience of spiritual power than the TV audience might expect. On such occasions too, Otabil’s performance may come much closer to the ‘average’ charismatic preacher, and his message closer to the faith gospel that he so often despises in his ‘life transforming messages’ that are select-
ed for media broadcast and that constitute the church’s public image.

At first sight, the Solution Centre, the prayer meeting, and parts of the annual conferences seem to be much more bodily oriented than Otabil’s televised Sunday sermon, where the audience sits still and takes notes of the message. Yet, during the sermon too, it is a specific bodily way of listening that facilitates the flow of spiritual power. During a Tuesday teaching service in the Christ Temple on 19 March 2002, my attention was drawn to a guy who was clearly different from the rest. He wore jeans, a cap, and a tight, sleeveless shirt showing his muscles. His body language spoke skepticism. He was sprawling in his chair, hanging over to one side, legs wide apart, one leg stretched into the aisle. He was turning his head as if exercising his neck muscles. He did not make notes and did not have a bible, only peeped into his neighbour’s once in a while. Looking at this guy, I became aware of the significance of body language, posture, movement, dress and attributes in making the church members a common body and indeed of the high level of uniformity concerning the body. No other men’s shoulders were uncovered, only women’s. There were no caps and not many women’s headscarves either. But more than dress, what was uniform was body posture and expression. A particular straight up, active, way of sitting and paying attention, reacting at the right moment in the right way with clapping, laughter, turning to one’s neighbour, lifting up one’s hand, or interjecting amens and hallelujahs are all part of a learned, bodily discipline of listening to the Word of God. A discipline that the guy just described clearly did not submit to.

The different modes of interaction between the ‘man of God’ and the religious subject thus all involve the performance of encoded, bodily behaviour by all participants. There is a format for worship, for prayer, for anointing, for prophesy, and also for listening to sermons. In order to be fully part of the social and spiritual community of believers and to take part in the blessings bestowed upon this community by God through the pastor, an individual has to participate in the interaction with the man of God according to the specific formats of clapping and dancing, sitting and standing, saying ‘amen’ and ‘hallelujah,’ praying aloud, and raising hands at the appropriate moments and for the appropriate lengths of time. Much of this behaviour is almost implicit, hardly explained or talked about. Indeed, it is supposed to be spontaneous, and incited by a spiritual touch. It is through mimetic behaviour, however, that one gradually embodies this knowledge and develops the mannerisms characteristic of the different ‘genres’ of charismatic practice. It is this proper participation in collective worship that enables one to ‘feel the Holy Spirit at work.’ This paradoxical relationship between disciplinary format and spiritual experience also characterises the ICGC’s membership trajectory.

‘Raising leaders, shaping vision’: making ICGC members

As stated in church PR material, it is the commitment of the International Central Gospel Church to provide the opportunity, facilities and tools for the release, development and
sharpening of the gifts, talents, skills and abilities of its members. By this we expect to produce mature, intelligent, principled, spirit-controlled, individuals who will exercise dominion on earth in the true expression of their leadership potential. These individuals who are vitally and experientially committed to God through a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ would be empowered to be the salt and light of the world in which they live. We are confident that such individuals will have the capacity to bring direction to our world.

This commitment is summed up in the church’s motto ‘Raising leaders, shaping vision, and influencing society through Christ,’ that is projected on screen during church activities and mentioned during broadcasts and on message tapes. This section takes a closer look at this process of raising, shaping, and influencing by examining what it takes to become and to be a member of Otabil’s International Central Gospel Church. First of all it takes discipline, subjection to authority and to bureaucracy. At various stages members are requested to fill in forms concerning their Christian life and spiritual growth and can earn certificates. The bodily, sexual, and social discipline required of church members is high. From the moment a person joins the ICGC, s/he is socialised into the church community as a born-again Christian through a learned discipline of prescribed and forbidden practices. But at the same time s/he internalises the narrative of deep inner transformation which presents this change in a person’s behaviour and lifestyle as a result of an inner meeting with Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is this far-reaching inner transformation that Otabil aims at when he teaches about ‘transformation’ and advertises his tapes as ‘life-transforming messages.’

Before examining the church’s membership trajectory in detail, let me introduce a Christ Temple member, Enimil Ashon. This is not to suggest that he is representative or ‘typical,’ for a ‘typical’ Christ Temple member could only be fictive and Enimil is atypical in many respects. I have chosen him for his and his wife’s interesting religious itineraries, which for him included the Afrikania Mission, and we will meet him again in the context of Afrikania in chapter 6. Enimil was in his late forties when I met him in 2002. He is an intellectual, a Ghana School of Journalism graduate with a postgraduate diploma in Communication Studies from the University of Legon. He works as a press journalist for various newspapers, writing especially on matters of ‘culture,’ and this interest is what primarily attracts him to Otabil’s church.

The other churches, they don’t even know what Afrikania is, they don’t know what African culture is. They don’t know what African religion is and yet they condemn it. They don’t know what the deities are, they don’t know African religion, they don’t even know Africa. What they are condemning is what the white man asked them to condemn. About 500 years ago. So they are just toeing the line. Otabil doesn’t rubbish Afrikania. Otabil is a member of the culture commission. But his concept of culture is different from the concept of the culture commission. The culture commission believes in drumming and dancing as culture. But culture is developmental. That is what Otabil believes in, culture
should serve our purpose. Why is it that when a whale gets washed ashore, we go and pour libation? The white man will go and cut up the whale and start discovering why the whale died. They will use part of the whale for oil, part of it for chewing stick. Why are we like that? We have condemned ourselves to stagnancy, we are stagnant in time. We don’t move, because of our believes. The concept of the culture of the NCC [National Commission on Culture] and of Afrikania is very very static, we won’t progress with it. By movement we don’t say we should be western, but we should be able to progress. 14

Enimil acknowledges that his vision on Africa, culture, and development is to a large extent shaped by Otabil’s preaching. His interest in ‘African culture,’ however, dates from long before he first heard Otabil preach.

Born a Roman Catholic, Enimil joined the Afrikania Mission in his late twenties as part of a personal and political search for African identity and became ‘violently anti-Christian.’ Six years later, however, after a severe health crisis, he suddenly gave his life to Christ, in response to an altar call at a breakfast meeting of the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International. Being ‘a man of extreme positions,’ he ‘switched all the way to the end of it,’ devoted his six months sick leave to reading the bible and started going round to speak at Christian forums. His wife, whom he had married early in life, an Anglican by birth, had joined the Church of Pentecost when she became a nurse in Accra. Together with the Nurses Christian Fellowship, she had tried to convert her husband, both when he was still a Catholic and when he became an Afrikanian, but had given up when she realised that he was ‘not convertible.’

