Lessons in Mission from an African Initiated Church: A Case Study of the Zimbabwean VaPostori of Johane Masowe

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Introduction

Most visitors to southern, central, or east Africa have seen members of the various VaPostori sects, even if they do not know the name. The VaPostori stand out because of their distinctive look: their women are clad in white dresses and scarves and the men shave their heads and let their beards grow. Not only do they look different, but they also abound in public life, especially on the streets of urban areas, where they conduct commercial activities. They set up "shop" along busy thoroughfares to attract customers to buy their homemade wares such as baskets, crocheted items, metal containers, and wooden furniture. In addition, they are cross-border traders and are ubiquitous at border posts and in major cities where they function as unofficial currency changers. As they are members of sects that operate internationally, they are constantly traveling long distances both for business and for church meetings. From humble beginnings they are now more prosperous than many similar groups, including churches established by western missionaries.

Just who are the VaPostori? When I arrived as a new missionary in Zimbabwe in 1981, these groups intrigued me, but I knew little about them. When I signed up in the early 1980s for a correspondence course on folk religions, taught by Paul Hiebert at Fuller Theological Seminary, I decided to make one sect of VaPostori, the followers of Johane Masowe, a research project. The course requirements involved not only reading the literature on this group but also visiting their worship services. What I discovered surprised me and created a continuing interest in the VaPostori that provided the fuel for this paper. What I hope to accomplish here is to extract some mission principles followed by the VaPostori that might help other non-western missionaries to replicate their amazing feats in cross-cultural mission.

The Mission of Johane Masowe

Both of the major sects of VaPostori were founded in 1932 in eastern Zimbabwe by similar prophets, Johane Masowe (1915-1973) and Johane Maranke (1912-1963). According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, the Maranke group is the largest African Initiated Church in Zimbabwe. With 910,000 adherents in 1995, it vies with the Zion Christian Church and the Roman Catholic Church for the greatest number of affiliates in the country. By comparison, the Masowe group is small, numbering 55,000 in the main Gospel of God Church in Zimbabwe in 1995.[1]

Police records from the white colonial regime of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) indicate that Johane Masowe (whose original name was Shoniwa Masedza Tandi Moyo) first got the attention of the authorities when he was arrested in 1932 for traveling around preaching without proper documents. In the police interrogation, he explained that he began having severe pains in the head that culminated in a dream that he had died. After that he heard

voices saying that his name was now John, which he interpreted to mean John the Baptist. This new name carried a mandate to preach to the African people. His commission came from spending forty days in prayer on a hill during which time he did not sleep and survived only on wild honey. A voice from a burning bush told him his mission: "Tell the natives to throw away their witchcraft medicines, not to commit adultery or rape." He insisted to police, "I really do believe that I have been sent from heaven to carry out religious work among the natives. I think I am 'John the Baptist,' as the voice told me so. No human being has guided me in my teachings."[2] After these experiences, his headaches ceased.

A Jesuit priest, Clive Dillon-Malone, wrote the first detailed study of the Masowe VaPostori as his doctoral dissertation in 1976, later published as a book entitled *The Korsten Basketmakers* in 1978. He believed that Masowe had a profound religious experience that was, however, not unique at the time, since Maranke had a similar experience. In both cases, the call was for the prophet to reproduce the ministry of John the Baptist by preaching repentance and baptizing Africans. Masowe's commission, as described in his own words, resembled that of Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus in spending time alone in the wilderness, hence the name Johane Masowe, meaning "John of the wilderness."[3] Dillon-Malone concluded that the depth of this initial experience motivated Masowe to undertake a mission far and wide: "The conscious motivating power which impelled the religious behaviour of Johane and his inner core of disciples was an explicit awareness and conviction of being called by God to perform the work of salvation among African peoples."[4]

Both groups of VaPostori fit the category of "revitalization movements" as described by Anthony F. Wallace.[5] Such movements may arise when a culture is under pressure from such things as foreign domination or economic marginalization. In the case of the VaPostori, both factors were present: Africans in Rhodesia were coming increasingly under white domination in the British colony and everyone was suffering economically during the worldwide Great Depression.[6] Revitalization movements arise in reaction to a perceived intolerable situation when a charismatic leader explains what has gone wrong with society and preaches a sacred message offering a utopian outcome.

