

**PENTECOSTALISM AND THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF THE KINGDOM OF  
GOD IN THOHOYANDOU, SOUTH AFRICA**

**By**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any University for a degree.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the role played by Pentecostalism in the lives of people, particularly by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Thohoyandou. The importance of this study lies in its demonstration of how Pentecostalism seems to solve some of the pertinent problems that prevail in society. The change of government in South Africa in 1994 had far reaching implications in the arena of political decisions which also affected the socio-economic aspect of the population. By covering the historical development of Venda and also showing how the democratic government changed the whole set up the study represents how religion, particularly prosperity Pentecostalism, may be used as a weapon to fight against socio-economic uncertainties where youth are the hardest hit.

The study is premised on the assumption that the end of youth transition is not simply adulthood but also being part of the global economy. This to most youth, seems to be delayed and this leads young people being delayed to reach full adulthood. Against this background young people today have begun to redefine their identities in relation to the government and thus questioning meanings of success. Besides youth the elderly people who for some reasons feel deprived of their prosperity are trying to seek refuge in Pentecostalism. Some feel they have been robbed of their wealth and, therefore the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God as a coping strategy and a means to recoup what they had in the past. While some view the church in a positive light there are those who see it as encumbered by ill-practices.

The thesis examines the above, through chapters entitled: history and functioning of the Universal Church, Youth and the Universal Church, other members of the church as well as the views of non-members of the church. It further opens up space for further research into the whole phenomenon of Pentecostalism as a coping mechanism during time of change.

## ABSTRAK

Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek die rol wat Pentekostalisme speel in die lewens van mense, met besondere verwysing na die Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Thohoyandou. Die belang van die studie lê daarin dat dit aantoon hoe Pentekostalisme blykbaar daarin slaag om ernstige sosiale probleme suksesvol aan te spreek. Die verandering van regering in Suid-Afrika in 1994 het verrykende implikasies gehad in die arena van politieke besluitneming wat die sosio-ekonomiese aspek van die bevolking geraak het. Die studie dek die historiese ontwikkeling van Venda en wys hoe die demokratiese regering die hele sisteem verander het. Dit toon aan hoe religie, en met name voorspoed- Pentekostalisme, gebruik kan word as 'n wapen in die stryd teen sosio-ekonomiese onsekerheid wat die jeug die swaartse tref.

Die studie gaan van die veronderstelling uit dat die einde van jeug nie bloot oorgang tot volwassenheid is nie, maar dat dit deelname aan die globale ekonomie insluit. Die meerderheid jeugdige ervaar 'n oonthoud ten opsigte hiervan en dit lei tot 'n vertraging in die bereiking van volwassenheid. Teen hierdie agtergrond het jongmense begin om hulle identiteit ten opsigte van die regering te herdefinieer, en sodoende om die betekenis van sukses te bevraagteken. Ouer mense wat vir 'n verskeidenheid van redes voel dat hulle van hulle welvaart ontnem is, probeer ook om 'n veilige hawe te vind in Pentekostalisme. Party van hulle voel dat hulle beroof is van hulle rykdom en daarom verteenwoordig die Universal Church of the Kingdom of God vir hulle 'n strategie om die mas op te kom en 'n middel om terug te kry wat hulle in die verlede gehad het.

Die kerk word deur sommige mense in 'n positiewe lig gesien, maar daar is ook diene wat dink dat dit gebuk gaan onder problematiese praktyke.

Die verhandeling ondersoek die bogenoemde temas in hoofstukke getiteld: die geskiedenis en werkswyse van die Universal Church; die jeug en die Universal Church; ander lede van die kerk; sowel as die beoordeling van die kerk deur nie-lede. Die weg

word geopen vir verdere navorsing oor die fenomeen van Pentekostalisme as 'n oorlewingstrategie in tye van verandering.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The history of Christianity in Africa south of the Sahara begins in the fifteenth century, with the arrival of the first missionaries carrying the gospel from Europe. Unfortunately, African Christians rarely recorded their stories and as a result, we know more about European and American missionaries than we do about the African catechists and evangelists whose role in bringing Christianity all over Africa is far more significant. Modern African Churches can, for the sake of convenience, be divided into three main groups, though there are far greater differences within each group than there are between the three, and that there are very important continuities from the one to the other. The groups are Roman Catholic Churches, Protestant Churches and African Independent Churches (South African Christianity 2000:2).

Since Sundkler wrote *The Bantu Prophets* in 1961 the African Independent Church (AIC) movement has mushroomed in South Africa, particularly the indigenous Pentecostal-type churches. West (1975:2) states that most people in the Black population belong to these AIC's. According to a census report of 1960, 21,2% of Blacks were members of these churches. According to Anderson (1992:23), by 1990 this figure had reached an estimated 6000 and the 1991 official census report indicates that at least 46% of all Black South Africans were members of the indigenous churches. Anderson (1992:24) points out that about 41% of the total Black population belongs to African pentecostal-type churches which represent at least ten million Black people. It also seems that the growth of African Pentecostalism and the AIC movement has been at the expense of the mission churches, some of which have declined drastically in membership. This study attempts to find out why, inspite of the growth of Pentecostalism, some pentecostalists are not keen to be members of the Universal Church.

## 1.2 Pentecostalism and the Universal Church

The study is about a pentecostal church, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, in Thohoyandou. This church originated in Brazil and was founded by Bishop Edir Macedo in 1977. It was officially registered in the same year by the Brazilian government. His adversaries say Bishop Macedo's dream is to convert Brazil into a religious state, a kind of new Iran in which he would be its all powerful Ayatollah. He expanded the church to different parts of the world. Macedo would take pins and put them on a map with every pin representing a new church in his empire, which by last count had more than 2000 temples in 46 countries. Three hundred of these prayer houses are in Brazil. Precise numbers are hard to get due to both the secrecy and rapid spread of the church (Igreja Universal Do Reino de Deus 2001:3).

With close to 6 million believers all over the world and an estimated \$1 billion annual income, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God has become the biggest Brazilian multinational employing around 40 bishops and more than 7,000 pastors. The church owns TV Record, a traditional Brazilian television network that they bought in 1990 for \$45 million (Nascimento 1995:2).

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God also owns 30 radio stations in Brazil, four in Portugal, one in Mozambique and several publications including the national weekly newspaper, *Folha Universal*, which prints 1 million copies per year, and the US-based *Universal News*, with more than 100,000 copies. All of this is administered by LM Consultoria, a holding company. The church also owns Banco de Crédito Metropolitano, a small bank. Among many of the church's plans, there is the publication of a national mass-circulation daily.

The success of Edir Macedo, 60, an ex-public servant who started two college courses (studying Mathematics and Statistics) without finishing them, has a lot to do with his ability to use the media in his favour. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God has been promising miracles and cures even for AIDS, but the biggest miracle of all has been how fast the church has grown. It was in 1977 that Macedo and four other friends

transformed an old funerary house in Abolição, a suburb on the Northern side of Rio, into the first temple of the incipient evangelical multinational.

Macedo was 20, when disenchanted with the Catholic church he became an evangelical, joining the New Life Church. He would stay 10 years with the congregation before leaving it in 1975, accusing the church of elitism. In Casa da Bênção (Blessed House), the new church he had joined, the restless maverick was advised to start his own religious movement. So Macedo and a small group of friends created the Eternal Road Crusade, an aggressive bunch of people brandishing the bibles in public squares and preaching in rented movie theaters. Once again he did not agree with what was being done and started his Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

The church emphasises the importance of the Bible and encourages its members to bring outsiders into the church. The church has many features of the pentecostal movement—baptism by the Holy Spirit, the power of the gift of speaking in tongues, supernatural healing and an emphasis on material prosperity. It is opposed to vices such as drug taking, adultery, fornication or sexual immorality (Universal Church Newsletter 1999:4).

Venda in the Limpopo Province (formerly the Northern Province) of South Africa has seen a move from orthodox churches to pentecostal churches. Pentecostal churches are widely spread. People moved towards them because of their emphasis on prosperity and healing. Unlike other pentecostal churches in the Thohoyandou area, the Universal Church has few followers.

What motivated the researcher to examine this church is that the church is pentecostal and quite new in the area but not many people are interested in becoming members. It is a common practice that when a new pentecostal church is introduced in and around Thohoyandou most people flock into the church but, such has not been the case with the Universal Church. This provoked a lot of questions on why most people were not keen on becoming members of the church. This study also attempts to aggregate people's perceptions about this newly established Universal Church. Most people in Venda,

Thohoyandou in particular, where the church is situated, equated the church with a Satanic movement which was topical among the locals. This study will, therefore, attempt to establish whether this allegation is true or not. The study will further look at why people in Thohoyandou are not keen to join the church despite the fact that this church preaches the prosperity gospel. Questions relating to the interest of people in the church will be asked. Some will relate to how one can best understand the church without being biased, as well as looking at socio-cultural reasons for the church's existence. One of the aims of this study is to investigate why the membership of the church is so small, while that of other pentecostal churches is far bigger. The study concerns itself not only with why people are not members of this church but also looks at people who participate in the activities of the church without being members thereof.

This study is not the first of its kind. A similar case study in South Africa was done by Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:291) in Mmabatho, the former capital of Bophuthatswana which forms the larger part of the North West Province. During the apartheid era, these two areas, Venda and Bophuthatswana were given "independence", and were "no longer part of South Africa" as they were self-governing territories. The similarity of historical backgrounds will enhance our understanding of the Universal Church in Thohoyandou since both areas were incorporated into South Africa during the political transformation of 1994.

People in Mmabatho also make reference to the Universal Church as a Satanic movement and maintain that this newly established church in Mmabatho practices an occult economy because it promises people wealth for nothing. You only have to believe that God will provide you with material well being by just praying and giving a tithe faithfully. These people say that this makes them believe that the Universal Church is Satanic. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:288) provide an anthropological interpretation by saying that people use magic to satisfy their consuming passions. They illustrate this by using different examples: pyramid schemes, ritual murder as well as Pentecostalism. In a pyramid scheme one invests a little amount of money and expects to get a higher yield. There is also a belief that if you get a human organ and bury it in the business

premises, that would help you to acquire more wealth. These body parts are acquired through ritual murder.

What is central to the study however is to look at participation of the youth, because Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:292) assert that the church holds services for all passersby during the day, particularly the youth. Given this reality, it is interesting to investigate whether the Universal Church in Venda appeals to young people. An effort will also be made to look at the impact the church has on older people in rural and urban Thohoyandou as well as what really happens in the services. Lastly the study will examine the views of non-members of this church.

### **1.3 Political history of Venda**

One cannot begin to talk about the political history of Venda without giving reference to the National Party, a party that crafted the way to Venda's independence. In 1948, the National Party won the elections and took control of the South African Government. The Apartheid policy was based on the belief that South African society consisted of four major racial groups, Whites, Africans, Coloureds and Indians. Each of these had to exist separately without the interference of the other groups. The party thus introduced the Bantustan policy. The policy was aimed at the creation of separate development between the "Whites" and "Blacks". The policy created Venda, Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Qwaqwa, Lebowa, Gazankulu, Kwangwane, Kwandebele and Kwazulu as self-governing territories. The first four then opted for an artificial "Independent State" status in an attempt to prove that separate development, espoused in Apartheid, could work. It was also aimed at African self-development in their own reserves and complete segregation between Blacks and Whites. The National Party did not view all black people of South Africa as a single people but as separate entities on the basis of languages, culture and tradition (Rodgers 1976:481).

The policy led the government to introduce the homeland policy which was established in 1951. The political development of the homelands as from 1951 gave powers to the chiefs and ensured that political development was based on ethnic lines. In 1953 Venda

had the smallest population of all African ethnic groups in South Africa (Thompson 1990:167). It was ruled by chiefs like Mphephu, Kutama, Sinthumule, Tshivhase, Rammuda and Mphaphuli amongst others. Verwoerd saw the only solution to solve the country's race problem by transferring political power of the Africans to the homelands. This was to be done by empowering traditional leaders whose authority was crumbling because most of the male population was employed in the urban areas. This was caused by rural poverty, overcrowding and the lack of job opportunities in the reserves. The administration of the Africans was to be transferred to the homelands with the chiefs in command, while senior white officials would assist them (Seiler 1980:139). The only contact with whites in the Venda rural community was with the missionaries, traders and government officials. In rural areas the needs of the community were basic in nature and the politics of liberation was absent.

Politics, the economy and cultural affairs were organised by the National Party government in such a way that they fostered division among different ethnic groups. Culturally, the government created a feeling of a communality based on language, religion and regional particularities. In the far North-Eastern Transvaal, the creation of Venda homeland meant the establishment of separate governments. The idea behind the formation of the self-government state was to form a mini republic for each homeland. The homeland developed at its own rate as an autonomous state or republic within a South African Republic. Nation states like Venda, which were found in remote areas, were far behind as far as social and economic development was concerned (Verbatim report of the second session of the first Venda Legislative Assembly 1979:105).

Verwoerd wanted to reduce the number of Africans resident in South Africa's urban areas. He wanted Africans to live in their respective homelands and seek employment in nearby towns and cities where they would be able to commute every day to and from work. This was to be done as a way of addressing rural poverty. Verwoerd's policy of separate development which was sometimes interpreted as separate freedoms, was attractive to Venda chiefs, because it promised to give them respect, power and dignity (Danzinger 1983:94). All chiefs who were ruling at the time favoured the new

government policy mainly because of Venda's isolated location in the far Northern Transvaal, where the chiefs had been able to maintain their traditional system of government better than elsewhere. They were less affected by external influences promoting rapid modernization than traditional rulers were in many other parts of South Africa (Maylam 1986:171).

Mphephu, in particular, supported the new political dispensation. As a strong traditionalist he wanted to preserve the chieftainship of his forefathers. He found the Nationalist government policy of restoring the traditional rule very much acceptable. He reasoned that the development of homelands would alleviate rural poverty in his chieftaincy because the homeland, besides being backwards, was also very poor.

When Venda became a self governing territory on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1973, it took the penultimate step to independence. The Venda leaders and some subjects believed that they should expend their energy towards making Venda economically sustainable. They wanted Venda to be a self governing territory which depended less and less on grants from the South African Government (Thohoyandou Special, vol 3, no.9, 13 September 1979).

The former homelands of Transkei and Bophuthatswana were already granted independence in 1976 and 1977 respectively. The developments which were taking place in the newly created independent states prompted Mphephu to follow suit in 1979. The final step towards the formation of a separate Venda state was when the then State President of the Republic of South Africa, President Marais Viljoen granted full "independence" to the Venda people on the 13 September 1979. The decision to grant "independence" to Venda was embodied in the statutes of the Venda Act which defined the territory and population of Venda. Chief P.R.Mphephu was made president and paramount chief of the Venda nation. The Constitution of Venda provided that Venda was a sovereign state comprising of five districts namely, Thohoyandou, Dzanani, Vuwani, Mutale, and Tshitale. The seat of government was in Thohoyandou.