I asked them a few questions about life. I realised that most of them didn’t have any answers, apart from ‘the Bible says,’ ‘according to the Bible.’ What if I don’t know the Bible? When I became a Christian, I realised that if I wanted to avoid the shallowness of these people, then I have to know the Bible very well and I have to know other religions too. So I studied other religions. I have a Quran at home. I have friend who are Buddhists. One thing I don’t do is to condemn another religion.

After his conversion to Christianity, Enimil joined his wife in the Church of Pentecost, but felt that ‘deep as they were in prayer, they could not impart the word of God.’ Yet, he did not know any other church and stayed with them for almost a year.

Then one day I heard somebody preaching on tape in a car, a taxi. It was powerful, the exposition on the Bible was deep. So I asked the taxi driver ‘who is this?’ He said ‘his name is Otabil.’ I said ‘where is he,’ so he showed me. The driver was playing a tape, at that time there were no FM stations yet, that was in 1988. So he said his name was Otabil and they were worshipping at Baiden Powell, so I went there a few times and I realised that it was the place to be.

He told his wife about Otabil and although ‘it took some time to convince her’ both of them went to Otabil’s church. At present, however, she is a Baptist. When they moved
out of Accra, coming all the way to Central Accra by taxi with their children was too much of a hassle and too costly. She found a Christian church close by and this happened to be a Baptist church. Enimil remained in the ICGC, however, and is now active as a ‘consultant’ in the church PR committee.

Anything ICGC has to do that has to go public, I have to help, it is a committee sort of thing. Anytime something has to be done by way of PR, we constitute a committee, like we constituted a committee recently to launch Otobil’s book. When I came at first the church realised that in the various departments there was not much of PR consciousness, so I organised seminars for some of them, the choir and other departments. Talking about PR, how they have to be conscious of that.

I asked him what is important about PR for the church.

Look at some of these pastors, their public way of speaking, they say just anything. I am not attracted to most of them. They just talk, their knowledge of the Bible is not even deep. With all sorts of gesticulations and things like that, I am not attracted to them, to their church and the way they are structured. So I thought ICGC should be different. Otobil is a PR person in himself. So conscious about his public image.

Attracting people to the church, then, is very much a matter of good PR. In the previous chapter I have analysed Otobil’s personal PR and the role it plays in attracting people to religious celebrity. Here I address the problem of binding people to the church as committed members. Both Enimil and his wife frequented four different churches before joining their current church and they are certainly not exceptional in this. Such high religious mobility, or ‘church hopping,’ is characteristic of Ghana’s current religious climate and of the charismatic-Pentecostal field in particular. This poses challenges with regard to membership, as people may be easily attracted by convincing PR, but they may as easily be lured away by other, more ‘powerful’ churches or pastors in the religious marketplace. The ICGC is thus very conscious not only about attracting people, but also about keeping them. The demanding membership trajectory selects only the really committed ones, as full church membership is difficult to attain. It requires several steps, usually starting with the public ritual of giving one’s life to Christ.15

**Being born again**

By confessing the Lordship of Jesus Christ over one’s life in front of the church congregation one becomes ‘born-again.’ This confession is a requirement for membership. So even though being born again is in the first place considered an inner, spiritual transformation, it has to be accompanied by a public ritual. This starts with Otobil’s ‘altar call’ at the end of both Sunday services.
Now bow you head. There are some of us who have not yet received Christ. Those of you who want to be born again, raise up your right hand, rise up on your feet, come to the front, bring your Bible and I will pray for you. We will all pray together.

Usually around twenty-five people come forward and assemble in front of the stage, where Otabil leads them in their confession. Then he tells them that ‘something dramatic has happened in your life right now. Because you did what the Bible said, you believed in your heart and confessed with your mouth.’ Right after this conversion ritual, the newly born Christians are led outside by ‘welcomers’ to the multi-purpose hall behind the Christ Temple, where they receive information on what it means to be a Christian and what it takes to become an ICGC member and fill a ‘new convert form,’ on which they, among other things, state issues for prayer and counselling. Pastor Charlotte, who processes these forms and gave me the harvest of three weeks to go through, told me that almost all who give their life to Christ after the altar call during Sunday service (about fifty people each week) are first time visitors, who have heard the message on radio or TV before coming. After they have filled in the form, a letter will be sent to them and the counsellors will visit them at home. Almost all of them become members of the church. The church is thus very fast growing.

People who are already born again and come from another church to join the ICGC do not have to make a public confession again, but have to produce evidence of their conversion in the form of a water baptism certificate (see below). At the newcomers’ reception after service ICGC hosts recognisable by their badge, guide visitors to the multi-purpose hall (fig. 3.15). I joined as a newcomer on 17 March 2002. The
new converts were already seated at the tables with table cloths and platters with soft mints. There were about forty people. Some took pictures against the background of the waterfall of the baptismal. Our host William handed us ‘let’s get acquainted’ visitor’s forms (fig. 3.16) (introduced in August 2001) and quickly explained how to fill them, before moving on to the next table. Then he returned to serve us with coke, fanta, and malta and poured a waterfall of standard church information on us: on the discipleship classes, the covenant families, and on where to get a membership number needed to pay your ‘first fruits,’ so that ‘when you have any problem, you can come to the church and they can see in the computer that you are paying.’ The newcomers listened rather passively, sipped their soft drinks, hardly talked to each other, and left quickly. The reception gave me the impression of efficient processing of individuals rather than community building. This is indeed the predicament of a mass church as ICGC’s Christ Temple and it characterises the membership trajectory as much as the various services. Efficient processing of (potential) members is facilitated by tools such as, to start with, the acquaintance form, on which people write their name, address, and telephone number, tick their age group, the way they learned about the church (radio, television, Internet, or other), and the kind of information they require.19 On Tuesday morning after the newcomers’ reception I got a phone call from William, inquiring whether I had attended the discipleship class and encouraging me to finish the whole course. A week later I received a personal letter of encouragement ‘signed’ by Otabil and tailored information in the form of Christian brochures by the Bible Society of Ghana and an ICGC publication First steps in Christ.