As might be expected, Johane Masowe preached in reaction to white domination, promising a better situation for Africans without white influence. While he harkened back to some African traditions, he insisted that other traditions be stopped, thus creating a New Religious Movement (NRM) containing a mixture of both old and new. Masowe VaPostori are a curious blend of African Traditional Religion and Christianity with Old Testament practices being prominent. One of Dillon-Malone's informants about the early days of the movement told him that Masowe taught that Africans "should burn the religious books of the European, as our forefathers did not have books. He suggested that the Bible, hymn books and the New Testament should be destroyed, together with all other religious books."[7] One of the main reasons was that books had to be bought with colonial money and the VaPostori movement was essentially nativistic.

In addition, the VaPostori were millenarian and messianic. This means that Masowe's preaching contained a strong sense of eschatology, urging repentance in light of the imminent end of the present age and the start of a better one. Masowe, as the prophet who revealed this truth, was also seen as a messianic figure, sent to bring salvation to Africans.

Masowe had no intention of abiding by colonial restrictions on his movements, but continued to preach and baptize people from his own Shona-speaking group even after he was arrested and imprisoned several more times. Documents surviving from Native Commissioners indicate that the authorities often kept Masowe under surveillance and witnessed how crowds of Africans responded enthusiastically to his preaching by handing over to him their fetishes and charms, along with items dedicated to witchcraft, as well as those used simply for female adornment.[8]

Masowe's message, however, was not only for his own ethnic group, but for all Africans. Pressure from local authorities plus his own missionary zeal soon launched his sect of VaPostori into neighboring groups, even those considered hostile to Shonas. By the end of the 1930s, Masowe moved to Bulawayo, the capital of the Ndebele-speaking people, who are traditional enemies of the Shonas.[9] Bulawayo was where I encountered the Masowe Vapostori and discovered that their sect retained a strong Shona element, but that it resonated nonetheless with some Ndebele people as well. Masowe became a successful cross-cultural missionary inside Zimbabwe.

Then he launched an international mission, traveling through South Africa in the 1940s, again partly due to pressure from colonial authorities and partly because of his own vision for Africa's future. Around 1947, he settled in the Korsten district of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and some of his followers began to migrate there to join him. Realizing that they needed some means of generating income that would not drive them to join the larger society, Masowe initiated the self-help projects in Korsten that became a VaPostori trademark and earned them the name "Korsten Basketmakers."[10]

At this point, Bengt Sundkler, one of the first to research African Initiated Churches, tried to meet Masowe. He suspected that he did indeed meet him, but extreme secrecy shrouded him so much that he was not sure whether he met him or not. The VaPostori told him that Masowe was away, and various other people were presented to him as the local leaders, but he felt that these were decoys. "Behind the decoy of these masks, hidden in the white-robed masses of thousands of believers, is the real Messiah, John of the Wilderness."[11] This reveals two important aspects of the Masowe VaPostori: they are extremely suspicious of outsiders, especially white people, and even at this stage Sundkler assumed that Masowe had taken the place of Christ as Africa's Messiah.

When the South African authorities discovered that most of the "Korsten Basketmakers" were illegal immigrants, they repatriated 1,880 Masowe Vapostori by train to Zimbabwe in 1962.[12] Since countries to the north were finally being granted independence from Britain, the VaPostori preferred to move there rather than having to deal with colonial authorities again. Large numbers of them moved to Lusaka, Zambia and to the Zambian

Copperbelt. There they discovered some of their own number who had migrated directly from Zimbabwe much earlier.[13]

From Zambia, the VaPostori continued to spread throughout Central and East Africa. Masowe himself took up residence in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1964 and later lived in Arusha, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya. The VaPostori entered Kenya in 1967, Mozambique in 1969, and Congo (Zaire) in 1972.[14] After Masowe died in Ndola, Zambia in September 1973, his body was flown home by airplane for burial at his home in Gandanzara, Zimbabwe.[15] By that time the number of Masowe VaPostori exceeded half a million people in nine nations of southern, central, and east Africa.[16]