On the date of the “independence” celebrations people were promised jobs, and salaries for all Venda government employees were increased. Chiefs and members of Venda’s petty bourgeoisie benefited from “independence”. They got more governing powers and resources from Pretoria than in the past.

Independence was not taken with ease by some Venda citizens. It was heavily contested. Mphephu agreeing with his cabinet to obtain independence during the second half of 1979 aggravated this. He was criticised by many people for accepting independence. By accepting independence he experienced opposition also in parliament and he consequently applied harsh laws to suppress the opposition.

The extent to which Mphephu had lost the support of the Vendas inside and outside the borders of the homeland became evident when the elections took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July 1978. Independence in Venda was heavily contested, Mr. Baldwin Mudau started an opposition party known as the Venda Independent People’s Party. The only opposition that contested the elections was founded by Mudau who was an urban representative. Many Venda people in urban areas supported Mudau because they did not want to be identified with the Venda homeland. The VIPP wanted to reduce the powers of traditional leaders in the government and they favoured modernisation. They regarded Venda as part of South Africa and they were advocating for changes in the administration of the homeland (Gordon 1979:328).

Despite the fact that Mudau won the elections he could not form a government because of the predominance of traditional leaders in the Assembly who were Mphephu’s supporters. Since Mudau was a commoner by birth he did not have any support from the royal group. Mphephu lost popular support because he got rid of some political opponents by arresting them and nominating some of his supporters to the Assembly in order to obtain a majority. One of the reasons why Mphephu lost support was that the majority of educated Vendas resented the traditional system of government which did not allow ordinary people to take part in the decision making process. They wanted to be

part of a South Africa where they could participate in the decision making process in a unitary state (Gordon 1979:328).

The reasons why the majority of the Vendas rejected independence were not the same for everyone. Fear of independence, to a large extent, came from the unemployed who did not like the idea of being excluded from the labour markets of metropolitan areas in South Africa. Pensioners were afraid that they were going to lose their income since residents in Tshikota (former Louis Trichardt) were getting better pension than their counterparts in Venda. Their fears were not unfounded. Those who were educated wanted to remain in South Africa on political grounds since they were opposed to the policy of separate development. Business people rejected independence purely on travel restrictions. They took cognizance of problems emanating from business transactions if they belonged to a foreign state. Most Venda people in the urban areas were not favourably inclined towards the idea of independence. Among some ordinary Venda, particularly from rural areas, there was little understanding of what independence meant. To them it was merely a period of enjoyment were all citizens gathered at the Thohoyandou stadium and enjoyed people singing and dancing as well as free meals. Independence had a very minimal direct impact in their lives.

After independence several groups continued to oppose the government. Besides the opposition party, the Lutheran church played an important role in opposing the government. They condemned the South African government's policy of separate development. They preached the gospel of liberation which undermined Mphephu's rule. This struggle continued throughout Mphephu's political career. Opposition to Mphephu's rule also came from the NG Kerk in Africa although this was to a lesser extent than from the Lutherans. Further opposition to Mphephu's government came from officials who belonged to banned organizations even though they depended upon government for survival. They usually criticised the government in general and Mphephu in particular in government newspapers. Mphephu would retaliate by having them arrested and detained.

According to Maylam (1986:114) chiefs were given high salaries and material comfort in exchange for supporting the homeland system. Mphephu knew that the majority of the people did not support him and those who did, particularly from the royals, were rewarded with high government posts. That made him very unpopular with most civil servants. In order to promote the local economy a recommendation was made that Thohoyandou be declared a capital city. A shopping centre was envisaged as an urban centre. Its main purpose was to provide essential services to the people as well as for job creation. Consumer goods would also be brought nearer their homes. Tourism was also well developed, and numerous agricultural projects were launched. Not all the citizens enjoyed the privileges and this led to economic inequalities.

Even after independence, the relationship between Mphephu and the opposition remained strained. The opposition felt that Venda's independence had divided the people, as well as advancing separate development. This was worsened in 1983 when Mphephu consolidated his position by becoming the Life President of the Republic of Venda and creating a one party state (Sidley 1987:26). This move was condemned by the opposition who had wanted to see Mphephu leaving active politics to become a constitutional king. This did not hamper development as such. Mphephu started building government blocks. Amongst others the Venda Parliament was erected at Thohoyandou to become the capital city of Venda. Those whom he suspected of not showing complete loyalty were sidelined and not given high profile positions.

When Venda attained independence more attention was given to the development of agriculture. It became very clear that subsistence farming alone could not feed the growing population. The Venda Agricultural Corporation (Agriven) was formed from the Venda Development Corporation in 1982. The corporation was charged with the development of commercial farming and the training of Venda farmers in the new methods of cultivation. Agriven was also charged with the development of agriculture in Venda. These two corporations will be discussed in due course.

#### **1.4 The Context: Thohoyandou and Venda**

In order to understand the Universal Church one has to give a profile of Thohoyandou the former capital city of Venda in the Limpopo Province. Venda is a former homeland, which forms part of the northern region of the Limpopo Province. The Limpopo Province is one of the poorest of the nine provinces of South Africa and is characterised by the highest proportion of illiterate people and the second highest unemployment rate. More than 60% of households still use wood for cooking. It is labelled the least urbanised area with 90% of the population living in rural areas (Benso 1979:14).

Thohoyandou lies between the latitudes 20,50° and 23,45° south and longitudes 29,50° and 30° east and it is located in the north of South Africa. The Limpopo Province is bordered by Zimbabwe in the north, Mpumalanga in the east, North West Province in the west while Gauteng lies in the south. It attained independence on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1979 and was the third of South Africa's emerging black states to be granted sovereign "independence" during the apartheid era. This was the culmination of a long process of political, administrative and economic development stretching over many decades (Benso 1979:10).

The economy of the territory and the lives of the people have always revolved around the land. For centuries people practiced subsistence farming to produce only enough to sustain themselves. Women prepared the fields, cultivated and harvested the crops while looking after the cattle was the responsibility of men (Stayt 1931:51). Venda's independence to some came with modernity that was perceived as a way of living. As people became modernised, they consequently left their rural areas to seek urban life and employment. Thus many people were attracted to the urbanised Thohoyandou.

One of the development agencies was the Venda Development Corporation (VDC) which was founded on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1975. It was charged with the responsibility of developing agriculture and industry. It, amongst others, assisted in the formation of commercial, financial and other business enterprises to promote projects that were beneficial to the economic life of Venda and its inhabitants. It also assisted in the execution of such

projects and promoted and financed the training of Vhavenda on all fronts. Economically, Thohoyandou developed very rapidly thus providing jobs to many people (Benso: 1979:27).

When economic development got under way, however, the construction sector experienced a boom as demand for modern housing, factories, office buildings, schools, roads, bridges, dams and water reticulation schemes increased. Most of these developments were the outcomes of government bodies initiating economic development by providing the required infrastructure and by generally playing their part in getting the process of development off the ground. The establishment of the VDC had both a positive and a negative impact on the government. This was strategic in a sense that it was aimed at reducing the flow of Venda residents to the cities. The plan was to create job opportunities in the homeland so that men especially should be employed near their homes. The development of agriculture was given priority since the majority of the population traditionally depended on it for survival. This also had a negative impact because people were restricted from moving to areas where they wanted to be.

The VDC has been seen as a force for urbanisation. It contributed to economic development by providing for modern housing in the area. Because there were a lot of buildings that had to be constructed, for example, parliamentary buildings, the offices for Radio Thohoyandou, residences for the president and his cabinet ministers, the Supreme Court, the national sports stadium and a shopping complex, more people were drawn to the urban area to seek employment. These government constructions had a considerable impact on the domestic economy. The benefits were that it gave relief to some extent for a while in terms of unemployment. A lot of people who were in the rural settlements came to supplement their agricultural produce by working in construction projects, and better facilities became available to the Vhavenda. For all construction work the Department of Public Works took the initiative to provide local entrepreneurs with the opportunity to tender to undertake construction for development.

The existence of Thohoyandou led to the flourishing of the informal economy. The VDC was undoubtedly the key to Venda's development. It provided buildings and business premises for lease. People, particularly those who wanted to be entrepreneurs, moved to these buildings to carry out their respective businesses on a rental basis. What also drew people to the capital city of Thohoyandou was the establishment of the Thohoyandou industrial area. The rapid development of Thohoyandou drastically changed the socio-economic structure, and women for the first time competed with men in jobs traditionally reserved for males. The Venda Development Corporation believed that its main role in this field was to promote agro-industries and to utilise local produce in small-scale industries producing mainly for the local market. The main development in this regard has been the establishment of a factory that processed mangoes into chutney. Many people, both males and females, were employed (Benso 1979:62).

More and more people were drawn into industries because the VDC built factories and rented units to small industrialists who then got the opportunity to start production on a small scale with the assistance of the VDC, which provided infrastructure and buildings, managerial help and finance where required. Besides the chutney factory, the knitwear factory also employed Venda citizens, particularly women because they provided cheap labour.

The development of agriculture presented a lot of problems because headmen were reluctant to cooperate and give their land as cultivation areas. When new farming methods were introduced some were not informed, that made them not to cooperate with agricultural extension officers. This created a very serious problem. The VDC and its initiatives were not welcomed by most people. When the VDC started their projects they expropriated land from the people. This was done without their knowledge and there was no informed consent between the people in the community and the government. This made the VDC very unpopular. One other thing is that many people perceived the VDC as a corporation for the educated, so those who were not educated did not want to associate themselves with its activities.

Furthermore, other citizens with secondary education were trained to render administrative services. To facilitate the process of development, physical infrastructure was created whereby roads were constructed and bridges built and maintained. After independence the Department of Public Works constructed and improved roads. Some were tarred whereas others were not. The Department of Public Works was responsible for maintaining the roads, which were also used for joining the rural areas with the urban part of Venda. Apart from roads, a sewerage plant for the capital city Thohoyandou was constructed to provide services to the people, and Eskom (Electricity Supply Commission of South Africa), a public body, supplied electricity to the Venda area. Houses around Thohoyandou were electrified as well as the administrative buildings. According to Benso (1979: 76 – 79), the type of housing in the towns differed depending on whether they were built privately or by the government.

The Venda Development Corporation, which made housing loans available on the same basis as any established building society, introduced a system of private home ownership. The authorities and the corporation did everything in their power to boost this scheme so that a stable property owning middle class could be established in Thohoyandou. There were still people building houses privately but this continued at a fairly leisurely pace. This was a reflection of the fact that migration to the capital had not reached a stage where the demand for houses in the urban areas was leading to a serious shortage of houses and squatting. Those who did not have housing would usually commute to and from places of employment.

The construction of houses in the urban areas changed the whole family set up. A man would start off commuting to Thohoyandou and then move back to the rural area. As time went by, he would purchase a site to build his house. If he was a civil servant he would rent a house. Relatives in the rural areas were left destitute. Many men left their parents and relatives in the rural areas to fend for themselves. The parents felt neglected because once the sons established themselves in the urban area, it became difficult for them to visit parents as often as they used to. But in most cases people have not severed all links with people in the rural areas, they still visit their relatives occasionally.

Thohoyandou became overpopulated, as there was an influx of people into the urban area. Some were able to cope with life there but those who could not manage went back to rural villages.

The movement of people from rural areas to urban areas led to an increase in the population living in town. Those who live in the suburban areas of Thohoyandou such as Makwarela and Shayandima are mostly civil servants that are often found in the formal employment sector while many of those who are not civil servants are in the informal sector. Most of those who engage in the informal sector are females and this reflects gender inequalities in terms of education and financial resources. This also reflects the distribution of power, interests, and institutional arrangements as well as norms of conduct. Thohoyandou was then polarised between the rich and the poor, and this gross economic inequality has bred a large, poor, excluded mass on the one hand and a small privileged elite on the other. Benso (1979:81) says the increase in Thohoyandou's population can be attributed to these developmental policies that were put in place for creating a modern town.

Administrative buildings as well as houses for civil servants were erected. In the development process, the establishment of the town and the provision of housing, the training of workers, and an infrastructure were all of cardinal importance. Local employment opportunities and income had to be increased and this was made possible by creating employment at a rapid rate to enable surplus labour to be taken off the land.

In spite of all that, most people in Venda were dissatisfied about the conditions above. What made people worry was that those who were in power were seen as perpetuating oppression among Blacks. Many citizens protested against the white dominated government in the Republic of South Africa. The protests in the 90s took a lot of forms ranging from marches, consumer boycotts, and killings. This further led to racial conflicts particularly between Blacks and Whites. In its dying years, apartheid unleashed a vicious wave of violence. Many people were brutally killed due to organisation related violence. Those who belonged to the National Party fought and sometimes killed those

who belonged to the ANC and vice versa. Others were maimed and many more were forced to flee from their homes. Policemen and security forces were implicated, as they would often not protect the people.

As the ongoing conflict continued, Venda as an “independent” state was also targeted because most of the people saw it as racially segregated and discriminated against by South Africa. It was labelled an apartheid structure. Tension mounted among parties that were fighting for liberation, amongst which were the ANC (African National Congress), PAC (Pan Africanist Congress), AZAPO (Azanian People’s Organisation) and the VIPP (Venda Independent People’s Party). Venda was a stronghold of the ANC. This was evidenced by the support it got from the first democratic elections in 1994.

The conflicts continued until 1990 when South Africa’s President F.W. De Klerk, who was then in power, unbanned all political organisations fighting for liberation. This brought relief to many blacks in South Africa. This was not enough as it was only the beginning of a further struggle. The protracted and sometimes robust negotiations among political parties culminated in elections on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1994. This day has come to be known as Freedom Day. Most people thought that this was the end of all their problems, for example, poverty, unemployment, financial constraints and other factors.

Liberation came with a lot of expectations among different people. For most of the people elections were a tool towards liberation. People mistakenly assumed that the democratic government would give everyone the opportunity to earn a living, buy houses for everyone, employ everyone and poverty would be alleviated as soon as possible. Distribution of land was one of the factors that became a buzzword with the culmination of the liberation struggle.

In 1994, a democratic government was voted into power, and the Venda bantustan’s status had to change for it to become part of South Africa. Venda is part of South Africa and falls within the Limpopo Province. The Venda Development Corporation and its counterparts, namely the Gazankulu and Lebowa Development Corporations, were joined

and later disbanded. Most activities assigned to these corporations are now being done by new departments linked with the provincial administration. The incorporation of the three homelands into one province was fraught with problems. Firstly there was the problem of incorporating the three homelands and their associated problems into one unit. Secondly, there was the huge task of trying to bring the development of this area on par with other provinces. Other major problems faced by the province were high population growth rates, high levels of illiteracy, marginalisation by the previous government and the lack of supply of basic services.

In the new dispensation Thohoyandou is now divided into rural and urban Thohoyandou. Urban Thohoyandou includes Makwarela, Shayandima, Thohoyandou P East and West, Blocks F, G, E, J, K, and M while rural Thohoyandou includes places such as Maungani, Tshisele and Tshisaulu, to mention but a few.