Discipleship classes
Every prospective member is required to follow ten ‘discipleship classes’ on Sunday afternoons that teach the basics of charismatic Christian doctrine and the specific ICGC vision. I participated in one series of classes together with about 150 other people, most of them in their twenties. All where already born-again, as a quick survey
by the teacher showed. This is important to stress, as it reflects the charismatic conversion discourse that presents conversion not as a result of learning church doctrine (as in the Catholic Church), but conversely as a spontaneous spiritual transformation that nurtures a profound interest in learning church doctrine. I argue, however, that the spiritual experience of being born-again is as much nurtured by repeated and embodied participation in religious practice, including discipleship classes. Everyone was officially registered for the classes and attendance was checked weekly and marked in a book. A missed lesson had to be made up for later. Each lesson took at least one and a half hour, started and ended with a prayer, and consisted of class teaching, supplemented with discussion, evaluation of assignments, and memorisation of bible verses. This very much followed the format of teaching in Ghana’s school system. The course material was a booklet written by pastor Morris Appiah of the Christ Temple, *Getting established in Christ*, and the bible. The course book, a bible (‘not this small, blue one that you get for free, invest in a nice, big Bible’), a notebook and a pen, and command of English, were basic requirements for participation (which obviously restricts church membership). Obviously aware of the problem of feeling lost in the mass, the teacher encouraged us to get to know ourselves and make friends.

It is important here to briefly discuss the contents of the discipleship course, because much of the charismatic doctrine that is taught is hardly stressed by Otabil in his ‘life-transforming messages,’ yet constitutes an important area of transforming church members, of forming religious subjectivity. The first lesson treated ‘the fall of man,’ man’s inheritance of the sinful nature of the Devil. As a newborn Christian you must thus first accept that you are a sinner. Fortunately, God has a plan of salvation: the deliverance of man from the power of sin and death, that is, from the domain of Satan, through the death of Christ. One can get saved through the ‘ABC of salvation’: ‘Accept that you are a sinner, Believe that Jesus died in your place, and Confess the lordship of Jesus Christ over your total life.’ One has to be assured of one’s salvation (inner confirmation), first because the Word of God says so and second, through individual experiences, such as sensitivity to God and to sin, desire for God’s word and for sharing it, attitude to ‘the things of the world,’ and joy in prayer. It is this kind of teaching of course, that largely induces such experiences. When one ‘believes’ (defined as a process of hearing, conviction, faith, obedience, confession), one has to be baptised by immersion in water to identify with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. But one should first receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit: the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit within one, with the initial outward evidence of speaking in tongues, the ‘direct communication line to God in the Spirit.’ Even though it is the Holy Spirit that manifests itself in the person, a person can and has to do something in order to receive it: acknowledge the gift, believe, confess, and expect it, lay on hands as a point of contact, and endeavour to speak the ‘tongue’ during prayer. Significantly, after the lesson on Holy Spirit baptism, many people ‘spontaneously’ experienced this manifestation and started speaking in tongues during the closing prayer.

We were also taught what our personal devotion should look like. One should aim at Christian growth through Bible study, prayer and devotion as ‘personal com-
munication links with God, not through someone else.‘ Although ‘personal,’ there is a recommended time (early morning, daily), space (in seclusion), and mode (prayer, singing, bible reading, tape listening) for devotion. The goal of the lesson on evangelism was to ‘lift each single member from a convert to the level of a disciple with a lifestyle of real spirit-filled soul-winning.’ Again, evangelism is said to be the ‘release of fire by a spontaneous flow of the Holy Spirit,’ but it is also very much an imposed obligation to be carried out in a strictly prescribed mode (‘to be able to effectively evangelize you must…’). The last three lessons dealt with ‘the church.’ ‘Every Christian must of necessity belong to one local church where the Word is taught and practised.’ So even though being born again is about one’s personal relationship with God, one cannot do without a ‘shepherd who is a representative of Jesus Christ.’ The church has a commitment to believers and offers certain benefits: spiritual, mental and emotional, physical and social. ‘The church is an avenue God has designed to bless YOU.’ More specifically, but this isn’t taught, in practice the ‘Man of God’ is the medium God uses to bless. The believer also has a commitment to the church: s/he has to show respect, appreciation, submission, and spiritual support towards the pastor, and be committed to church programmes and activities in terms of attendance and finance (see below on finance).

After the formal teaching of the above subjects, there was time for questions and discussion. An example of such a group discussion, about the question whether to watch porn films with one’s spouse is sinful or not, and more generally about media and ‘the world,’ will be discussed in the next chapter. Here I want to note that the discussion, which gave people the chance to ask any kind of question and to suggest answers to each other’s questions, gave the impression of a free exchange of ideas and opinions. In the end, however, there was always only one right answer and the teacher made sure that everybody understood and internalised that answer and knew the bible verses that supported it by heart. Through these classes new converts not only learnt what it takes and means to be a born again Christian, they first of all learnt to speak the language that comes with it. Here we clearly see institutionalised religious power at work.

Water baptism
Like all charismatic churches, the ICGC practices baptism by immersion in water when a person has accepted Christ and has been baptised in the Holy Spirit. Although water baptism is required for membership, it does not make you a member, neither is it restricted to members. It is a service offered to the general born-again public, open to both ICGC members and people of other churches, including Catholics, as long as they are born again. There is no effort to assess this, however. When the ICGC was still based at the Baiden Powell Hall in Central Accra, people were baptised in the nearby sea. Nowadays the baptism ceremony takes place in the baptismal behind the Christ Temple once a month on a Saturday morning.

On Saturday 23 November 2002 I attended such a baptism ceremony. About fifty people had turned up at six o’clock in the morning, much less than usual. Pastor Kisii received them in the auditorium and taught them ‘the meaning of water bap-
tism.’ Outside, while queuing to enter the water, their names and church affiliations were written down for the purpose of making baptism certificates. Three pastors stood in the water, praying aloud and holding hands. The baptisees stood by and watched or prepared by praying. I was surprised to see a child among them, as normally only adults may be baptised. Then they were led into the pond three at the time. The pastors prayed with them one on one, both in English and in tongues, holding their hands. After having thus spiritually prepared the person, the pastor put his hand on his/her head and gently pushed him/her under water. The person came up again, walked out of the pond, and went to change into dry clothes in the lavatories.

Charismatics themselves commonly explain water baptism as a symbolic representation of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. By going down into the water your old self dies and when you come up out of the water, you are a ‘new’ person. Distinguishing between dominant discourse and practice (cf. Green 1996), however, I would argue that water baptism as a practice of the body not so much represents a spiritual order, but reconstitutes the body, conceived as permeable to spirits, in its relation with the spirit world. By total immersion in water, made holy and powerful through the pastors’ prayer in it, the body becomes the medium that establishes a connection with the Holy Spirit. The practice of water baptism thus serves to effect a physical-spiritual transformation of the body and thus to constitute a particular kind of religious subjects, rather than to embody a symbolic representation.