While Masowe's life work may raise many questions, the one that concerns this paper is what methods he used that were so successful in planting groups of followers across such a vast expanse of territory. Without foreign help, he raised up a group of disciples from numerous people groups and languages who followed him wholeheartedly. Each disciple was required to change lifestyle drastically and to support the movement totally. While his followers actively spread their new faith, Masowe set the pace by preaching constantly for 41 years. After his death his movement continued to spread both by the high birth rate associated with polygamy, which was approved, and by evangelism to win new converts.[17]

Although other non-western missionaries may not wish to emulate all of Masowe's methods, what are some sound mission principles that come from studying the rapid growth of the VaPostori? For this paper, only five principles must suffice: the presentation of a clear eschatological message, indigenous initiative in reaction to western domination, cultural relevance to African concerns, radical commitment for membership, and self-contained economics.

Clear Eschatological Message

Anthropologist Matthew Engelke argues that the first recorded interviews with informants reveal that Masowe's initial message was unclear or inconsistent. He suggests that this "inchoate message" reflected "a hopeful charismatic fine-tuning his rhetoric in a moment of uncertainty as to how he might best proceed."[18] This changed, however, after he emerged from a three-month imprisonment. Engelke explains, "Time in a cell was time to think. . . . Once out, Johane began to build on his initial message by moving more deliberately toward a model of apostolic or Pentecostal faith, a faith modeled on 'what people in the Bible used to do.'"[19] This reflected a radical turn in his acceptance of the Bible as God's word, a change of such magnitude that it permanently divided his followers between those who kept his original injunction to destroy Bibles and those who used them.[20]

Engelke suggests that Masowe's acceptance of the Bible and his clearer message came from a temporary connection to a Pentecostal denomination, the Apostolic Faith Mission.[21] In any case, some of Masowe's message was constant from the beginning and it related to his original visions. This included "the designation of 'disciples,' the donning

of white robes, emphasis on the Holy Spirit, and the public confession of sins."[22] An interview by government officials with an informant in 1932 contains the following description of Masowe's vision of being in heaven after he reportedly died:

> Then Jesus said, "You are to go back to earth to drive away witches and to destroy all medicines (*mishonga*) because the world is about to come to an end. The different churches have failed to teach the laws that I have given them. They have done as they wished themselves." Johane answered, "I cannot do such an important work." Jesus then said, "You will speak through the power of the one who will help you. I am giving you the power of John the Baptist of Judea who is crying out in the wilderness, 'Repent and cease from your evil ways and be baptized by water and by blood because the case of those infants—the ones who are complaining to me day and night that the world should come to an end—is becoming very serious.'"[23]

The infants in question had been killed by their parents for being born as twins and were now demanding that God should bring the world to an end so they could bring a case against their own forefathers.[24] In essence, Masowe claimed to have died and been resurrected with a mandate and power from Jesus to preach the impending end of the world because of the sins of the African ancestors. To show their repentance and avoid judgment, Africans must give up everything dedicated to ancestral spirits, including "medicines," and must drive out the witches who used them to harm others. In addition, penitent Africans would undergo "Jordan" baptism and adopt the peculiar ways of Masowe disciples.

This simple message obviously borrows from the Gospels, which describe the work of John the Baptist as "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4), and the message of Jesus as preaching, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Discipleship meant repentance, baptism, and following Jesus in the end times. Preaching was presented with the urgent eschatology associated with the kingdom of God. One can only imagine the excitement of ordinary people in Galilee and Judea when John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching the approach of God's ultimate reign over the earth. Just as John and Jesus created some sensation that resulted in the formation of groups of followers, so Masowe discovered that his simple end times message struck a cord with African peasants who formed communities of Masowe VaPostori. A clear eschatological message is key for the rapid spread of the gospel today.