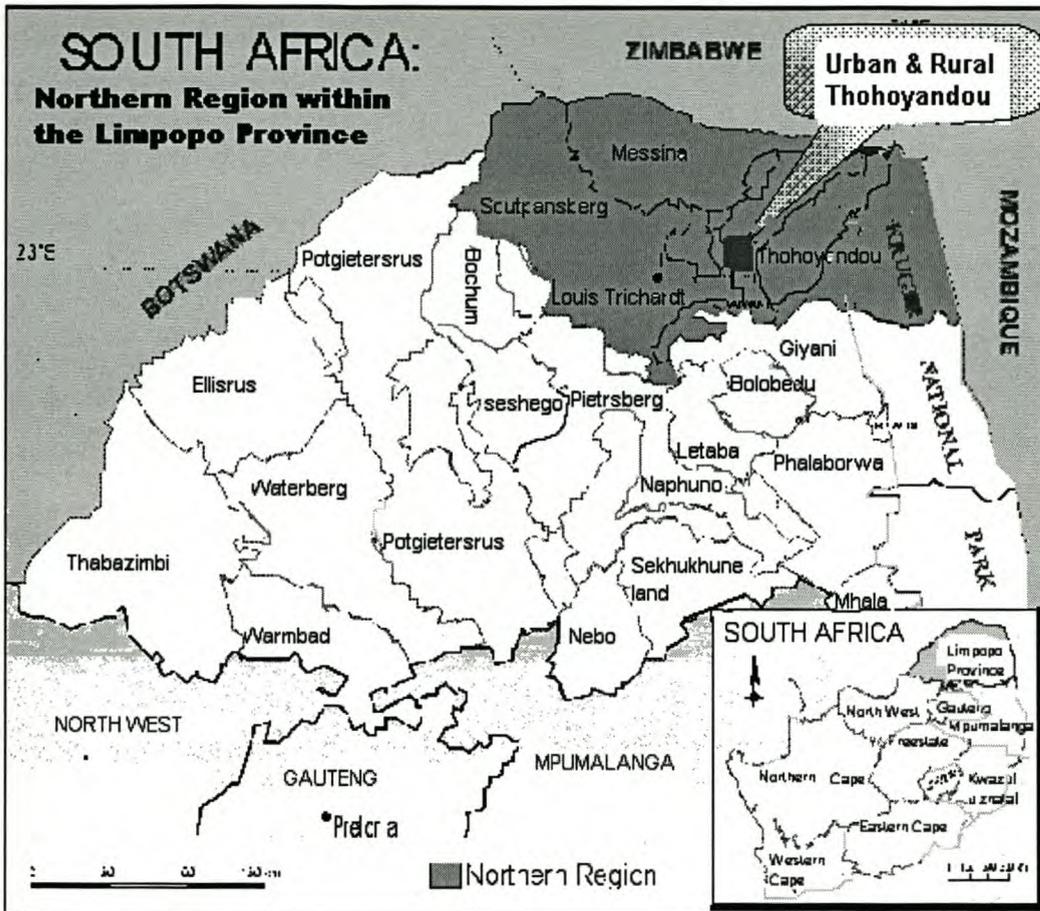
As noted earlier, when Thohoyandou was established, people flooded to it from the rural areas. With the advent of the new democratic government in 1994, Thohoyandou was stripped of its administrative status. Departments were linked to the provincial administration in Polokwane, the capital of the Limpopo Province. This resulted in the loss of large disposable incomes accruing to civil service employees who were now relocated to Polokwane. The removal of financial incentives for industrial development, attached to its former status as an industrial development point, led to massive industrial closures and the abandonment by industrialists of Thohoyandou. In Shayandima, one of the most successful industrial areas in Thohoyandou, numerous industries were shut down. This decline in the economy had a great impact on the increasing population in the area. This led to an inability of this area to sustain the population during and after the closure. The formal sector economy became inadequate to cater for the people's needs. The rapid urban population growth had outstripped the sector's capacity to generate employment opportunities to support this growing population. Urban poverty and unemployment have increased markedly and large proportions of the urban population have engaged themselves in various forms of the informal economy, which has grown

tremendously in recent years. In general, Thohoyandou's informal economic sector represents a youthful and female dominated population.

After the 1994 election, masses of people were still without land, they remained in poverty, without tangible prospects for a better life. The government wanted to achieve development through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The basic principle of the RDP was that it was a coherent programme, that builds a nation, it was people driven, and provided peace and security for all. It further linked reconstruction and development and democratised the state and society. It managed policy and the ability to determine spending priorities within a strategic perspective. It also coordinated resources and actions. The most important function was to ensure adequate funding of integrated programmes and that the resources reach targeted communities as well as to facilitate the management of potential conflict over limited resources and differing needs ([www.polity.org.za](http://www.polity.org.za)).

The Reconstruction and Development Programme was nevertheless not achievable, was unsustainable and did not meet the objectives of freedom and an improved standard of living and quality of life for all South Africans within a peaceful and stable society. This was eventually done away with by the government since it did not serve the community and reach the intended goals.

As mentioned earlier, Venda was formally reincorporated into South Africa, and this was evidenced by the relocation of certain departments to Polokwane, the capital city of the Limpopo Province. The movement of civil servants to Polokwane had an impact on a number of issues. People, mostly men, were separated from their families. They would infrequently come home. Most of them came home during weekends and others only came back home once a month depending on their financial situation. This also led to family disruptions and imbalances, consequently there has been a lot of dissolution of marriages. This also led to loss of income in the area as well as a rise in unemployment which is also very high in South Africa.



### 1.5 Churches in Venda

The emergence of Thohoyandou as a town has also seen an increase in churches, for example, mainline or traditional mission churches such as the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist and the Roman Catholic. Du Plessis (1911:349), as quoted in Khorommbi (2001:91), says that the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa changed the whole face of Southern Africa. Many people, including the Vhavenda men, went south to seek employment when diamonds and gold were discovered. They then became attracted to the teachings and preaching of the missionaries established in these places. Some were converted and became disciples of the new faith, while others attended night schools in these establishments where they learned reading, writing and arithmetic. Major Lutheran mission stations were established in Venda: Beuster Mission in 1872, Tshakhuma Mission station in 1874, Georgenholtz Mission in 1877 and Gertrudsburg in 1899.

The Lutherans contributed a lot educationally because up to 1902 all education for Blacks in the Transvaal was a missionary undertaking carried out without any financial aid from the state. Venda was one of the last parts, if not the last part, of South Africa to receive educational attention. The project of the missionaries also introduced Africans to western medicine. When missionaries arrived widespread poverty and diseases that claimed the lives of so many people, particularly children, struck them. The Reformed Church started in 1940 in Venda where missionary Hugo du Plessis started the De Hoop mission at Masia village. In 1905 Gouldville Mission, a Presbyterian mission station, was established by Rev D.A. McDonald (Ravhudzulo) (as quoted in Khorommbi (2001:13). Dr Nico Smith, of the Dutch Reformed Church founded Tshilidzini Mission, which has grown into the largest hospital in Venda.

There are a number of pentecostal churches in Venda at present: the Assemblies of God, Faith Mission, Charis Missionary Church, Rhema Kingdom Life Church, Calvary Christian Church, Christian Worship Centre, just to mention a few. These churches have a very large following and the membership ranges from 500 to 3000 in each denomination. Rhema Kingdom Life Church has structural links with the Rhema Bible Church whose headquarters are in Johannesburg. Calvary Christian Church, Christian Worship Church and Charis Missionary Church claim to be completely independent, having no organisational links with any other churches. Each has its own constitution and is registered as a company established not for gain, thus being exempted from taxation. Most of these churches share the same beliefs and ideals.

Sundkler (1961:48) recounts that Pentecostalism was introduced in South Africa in 1908. From Johannesburg it spread to other areas, Venda included. People who used to go to Pentecostal churches referred to them as miracle churches, "*Ri khou ya u vhona madembe*" (we are going to see miracles). This is also echoed by Khorommbi (2001:156) who held an interview with Pastor Netshifhefhe who said, "the African Faith Mission grew in Venda because it was known as the "*madembeni*" (miracles) church".

Besides the above-mentioned churches, in April 1997 the Universal Church on which this study is focused was established in Thohoyandou. It is situated in the main commercial centre, the chief retail centre of the greater Thohoyandou area. It is a new form of pentecostal church and an important voluntary association of brothers and sisters in Christ with a new organisational style. This new religious community provides members with shelter, security and solidarity, thereby creating a new world and a new existence for them.

Besides the pentecostal churches, African independent churches also emerged in Thohoyandou. According to Kitshoff (1996:86) these churches resulted from attempts by black Christians to have theological independence from the white mission churches. The establishment of these churches was a response to the deprivation and alienation induced in black people by the segregation and apartheid systems. They tended to emerge in urban areas and were the result of socio-economic stresses caused by fragmentation of black family life through forced labour, migration and the sense of being personally isolated. These churches also became part of the religious circles in Thohoyandou. They served as a link between town and countryside where church members have relatives. These churches combine Christianity with certain traditional beliefs and this really draws people to the churches.

The first of the African independent churches was the Ethiopian Church. Sundkler (1961:97) says that Ethiopianism was mainly a movement of ministers whose aim was “to plant a self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating native church which would produce a truly African type of Christianity suited for the genius and needs of Blacks and not merely a Black copy of any European church.”

The Zionist churches also deserve attention as a category of African independent churches. They also represent a movement of the African spirit. They believe in the power of the ancestral spirits. Zionism is a South African (largely Zulu and Swazi) protestant Christianity which has missionary origins, but found itself so much in tune with and parallel to African ways of thinking that it blended itself into a kind of

traditional African culture. The Zionist churches have become virtually indistinguishable from churches which have formally broken away from their missionary foundations, especially since the Zionist churches are entirely under African leadership and no longer refer back to the American Zionist church. These churches, like the pentecostals, are characterised by a commitment to faith healing, river baptism and to the pentecostalist gift of speaking in tongues. They have clear missionary roots, they openly accept polygyny and fit into the structures of African traditional religions, in terms of spirit possession, faith healing as well as other manifestations of spiritual power. They share the basic assumption of traditional religion about the reality of witchcraft and the spiritual dimensions of reality, while rejecting witches and spirits as evil beings to be cast out (Oosthuizen 1987:20).

Zionism is for the working class because when first established, it reflected its opposition to the white mission churches due to their support of white control and racism. Their call is "Africa for Africans" and they reject the colonial domination by whites in Africa. Most of the people who were Zionists were found in black townships as the church was seen as an attempt by blacks to solidify themselves against white oppression. Migrant labourers then introduced Zionism to the rural villages. Its difference to Pentecostalism is the fact that Zionism is characterised by a strong charismatic flavor with social and political aspirations. What is more important is that Pentecostalism does not only concern itself with the spiritual aspect of life, it also focuses on the material (Oosthuizen 1987:27).

Similarities between other pentecostal churches and the Universal Church are that they all believe that today everything in the world is unstable and that Christians should be prepared for constant change, conflict and upheaval. The world is a pretty dangerous place unless one has strong principles. A person does not really know whom he or she can count on. Members of these churches believe that this world is run by a few powerful people and there is not much that the ordinary person can do about it, but if they become pentecostalists through the power of God, they have an influence over the things

that happen to them and that they have never felt better in their lives than they do right now.

One of the differences between mainline churches and Pentecostalism is that pentecostals centre on soul winning and they perceive politics and national events as dangerous diversions. These churches also offer women as well as blacks opportunities to serve in positions of leadership, which they would not have had in traditional organisations. Pentecostalism is a protest movement of the dispossessed and marginalised. Most people who join Pentecostalism want to be seen as part of the mainstream economy.

In the pentecostal church, God is constantly entreated to send down His Holy Spirit to drive away all evil spirits that are eager to distract people's attention, but in traditional churches the preacher merely alludes to the spiritual domain in a short prayer. In other words the Universal Church deals with the role of God in a more practical way, which involves the whole congregation (Meyer 1995:240).

### **1.6 Problem Statement**

Challenges that face postcolonial South Africa are mainly socio-economic issues, for example, poverty, unemployment and illnesses amongst others. Socio-economic inequality has been a problem during the Apartheid era and it is a problem which postcolonial administrators are still grappling with. Most people have learnt that the present government seems not to have effective strategies for providing employment and they see churches as alternatives for employment opportunities, prosperity as well as providing for health. There has been a move from orthodox churches to pentecostal churches over the last thirty years. Pentecostal churches are widespread in Venda despite their emergence only in the early seventies because they emphasise prosperity and healing.

Writing about postcolonial South Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:279) argue that "it appears to have witnessed a dramatic rise in occult economies: in the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends." In late modernity the global changes

that have taken place have excluded a majority of the world's population. Those who have been excluded from the benefits of modernity have tended to depend on the belief in the irrational so as to make sense of the world around them. For most of the poor, belief in the irrational is a defensive project against the vicious changes that have occurred globally. Is this belief in the irrational solely an expression of frustration generated by the widening gap between those who consume modern products and those who are excluded? Pentecostalism seems to be a passionate attempt by those excluded from modernity to quicken the process of their inclusion into modernity.

Healing is one of the challenges facing Pentecostalism. Meyer writes that in Ghana, most people felt attracted to Pentecostalism because the Christian faith has power that protected them from the hostilities of life. There seems to be a potential existence of evil everywhere. This study looks at a church involved in issues relating to prosperity and healing.

Despite the above-mentioned situation very few studies have been conducted in South Africa, particularly in the Limpopo Province. It is against this background that the researcher has decided to investigate Pentecostalism in Thohoyandou.

The following questions will be central to this study:

- What is the social profile of the church?
- What are its approach and activities?
- How does it fit into the lives of the people who are associated with it?
- Why are people in Thohoyandou, given their socio-economic plight, not so keen to be members of the Universal Church despite the fact that, just like other pentecostal churches that are well attended, the Universal Church preaches a prosperity gospel?
- Is prosperity gospel an idiom with which the youth and older people articulate their dissatisfaction with the socio- economic condition? Does this bring them nearer to wealth and empowerment?
- What is the Universal Church's view on healing?
- How can the Universal Church be contextualised?

## **1.7 Methodology**

### **1.7.1 Research Design**

The study used a qualitative approach in order to get a holistic view. The main aim of using this approach is to understand the social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life. Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindal (1994:54) indicate that qualitative research is: 1. an attempt to capture the sense that lies within, and that structures what we say about what we do, 2. an exploration, elaboration and systematization of the significance of an identified phenomenon, and 3. an illuminative representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem. This type of approach facilitates the process of interaction between the researcher and the target group. According to Berg (1995) qualitative researchers are mainly interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how the inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles. De Vos (2000:241-242) also maintains that during the process of interaction between the researcher and the participants, the participants' world was discovered and interpreted by means of qualitative methods. This approach makes one capture and discover meaning once one becomes immersed in the data because it seeks to understand phenomena.

The study was conducted in Thohoyandou where a congregation of the Universal Church is situated. The researcher used participant observation, which combined participation in the lives of the people under study with the maintenance of a professional distance that allows objective observation and recording of data. The researcher went to the church to observe, to ask questions and to write down what was seen and heard. A rapport with most members of the church was established and that helped the researcher to internalise the basic beliefs, fears, hopes and expectations of the people.