Covenant Families
After completion of the discipleship classes, pre-membership supervision continues in neighbourhood ‘covenant families’ and it is not until six months afterwards that one may attain full membership. ‘Covenant families’ are neighbourhood-based groups of church members, who meet once a week on Thursday evenings in one member’s home under the supervision of a church-appointed leader. Borrowing the idea of cell groups from the global charismatic movement, Otabil introduced it to meet the challenges posed by a mass church like the ICGC. Meetings are highly structured in a manner prescribed by the Covenant Family manual used by leaders and by senior pastors to train leaders. The detailed prescription of the format of the meeting concern the meeting place (e.g. ‘the premises must be fenced or walled to provide physical security’), the arrangement of the room (‘must be swept and cleaned 30 minutes before the meeting, chairs should be arranged in a circular form’), and the sequence, duration, and content of activities. The content of the opening prayer, for example, is prescribed as ‘commit the meeting to the Lord and pray for the Lord’s anointing on the people and programme.’ And the content of the ten minutes of praise and worship reads:

Worship joyfully. Start with a few fast-timed praise songs and end with quieter worship choruses. Musical instruments such as guitars and tambourines could be used. … Encourage expression such as lifting of hands, clapping, dancing, etc.

The most important part of the meeting is 50 minutes of bible study and discussion, following a lesson outline including listed ‘share-questions’ prepared by the church.
3. Christ Temple

The leader reads the introduction to the lesson, has members read parts of the outline and the referenced bible passages, and ensures that the group does not deviate from the topic under study. After this, 20 minutes are available for prayer, first congregational prayer, whereby each member has to talk to God about his/her life in relation to the lesson learned, and then special prayer requests from individuals. One or two testimonies confirm answered prayers. After reading a relevant bible verse, an offering is taken with musical accompaniment (if available) and the meeting is closed with special announcements by the leader and a prayer.

What speaks from the Covenant Family manual is that the institutionalisation of a format for religious service, as described above for the mass services in the Christ Temple, starts at the small scale Covenant Family level, through selection, instruction and training of leaders. Apart from worship, bible study, and prayer, the CF meetings are also, very importantly, a means of supervision. For prospective members attending covenant family meetings is obligatory and a means of assessing whether they are fit for ICGC membership or not. First, it is the leader’s task to keep a record of attendance on a weekly basis and submit this to the central Covenant Family secretariat, giving remarks where a member does not attend regularly. Moreover, s/he should follow up on absentees and encourage them to come to meetings, and also on new members ‘to find out about their lives.’ But attendance alone is not enough. The CF leader uses a membership recommendation form to assess a person’s Christian commitment and growth over six months, ticking scores concerning attitude to the word of God, to prayer, to evangelism, to leadership, to giving, social behaviour, character et cetera and recommending the person for membership or not. Only after a positive recommendation one can become a member. What is interesting about these forms is not so much the information about the persons, but the questions asked, the kind of things looked at, and the very practice of using such an assessment form to judge whether a person is fit to become a member or not. ‘We want to be sure of our people,’ pastor Charlotte explained. It brings out the highly bureaucratised and supervised nature of the church’s membership trajectory.

Membership

After positive recommendation, a person is given a membership data form to fill. This form again comes to pastor Charlotte, who prepares the membership certificates (with the person’s name printed in calligraphic font) and has the membership data entered in the church data base. At the time of my fieldwork the assistant administrator, Divine, was in the process of acquiring and applying data base software specifically designed for churches. Unfortunately, this was not yet advanced enough for me to have access to the electronic data base, as the former administrator had promised me earlier. All membership data were still kept on paper in bulky folders, out of which Charlotte allowed me to take a random sample of 240 records. The form records extensive information on every member: surname, other names, sex, date of birth, tribe, languages spoken, nationality, residential address, work address, father’s name and occupation, mother’s name and occupation, next of kin, address of next of kin, last two institutions attended, academic qualifications, professional qualifications,
employed or unemployed, present occupation, job nature, employer’s address, marital status, marriage type, date of marriage, name of spouse, work address of spouse, spouse’s church (plus tick born-again, church goer or non-believer), number of children, marriage blessed by ICGC or other, date of becoming born again, date of Holy Ghost baptism, date of first attendance, introduced by, date of completion discipleship classes, hobbies, and special talents.23

The church’s membership consists mainly of young people between the ages of 20 and 35 (71 %), and counts, in contrast to many other charismatic churches, more men than women (55 %). A (male) church member explained that

For every church, the membership thrives on the vision of the church. Our vision ‘bringing vision and leadership to our generation,’ is more rational than that of many other churches. Otabil is teaching you about society, making you aware of problems and encouraging you to do something yourself. Here you are being told that prayer alone does not work. That rational emphasis attracts men. Other churches have much more women than men, because they focus more on emotion, on miracles.

This argument is common and it indicates that religious styles are gendered, that is, different religious behaviour is expected from women than from men. As can be expected, Otabil’s exclusive use of English attracts not only an ethnically heterogeneous, but also relatively well-educated membership. The majority of Christ Temple members (65 %) has finished Senior Secondary School or its equivalent and one third (33 %) has followed or is currently following tertiary training or university education. Only little over half (51 %), however, is employed, most of these in white collar jobs (15 %), skilled trades (13 %), or as educated professionals (13 %). Many also are traders or businesspeople (the difference is not clear, 11 % together) and there is a relatively high number of students (8 %).24 The dominance of young educated people in the church also reflects in the members’ marital status: the large majority (67 %) is single and has never been married. Less than a quarter (23 %) is currently married. The membership data records are a very valuable source of church statistics, but this kind of record keeping as such is also interesting as a practice of government, of supervision and control. It again points to the ICGC’s high level of institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of religious authority and religious subjectivity, which seems to contradict the significance of charisma as the source of authority.