Indigenous Initiative in Reaction to Western Domination

Johane Masowe's initial rejection of the Bible and his subsequent acceptance of doing what people in the Bible did were both a reaction against white colonial churches. We have seen that the rejection of Bibles was because Africans did not originally have books, so it was the form of God's word that Masowe objected to. The Bible in book form implied the need for European education and money in order to know what God wants. Masowe felt that God had spoken to him directly and that the God of the Bible was the

same as the Shona creator God, Mwari.[25] On this last point, Bible translators agree with Masowe, as Mwari is the word used to translate God.

When Masowe accepted the Bible, he still objected to how Europeans used it. This was because white missionaries tended to discount the possibility of miracles even though they occurred in the Bible. Dillon-Malone quotes the following excerpt from a 1974 sermon by a Masowe Apostle:

> When we were in those synagogues [white established churches], we used to read about the works of Jesus Christ. . . . We Africans, however, who were being instructed by white people, never did anything like that. We just worshipped an idol. We were taught to read the Bible, but we ourselves never did what the people in the Bible used to do. We never did the works which were mentioned by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, however, gave power to his disciples.[26]

This was Masowe's basic objection to white Christianity: it was too academic and therefore failed to touch the Africans' deepest needs.

Even those mission churches that sought to bring New Testament type revivals failed to penetrate deeply into the African psyche. Terence Ranger investigated revivalism in the region of Zimbabwe that gave rise to the VaPostori sects and found that camp meetings of the American Methodist Episcopal Church that were intended to instigate revivals resulted in a two-tiered Christianity—the official missionary version and the African folk version.[27] Eventually the Methodist missionaries grew tired of revivalism and turned to propagating Christianity through schools.

In the same place where Methodist revivals were the strongest, however, conditions proved ripe for the birth of the VaPostori movements. Ranger said that Masowe was "both a critique and continuation of Manyika [a local Shona subgroup] folk American Methodism."[28] Indeed, Masowe's birthplace, Gandanzara, was the location of a key Methodist mission station. In contrast to the periodic camp meetings conducted by missionaries, Masowe offered "continual rather than occasional rituals of repentance, exorcism, and protection. . . . Masowe's teaching stuck deeper into Manyika society than American Methodism had ever done."[29] What the more enthusiastic white missionaries offered in small doses at camp meetings, Africans wanted in large and continuous doses. Most missionaries, however, preferred schools and gradual westernization.

The deeper impact of Masowe's teaching as compared to that of American Methodism illustrates that Africans do well to take charge of their own mission efforts. Since the African traditional worldview fits in many ways the worldviews described in the Bible, evangelism as it was in the New Testament is effective in Africa. To the degree that rational scientific thinking and secularism have affected western churches, they become less able to penetrate African hearts, or the hearts of any non-secular people for that matter. It therefore behooves non-western missionaries to apply the Bible directly to their own lives and needs without the mediation of western missionaries.

Cultural Relevance for African Concerns

From the start, Masowe saw himself as a prophet sent to the African people. As a cultural insider, he not only understood the African psyche, but his followers presented an all-African face to potential converts. All the leadership, management, organization, and resources that drove his movement were African. The Masowe VaPostori spoke from a background of African traditions, using only African languages, but were able to initiate innovations as well. Masowe was a deliberate change agent within the African context. Notes from a court appearance in 1932 quote Masowe as saying, "Now, I am John the Baptist. I have been sent as a messenger to the Africans. . . . In God's language, Johane means a new beginner or the beginner of new things. I am preparing a new way amongst black people. Our fathers never learnt this way."[30]

Some would say that Masowe was too African, a syncretist claiming to be the Messiah for Africa.[31] Isabel Mukonyora, a fellow insider to Shona culture, disputes this notion. She regards Masowe's death experience as similar to the suffering of Shona spirit mediums, and hence not equivalent to the death and resurrection of Jesus. "In other words, Johane Masowe merely suffered acutely from his illness before his followers recognized him as a prophet. He did not die and rise again as Christ did to save humankind, only to die again to be buried in Gandanzara some 30 years later."[32] She says that Masowe saw himself as a prophet like John the Baptist and not as Messiah.