Participant observation was opted for because it is generally assumed that the lifeworld of the research participants or subjects can only be appreciated if the words and expressions they use in specific situations are revealed. This methodology was used because human behaviour is influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Furthermore, researchers should, as far as possible, visit and preferably spend considerable time in their subjects'

natural habitat where they can obtain first hand data on how their subjects go about their everyday lives. This provided this researcher with a detailed picture of what really happens in the Universal Church because the actual behaviour of congregants was observed to gain a much deeper and richer understanding of such behaviour. In the same vein, group behaviour can be studied over time. Participation in group activities was also used, at least for a part of the duration of the research to learn to understand the subject's perspective (Holloway1997:115).

### **1.7.2 Data Collection Techniques**

Semi-structured interviewing is a common method of data collection to inform the researcher about social life. This helps one to understand the closed worlds of individuals, families and communities. This type of methodology helped to maximise the flow of valid reliable information. Semi-structured interviews are used in order to gain a detailed picture of the participant's beliefs or perceptions of a particular topic (Fetterman 1998:89). When using this approach, the researcher simply introduces the topic and motivates the participants to participate spontaneously as is recommended by Schurink (1988:78). The participants, in this type of interview, describe the situation in their own words and at their own time.

Forty-one qualitative interviews, of which twenty-three were with members of the Universal Church, were conducted. The activities of the church were observed and members were individually interviewed at home or after a prayer service. The interview each take almost thirty to sixty minutes. A maximum of two people were interviewed per day. Follow ups, depending on the information already collected, would be made. Eighteen non-members, who would come and attend specific services in the church were interviewed either in church or at their homes. The study took place between March 2001 and September 2002 and a follow up was made in June and July 2003.

To complement participant observation, interviews which put into perspective what was seen and experienced were used. Members and non-members in the church were interacted with. Unstructured interviews were exploited to solicit information in a form

of casual conversations. This helped discover what people think and how one person's perceptions compared with another person's (Huysamen 1994:14). The researcher did not define the sample beforehand but adopted a technique called sampling until redundancy, that is, the researcher starts without a specific number of people to be interviewed but keeps on interviewing people until no new information can be discovered through the interview (Neuman 1997).

Pastors of the Universal Church were informally interviewed. In addition Universal Church services were attended in an attempt to gain additional insight into the church's character. Questions were asked about their theology, reasons for growth, their membership and their attitude towards other churches. Ministers of various mainline churches were interviewed and asked about their attitudes towards the Universal Church. The mainline church sample was drawn from five different denominations: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutherans and Presbyterian.

The researcher observed as many ministers as possible of the Universal Church in Venda, members of the church were also interviewed informally during the course of an ordinary participant observation. The idea here was to get people to open up and express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace. This method of interviewing allowed the researcher to interview people on many separate occasions. This approach enhances flexibility in terms of the type of questioning which will elicit more information. When appropriate tape recorders were used, except in instances where the information was considered too sensitive to be recorded.

Given the nature of the topic of this research, the sampling could not be rigorous. Snowball sampling was used wherein one member of the church would refer the researcher to another. Pastors were also approached and asked to provide names of members of the church. They were also asked to nominate as broad a range as possible in terms of religious commitment, age, gender and occupation. The names of members were also obtained from home fellowship group leaders. The respondents were all

telephoned and their cooperation sought prior to their interviews. Most of the interviews took place at the respondents' homes and some at the respondents' workplace.

It was difficult to establish precise membership figures for the Thohoyandou Universal Church because some were also members of other churches who would only come into the Universal Church to ask for specifics such as health or wealth from God. Some people were resistant to the term 'member' because it had denominational connotations.

Membership figures are, therefore, not permanent as they are based on the number that was at the pastor's disposal at that point in time and/or during a particular attendance at services. Some people would only come to participate in some services and leave. It was thus difficult to make follow-ups. The picture that emerged was that the researcher would see some people three or four times and after that never see them again. Some of those who participated did not want to be identified with the church because of its reputation as a Satanic movement.

### **1.7.3 Plan of thesis**

The first chapter is an introduction to the thesis. It highlights the main line of enquiry and includes what the study is all about, what motivated the researcher on this type of study as well as the approach that was used. The methodology that was employed and reasons for its choice, how the interviews were conducted and the time when the study took place are also highlighted.

The second chapter reviews literature related to the study. The review describes theoretical perspectives and previous research findings related to the problem at hand.

The third chapter discusses the history and functioning of the church. i.e. when the church was founded, how it was founded and by whom. The structure of the church, the training that the pastors get, the pastor's income, as well as the role of the church assistants are also outlined.

The fourth chapter focuses on youth. Why is it so important for the youth to join the church, what incentives do they get by joining the church? Are there any differences between male and female youth in terms of what they desire in the church? Do the youths experience the same kind of pressure to find a job?

The fifth chapter focuses on the other members in the church examining membership in terms of age, gender and employment status. A discussion of the historical changes and how it relates to the position of the individuals concerned is given.

The sixth chapter gives an account of the views of non-members of the church. This includes perceptions about church members and quotations of what people say about the church, negative and positive comments.

The conclusion summarises the thesis and brings together the argument as a whole by giving the final interpretation of the material.

## **1.8. Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the thesis. The first part provided the aims and objectives of the study while the second part elaborated on the research methodology adopted. A background of the research setting is also provided. The last part gives us an outline of how the whole thesis is organised and a summary of each chapter's contents.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on Pentecostalism placing emphasis on prosperity Pentecostalism. The first part concentrates on the origins of Pentecostalism globally. An overview of Pentecostalism nationally as well as the characteristics of Pentecostalism will be given.

### **2.2 The origin of Pentecostalism**

The pentecostal movement can be traced to America in the midst of a period of great social change and spiritual uncertainty in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is difficult to assign to any particular factor, or a group of factors, the cause of the rise of the pentecostal movement (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001:1). Gromacki (1967:24) suggests that the breakdown of strong orthodoxy after the Civil war might have led to the rise of Pentecostalism. The industrial revolution produced moral corruption and labour management problems causing general unrest and questioning of the established order. These sentiments are shared by Bruner (1971:50) who ascribes it to the failure of the older churches to meet the religious needs of all groups in the population. Gromacki further contends that a sympathetic and tolerant attitude towards the pentecostal movement developed among the leaders of American orthodoxy.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a new movement within Christianity which has traditionally been called Pentecostalism. The pentecostal movement is the result of a long line of events that have occurred in history. Pentecostals claim that their ancestral line began with the Pentecost and can be traced to the Corinthian church through succeeding movements in subsequent generations (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001:5).

Over the past two decades Latin American and African societies have experienced phenomenal growth of pentecostal movements. This form of Christianity which was only marginally present in many Latin American and African countries at the middle of the century represents more than a hundred million faithful across these two continents and

continues to grow at an astonishing rate. Despite the differences between the continents and individual societies within them, there is a similarity of pentecostal manifestations across these diverse cultures. Pentecostalism projects a new vision on how we look at the world, in particular the way most people respond to processes and promises of modernity and modernisation (Mc Clung 1987:56).

The first “pentecostals” in the modern sense appeared on the scene in 1901 in the city of Topeka, Kansas in a Bible school conducted by Charles Fox Parham, a teacher and a former Methodist pastor. Pentecostalism today claims some 12,000,000 adherents in 90 countries in the rest of the world. In spite of the controversy over the origins and timing of Parham’s emphasis on glossolalia, all historians agree that the movement began during the early days of 1901 just as the world entered the twentieth century. The first person to be baptised in the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues in Topeka was Agnes Ozman, one of Parham's Bible school students, who spoke in tongues on the very first day of the new century, January 1, 1901. According to Flower, the founding secretary of the Assemblies of God, Ozman’s experience was the “touch felt round the world,” an event, which marked the beginning of the pentecostal movement in the twentieth century (Derker 2000:7).

As a result of the Topeka pentecost, Parham formulated the doctrine that speaking in tongues was the Biblical evidence of baptism by the Holy Spirit. He also made the assertion that tongues were a supernatural impartation of human language for the purpose of world evangelism. He posited the view that missionaries need not study foreign languages since they would be able to teach miraculously in tongues all over the world. Armed with this new theology, Parham founded a church movement, the “Apostolic Faith”, and began a whirlwind revival tour of the American Middle West to promote his exciting new experience (Stephens 2001:5). It was not until 1906, however, that Pentecostalism achieved worldwide attention through the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles led by the African-American preacher William Joseph Seymour. He learned about the tongues-attested baptism in the Bible school that Parham conducted in Houston, Texas in 1905. Seymour opened the historic meeting in April 1906 in a former African

Episcopal church building at Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles. What happened at Azusa Street fascinated church historians for decades and has not been fully understood and/or explained. For over three years, the Azusa Apostolic Faith Mission conducted three services a day, seven days a week, where thousands of converts received the baptism of tongues. From Azusa Street, Pentecostalism spread rapidly around the world and began its advance towards becoming a major force in Christianity. Consequently, Seymour's and Parham's place as important religious leaders, seemed assured. They could well be referred to as "co-founders" of world Pentecostalism (Derker 2000:9).

The origin of Pentecostalism was multi-ethnic and often challenged racial norms. Scholars who focused on the interracial aspect of Pentecostalism, viewed the movement as a radical protest to segregation and thus, a dynamic force for social change. Sociological studies used class analysis and theories of deprivation to understand the movement's appeal to people. Those who studied the social class origins of Pentecostalism discovered that extreme social strain among the nation's poor and dispossessed was the source of Pentecostalism, while others located social tension (such as class conflict and class stratification) in industrialisation as a major cause for the emergence of Pentecostalism. In the United States of America the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society led to estrangement and those most at odds with this change suffered "status anxiety" and turned to Pentecostalism (Anderson 1979:13).

Cox (1996), a well known writer on Pentecostalism, argues that people who call themselves "pentecostalists" today, take their name from a story recounted in Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible. The story tells us how the disciples of Jesus, whom Cox refers to as "the recently crucified rabbi", were gathered in Jerusalem to mark the Jewish holiday called "pentecost", which occurred fifty days after Passover. There came a sound from above the sky "like a rush of a mighty wind, while they were still astonished, the Holy Spirit filled them. Tongues as of fire crowned their heads. These people came from different parts of the world but to their amazement, each began to understand what the other was saying" (1996:4).

In the last ten to twenty years, Pentecostalism as a movement has made an impact in the church world. Arguably it became the most important mass religious movement of the twentieth century. This revival was an expression of both social and theological discontent among America's lower and middle class groups. They disapproved of impiety in orthodox denominations and were alienated by the growing wealth and elaborateness of their churches. Not content to remain in mainstream churches they formed new religious communities committed to the theological doctrine of perfectionism (Gromacki 1967:30).

### **2.3 Characteristics of Pentecostalism**

The story of pentecostal churches has always served as an inspiration to people who were discontented with the way religion or the world in general was going. Pentecostalism became popular because it brought a lot of changes into peoples lives, especially in how they viewed the future. It transforms the way they feel about the present. It depicts God as a caring father who reaches His children through the power of the Spirit and touches human hearts to restore hope amidst life's vicissitudes.

Another distinguishing mark of Pentecostalism is the worship of its believers which is often characterised by speaking/praying in tongues, prophesying, healing, the "casting out of devils" (exorcism), hand clapping, shouting and being slain in the Spirit, which are all observed with great zeal and fervency. Since the beginning of Pentecostalism, these practices have been subjected to rules that have dictated as to when such worship was appropriate.

Pentecostalism popularised a doctrine of salvation that included physical health and healing as an essential part of the believer's deliverance. Church members are taught physical as well as financial healing. They thus became very powerful money raisers and they made God a responder to man's wishes. This notwithstanding, they are preoccupied with Satan, demons and spiritual warfare. In addition to high profile emotional preachers, the movement continues to generate a slate of Christian celebrities and personalities. It places emphasis on pentecostal distinctives (healing, baptism of the Holy

Spirit, speaking in tongues and the Second Coming of Christ). According to Tizon (2001:410-11) the belief in baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire as a third blessing became increasingly widespread. There was also a renewed interest in spiritual gifts, particularly healing.

Nearly all African traditional religions believe strongly in the existence of various kinds of evil spirits. These spirits influence human life in many ways. However, the western world influenced by rationalism, largely rejected the spiritual world. This has had some negative impact upon the western church. Though many of the western churches would not theologically deny the existence of demons, they had little understanding and experience with the demonic world. However, Pentecostalism took a much more literal interpretation of the teachings of the Bible about demons. Confronting demons and casting them out has become a major focus area within Pentecostalism around the world. When Pentecostalism came to Africa, it gave a solid theological blessing to the already existing African recognition of the world of spirits. It was therefore quickly embraced. Resisting demons and casting them out is now a regular part of nearly every pentecostal church service in Africa (ter Haar 1988:96).

Pentecostalism preaches the message that Biblical miracles of yesteryears are possible in current times. According to Meyer (1992:99) miraculous healing has always been an important part of African traditional beliefs, it was a natural thing to embrace Pentecostalism which also emphasised supernatural healing. Africans often express their emotions through singing and dancing and through other physical means of expression. Pentecostalism was at first a movement of the lower economic class of society. As such it encouraged people to express their worship of and praise to God in whatever way they felt would be meaningful. Pentecostalism tends to be much louder and more boisterous in its worship than most of the mainstream churches. When Pentecostalism entered Nigeria in the seventies, it found an audience which was ready for the message of free expression in worship. Africans have always clapped hands and danced and had been loud and boisterous in their celebrations. Pentecostalism demonstrated that this same kind of physical and emotional expression was legitimate in the church.

There are two major features of the pentecostal movement, namely, millennialism and speaking in tongues. This brought order to the chaotic lives of people and alleviated social strain. Similarly, speaking in tongues provided psychic escape through religious ecstasy. Social protest was channeled into religious ideology. The positive function of faith in the origins and the spread of Pentecostalism is that the movement provided individuals with certitude about the reality of the supernatural. Pentecostals coped with economic uncertainties, social ostracism and racism (Wacker 1986:84).

One of the central tenets of Pentecostalism is baptism by the Holy Spirit. The sign of this is evidenced by speaking in tongues. Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001:19) say that Pentecostals generally understand speaking in tongues in a psychological sense. They enter into a form of trance in which individuals reach a state wherein they have a “fusional relationship” with God. The prayers and praises reach God without a mediator. This form of religion according to Cox (1996:34) is experiential rather than fundamentalist. It is experiential in a sense that the way Pentecostalism is practiced these days gives one an open and flexible approach on how to interpret the Bible.

Pentecostalism also caters for conversion experience which means a person takes leave of customs in his or her culture that are considered sinful or demonic. The church may be seen as an alternative cultural community that substitutes the dominant culture in important respects and that may even demand the rupture of kinship ties with non-converts. The original culture will not fully disappear from the lives of the converts but it will undergo profound changes and only those aspects that are considered harmless remain (Corten 1995:117).