Concerning membership, we have to keep in mind that there are different kinds of ‘members’ and not assign too much weight to church statistics. The figures given above concern the official members, who have a membership certificate, are registered, and are thus included in the church statistics. They do not necessarily attend church, however, because they may have travelled or moved to another church. One of the reasons of registering members is finance. Apart from the anonymous money offerings that people give during the two collections held during Sunday services (and one during weekday services), members are required to contribute 10 % of their monthly income, tithes or ‘first fruits,’ to the church. Every first Sunday of the month people have to put this amount (in the form of a cheque or in cash) in a specially
designed envelope (fig. 3.17) and a special collection is held during which people pray over their money and hand in their envelopes amidst celebratory and danceable music. The amounts given are registered under their membership number, marked in the upper corner of the envelopes. Occasional offerings and contributions to specific projects are also registered under this number. Financial commitment is thus expected to be high and it is indeed high. Although the church's accounts books were not accessible to me, the head of administration told me that tithes and offering are by far the major financial source. The building and running of the church and all its projects (including Otobil's and other staff salaries), is almost exclusively paid for by the membership. There are no immediate sanctions on not paying tithes and of course not everybody does. Yet, pressure to pay is high, but by holding out the prospect of abundant blessing to those who pay and by stigmatising those who don’t, as in the following sermon quote:

An offering is out of free will, but the tithe is compulsory, a command of God. Honour God with the first fruits to finance his kingdom. The first fruit prepares the ground to receive full blessing. Less than 50% of the membership of Christ Temple do pay their first fruits. If you don't do it, you put yourself in the category of robbers and thieves.25

Moreover, there are instances when your fulfilment of the financial obligation to the church is checked, for example when you need help from the church, when you want to get married in the church, or when you die and are to be buried by the church.26

Apart from the official members there are a lot of people who attend regularly and identify with the church, but may not be registered as members and thus remain in a sense ‘invisible’ for church authority. This concerns especially many members from the early days. One of the church’s senior staff members confessed:

There are 6000 to 7000 people who call themselves members. Not all are official members however. To be honest, I am not either, but I was with the church from the beginning, among the first 40 people. Then we didn’t have these membership certificates and all that. And I never wanted to do that. But still, they will have to bury me when I die. Of course!

This shows that some older members, even the very people running the church bureaucracy, do not accept, at least not for themselves, the bureaucratisation that came with the church’s growth into a mass church. A third kind of ‘membership’ that I will consider in the next chapter is the regular Living Word audience. These people also in a way take part in the Sunday sermon and sometimes engage in follow-up actions like writing, phoning, or visiting the church, thus participating in the church more than some of the official members who are no longer around. It is clear that there is a considerable overlap between these three groups of ‘members.’ It points to the possibility, apart from the official membership trajectory described here, of alternative forms of belonging to the church, other ways of being an ICGC member. When I stress the high degree of supervision and control that comes with ICGC membership, I am not
arguing that this is totalitarian. One can always choose not to submit oneself to church authority, simply by not signing up for the discipleship classes and not registering for official membership, but just coming, participating, and going as one pleases. In a mass church like the ICGC, no-one is likely to bother you. Most members don’t know each other’s membership status. In order to take part in any of the church departments, however, one has to be registered. Members are expected not only to attend church services on Sundays and Tuesday evenings, and Covenant Family meetings on Thursday evenings, but also to participate actively in church departments (on Wednesday evenings and sometimes also on Saturdays) and other activities, thus having most of their spare time governed by the church.

Talent, skills, and lifestyle

The ICGC has 25 different church departments or ‘ministries,’ to many of which members can belong. In charismatic doctrine, ‘to minister’ is to serve as a channel for God’s spirit and message to bless the people of the church or outside the church. Pastor Morris explained it thus:

There are many ways to minister. Ministry is like marketing, catering for specific needs of different target groups. The different types of ministry can be compared to different kind of products in the market. Being ‘called’ to a specific ministry requires specific qualities, character, talents, and passion in the heart. Compare it with ‘profession’ in the world. There are full-time ministers, who are called by God and paid by the church, and there are volunteers, who offer themselves to serve. Every Christian has the responsibility given by God to serve in one or the other way, to do something. But in what way is not always clear for everybody. Gradually you have to find out into what ministry you are called.

The ICGC thus puts much emphasis on personal growth, discovery of talents and development of skills, on ‘becoming a leader’ in a certain area and taking responsibilities.

Some ministries focus on performing arts: the music ministry and the drama and dance section of the youth department. Others take care of the smooth functioning and organisation of the church: the guest ministry (including greeters, ushers, hosts, and front desk), the programming and production and the security ministry. Still others are more spiritually oriented: the intercession (prayer) and the evangelism ministries for example. Some also are organised around gender or age group: there are ministries for youth, men, women, single adults, and ‘senior citizens.’ Entry into a specific ministry requires (again) screening, training, disciplining and a high level of commitment. The music ministry provides a telling example.

The constitution of the music ministry states on recruitment that membership of the music department is open only to individuals who have gone through the church’s discipleship classes and have been accorded full membership of the ICGC. Applicants must show evidence of talent in music and an appreciable understanding
of music as a ministry. First they must go through a prescribed audition, during which the former is assessed, and if successful, are recommended for an interview by the music director. During the interview not only a person’s understanding of music ministry is assessed, but also his/her Christian commitment and moral lifestyle. If this is found satisfactory, the person is recommended for membership of the ministry. New members then undergo training for three months, which has, as pastor Morris explained, a technical and a spiritual side. It includes musical and vocal training exercises, but also schooling on the concept of ministry, on what it takes to be a good minister of music according to biblical principles.

Your devotional life must be strong; you must get up early in the morning to have time to pray, to fellowship, to read the Bible. The word of God must be practical in your life, the principles must be lived, that is, you must apply the truth that you take from the word of God to your life and make self-assessment and analyses. You don’t just come to church and live your life anyhow.29

Once part of the ministry, discipline is strict. The ‘music ministry constitution’ states:

The following offences shall attract necessary disciplinary action: absence, lateness, insubordination, unethical behaviour (unwarranted talking, chewing gum, sleeping, any such act that is incongruent with the smooth running of the rehearsal), and immoral conduct (gossiping and backbiting, poor interpersonal relationship, immoral behaviour).

Commitment expected from members is high, both in terms of attendance and active participation and of fulfilling financial obligations. Procedures and expectations are similar in other departments.

One remarkable, recently established department is the Health and Fitness Ministry. In accordance with recent middle class trends, the ICGC, Otobil told me, firmly believe[s] it is essential that every Christian takes good care of his/her physical body. A healthy lifestyle is very important, including physical exercise and a balanced diet, and I try to install that awareness in people through my messages.