In any case, Masowe's followers came to regard him as more than a prophet. The current website of the Gospel of God Church in Nairobi, Kenya contains sophisticated arguments to support the notion that Masowe is indeed equivalent to Christ. These explain that Jesus had a limited ministry to the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24) and so could not have fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 19:20 that a Savior would come to rescue those oppressed in Egypt. Johane Masowe, however, was sent to liberate Africans. This assertion is backed up with a quote from 1 Enoch 90:38, "That lamb became a great animal and had great black horns on its head and the Lord of the sheep rejoiced over it." The website article concludes that Masowe himself supplied the interpretation of this passage: "The black horns of the great animal were a pointer to the fact that the last Messiah would come from a Nation of Black people."[33]

The fact that the Masowe VaPostori have developed a website that includes such exegesis is indicative of their commitment to change from a thoroughly African perspective. For instance, the website displays photographs of VaPostori in their white robes on pilgrimages in places like Jerusalem and Axum, an ancient Christian kingdom in Ethiopia. Despite their emphasis on Africa, they continue to make further pilgrimages to such places as Britain, Germany, the United States, and India, on the instructions of Masowe to preach the gospel worldwide.[34] The VaPostori prove that Africans can achieve far more than they and others have expected, building on their own cultural heritage.

Culture has as much to do with feelings as anything else and the part of the Masowe worship service that evokes the most feeling is the "Great Hosanna,"[35] which I attended at 9:00 am on a Saturday, the VaPostori Sabbath. We entered a large hall bare of everything

except for a small photograph of Johane Masowe at the front. Men sat at the front on the bare floor and women and children behind, all dressed in white and barefoot. An elder approached a side door, squatting and clapping in the Shona attitude of respect, opened the door and then closed it. A minute later, nine women dressed in white entered the worship hall and took their place between the men and women. These were the Sisters, who are devoted to prayer; many of them never marry.

A worship leader then shouted, "Imbai!" ("Sing!") in Shona and everyone sang the words "Hosanna" repeatedly until the song melted into high-volume unison prayer, finally returning to singing, "Hosanna, Hallelujah!" for a total of fifteen to twenty minutes. Even though this happened a long time ago, the memory is still strong, as the VaPostori are masters of ritual and emotion. In their case, they combine biblical elements with African culture in unforgettable ways. Engelke explains that the singing of the Hosanna transports the VaPostori back to the hill where Masowe first had his vision and heard angels singing Hosanna. But it does even more: "The sounds of the opening verse engulf the congregation, transporting them into another mode of existence."[36] The biblical images used in VaPostori worship are a means of demonstrating that God touches Africans directly, without the mediation of either Europeans or ancestors.

Non-western Christians can use their cultural backgrounds and the Scriptures to reach their cultures for Christ and to move beyond their cultures into something new. Christianity need not mean westernization or captivity to any culture. The call of Christ to world mission means that innovations can be generated from within to reach cross-culturally to neighboring peoples, using local languages and thought patterns. Christ as a more powerful person than the ancestral spirits can meet felt needs that include fear of spirits, the need for healing, and a community to belong to. Just as Masowe called on Africans to repent for the sins of their ancestors and be baptized, so the gospel calls on its hearers to accept Jesus in place of other spirits as the only Lord.

Radical Commitment for Membership

Seventy-five years after Johane Masowe began to preach, his followers still look and act like a sect. Other Africans see them as different because they stand out. When a person joins their congregation, it means a complete change, not just on worship days as it might be for some Christians, but in the total way of life. The cost of becoming a follower of Masowe is high. Apart from the need to shave the head and grow a beard for men, or to wear white dresses and headscarves for women, the VaPostori are a closed community. When I asked the difference between the VaPostori of Masowe and Maranke, the reply was that the followers of Masowe are not permitted to work for anyone outside their own group. Thus a Masowe disciple is required to learn a trade by which he or she can contribute to the welfare of the group; any other work is unacceptable.