Sociologists of religion argue that, for some time, churches such as the Catholic engaged in political and social activism. In the last three decades, pentecostal churches specifically, joined hands with local communities in organising economic development programmes. Pentecostal churches are key advocates of economic and social change (Stark and Williams 1987:57).

McRoberts (1988:67) asserts that religion has changed. To this end students of black religion agree that until recently, Pentecostalism has been a class religion. It has always appealed to the poor and working class. He is of the view that the supporters of Pentecostalism did not like the way traditional churches were set-up. Members of such churches believe in attending church, singing and glorifying God, but they are not concerned about what's outside of the church walls. The traditional churches did not really care about the people's needs. What they emphasise is life after death, there was no emphasis on the here and now. People become pentecostal converts because it addresses present life situations. It is perceived that in traditional congregations the most important resource is membership. Members bring with them the time, energy, goodwill and money necessary to carry out the church's mission. They do not worry about what is happening around the congregants.

There are pentecostal discourses that circulate globally such as bible study, prayer, professional and financial success, children, marital relations, dress, diet and lifestyle. One of the ambivalences inherent in the pentecostal discourse is expressed through the symbolic role of money. Money is one of the symbolic objects which enables the passage from the profane to the sacred. Conversion to Pentecostalism is associated with ideas of progress and modernisation. Pentecostalism allows the youth to distance themselves from the constraints of village social relationships, in particular kinship obligations. Pentecostalism is implicated in a process of rural modernisation where modernisation is seen as a mode of liberation for the youth. In the cities Pentecostalism places emphasis on healing and restructuring of social relationships which have broken in a context of urban crisis (Anderson 2000:90).

Powell as quoted in Cox (1996: 18) also argues that traditional Christians get involved with the spiritual aspect of the human being and do not deal with the total person. Pentecostalism addresses how one reaches somebody and gets him a job, gets him a house or some kind of structure, and lets him know he has a reason to live. There are people who do not see a reason to live because they are poor, sick, have family disputes and other hardships.

Willem as quoted in Cox (1996:38) says that pentecostal congregations counteracted moral meaninglessness by supplying their members with a sense of coherence and a strict set of rules to live by. Ordinary people who lived in religious cultures and felt they were sidelined and weak, suddenly became empowered with the gift of the Holy Spirit. They then became active agents because they were in a position to bring about spiritual deliverance to others.

Pentecostalism emphasises the individual in times when the structure of society has limited the possibility of interpersonal contact and relations. In these churches one finds that human life is taken very seriously. Once the Holy Spirit baptises a new member he becomes part of the church. Pentecostal emphasis could be blamed for creating a culture of individualism, which finally produces the middle class component of society. Gifford as quoted in Khorommbi (2001:230) blames Pentecostalism in breaking down the extended family system.

It is not surprising that Pentecostalism is found everywhere in the world. People are attracted to the pentecostal theological system because it is embedded in testimonies and ecstatic speeches. It brings faith and hope to people who are losers and rejects in society. Today, some of the church members are rich and preach the gospel of prosperity.

Cox (1996:24) attributes the appeal of Pentecostalism to the young generation to the way of worshipping that follows a particular pattern: high amperage music, praise, bodily movement including clapping, swaying, personal testimonies, sometimes prayers “in the spirit”, sermons full of stories and anecdotes, announcements, lots of humour, a period of intense prayers for healing and a parting song.

#### **2.4 Pentecostalism in Africa**

African Pentecostalism owes its origins to the work of John Graham Lake (1870-1935) who began his ministry as a Methodist preacher but later prospered in the business world as an insurance executive. In 1898 his wife was miraculously healed of tuberculosis under the ministry of divine healer Alexander Dowie, founder of a religious community

called “Zionist City” near Chicago, Illinois. Joining with Dowie, Lake became an elder in the “Zion Catholic Apostolic Church”. After his pentecostal experience, Lake abandoned the insurance business in order to answer a long-standing call to minister in South Africa. In April 1908, he led a large missionary party to Johannesburg, where he began to spread the pentecostal message throughout the nation (Khorommbi 2001:101).

The role of a new and rapidly growing form of Pentecostalism is increasingly recognised. This movement, which has only emerged in 1970, is fast becoming one of the most significant expressions of Christianity on the continent, especially in Africa’s major cities. In the 1970s, partly as a reaction to the bureaucratisation process in established churches, new independent pentecostal churches began to emerge all over Africa, especially in West Africa. Many of these vigorous churches were influenced by the pentecostal movement in Europe and North America, and by established pentecostal mission churches elsewhere in Africa. However, it must be remembered that these churches were largely independent of foreign churches and had an African foundation.

Many arose in the context of interdenominational and evangelical campus and school christian organisations, from which young charismatic leaders emerged with a significant following. These new churches eventually replaced the former interdenominational movements. At first they were nondenominational churches, but in recent years, as they expanded, many of these churches developed denominational structures. Several prominent leaders have been episcopised and as such some are now international churches.

Cox (1996:50) did a study in Kinshasa and concluded that many Christians left the traditional mission churches to go and look for salvation elsewhere, where their aspirations would be better addressed. The pentecostal groups are proliferating in societies undergoing change. When missionaries came to Africa, for example, they condemned old beliefs and practices and replaced them with traditions and practices they had developed elsewhere. The missionaries’ religion did not provide answers to the socio-economic state of Africans and, therefore, did not provide security for the lives of

Africans. New groups were formed in response to the needs that arose. Cox (1996) further argues that these churches represented hope for the despairing and voiceless. New forms of solidarity and brotherhood arose ensuring acceptance and security, mutual assistance and support. Here the traditional African values of sharing and solidarity find concrete expression.

Gifford (1980:32) says that joining the pentecostal church in Liberia means that one has been provided with certainty, security and prosperity. The church focuses on sins and evil but it also places emphasis on every aspect of existence. It appeals to the poor and the lower class that had little hope. Missionaries emphasise that those who believed in Jesus Christ would get their rewards when they die. They were not allowed to live comfortably in this world. It was said that they would enjoy eternal life after death, in this world they had to live a life devoid of material happiness.

Marshall as quoted in Cox (1996:60) writes about Pentecostalism in Nigeria. She is of the view that one of the most remarkable trends among the Christian population has been a rise of pentecostal churches in Nigeria. They have formed a broad-based religious movement that is becoming very powerful. These churches incorporate a much higher percentage of educated, upwardly mobile university and school leavers embracing a more charismatic doctrine, which stresses experiential faith, the centrality of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual gift of tongues, faith healings and miracles.

Besides prosperity, Pentecostalism emphasises healing through the word of God. Pastors are found everywhere emphasising doctrines of prosperity in which the spiritual and material fortunes of believers are dependent on how much one gives spiritually and materially to God (or His representative), who will reward him with prosperity. Wealth is not considered unholy. The attitude to material success also allows access to new networks of accumulation by members of the church community.

Writing about Pentecostalism in Liberia, Gifford (1980:25) maintains that the pentecostal church consists of young ambitious men. The pastors in the church teach them the gospel

of prosperity. They stress that “if you have enough faith to be born again, you have faith enough to live beyond your means and have financial miracles.” People have to use their faith to stretch their income. Pastors claim that all Biblical verses dealing with prosperity are just as trustworthy as texts that deal with other issues such as healing and baptism by fire.

Pentecostalism in modern societies is both a debate within modernity as well as a discourse on modernity. It deals with the predicament of many living in the urban areas of a country like Ghana. Ghana experiences imbalances and inequalities on a daily basis. Meyer (1999:144) writes about Pentecostalism in Ghana. She looks at trading and its effect on Pentecostalism. Ghanaians are well known for trading in cocoa which is the backbone of Ghana’s economy. The missionaries who introduced western churches among the Ghanaians were from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Through cocoa farming most Christian lifestyles changed. There was motivation to work for money either as producers or as consumers of western commodities. This led to changes in social life, instead of the extended family system, a nuclear family was introduced. To both the Ewe converts and the missionaries, western goods were an indication of a true Christian life and lack of it was a sign of savagery.

As years went by cocoa trading declined and the economic decline was paralleled by the rise of new churches which promised their members not only salvation, but also material well-being in this world. These churches appealed to many Ghanaians as they became increasingly popular. Mostly young educated people and middle-aged women attended such churches. These churches attracted people who were relatively powerless in the male dominated power structure and who were attempting to ascend the economic ladder mainly by business or trade. In these churches, people found a perspective from which to look at the changing world.

Pentecostals in Ghana, as Meyer (1992:102) writes, present themselves in sharp contrast to the established mission churches. Missionary churches are criticised for failing to help their members to retain health and wealth. Success, to pentecostalists, is of great

concern. Regardless of the economic odds, the pentecostal seeks divine protection to carry on in order to progress. Prosperity does not come as a surprise. Thus money and goods are important themes in Pentecostalism discourse. They also embrace the so-called prosperity gospel which teaches that God will bless only true Christians with prosperity. People are urged to try to earn money through hard work. There are prayers to make these efforts successful. They may not offer remedies against economic misery to anyone, but they provide space in which people may address their longing for a prosperous life.

Besides preaching a prosperity gospel, Pentecostalism is widely spread because it also addresses witchcraft. Catholics and Protestant missionaries vigorously disapproved of African concepts and practices. They referred to them as “heathen” or “diabolic.” Members of orthodox mission churches, who secretly practiced non-Christian rituals, were seen as missionaries’ victims bereft of their Christian identity, while on the other hand, followers of the new religious movement were not considered true Christians.

The Ewe themselves understood the Christian faith as the power that protected them from the hostilities of life. God was equated to good things and the devil to bad things. Church members saw the belief in witchcraft as superstition. It was not even talked about in services. Most Ghanaians felt attracted to Pentecostalism because by taking the threat of the devil and witchcraft seriously, their reality, which mission church officials denied, was confirmed over and over again. Meyer (1992:108) argues that obsession with demonology is one of the most salient features of the new pentecostal churches. Although the belief in the existence of the devil is central to many Ewe Christians, irrespective of the church they attend, it is the pentecostal churches that continuously dwell on the boundary between Christianity and heathendom.

The new pentecostal churches maintain that the power of prayer is understood as a product of intense communication with God, whose spirit, as a result, merges with the person praying. People are urged to always pray at home, in the market place and on journeys. People are encouraged to seek contact with the divine virtually all the time and

to pray over all things received from others or bought in the market. In this way, potentially evil and destructive influences inherent in such objects are said to be rendered ineffective. There is a potential existence of evil everywhere. Through prayers good Christians attempt to situate themselves permanently on the boundary between the world and the divine realm. Those filled with God's spirit are supposed to be able to ward off danger, to escape temptations and even bring about healing and exorcise evil spirits for others in need.

Pentecostals believe that there are people possessed by evil spirits. But they do not know that these evil spirits are within them. So evil spirits use them like a rented room and they go out to do bad things and then come back to stay. The Holy Spirit drives out such evil spirits. To the pentecostals, christian baptism ensures that one should be possessed by the Holy Spirit, not by evil spirits. People have to make sure that the Holy Spirit enters them as they can easily be possessed by evil spirits, which cause bodily sickness and material ruin (Meyer 1999: 145-6).

Emphasis on individual experience of the divine, and contact with it, is a characteristic feature of pentecostal churches. Members are encouraged to pray for themselves. By so doing these churches have individualised access to the divine. This is also expressed by the fact that there is room for people testifying about their miraculous experiences. At the same time, members are thereby held responsible for their lives. They themselves have to make sure they are in contact with God and lead decent lives. Only if things go wrong and a person is in trouble, that is, if he is assumed to be filled with evil spirits rather than the Holy Spirit, does the preacher intervene. The pentecostal church became popular in Ghana because the preacher mediates between God and human beings. Those who go to the Evangelical Presbyterian church complain that in this church people do not know how to pray, so most of them joined Pentecostal churches (Meyer 1999:143-144).

Prayers are held, testimony and prophecies given and congregants sing and dance. Then comes a long sermon and some teaching regarding the dangers of Ewe religion and

prayers for the improvement of health and wealth and for deliverance. Congregants are eager to testify about the great deeds God did for them.

The congregants are encouraged to fast. While fasting more emphasis is put on evil spirits. The assumption is that denial of bodily needs such as food and drink, brings people closer to God and makes the Holy Spirit more accessible than it would ordinarily have been. Through fasting people are to leave behind bodily desires and become more spiritual, a state of being considered the most appropriate for fighting evil forces. Fasting is done for healing and for a member's financial situation. The prominence of healing prayers suggests that health is a problem to many members. Many people, especially women and children, suffer from physical weaknesses, headaches, backaches, insomnia and other illnesses. All those feeling ill usually come forward to be prayed for.

Another point of concern during fasting prayers is members' financial situation. Many people have financial problems. Meyer (1995:238) writes that in one fasting session government workers were prayed for to receive higher salaries, farmers to receive rain and not to be troubled by bushfires, traders to receive capital and for all those in debt to be able to settle their debts. The preacher called both men and women to the front and before praying for them, he urged them to send a spiritual cheque to heaven, they close their eyes and in their thoughts thus fill in a certain amount and let it go up to heaven to be signed by God. Sooner or later God would cash this cheque with real money. People really had the belief that they will eventually get money. There was another scenario where people were warned not to make money through evil forces for example, in which riches are achieved at the expense of one's own fertility or the life of a close relative because that was considered Satanic.

In Ghana it is very common that one hears about devilish or demonic activities by way of stories from people who actively or passively, got involved with these powers. There are people who unintentionally became victims of evil powers which mostly manifest themselves through financial loss, sickness and marital problems. There is a story on Satanic riches of a bank note, which was circulated among female traders. Once the bank

note is put into a purse it starts to steal the owner's personal money in a spiritual way. Some people think that this money may be used in order to make others rich in a Satanic way. Such a bank note can be rendered harmless only through prayer (Meyer, 1995:239). People who have become victims of diabolic agents argue that the devil was able to affect their lives because they were not really converted to Christianity. In their accounts they warn others that the Devil himself is indeed invisible, but is nevertheless really at work and that he can cause disaster for all those who do not really have faith in God.

The prayers are usually followed by testimony from members recounting how after the last fasting session, their condition has improved. Such powerful testimonies often deal with wonderful healings or miraculous gifts. But those who testify may also rejoice in the fact that despite all setbacks, their situation does not deteriorate further. These statements confirm the efficacy of previous prayers and enhance peoples' belief that Pentecostalism has practical results for their lives.

Pentecostal churches provide believers with remedies and protection against all sorts of illnesses and mishaps attributed to the machinations of evil spirits. In Ghana they have become very popular in urban as well as in rural areas. One of the most striking features is the image of the Devil and the imagination of evil, in which witchcraft, money and family problems are recurrent features.

In her study, Meyer tries to show that the existence of demons is not confined to premodern cultures and societies, but is rather part and parcel of modernity both in the West and elsewhere. She says that this is an attempt by people to understand their situation and grapple with changing conditions. Pentecostalism in Ghana is popular because it supplies people with an image of the Devil, which can be used not only to demonise traditional gods and ghosts, but also to diabolise negative aspects of the capitalist world economy (1995:250).