And through his own example: Otabil himself jogs every day, lost weight and doesn’t hesitate to tell his congregation. To encourage members of the church to take up sports and adapt a healthy lifestyle, the health and fitness ministry was established in 2004. That same year it organised a non-competitive half-marathon for all members, but it turned out that it was too much for most people. In 2005, therefore, the ministry organised a ‘Life Walk’ over a distance of about 21 km, as part of the activities of the ‘Health and Fitness Month’ in March. Participants were to buy a T-shirt and a cap, the proceeds of which would be donated towards the building of a boys’ dormitory block at Osu Children’s Home. That way, the Life Walk gives both physical and spiritual benefit. Spiritual because giving to people generates blessings. The Health and Fitness
Fig. 3.18 Wedding at the Christ Temple.

Fig. 3.19 Wedding card of ICGC members George Atsu and Millicent Agbenohevi.
Ministry and the Life Walk fit into the new urban trend of organising walks on various occasions and the general health awareness that has become part of a new, urban middle class lifestyle. Church ministries provide the opportunity to discover and develop various kinds of talents and skills, but the emphasis is on leadership qualities and becoming a leader, in one of the ministries, in the covenant family structure, or as a discipleship class teacher. As ‘raising leaders’ is the church’s aim, we have to take a closer look at what leadership is understood to be by the ICGC.

Leadership
The Covenant Family manual gives insight into the qualities and characteristics expected of a leader. First, ‘s/he must be born-again and filled with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues’; second, ‘s/he must walk by the spirit and live in conformity with Christian principles as taught in the Word of God and exhibit a lifestyle worthy of emulation’; third, ‘s/he must have good understanding of the principles of spiritual authority and hence submit to the authority of the overall leadership of the local church’; and fourth, ‘s/he must be committed to the local church as evident in active participation in all worship services, faithfulness in giving.’ There is no emphasis on formal religious education or leadership training or experience, rather on ‘a heart that seeks to serve,’ ‘the ability to motivate and inspire,’ and ‘entire dependence on the Holy Spirit.’ Charisma, lifestyle, and submission to authority are clearly valued much higher than planning and organisation, which appears as the very last ‘gift.’

In the ICGC’s Living Word School of Ministry, Rev. Simon Tinglafo teaches a course on ‘Principles of Leadership.’ He defines the essential ingredients of effective leadership as follows: 1. Divinely initiated vision that comes from God directly to your spirit. 2. Communication. 3. Motivation, both one’s own motivation made up of God’s call, the vision received from the Holy Spirit, a desire to please God, a passion for souls, the Holy Spirit friendship, fellowship and daily instructions, and the ability to motivate others by imparting enthusiasm and awakening them to action. 4. Decision-making, which receives much less attention. Although Tinglafo states that ‘leadership is not a handsome looking man radiating certain personality traits [but] something that can be studied and applied,’ the ‘essential ingredients’ rather depict a kind of leadership based on supernatural giftedness, divine inspiration, and the ability to communicate this, in short, charisma. Despite the high level of bureaucratisation and the hierarchical structure of the organisation, charisma thus remains the key leadership principle in the ICGC.

Church marriage
As a result of the high level of commitment and participation demanded from members, much of their social and spiritual life takes place within the supervisory structure of the church. But apart from this regular church life, the church is also involved (to various degrees) in the life course events of its members: marriage, childbirth, and
death. The rites of passage the church offers to mark the key moments of a person's life give opportunity for specific teaching, for encouraging individual introspection and reflection on life's progress at the same time as bringing this in line with Christian doctrine.

As in many charismatic churches, the life course event that gets most emphasis is marriage. Marriage is also a recurring area of emphasis in Otábil's pleas for cultural transformation. Marriage and love relationships often feature in his sermons as examples of Ghanaian or African culture that need to be changed, often jokingly, almost ridiculing common and very recognisable practices to the entertainment of the audience. To give an example from ‘Turning failure into success’: ‘Ladies, don’t let your whole life depend upon the generosity of your husband. Your life does not depend on a man. Make your own money, be rich yourself. Don’t sit and wait to be married by a rich man and offload your ancestors’ poverty on him.’ He also devoted a whole message series to the subject, titled ‘Marriage 101,’ designed as a ‘course in marriage’ that ‘challenges the socio-cultural stereotypes that harm marital relationships’ (promotional text). The series was very successful, in terms of tape sales it ranked second in 2003 after ‘Turning failure into success.’ The success of this message is not surprising, considering the fact that the largest part of the membership in most charismatic churches consists of young singles. A common remark about these churches is that they function as a wedding market and that many people join them primarily in order to find a partner. One of ICGC’s marriage counsellors, Joshua, confirmed that ‘a good place to find a partner is church.’

The ICGC marriage procedure can be divided into four phases: choosing a marriage partner, registration, pre-marriage classes, and church wedding. The church clearly attempts to influence members’ choice of marriage partner. Meeting a partner in church is already encouraged during discipleship classes, when new converts are urged to ‘get to know yourselves, organise yourselves, establish relationships. Chat a little before rushing out. Make friends. Meeting your marriage partner in church is not a crime.’ During one of the teaching services pastor Donkor spent a whole sermon, ‘Achieving a blissful marriage’ (26 August 2001), on how to choose a marriage partner, a rather rational, information-based choice in his view. The most important point is to choose a Christian; in the ICGC you can’t marry an ‘unbeliever.’ But denomination and spiritual development also matter; the person must be born again and committed to the will of God. Sharing spiritual values is considered crucial. Further, you must marry somebody who is committed to personal growth and development, who has a passion to reach somewhere in life. Marriage must be based on friendship and love, on sharing ideas and life goals, on conversation, mutual understanding, encouragement and dependence. Yet, although a common level of education is considered important for communication, ‘the man has to be higher in education, income, and age than the woman to make things flow naturally; a woman must marry somebody you can submit to, a man must marry somebody you love.’ You must also marry somebody you find physically attractive, but inner beauty is regarded as more important. A man must have leadership qualities; a woman must be respectful, hospitable, and submissive.

Although the church thus clearly promotes conservative Christian gender roles
of the man as the head of the household and the woman as subordinate, in the Ghanaian context many of the ideas about marriage, love, and gender roles that the church tries to instil in its members are considered very ‘modern’ and differ from cultural values. Marriage as a bond between two individuals, who make a personal choice for each other, based on knowing each other well, on friendship and on romantic love, is the ideal for many young urbanites, an ideal greatly influenced by the media (cf. Spronk 2006) and by a desire to break with the influence of extended families and the ‘traditional’ marriage as a bond between two families. At the same time, however, the church integrates ‘traditional’ ways of marrying into the Christian marriage by discussing (and recording on the marriage preparation form) the ‘knocking’ ceremony and the customary marriage as part of a couple’s wedding plans. Interestingly, the customary marriage ceremony, including the ritualised exchange of words, gifts, and drinks by both families, is nowadays commonly celebrated as the ‘engagement’ prior to Christian marriage, with the gifts including an engagement ring and a bible. Often this is even done on the morning of the wedding day, not in church, but in the home of the bride.

