Hittin' the Prayer Bones: Materiality of Spirit in the Pentecostal South. Anderson Blanton. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Pp. 236.
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In *Hittin' the Prayer Bones* Anderson Blanton ethnographically investigates how the Holy Spirit is materially mediated, "even in a historically iconoclastic Pentecostal tradition" (3). Blanton, a research scholar in anthropology and religion at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic diversity in Gottingen, Germany, studies Pentecostal churches and related radio broadcast sermons throughout "southern Appalachia"—a geographical region he loosely describes as northeast Tennessee, northwest North Carolina, southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and part of West Virginia. He examines numerous examples of a "something else" behind material worship, including radio-listener interaction, prayer cloths, and "materialities of prayer" (22).

At station 105.5, WGTH, "The Sheep," Blanton notes an array of interesting events. In addition to the necessary recording equipment and furniture, the studio boasts an altar and pews. Much like traditional Pentecostal worship spaces, the station's building possesses an unsuspecting and naked esthetic. In order to "get a prayer through" for listeners, those inside the studio circumambulate and touch the microphone's wooden platform (30). Not to be left out, the program's listeners are implored, for the sake of their prayers, to interact with their material surroundings as well—an activity Blanton terms "radio tactility" (8). "Lay your hand on the radio," the host suggested, "as a point of contact and pray with us" (30). Put your skin to the apparatus and get closer to the Holy Ghost. Between the hosts, studio congregants, and the listeners, the Pentecostal radio broadcast encourages spiritual mediation through space.

Prayer cloths, an object of worship and healing for Pentecostals since the early twentieth century, similarly work as conduits for physical interaction and the Holy Spirit. Often passed between believers in an "exchange of hands," prayer cloths embody the participating congregation's prayerful needs and, as it moves between hands, the mobility of God (59). As the object moves throughout the body of people, so does God. During this process—the textile's sifting through the faithful's palms—"the force of belief, and thus the powerful efficacy of the Holy Ghost builds" to where it is able to "repel the devil himself" (84). In short, Blanton posits, prayer is no longer an abstract, invisible practice but instead highly tangible. Faith, in this scenario, is not an immaterial expression. Instead, this is where "belief emerges and seems to gain momentum" (84). Through the prayer cloth, the Holy Ghost is empirical and mediated.

Unlike the two prior examples of the radio experience and prayer cloth, Blanton's last chapter examines an animate object, the human body, as a mediator.

When the subject of a prayer or healing are not physically present for a laying of hands, the congregation can appoint a "stand-in" to conduct the Holy Spirit's power. The stand-in, thus, had dual roles in which "he or she provide[d] a physical substitute for an absent body while simultaneously providing a material conduit for the communication of divine healing power to the sick patient" (157). Another believer—an autonomous, living agent—could be a site of transfer for the Holy Spirit and a fellow congregant. Whether carried out on a studio pulpit or in traditional church setting, bodies were capable of carrying, and communicating, God's healing.

Blanton's creativity and mission—to provide a material study of belief—have to be appreciated. Though this comes roughly twenty years after Colleen McDannell's *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), and differs substantially in its content, it is quite similar in its effort to deemphasize intellectualism and doctrine in the study of religion. Such studies, importantly, challenge conventional method and push scholars and students to account for understudied spatial and behavioral realities of believers. Not to be ignored, either, is Blanton's contribution to studies in media and religion. In his attention paid to "radio tactility," or the process of listeners physically touching radio sets to increase the efficacy of their prayers, Blanton interestingly crosses paths with the "liveliness" posed by Jeffrey Sconce's *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence From Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000). Though Sconce's study is occupied with nineteenth- and twentieth-century entertainment devices as mediators of a "disembodied voice" or "electronic elsewhere" instead of the Holy Spirit, Blanton contributes a similar examination of media and mediation. However, *Hittin' the Prayer Bones* is not immune to concerns.

Between each chapter is an unexplained, excerpted sermon. It is assumed Blanton has a wealth of such source material from his ethnographic efforts, and they could certainly be used to augment his argument, but his purpose in (randomly?) alternating them between actual chapters is unclear and confusing. More perplexing is Blanton's comparison of Pentecostal prayer cloths and Catholic prayer beads. This leads him to a distracting discussion of sociological theory which postulates that Catholic "fingering" of prayer beads resembles the "manual stimulation of the sensation of defecation … and the prohibited desire to play with feces" (75). Why this section, with its highly questionable theoretical validity notwithstanding, was necessary to the study is difficult to understand. Even with its faults, Blanton's work is a useful resource for students and scholars of Southern religious practice, religion and mediation, and religious materiality. One hopes that *Hittin' the Prayer Bones* will be a launching-pad for further consideration of spatiality and behavior in American religion.