## **2.5. Pentecostalism in South Africa**

A significant chapter opened in the South African Church history in 1908 with the arrival of American Pentecostal missionaries led by Thomas Hezmalhach and John G Lake. Lake was a former elder in Dowie's church (Sundkler 1961: 59). Later in the year, a number of other Pentecostals arrived from America and Britain apparently independent of each other. It was already mentioned that from Gauteng Pentecostalism spread to other areas of South Africa including Venda (Khorommbi 2001:150).

As Lake was conducting his ministry in Bree Street, Johannesburg in 1908, one of the people who was listening to him and was converted was Brother Duggan, who carried the pentecostal message to the Zoutpansberg area. van der Wall (1911:3) estimated the population of what he called Zoutpansberg at 350 000 of whom only 20 000 had in some way come into Christianity. It was not clear whether his Zoutpansberg included the whole of Venda. van der Wall pointed out that the people of the area, the Vhavenda and perhaps some Pedi speaking people were "still ignorant and bound by their native customs and superstitions...polygamy, the battering of wives, worship of the spirit of ancestors, propitiary sacrifices to evil spirits, the belief in witchcraft and the custom of smelling out the party reputed to have caused the disease and calamity".

van der Wall (1911:3) viewed the Vhavenda situation during the advent of Pentecostalism as follows: "the other 330 000 are still absolute heathens, waiting for the light of the Gospel. The paramount chief of the Vhavenda tribe, Mphephu, who has hitherto refused the missionaries to settle and labour amongst his people, has given an open door to the Apostolic Faith Mission. He has no doubt observed that our teaching embodies more than usual, that the Word of truth is sustained by signs and wonders, that we preach the Christ who saves the soul, but also heals the body, as He ever did and still does. His tribe outnumbered the others by many thousands, and some have already accepted Christ and experienced his healing power. What an opportunity. What an open door."

In Venda, the wave of Pentecostalism also gripped the area in the last twenty to thirty years. Former Lutherans, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics and Methodists believed they were experiencing a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit much like the early church experienced in the book of Acts. This renewal gave them the zeal for “Spirit Baptism”; which is divine empowerment of believers, and other gifts such as healing and prophecy. Pentecostals teach that the “gift of the Holy Spirit” refers to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which follows repentance and conversion.

Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:291) also write about Pentecostalism in post-colonial Africa in particular the Universal Church, a pentecostal church in the North West Province. The Universal Church emphasises the prosperity gospel. They also observe that pentecostal churches such as the Universal Church are proliferating everywhere. In a study they did at North West Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, they established that this church was highly controversial in its country of origin because it deviated from Brazilian Christianity, that is, Catholicism. Its main concern is how to deal with prosperity.

The Universal Church promises quick and easy acquisition of goods and pleasures to those who are closer to Jesus Christ and speak publicly against Satan. These people should trust in the pentecostal religious doctrine and put their belief to use. In order to acquire instant success people should talk about how they hate Satan and how Satan makes one's life miserable. In order to be on the safe side, one has to be protected by Christ, who is the Lord and Saviour. It is also rumoured that the church can provide a credit card that registers no debt. One is in a position to use the credit card without becoming indebted to the creditors. In return, the church requires that members make sacrifices in the form of cash. One has to make good offerings to God in order to claim more from His kingdom.

The church holds services for all passersby during the day, particularly the youth. Photographs on its windows show beautiful, well dressed men from all over Southern Africa who are supposed to have found happiness and satisfaction in the church. The

ability to bring about instant success serves as a strong form of persuasion. It also shows that God is a multinational being. Beautiful pictures of church members posing, lottery winners and BMW owners are to be found all over the church buildings.

The Comaroffs (1999:282) thus see Pentecostalism as involving the supernatural, which pertains to mystic arts, involving magic and is beyond human understanding. It is beyond the bounds of ordinary knowledge, mysterious and outside the laws of the natural world. Among citizens of the North West Province, people would join the pentecostal church because it provides an imaginary space in which people may address their longing for a modern individual and a prosperous way of living. They say the belief in the irrational is solely an expression of frustration generated by the widening gap between those who consume modern products and those who do not.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

This chapter focused on literature which deals with the origin of Pentecostalism, general characteristics thereof, Pentecostalism in Africa as well as Pentecostalism in South Africa. Pentecostalism is an outgrowth of the Holiness Movement which emerged in 1901. Theologically, pentecostals are fundamentalists holding to the doctrines of the inspiration of the scriptures, the Trinity and the Deity of Christ amongst others. The characteristics that differentiate it from other evangelicals are the insistence on the holiness of the heart and life, baptism with the Holy Spirit, the evidence of speaking in tongues, faith-healing and economic and material prosperity promised to adherents. The next chapter will be a close investigation of the Universal Church as a pentecostal church in South Africa with particular reference to the one in Thohoyandou and its strong emphasis on prosperity.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH: HISTORY AND FUNCTIONING**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the history of the church, i.e., how the church originated, who the founder of the church is and when it was founded. It also looks at how the church found its way to South Africa, and eventually to Limpopo Province and Thohoyandou area in particular. The theology of the church as well as its liturgy and the different services that are held in it will be looked into. Like all churches, the Universal Church has a structure that will also be examined.

The Universal Church originated in Brazil and spread to a number of countries. Precise numbers are hard to gather due to secrecy and the rapid spread of the church. The church started its foreign expansion in 1985 when temples were opened in other parts of the world. It grew and received attention because of its powerful leader. The church today is a multi-national empire with about 800 temples and 2000 pastors in Brazil. The church has control of a television network and several radio stations in Brazil. The Universal Church was founded in 1977 in a converted mortuary and is Brazil's fastest growing evangelical church (Nascimento 1995:6).

### **3.2 Brazil**

Different versions of the history of the Universal Church have been greatly influenced by the historical situations in which the church was founded. The church was founded in 1977 by Edir Macedo. The Universal Church spread its wings from Brazil to the European Continent. Bishop Marcello Crivelli introduced the church into the African Continent. In South Africa it was introduced in order to transform people's lives, as it is believed that it can set people free from illness, personal problems and financial constraints. Pastors pray for people to receive healing from ailments like depression and stress, AIDS, sugar diabetes and hypertension (Universal Church Newsletter 2002). In Brazil, Bishop Macedo admitted that the first Christian church was the Roman Catholic

which, according to him, people joined in order to be accepted by other members of society. But this acceptance did not meet the needs of the poor, the orphaned, the disadvantaged and the helpless. These people felt rejected and accordingly decided to seek refuge in other religions. He states that Brazilians suffered from a lack of God's presence in their lives. They thus wanted churches that were not concerned with politics, but with people's lives and health. In the Roman Catholic Church there was a great distance between the people who were members of the church and the pastors or priests. Most members of the church were suffering from sicknesses and poverty and there was nobody to look after them while the priests claimed that God is the Provider. Macedo, who was not a Catholic priest, observed that most Brazilians had no choice but to be members of the Roman Catholic Church because it was the most dominant church in Brazil.

The reason why Macedo started the Universal Church was that he saw a lot of people suffering from illnesses and as such could not go anywhere for help. He asked himself: "If God is our Creator, how can He let misfortune befall us and does not provide for answers?" He wanted God to provide answers for the destitute, weaklings and those who have personal problems. In addition, his daughter Vivienne was born with a defect and that was motivation enough for him to start the Universal Church. The doctors said that Vivienne would not be able to speak properly, that her teeth would not grow and that various problems would follow.

Vivienne's mother said: "With Vivienne's birth I saw what suffering meant. I felt it deep inside me. Imagine your baby daughter on your lap and people being shocked because of this ugly defect. I saw the pain of people who did not even have money to go to the hospitals, people without doctors, without psychiatrists to help them. All by themselves, just them and God if there is a God for them." Vivienne's suffering made Macedo and his wife experience the pain that destitute people felt. Many poor people in Brazil had no access to good healthcare facilities. The Macedos strongly felt that by having faith in God their daughter could be healed and indeed this happened when they constantly prayed for her recovery, she was completely healed.

People in Brazil had a lot of questions about themselves but did not find answers. The Catholic Church did not give them spiritual support and because of this, they turned to witchcraft, sorcery, magic and occult power. They then started to use witchcraft and magic as the only ways in which they could get spiritual and emotional support. They worshipped inanimate objects such as wood, stones and a lot of other objects in order to seek solutions for their problems.

The Universal Church was established to create a personal relationship with God and to help find answers to peoples' problems. The problems were not only related to diseases as they included family problems, financial problems, alcohol and drug addiction. Through the Universal Church Brazilians found answers to their suffering. People who belonged to the Universal Church gathered in Rio de Janeiro in large numbers to worship God. They usually assembled in stadia to get healed as well as to get solutions to various problems. It is claimed that a lot of people were being delivered from their sins and suffering while others lived a problem - free life without diseases (Universal Church Newsletter 1998:3)

### **3.3 The United States of America**

From Brazil the church spread to Argentina. Like in Brazil, people assembled in stadia to get healed as well as to get solutions to problems. The church then spread its wings to Columbia where a disabled person confined to a wheelchair was able to walk. This miracle happened in 1979. The congregation increased in number because lives there were being transformed. The founder believes that this is very important and motivating for people accustomed to long and boring sermons about sins. Unlike other churches that were becoming emptier, the opposite happened here because lives were transformed and miracles occurred in the services, and as a result, numbers increased (Universal Church Newsletter 1996:7).

The pastors in the church continued to evangelise. They went to Mexico where twenty-one churches were established. From Mexico the church spread to the United States of America. According to the church, in the United States there was a woman who had

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). She heard about the Universal Church. After attending the services, the Holy Spirit cleansed her and she became completely healed. Her HIV test results are now negative.

### **3.4 Portugal and Spain**

Portugal was the next destination of the Universal Church. Many people in Portugal were abusers of drugs and alcohol, before the arrival of the Universal Church. The religion that was taught did not answer most of the questions of the citizens. Many thus resorted to drugs and alcohol. Some Portuguese had a belief that in order to set one free from illnesses, personal problems or financial constraints, one has to depend on drugs or alcohol. It left a lot of them with poor health and financial burdens. According to the pastors of the church, when the Universal Church arrived it set them free from such beliefs. Pastors started praying for them to relieve them from depression and stress, which is brought about by addiction. Not all citizens became members but many of them kicked their bad habits.

From Portugal the Universal Church spread to Spain. People in Spain were victims of similar forms of behaviour, i.e. abuse of drugs and alcohol. Besides that, they were also engaged in worshipping inanimate objects such as pieces of wood, clay or cloths. They referred to them as saints which they would always carry around with the belief that they would bring some luck. These items were tucked away under the dress or somewhere on the body, where they will be invisible. It had been part of the Spanish people for centuries to believe in other spiritual powers outside the Christian tradition. This was a very prominent part of their religious experience and very difficult for them to leave.

Many peoples' lives were transformed by their coming to the Universal Church. People came to experience the living God when their lives were transformed as the Holy Spirit touched their lives and souls. They then saw the pieces of wood and clay as nothing but objects. They no longer regarded them as something with protective power but as useless items. The church spread to Italy, Switzerland, England, Rome and eventually to Africa.

### 3.5 Africa

Macedo's church seemed unstoppable and it stretched its reach to the African continent. Bishop Crivelli who did most work for the Universal Church on the African continent suggests that Christianity was not introduced correctly in Africa. Missionaries who came introduced the health and the school system, but did not dwell much on the spiritual realm of the people. It needed to take a different shape and the Universal Church provided this to people. With the Universal Church, people saw active Christianity and the real power of God, according to the church (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus 2001:5-6).

In Africa the growth of the church has been staggering. In only one day 3000 believers were recently baptized in Mozambique (a former colony of Portugal). Ministers have been to France learning the language in order to spread the Universal Church to French speaking African countries.

Bishop Crivelli maintains that the Universal Church is completely different from traditional churches in Africa because it addresses peoples' problems. He further maintains that now is the time for a church, full of God's power, that heals the sick and oppressed and casts out demons. A church that transforms people's lives in supernatural fulfillment of God's words. In Africa the work of the Universal Church was to evangelise and free people from evil spirits, warning them of diseases such as HIV and building happy families.

In Africa the Church was established in Zambia in 1995 where it was not well received because its existence was shrouded in controversy. The Home Affairs Minister proscribed the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God at the end of August 1995, arguing that the church had not operated "within the laws of the land." Although the minister did not go into details, former members of the Universal Church alleged that members were required to donate blood for Satanic rituals. Former members also say that the prayers and religious teachings of the church had a "Satanic slant" (Mail and Guardian, 9 September 1998).

According to Bishop John Mlambo of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a number of “Satanic” churches were operating in Zambia, which was declared a Christian nation in 1992 by the former President of Zambia, Frederick Chiluba, a born-again Christian who has since fallen from grace. The laws on the registration of churches were very weak in that country and needed to be reviewed in order to maintain peace and stability. By saying that, he was suggesting that groups like the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia should be allowed to scrutinize applications for the registration of new churches. Some Zambians thought that the government was trying to impose its religious will on others (Mail and Guardian, 9 September 1998).

A secretary of the banned Universal Church said that the allegations that the Universal Church was involved in Satanic practices were false. A Brazilian national also denied that the church was involved in collecting blood from its members: “We have been victimised and those accusing us should prove their allegations.” Members of the Universal Church in Zambia were also distraught pointing out that besides evangelical work, the church was also involved in social projects such as the building of a radio and television station and a health centre.

The Universal Church has been considered a controversial Christian sect since its inception. It has an estimated 6 000 000 followers worldwide. It preaches that diseases are caused by demons and those demons have to be exorcised in order for the person to be healed. Its Brazilian founder is faced with corruption allegations, that he uses congregants’ money to enrich himself and is criticised for forcing members to pay 10% of their income to the church, the so-called tithe. Brazil is well-known for being the largest Catholic country in the world but since 1977 the Universal Church has been winning converts in large numbers. These people are from the poorest sectors of society who are attracted to the church because of its emphasis on empowerment and personal responsibility. The church’s controversy also rests on its views about homosexuality. It alleges that homosexuality is a disease which can be cured by prayer. Homosexuality, according to the founder, may be suppressed by prayer, an argument that most people do not believe in.

Its controversial nature is not only in Brazil but all over the world as can be seen from what had happened in Zambia. In Portugal in 1991 Macedo alleged that the church is suffering from “religious inquisition”. The charge follows a series of violent confrontations that have included the stoning of the sect’s faithful, violent picketing of its meetings and the destruction of its temples usually in cinemas or warehouses. People no longer wanted these people to hold meetings in their previously bought property because the church was criticized. Most of the critiques said that Macedo the founder has just become a multimillionaire while a few years earlier he held his services in a tiny mortuary in Rio de Janeiro. There were rumours that this is a giant money laundering scheme operating for a Columbian drug cartel. These unproven accusations of drug connections followed the church to Europe, where it was claimed that the church is out to defraud believers (Nascimento 1995:10).