If you find a fiancée that you want to marry, the second step is to see pastor Donkor and register the relationship. This registration involves an interview and filling a ‘marriage registration and preparation form.’ Through this, pastor Donkor explains, ‘we get details about themselves and their families and this background is very important for building the marriage.’ The form records age, education, occupation, residence, and Christian biography. Marriage in the ICGC requires being born-again and Holy Spirit baptism for both partners. Both things will be asked during the wedding ceremony and should be answered positively. But of course this is very difficult to prove. If people say they are born-again and baptised in the Spirit, that is it. The partners must have completed discipleship class. In case one partner is from another church, the pastor Donkor checks with that church. He also looks at whether a person has paid first fruits, ‘because that shows how you have lived your life.’

Living conditions are investigated because ‘when you live in a family house, there may be no peace, some of them may not be Christians. You cannot take your wife there; first you have to have your own place.’ He also asks about the parents’ relationship – ‘maybe the father had more wives, or the father hit the mother, or somebody is from a Muslim background and had a change of mind, or from a broken home’ – and about the parents’ jobs. He records how the families see this marriage, and whether they have discussed the marriage with each other. Finally, but very importantly, he counsels the partners on how to keep themselves during courtship. The last question on the form is: ‘Have you and your partner set boundaries as to how far you will go in physical intimacy? If you have, do you feel comfortable and at peace about these boundaries? Are you both keeping within these boundaries? If you have not set boundaries, do you feel you should?’ Although these questions seem to leave the setting of the boundaries to the couple, the church explicitly sets a boundary before sexual intercourse. Both partners are to sign ‘My Marriage Preparation Commitment’:

“I, …., commit myself to actively participate and to complete this series of counselling sessions and to carefully work through assignments. I consider
preparation for marriage, not just the wedding, to be a top priority in my life. I also commit myself to honour God, my partner, and our relationship by not having sexual intercourse from now until we are married.”

When a couple is thus thoroughly screened and considered ready for preparation towards marriage, the third phase involves participation in a weekly pre-marriage counselling class for three months. There is one counsellor to three or four couples at the time. Pre-marriage classes follow the outline of a marriage counselling book written by one of ICGC’s marriage pastors, Daniel Jenkins, *How to have an enjoyable marriage* (1996). It covers different topics, ranging from the biblical foundations of marriage and love, the practice of love in marriage, and six keys to a happy marriage to how to build a Christian home, how to relate to one’s in-laws, and how to deal with money. The emphasis is on the effort put in marriage and romance by both partners. A medical doctor teaches the future couple about male and female anatomy, sex, and family planning. Indeed, the classes are rather explicit about sex and the book contains images of the sexual organs. Much more could be said about the contents of the classes, but what I want to emphasise here is the high degree of formalisation of the marriage preparation and the close and lengthy monitoring of the partners. Even though there is no ‘exam’ to pass, when a couple is about to end the class, the counsellor has to approve that both partners have been serious and have really finished. Only if the approval has been given, a wedding date can be planned and the couple can start preparing towards the day.

When the date is set, the couple is introduced and the wedding is announced in church through a Power Point animation. If anybody among the congregation has any objection to the marriage s/he can inform the pastors. The wedding usually takes place on a Saturday and is a big event drawing lots of people (fig. 3.18). Without describing the whole wedding ceremony here, I do want to point out that this, again, follows a detailed script, prescribing all words (except the sermon), actions and movements to be spoken and performed by the officiating pastor, the groom, and the bride. Indeed, one week before the wedding the two protagonists come to rehearse the play. In half an hour, Joshua takes them through the whole process and teaches them how to hold each other, what to say and what to do at what point. They are told, for example, that they have to embrace and not kiss each other. ‘Ghana’s culture is not like Europe. Here we don’t kiss in public, there are children present.’ Again, the power of the Holy Ghost, in which the couple is pronounced one and which ‘gives Satan no place in this marriage,’ is channelled through church procedures and formats, meticulously designed to transform two young people into a Christian husband and wife (fig. 3.19).

When we look at the whole process of becoming an ICGC member, growing in the church and church marriage, we see a dialectics between shaping individuals and creating community. On the one hand, there is much emphasis on the discovery and development of individual talents, skills, and spiritual gifts, on personality and individual growth, and on one’s personal spiritual experience. On the other hand, members are required to participate in all kinds of church activities and church groups and
pressurised to conform in behaviour, thinking, speaking. The church thus tries to dominate not only its members’ spiritual life, but also their social life, and even their mental life. In a mass church as Christ Temple it is difficult, however, to keep the level of community and face-to-face control that characterises small churches. It therefore employs bureaucratic technologies of modern governance, such as record keeping and data forms, assessment interviews, questionnaires and reports as modes of subjectivation and supervision. In a way, the church organisation thus functions as a kind of micro-state, supported by its own effective system of taxation. The challenge posed by the efficiency and smoothness of the well-oiled Christ Temple machine, however, is that it may perform very well in processing a mass of individuals, but much less in establishing among these individuals a feeling of communality, interdependence, mutual commitment, indeed, of belonging to a community. While much of church practice and discourse is directed at the individual person, and this is also one of the church’s attractions, this individual at the same time risks getting lost in the mass. Indeed, the few people I spoke who left the ICGC indicated that they found the church too massive, too ‘impersonal,’ too ‘cold,’ as one of them expressed it. They found it difficult to make friends and establish lasting relationships within the church and left for smaller churches. This tension between individual and mass also marks Otabil’s media ministry, examined in the next chapter.

Conclusion: format, spirit, and the religious subject

Otabil’s message, the various Christ Temple activities, and the institutionalised process of becoming and being an ICGC member are all geared towards the formation, or rather transformation, of the person and, ultimately, of society. In this process, the religious subject becomes a site of production and of power (Foucault 1977; Bayart 1993, 2000). Analysing the formation of the religious subject in the ICGC, I have in this chapter distinguished between two kinds of knowledge and two kinds of power, that seem to contradict, but deeply inform each other.