Masowe people see themselves as aliens shaped by their early experiences of being harassed by colonial authorities as well as having a message for all of Africa. Thus their missional push can also be described as pilgrimage. Dillon-Malone says that the reason for the VaPostori urge to reach Nairobi (seen as the center of Africa), Ethiopia (an

ancient center of Christianity), and Jerusalem stemmed from their call to liberate all of Africa and their view of themselves as "the new African Israelites wandering through many lands as they made their way to the Promised Land."[37]

In addition, the vast majority of VaPostori do not have church buildings, but meet under trees. Mukonyora understands this as part of Masowe doctrine: "Today the name Johane Masowe is associated with communities which pray in open air venues called *masowe* [wilderness], preach repentance and carry out baptisms in rivers and/or dams called 'Jordans.'"[38] The lack of buildings does not then imply the inability to purchase such structures, but is another reflection of their pilgrimage. Their building that I entered in Bulawayo was in fact an anomaly, perhaps an indication of change from original traditions; this building, I was told, was the first that the sect had built in Zimbabwe.

The Sisters are another unusual feature of the VaPostori. Since celibacy is highly unpopular in Africa, an obvious question is how this group of women arose within the Masowe community. Dillon-Malone explains that this is another custom that goes back to African Traditional Religion. He says that spirit mediums sometimes required parents to devote their unmarried daughters to their service. These girls were called "wives of Mwari,"[39] who lived in chastity during the time of their service.

When he was in Port Elizabeth, Johane Masowe began to organize the Sisters as a group who accompanied him to pray and sing at gatherings as his spiritual "wives," but who abstained from sexual relations as an expression of their devotion to God. As it became clear that the VaPostori would have to leave South Africa, the Sisters took on an increasingly symbolic value as the presence of God among them. "Johane, like Moses, had been given the privileged mission of leading the people of God to the Promised Land. . . . The 'wives' had become the ark of the covenant, the house of God, the guarantee of the saved remnant."[40] Thus the Sisters also can be understood in terms of pilgrimage, and this explains why the Great Hosanna begins with the ritual of opening the door where the Sisters were waiting in prayer. Their presence, now that Masowe has died, must be all the more desired for reassurance that God is still with the VaPostori.

As cult-like as the VaPostori are, they offer Africans a place to belong to a close-knit community with well-defined leaders and traditions. According to Martinus Daneel, who studied African Initiated Churches extensively in Zimbabwe, that is exactly what Africans want in this confusing age:

> In the disruption of social structures caused by the accelerated processes of acculturation and industrialization thousands of alienated individuals have found in the Independent Churches "homes" of spiritual, mental and even material security, true African havens of belonging. . . . In developing an intimate corporate life, the Independents are compensating for the lack of koinonia in the historical churches.[41]

Non-western missionaries can learn from the VaPostori that the call to discipleship can and should be radical. As long as the communities that they call people to enter are

deeply committed both to the gospel and to each other, people will respond and serve sacrificially. Non-secular people are looking for churches that function not only on Sundays, but also day and night every day.

Self-Contained Economics

The final aspect of Masowe discipleship that we consider should already be obvious. Not only is the financial base of the VaPostori all local, but they have never sought outside help or desired it. They have not required all the things we usually consider necessary for successful mission work. Without European education or money, they successfully spread their faith through nine African nations in Masowe's lifetime. Along the way, they even became prosperous through hard work and business acumen.

At the worship service I attended, numerous cars, trucks, and buses were parked at the building. One was a bus loaded with VaPostori that had arrived from Lusaka, Zambia. The number of vehicles far exceeded that of any comparable church in that part of Bulawayo. I was told that the construction of the church building cost US$70,000 and that this sum was raised entirely from VaPostori members. No mission-established churches could match this level of giving.

When I took the assignment to attend a Masowe worship service, I did not anticipate how much suspicion my request would arouse among the VaPostori leadership. For three months, I went regularly to a leader's home to ask permission to attend a service, but I was ignored. When I decided to show up for the Saturday services uninvited, I was turned away two weeks in a row. Finally I had to settle for what they offered; after my persistence they gave in and let me attend a one-hour service, but no more than that.