The church also claims to offer protection from black magic and attracts millions of followers. But the murder of Anna Climbie in one of Britain’s worst ever cases of child abuse has raised troubling questions about the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. The Church has already gotten into trouble over its claim that evil spirits are the cause of people’s woes. In 1997, the Advertising Standards Authority banned a church poster that said: “Constant headaches, depression, insomnia, fears, bad luck, strange diseases. These are just a few symptoms caused by demons.” The deliverance service has dragged the church into its darkest controversy yet. It was to one of these services that eight-year-old Anna Climbie, the little girl who died of hypothermia after being tied up in a bathtub in one of Britain’s worst ever cases of child abuse, was taken by her adoptive mother (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus 2001:7). Leaders of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God are also said to be involved in the drugs and weapon trade via Paraguay and Portugal. Though the activities of the Universal Church in Belgium are marginal, a witness notes that the church has elected to base itself near the big international ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam (Nascimento 1995:12).

### **3.6 South Africa**

“We want to save people that are on the streets, depressed, anguished, victims of AIDS and help make those who have no homes happy, blessed and prosperous”, said the pastors when the Universal Church was introduced in South Africa.

The Universal Church was introduced to South Africa around 1994 and now it is found in many provinces. By 1996 the church had almost 1,050 000 members in South Africa. For example, in Kwazulu-Natal there is a cathedral, which houses thousands of adherents. Before the cathedral was built, most people went to Gauteng to worship in the Universal Church there. Similarly, before the church came to Thohoyandou, people from the Limpopo Province used to go to Gauteng Province to attend services. They would hire a combi once a month and go to church over the weekend to attend night vigils.

Church members persuaded the pastors to consider hiring a place in Polokwane, which would be more convenient for people from all over the Limpopo Province. Their request was considered and the church rented a building in Landros Mare’ Street. Church members in the province still clubbed together and went to Polokwane for services. Since Polokwane was nearer as compared to Gauteng, they would go there twice a month. The church spread to Lebowakgomo, Seshego and other suburbs around Polokwane.

### **3.7 Thohoyandou**

In April 1997 the church was established in Thohoyandou. This was after serious deliberations with church members and the pastors on the need for the establishment of the church because there were many Venda-speaking people who attended the church. A building was found and the church was then based in the Luvhengo Complex. In Venda, like in Zambia and the North West Province, the church has a reputation of being a Satanic movement. The establishment of this church coincided with the conscientisation of people about Satanic movements. One pastor from Nigeria known as Emanuel Eni came and held sermons telling people that he once belonged to a Satanic movement. He confessed that there are certain churches that belong to these movements but on the

surface they behave as if they belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. These churches, it is believed, perform rituals during the night and they sacrifice by making use of human flesh and blood. It was just a coincidence that at the time the Nigerian pastor came, the Universal Church was also being introduced in Thohoyandou. Erroneously this church was considered a Satanic movement. It also has strange practices, people in Thohoyandou are used to going to church once on a Sunday and some churches will have meetings once a week. The Universal Church has different sessions per day which converts are supposed to attend everyday. A service will be held even if there is only one member present. This practice does not go well with people who are not members of the church and renders the Universal Church suspect.

The Universal Church is a small church compared to other pentecostal churches in the area. It has ninety-two registered members besides those who visit the church occasionally. Taking into account the population size of my sample in Thohoyandou which is 40754 according to Statistic South Africa, one can see that the Universal Church, despite preaching a gospel of prosperity, has not managed to attract as many people like the other pentecostal churches.

### 3.8 Membership of the church

**Table 1: Members living in urban Thohoyandou**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Upmarket suburb females	3	7,2
Middle class suburb females	25	59,5
Lower class suburb females	14	33,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table indicates female members living in urban Thohoyandou. The majority (59,5%) live in middle class suburb, 33,3% live in low class suburb. Less than 10% are in the upmarket suburb.

**Table 2: Members living in urban Thohoyandou**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Upmarket suburb males	1	5.3
Middle class suburb males	5	10.5
Lower class suburb males	16	84.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>

The table shows the number of male members of the church. It is clearly indicated that 84,2% of males in the church are from the lower class suburb. 10,5% are in the middle class suburb whilst only 5,3% represents upmarket suburb males.

**Table 3: Members living in Rural Thohoyandou**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Females	19	67.8
Males	9	32.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 illustrates members who live in rural Thohoyandou. The majority of members in rural Thohoyandou are females who constitute 67,8% whilst males only constitute 32,2%.

**Table 4: Employment status**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Unemployed males	18	60.7
Employed males	13	39.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 indicates the employment status of males. In the church there are more unemployed males than those who are employed. Most males (60,7) are unemployed whilst only 39,8 % are employed.

**Table 5: Employment status**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Unemployed females	39	67.4
Employed females	22	32.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 5 also shows that 67,4% of females in the church are unemployed whilst 32,6% constitute females who are employed.

### **3.9 Structure of the church**

The Universal Church, like all the other churches, has a structure. Bishop Edir Macedo is the highest in the hierarchy. The pastors are hierarchically organised with local pastors, state pastors and assistants who deal directly with the Bishop of the church. The pastors who are low in the structural hierarchy of the church, together with the church assistants, are the ones who do operational work.

Pastors get some training at the Head Office in Gauteng or Polokwane for three to six months and they are then allocated to different congregations. It is quite an involved exercise, they attend Bible studies almost every day and learn the church's practices. Most of the trained pastors are members of the church who felt they have a calling to become pastors. Their training also includes training lay persons to carry out the ministry of the church. After training they are stationed at different points. They cannot be in an area for more than a year. They are not allowed because church officials are afraid that the pastor will get used to the people in that area and he would not be able to deliver or do his pastoral duties well. They are only stationed for a short period, a year at the most. The pastoral team is primarily responsible for giving leadership and equipping persons for "the ministry to which God is calling them." Its responsibilities entail crafting a compelling and ever expanding vision for the church, cultivating new leaders to keep the church effective as new disciples are made. They also oversee the broad system of leadership development within the church and give primary leadership in worship. The pastors are sent to different congregations in different areas in order to convert people.

Pastors are given a stipend but not a monthly income in the form of a salary. Church members will from time to time donate money to a pastor for his own use. Money in the form of free will offerings or in the form of tithe is taken directly to Head Office, where a minimal amount will be given to the pastor. The tithe is normally 10% of a person's earnings.

When the pastors are in Thohoyandou, they sleep in the church. There is a place which is reserved for the pastor's belongings, for example, a bed and a trunk. Sometimes the pastor is invited to a member's house for a visit where he might end up sleeping over. During weekdays, the pastor may go to Polokwane to attend meetings. The pastors are assisted by church assistants who are involved with the direction of the church services on an informal basis.

The church assistants are men and women who are staunch members of the church who are considered to be faithful converts. Their desire is to attract and disciple large numbers of all ages from young children to senior citizens through activities which are rooted in the word of God. They continue to promote the worship of God through a variety of Sunday services, which are accessible to all kinds of people. They visit the homes of other converts, particularly those who are still new in the church so that they must feel accepted.

Church assistants oversee the church's activities during the pastor's absence. Their role is to officiate over ceremonies such as weddings and baptisms, preaching in church services, performing exorcisms and directing the chains of prayers. Also involved with the running of the church are church members who work voluntarily and perform tasks such as cleaning the building, looking after children, performing exorcisms and receiving worshippers into the church.

The church has females in its structures, but most of them are church assistants. Counselors as well may be females. There is a church council where the pastor is the chairperson. The church council comprises of both males and females who are church

assistants and some ordinary members of the church. Some ex-officio members, for example, are not church assistants but ordinary members in the church.

The colours in the church are symbolic, for example, red and white colours are quite prominent. The church rents a hall wherein it holds its services every day of the week. The Universal Church is draped with red and white curtains. The white dove indicates the Holy Spirit. The Universal Church is a pentecostal church and the Holy Spirit plays a central role in the everyday life of the congregants. The white colour also indicates purity and peace. Once one becomes a member of the Universal Church, she/he becomes pure because his/her sins would have been washed away by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, peace will prevail. The red colour symbolises the love that God loved the world with so much that he sent Jesus his only begotten son to come and die for peoples' sins. His blood washed away sins so that people should be pure.

At the entrance there is a big signboard on which is written "Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG)." Just below those letters there is a white dove encircled in red. Inside the church there are almost 200 black chairs, a pulpit and a big brown cross. At the corner there is a music system and at the centre there is a white curtain suspended from the roof. The sacred is represented using a chalice of blessed oil, prosperity is symbolised by a table with fruit on it. The church's windows are plastered with three large black and white posters featuring black women and men testifying how the church's teachings eased their ills. The brightly-lit room is tiled with neat rows of black chairs. The walls are blank except for the words, "Jesus Christ is the Lord", in gold lettering next to a brown cross on the wall. Soft music, mostly strings, floats elegantly across the room. The pastors, males, young with clean cut hair, mostly wearing shirts and ties each day are found in front of the church doors between services.

The church is located in the Thohoyandou shopping centre complex. This is primarily to attract people who come to the complex for shopping. Almost all Universal Churches are situated at shopping complexes. People come everyday in large numbers to the shopping complex and this serves as bait to recruit people to the church. Both old and young

people are reached, so the flyers that are sent around will fall in the hands of one or two people who might be interested in the church. This place is also convenient because even those who are working in the shopping centre or in the government service buildings nearby would be able to attend the services particularly during lunch and tea-time. The sermons are short, people sing hymns. In Thohoyandou, singing is back grounded by a music system which, according to the pastor, makes people relax and become less stressed. It sort of hypnotises the congregants and that has a positive effect since it promotes meditation and reflection. People start to meditate and remove what is hurting them that is embedded in their subconscious. After the hypnosis, the mind becomes relieved and one will have a positive outlook in life.

The theology of the church is a prosperity theology. The Universal Church preaches that by being a member of the church prosperity will follow you wherever you go as long as you follow God's rules. Tithe is one of the basic conditions of making one to be prosperous. The liturgy of the church which is not only the order of worship but the sum total of interaction when a congregation worships will also be looked into. When attending a praise and worship session one cannot afford keeping one's hands still while everyone around you is clapping or raising theirs. The rest of the congregation will be swaying from left to right. One may feel embarrassed if one is seated or just standing doing nothing while the rest of the congregants are moving. These sessions force each participant to become part of the congregation. It is also impossible to keep to oneself. This is a way of forging solidarity among members of the congregation since it has an egalitarian effect on members of the congregation. No matter how rich or poor, important status or not, all participants are drawn into a holistic act of worship. They do not only praise with their mouth but with their hands and feet as well. The collective role of singing and dancing motivates people and reinforces unity among believers. The liturgy in the church may also be directed by anyone in the church in the absence of the pastor and the church assistants.

### **3.10 Relation to other congregations**

The Universal Church in Thohoyandou does not really relate to other pentecostal congregations because there seems to be differences in emphasis in other congregations. Though other pentecostals preach a prosperity gospel it is not as prominent as it is in the Universal Church. The Universal Church even accords different days to different aspects of life, for example, praying for prosperity on Saturdays, financial upliftment on Monday or praying for healing on Tuesday. Their approach seems to differ from other churches. These other churches do not have services everyday, they only hold services on Sunday and have prayer meetings either once or twice per week. This makes it very difficult to relate to other congregants.

### **3.11 Functioning of church members**

They hold meetings during the week. After services, the church assistants and the pastor may meet if there are issues surrounding the church's functioning that have to be ironed out. If some member is sick or he is in a situation where prayers are needed the pastor goes with the church assistants to that household to pray for him or her. If, for example, there is a funeral they hold daily meetings in the home of the deceased until the person is buried. The pastor is the one who performs all the burial rituals and he is assisted by the church assistants. Members of the church are urged to attend ceremonies such as burials and weddings in order to show solidarity and brotherhood.

The church holds church conferences. International speakers are invited to come and discuss themes that relate to prosperity, healing, alcohol and drug addiction and domestic affairs, amongst others. These conferences are held in either Durban or in Johannesburg where there are cathedrals. Those who do not live in Johannesburg or in Durban have to go to these places to attend conferences.

Conferences have a counselling element. Those who have problems will attend sessions where they will be given a chance to talk to counselors about the problems they are facing. Sessions are motivational. Motivational speakers are invited locally as well as internationally to motivate people who feel they have achieved nothing so that they

continue to look at life more positively. These days there is even a television programme of the Universal Church that gives counselling not only to members of the church but to the public as well.

### **3.12 Services at the Universal Church**

Since the church is situated in the shopping complex it is easier for pastors and church assistants to attract people of all walks of life into the church. Furthermore, they market the church to these people and also state how it operates. It holds seven services weekly most of which seem to be aimed at solving socio-economic problems. These problems are apportioned to the different days of the week. The services are quite intense with the pastor delivering the sermon with the help of church assistants.

The sermons are about what is happening in everyday life. For example, they teach about prosperity, healing, domestic abuse, witchcraft, drug as well as alcohol addiction. The people who attend are assured that if they really believe in God and do what God wants them to and be obedient they are going to reap benefits.

### **3.13 Services for the unemployed**

On a Monday, prayers for financial security are held. Members and non-members gather to ask for financial upliftment. In the session that the researcher attended most of those who attended were young people both male and female. Among them twenty-seven were registered members and nineteen were unregistered members. Most of them were females. Some were from rural Thohoyandou, while others were from urban Thohoyandou. Forty-six people attended this Monday session.

This session is held particularly for people who are unemployed. They come to ask for employment opportunities. Those who have been retrenched also come in order to ask for employment opportunities in other sectors. With the new dispensation when Venda was incorporated into South Africa the Venda Development Corporation and Agriven, which were government parastatals, retrenched almost 90% of their employees. Most

civil servants did not make it to provinces such as Gauteng in order to secure employment.

Congregants yearn for help. The pastor instructed everybody to gather in front near the altar. He ordered people to stand and lift up their hands. Everybody lifted their hands. The pastor then said a short prayer, and as he concluded, "Amen," everybody started praying individually. The congregants prayed earnestly and loudly. In one session the prayer took almost fifteen minutes, one man who was praying next to the researcher prayed "Oh God, I have five kids to look after, an unemployed wife, my mother and father, sisters and brothers why don't you feel pity for me. If I do not get employed....." The researcher could not decipher the end of the prayer because the congregant started mumbling and after that tears were rolling down his face. There was soft music in the background which created a serene environment. The sermon was about asking God to provide participants with employment opportunities. The church believes that unemployment is the devil's plan to let people live in misery. After the sermon there was a free will offering. The pastor then anointed each congregant with olive oil. Olive oil is used because in the Bible it was used for anointing so that people should be blessed. A closing prayer was said and the sermon that started at 9h00 was over at 11h06.