A notion of charismatic or spiritual power takes a central place in the ICGC. Despite Otabil’s ‘rational’ emphasis, we have seen that divine inspiration, Holy Ghost power, and individual spiritual encounters inform many of the church’s activities, organisational aspects and above all its teachings and are considered both personally and institutionally empowering. The centrality of spiritual power is linked to a kind of knowledge that transcends human intelligence. Poloma (2003:23, drawing on Johns 1999) also points out that in the ‘transrational’ worldview of charismatic Christianity knowledge is not limited to the realms of reason and sensory experience. ‘Knowing’ comes from a right relationship with God rather than through reason and the bodily senses. This experiential knowledge of God alters a believer’s approach to reading and interpreting reality (Johns 1999, quoted in Poloma 2003). Poloma reproduces, however, the dominant charismatic discourse that opposes spiritual, Holy Spirit-given knowledge to rational, human knowledge. I argue instead that both kinds of knowledge cannot be separated, but produce each other.

Despite the church’s privileging of spiritual power, rational, bureaucratic
power also shapes the ICGC to a great extent. It can be found in formal teaching and indoctrination, bureaucratic procedures, institutionalisation, supervision, and church authority and leadership structures. By submitting oneself to church authority and listening to sermons, following discipleship classes and other modes of religious instruction one gains theological knowledge, understanding. Official charismatic discourse teaches that being born-again involves a deep inner transformation, caused by personal relationship with Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit and resulting in success in all areas of life. One also learns how to interpret one’s bodily responses to religious ministry or to media programmes, music, or books: as a touch by the Holy Spirit or as the presence of the Devil. At the same time, the born-again Christian subject is formed by a gradual embodiment of a format of bodily behaviour appropriate to listening to a sermon, worshipping, being delivered or prophesied to. While much of these charismatic mannerisms are signified as spontaneous responses to the Holy Spirit, they are acquired by mimetic performance, that is, the bodily reproduction of ritual formats. Whereas charismatic leaders oppose style and spirituality as supposedly superficial versus deep, or outside versus inside of the person, this chapter has argued that it is exactly through bodily practices of self-styling that the inner transformation of the religious self comes about (cf. Peperkamp 2006). The transformation from ‘within,’ in charismatic teaching caused by the power of the Holy Spirit, can thus not be separated from a transformation from ‘outside,’ instituted by bureaucratised church authority.

With the growth of the ICGC into one of the largest charismatic churches in the country, the experience of Holy Spirit power has come to be embedded in the church’s well-organised religious performances and strictly governed membership procedures. The church itself is concerned that organisation threatens to blocks the operation of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we have seen that in religious practice the working of the Holy Spirit is experienced exactly if one submits to and incorporates certain bodily regimes, behavioural scripts, and explanatory models. Other than Weber I would thus suggest, and agree with Fabian (1971) and Csordas (1997), that organisation and ritualisation can actually enable rather than counteract the sense of power that some call charisma and others the Holy Spirit. The question that they do not address, however, is how Zairian Jamaa members or American Catholic charismatics are able to escape the pitfall of routinisation. When does ritual become experienced as routine and when does it not? Or, for that matter, how is it that Ghanaian ICGC members do not experience the formats that govern the activities in their church and the membership procedures they go through as hindering the free flow of inspiration and spiritual empowerment they long for? I think the answer to this question has to do with the continual production of a sense of expectation that is itself ritualised. The emphasis on constant renewal, on a kind of transformation that never results in a static new state, but continually produces ‘something new’ is deeply engrained in charismatic religiosity. As the very popular gospel song by Elder Mireku goes, ‘Another day has gone, another day has come, do something new in my life.’ The expectation of something new is nurtured not only by doctrines of ‘transformation’ and ‘new life,’ ‘practices of prophecy, and rhetoric like ‘expect your miracle!’ It also feeds on the never-ending renovation of the church building and premises, where new structures are being built all the time, new stage
3. Christ Temple

backgrounds created, new office decorations and pieces of furniture arranged, and a new media studio equipped; the initiation of new church groups, ministries, and events; the design of a new house style for church products, a new logo, and new packaging; a new twist to Otabil’s messages. In the Christ Temple there is always something new going on. It is only now that I realise how often I have surfed to the ICGC website since my return from fieldwork, just to check what new things were going on. Being around for a year had produced a strong expectation of newness also in myself. In the Christ Temple the expectation of something new is ritualised and embodied to the extent that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is a kind of ritualisation that always challenges the status-quo and thus goes against a possible experience of routine.

This chapter has shown that the mediation of the power of the Holy Spirit and of charisma in the ICGC has strong physical, material, and spatial components. Clearly, the ICGC is a message-oriented church, and Otabil first of all a teacher. Yet, it is not only the more ‘marginal,’ spiritual activities such as speaking in tongues, laying on of hands, healing, and anointing that are carried by ritual involving the body, the senses, and sharing of space. The flow of spiritual power through the sermon is just as much dependent on specific bodily and spatially organised modes of both delivering and receiving ‘the Word.’ Moreover, the transformation a person is supposed to undergo as a result of the reception of the Holy Spirit is strictly supervised, prescribed and generated by the church’s membership procedures. This observation raises the question as to how this relates to Otabil’s extensive and successful use of electronic mass media, which lack much of the physicality of church performance, transcend the spatial boundaries of the church building, and preclude the possibility of supervision.

Notes

1 Holy Spirit and Holy Ghost are used synonymously in the ICGC.
2 This parallels the two complementary modes of anthropological learning discussed in the introduction: interviews, courses, and discussions on the one hand, and participation, mimesis, and gradual embodiment on the other.
3 Shaba Mahmood (2001, 2004) makes a similar argument in her study of Islamist women in Cairo, where she argues that the religious subject is formed by embodied participation. ‘Conversion’, then, does not precede a change in bodily forms, but rather vice versa.
4 Conversation 31 July 2002.
5 When I returned to Accra in March 2005, I saw that the Zongo road was now tarred.
6 The ICGC has invested a lot in piles to be able to build there.
7 Otabil used a whiteboard for some time, but it turned out that the white background behind his face did not yield good television images. Since he started using Power Point, copying the slide text has become a common practice among the congregation and not starting to write as soon as a new slide appears can evoke an attentive nudge from one’s neighbour.
8 Marks does not elaborate her provisional concepts of ‘haptic sound’ and ‘haptic hearing’, nor does she, surprisingly, apply them to the films she discusses.
9 Wearing plain red is unusual in the Ghanaian context, where red carries connotations of danger,