Dillon-Malone encountered similar suspicion at the start of his extensive study of the VaPostori. He began his research among them in Zambia in 1973 just after Masowe died in that country, but they did not let him know. Furthermore, the death of their founder created a split among the followers, but again Dillon-Malone was not told. He tried to interact with both parties in the split and could not understand the lack of cooperation: "My appearance on the scene among the Apostles was greeted with much caution and suspicion."[42] Eventually, he was allowed access to elders and leaders in the main group of Masowe VaPostori, but not to ordinary disciples and not to rival groups.

This kind of reaction to outsiders, especially white people, leads me to be fairly certain that the VaPostori have always been self-contained in finances. Indeed, this is one of their strengths, as they outshine those who remain dependent on the western resources which drive many mission-established groups. This financial independence gives them credibility among Africans, who see what people like them can do when united around a mission that transcends personal gain.

Non-western missionaries need not wait for foreign donors to line up in order to carry out God's mission in the world. Far too many assume that they can do nothing without outside resources, but the VaPostori prove otherwise. A sense of divine call, zeal, and

determination enabled the VaPostori to establish communities of disciples among many people groups, using their ability to operate at a lower financial level than more affluent Christians regard as necessary. Their strong community that relies on the hard work associated with Masowe trades creates wealth that can be channeled into their mission. The followers of Masowe prove that resources are available provided the commitment to find them is there.

Conclusion

Whatever we may conclude about the Masowe VaPostori, we cannot deny that they teach us some important lessons in mission for the postcolonial world. Launching into mission to Africa during the disruption to traditional life caused by the colonial period, they continue to adapt to postcolonial realities even as they expand into new nations. For example, the website of a Masowe church in Wheathampstead, England advertises:

> We also have nuns that are extremely talented. They are all self-employed and we help them financially. We also have spiritual sessions where the congregation is prophesied one by one and people are prayed for and truly healed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.[43]

From my brief interaction with the VaPostori and from my reading, I cannot conclude that they represent New Testament Christianity, but they do illustrate what non-western missionaries can do in terms of spreading the gospel far and wide without the mediation of western personnel or the need for western resources.

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[2] Clive M. Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers: A Study of the Masowe Apostles, an Indigenous African Religious Movement* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1978), 12.

[3] Ibid., 16.

[4] Ibid., 3.

[5] Anthony F. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 264-81.

[6] Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 255.

[7] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 17.

[8] Ibid., 19.

[9] Ibid., 28.

[10] Ibid., 29.

[11] Bengt Sundkler, "The Concept of Christianity in the African Independent Churches," *African Studies* 20:4 (1961): 210.

[12] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 34.

[13] Ibid., 37.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 41.

[16] Isabel Mukonyora, "The Dramatization of Life and Death by Johane Masowe," *Zambezia* 25:2 (1998): 193.

[17] Ibid., 194.

[18] Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 96.

[19] Ibid., 97.

[20] Ibid., 102.

[21] Ibid., 103.

[22] Ibid., 97.

[23] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 148.

[24] Ibid., 147.

[25] Ibid., 27; Engelke, *A Problem of Presence*, 95.

[26] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 26.

[27] Terence Ranger, "'Taking on the Missionary's Task': African Spirituality and the Mission Churches of Manicaland in the 1930s," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29 (1999): 177.

[28] Ibid., 195.

[29] Ibid., 199.

[30] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 149.

[31] Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press. 1961), 323.

[32] Mukonyora, "The Dramatization of Life and Death by Johane Masowe," 198.

[33] http://www.gospelofgod.ws/Gospel-of-God-Church_end_time_mission.htm, accessed 1/3/2008.

[34] http://www.gospelofgod.ws/Gospel-of-God-Church_fulfilment.htm, accessed 1/3/2008.

[35] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 75.

[36] Engelke, *A Problem of Presence*, 212.

[37] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 120.

[38] Mukonyora, "The Dramatization of Life and Death by Johane Masowe," 198.

[39] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, 63.

[40] Ibid., 64.

[41] M. L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987), 18.

[42] Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers*, viii.

[43] http://www.findachurch.co.uk/churches/tl/tl11/jmgogc/, accessed 1/3/2008.