After the prayer service, the researcher interviewed one member who was in that prayer session. He responded thus "I am coming to this church because it really works. I was a member of the Lutheran Church for 15 years. I lost my job through the Venda Development Corporation (VDC) retrenchment in 1997. In my church there was no sense of brotherhood where they sympathise with those who are unemployed. There are no services meant for unemployed people yet there are so many unemployed people. I am now a registered member of the church and a church assistant". The researcher wanted to know what made him become a registered member. He responded jovially "let me sit down and explain so that you see how the Universal Church works. The Lutheran Church did not provide me with a sense of belonging. You go to church every Sunday, nobody cares whether you are happy or not, whether you have eaten or not. I have been a

member for quite some years, there are people who personally know me, and they have not even asked me how I am keeping or just to organise a prayer meeting for me to ask God to give me strength. A friend from the Universal Church came to me and asked if I would like to accompany him to church. I did not want to go at first but he persuaded me to go. I agreed and then I accompanied him. He told me that if I follow what the pastors say as messengers of God I was sure to have financial security. I went there and I began praying to have financial upliftment.”

The pastor persuaded him to start a small business. He ventured into the informal sector. He was selling tomatoes and apples. Through prayers and faithful tithing he later bought a bakkie. The bakkie enabled him to go to nearby farms to buy tomatoes for selling to other hawkers. During the time of the interview he was in the process of buying another bakkie. Pastors collect the money from members of the church. Members put ten percent of their income in envelopes and hand these to the pastor. The pastor will pray over the money and when he goes to Polokwane for his weekly meetings, he takes the envelopes with him. He says that what he has, for example, the small business that he has started is through the Universal Church. There is a sense of brotherhood, people care about what is happening to others. He said anointment with olive oil is very important because it was also used in the Bible. It cleanses one from all worldly evil and it makes one to be nearer to God and in turn God blesses that person.

### **3.14 The services for healing**

On Tuesdays, healing prayers for the sick are held. Those who suffer from any kind of illness are anointed with olive oil in order for them to be healed. Many people these days suffer from different diseases and this then prompts them to go to the Universal Church in pursuit of healing. Both church members and non-members attend such services.

One of the interviewees at a Tuesday session where sick people were being prayed for said: “I have been attending the Universal Church for close to a month and I am feeling better physically. This church is like an emergency hospital for the soul.” He saw an advertisement on a flyer stating that those who have sicknesses should come to the

Universal Church for healing. This man did not belong to any denomination before coming to the Universal Church. He was on crutches as he entered the church and went straight and sat in the front row. The pastor said an opening prayer. After that the congregants prayed individually. Most of them were saying “God enter into my bones, veins, muscles and fill my body with your Holy Spirit.” They prayed together and sounded like a chorus, “*Phuma Sathane*” (get out Satan) from my organs and burn in fire.” They were really yearning for healing. They kept on saying “Get out you Satan, we are tired of you, we are tired of living under your bondage, back out from us. “*Phuma Sathane,*” (get out Satan) go out to the sea.” They were even showing this off by hands. From my observation each person wanted the devil to go out where he was feeling pain because they believed that he is the one who inflicted the pain. While saying, “*Phuma Sathane*” others were holding their heads, others their knees, stomachs, waists and other parts of the body. Some were really sweating, which was an indication that they really believed that by yelling they were driving the devil out of their system. The man on crutches was suffering from “*tshipfula*” an incurable sore, which is equated to cancer. After the session, the man went forward and the pastor prayed for him. He claims that after the prayer service, he felt better. He never stopped going to the church and he is no longer walking on crutches. He said, “I believe one day God is going to heal me.”

An old man who has been a member of the Apostolic Faith Mission for twenty-six years was also interviewed. He had preached to quite a number of people and he said he “drew them to Jesus kraal.” What was unfortunate was the fact that he was suffering from rheumatism. The condition grew worse by the day. It reached a stage where he wanted to commit suicide. The pain was so unbearable that he was prepared to allow doctors to amputate his leg, but he did not have enough money to let them operate on him. He used to take very strong medication. A friend of his introduced him to the Universal Church but at first he was reluctant to go. One night the pain became so unbearable that he thought of many ways of getting a cure and he eventually thought of trying the Universal Church. Early in the morning he contacted his friend so that he might accompany him to the church. They went together and attended the seven o’clock session on Friday. After

the service they approached the pastor who prayed for him and asked him to return on Tuesday, the day for praying for the sick.

In this Tuesday service, everybody was asked to touch where the pain was in the body. This old man said, "I touched my leg, I prayed loudly, you evil spirit get out of my body, you "*madimoni*" (demons), you "*madimoni*" (demons) who bring diseases to torment us get out of my body." He said this more than ten times. "I pleaded to God, please God help me, I am a sinner, I am asking for your healing power, save me from the power of darkness and evil."

He went to the Universal Church for almost four months. After each service, he would feel much better. He said, "It took a long time to realise that I had to let the Holy Spirit talk to me. You know these illnesses are not from God, illnesses are from the devil. The devil wants to torment us and to me the evil spirit in me manifested itself as rheumatism. These sicknesses are given names by the devil. I had been a Christian for over thirty years now and this was not revealed in the Apostolic Faith Mission. But the revelation has come since I went to the Universal Church. These diseases are evil spirits. Evil spirits are found anywhere. It could be at home or at work or at any other place. The pain that I had came indirectly from the devil so that I should scold God, that God is not helping me. The Devil works in a mysterious way. He might send someone to bewitch you." Witchcraft is an explanation of misfortune based on the belief that certain individuals possess innate psychic power capable of causing harm, including sickness and death.

This old man says that bad angels, angels of darkness, are the ones causing sicknesses. He says, "In the Apostolic Faith Mission they always westernise these diseases, they do not want to talk openly about witchcraft. The Universal Church believes that witches exist, and they are regarded as sinners. You know, in the Universal Church, when the pastor prays you really experience the power of the Holy Spirit, they really burn demons. Demons would be exorcised from the body of the person who was believed to have evil

spirits. When I was healed, I only felt a burning sensation and I fell down and when I came to I felt as if I was a new person. I am now free from the evil spirit of rheumatism.”

He further says that the Bible also talks about demon-possession. “These are bad spirits. There is no doubt why the church pays special attention to these forces and how to counter them. To keep the equilibrium, the evil forces must be driven out, chased away and kept at bay. You cannot fight an evil spirit with painkillers and medication. Doing so will be fighting a losing battle. You fight a spirit with a spirit. Painkillers would only ease the pain but would not be able to take out the evil spirit attacking a particular organ at a particular point in time. I feel I have wasted my time by fighting the evil spirit that was attacking me through medication. But I think God wanted me to understand the spirit realm and to come to realise it, I paid with a terrible pain. Now I can advocate that all sicknesses are from the devil who is a spirit, you attack him with the spirit also.”

It was impressive how this old man put his illness into perspective. He was sick for a very long time and all along he thought that was physical, but by being introduced to the Universal Church, he has come to realise that the sickness is not only physical but spiritual as well. It is as if the devil has labeled these sicknesses. These evil spirits according to him have names, for example, hypertension, gastric ulcer, sugar diabetes and many others.

### **3.15 The services for the Holy Spirit**

Every Wednesday in the Universal Church, there is a meeting for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is equated with fire. If one has been bewitched and animals have been sent by witches into his/her body, the Holy Spirit will burn the witchcraft familiars such as baboons, hyenas, and snakes, among others.

Twenty-three people turned up for the meeting for the Holy Spirit the researcher attended. They gathered and asked to be filled with the Holy Spirit like it happened during the Pentecost. As the congregants prayed, with their hands raised, the pastor acted as an intercessor between the congregants and God. After twenty minutes of intense

prayer, one woman yelled and fell on the floor. The church assistants and the pastor kept on praying as she yelled. Some were praying whilst others were singing. The woman was mumbling something that was unintelligible. Later on, the pastor explained what the woman was saying. He said the woman kept on saying “there is something inside me, a snake is burning inside.” The pastor then said to me, “The Holy Spirit is fire. It was burning the snake.” They kept on praying in order to take the snake (demon in the form of a snake) out of her body.

After a while, the woman rolled over several times and became numb. She was sweating. She was wet as if water had been poured over her. She had completely lost touch with what had happened. She started crying when it was explained to her that she was possessed by a demon in the form of a snake. In all the months that the researcher attended the Universal Church that was the first experience of seeing demons being exorcised. The woman who was rolling over and over again was amazing. The congregation was shouting “*Yisha Sathane* (Burn Satan), get out.” It was as if the woman wanted to undress herself indicating that she was burning.

### **3.16 The services for families**

Every Thursday there is a chain of prayer for families falling apart, experiencing separation, addiction and abuse. Families these days are experiencing domestic violence and abuse, which leads to the dissolution of many marriages. Couples who are experiencing problems in their marriages come to these services in order to tell God what their problems are and ask for forgiveness. One lady, a certain Christine, was a victim of domestic violence. Her neighbours had eventually come to terms with her running and screaming in the streets in the early hours of the morning. Her husband turned into an alcoholic a few months after tying the knot. He began coming home drunk in the early hours of the morning. He would beat her for no apparent reason. The next morning he would feel very sorry.

Christine started to attend services on Thursdays to pray for her family. She maintains, “I was taught to forgive and not to be aggressive.” One day Christine invited her husband

who joined her and was eventually delivered from his addiction. He now spends most of the time with his family and he even goes shopping with them.

Fervent prayers to destroy witchcraft, spells, curses, “*muti*” and all kinds of spiritual problems are said. Most of these spirits torment families. This is the night service of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and the service in the church where the pastor and his church assistants battle with the dark spirits that dare mess with families. People attribute failures and illnesses to witchcraft. In these services the spirits and demons are exorcised. Dozens of families tormented by the forces of evil go to the altar. Church assistants clutch the hair of the possessed, their shoulders, and their arms doing whatever it takes to break the spell. Some would be crawling on the floor coughing up bile.

Church assistants stand behind those in front of the altar. One woman was yelling and weeping. The church assistants grasped the woman’s head and the pastor commanded the dark spirit inside her to reveal itself, while the church assistant shouted “*Yisha Sathane* (Burn Satan), Get out.” The noise was deafening. Facing the crowd, the pastor pointed at the possessed and yelled into his microphone. “We will burn these demons.” As the church assistants battled with the woman, other church members shouted “*Yisha, Yisha Sathane*”. The whole ordeal lasted for twenty minutes and finally as if by magic, the woman became silent and calm. The congregants applauded as she went forward to hug her two daughters and her husband. The Universal Church promises that if you put your faith in God, He would deliver you from your family problems.

### **3.17 The services for deliverance**

Fridays are reserved for deliverance service where strong prayers to destroy witchcraft, spells, curses, “*muti*” and all kinds of spiritual problems are made. There is a belief that certain individuals possess an innate, psychic power capable of causing harm, including sickness and death. It is also believed that the aforementioned is caused by magical powers, therefore magical countermeasures should cure it. People go to the Universal Church where they lay the basis and means for taking counteractions. One Friday morning at 10 o’clock a young Pedi pastor neatly dressed in a white shirt and a tie was

pacing up and down the aisle singing loudly. The congregation was ordered to come to the front and to put their right hands on the chest. The pastor shouted “Are there any evil spirits tormenting you or stopping you from sleeping? The pastor grabbed the head of a young woman who was making a noise. He shouted, asking Jesus to “send his fire to burn the evil spirits.”

“*Yisha! Yisha! Yisha*” (Burn, Burn, Burn), the worshippers shouted in response, stamping their feet. The pastor took hold of the young woman, grasping her neck in what looked like a wrestling grip, and told everyone that the devil was inside her. The woman was told to pray and fast all week so that she could be relieved from her evil spirits. There are some diseases that characterise possession (by the devil), for example, constant headaches, insomnia, fear, faint or attacks, suicidal wishes, diseases whose causes have so far eluded doctors, vision of shadows and voice auditions and depression. These evil spirits must be exorcised.

In deliverance services congregants are encouraged to talk to the Lord. One man continuously said: “Lord Jesus Christ, I pray to you this morning. I need you, please help me, you are my last resort.” Such individual conversations with the Lord are encouraged throughout the service. The pastor bellows into the microphone “say to the person next to you, The Lord is here for you... the disease that you have will go away. You are not sick because you are supposed to be sick, you are sick because the devil is hiding your joy.” The congregants shouted “*Yisha Tokoloshe, Yisha Sathane, burn yourself Tokoloshe, burn yourself Satan*” some pleading, some cajoling and some collapsing. The congregants are asked to walk towards the pastor. The pastor would put his hands on the congregants’ heads, shouting: “God is going to heal your body, the Lord is going to get the *Tokoloshe* out of you.” Some of the people, mostly young women are overcome by emotions. The laying of hands is violent. The women are grabbed by their throats almost to the point of throttling them. At the end of the session, one girl who was still possessed by the *Tokoloshe* posed a challenge to the pastor. To that end, the pastor shouted, “this one is stubborn.” Thereafter the pastor and the church assistants shouted, Get out “*Sathane, Yisha Sathane,*” they screamed and their voices echoed. The young

girl struggled and wrestled with the three assistants who had grabbed her. She finally relaxed and staggered off stage, seemingly sapped of all energy.

After the sermon, the pastor came to the most important part of the service where blessings were received. A few people smiled as he summoned those who wanted to receive those blessings. He said he was going to start with anyone who wanted to give from R200 upwards. He told them that those who plant will reap. He talked in Zulu “*Akekho bazalwane*” (Isn’t there anyone fellow Christians) he asked, say “Amen, don’t be ashamed.” He sympathises moving on to the next scale of blessings. “Those who say they will give R100 upwards come forward and receive your blessings.” Three people walked to the front and handed money to the male pastor who touched each on the head as a form of blessing. The scale then went down to R50, R20, R10, R5, R2 and then to 50 cents. Those who did not have money were asked to put their hands on the Bible and the pastor blessed them.

### **3.18 The services for prosperity**

One important aspect of the Universal Church of God is the teaching of prosperity gospel. On Saturday congregants particularly pray for prosperity. This is a service where one meets congregants coming to challenge God. They bring their offerings to God saying to Him: “God I have given you so much, in return I would like you to multiply this by so much.” The service is quite intense. One man I talked to before the service started said that he was going to offer a thousand Rand as a free will offering. To him this was not a lot of money as God would multiply it tenfold.

It was one o’clock on Saturday, when people assembled in the church. The pastor started off with a prayer. These sermons, like any other sermon of the Universal Church, invite participation. The pastor invited the congregants to the front. “Those who cannot abandon a vice and simply those who are not happy enough with their financial life please come to the fore.” At this point most of the people went towards the pastor. The pastor said in a hypnotic way, “close your eyes, place your hands on your heart. Now let Christ touch you. Do not fight back “*bazalwane*” (fellow Christians). If you feel like

crying, let your tears flow, if you feel like screaming, scream loudly.” The pastor paced up and down, phrases and cries started to pour spontaneously from the crowd. They were singing and screaming loudly. As some were singing, others were saying, “If I am here it’s because I have repented. Forgive me, Lord, forgive me. Break the generation curse of financial disability.”

The congregants shouted “*Hamba* (go) the spirit of not having money, *hamba* the spirit of *Amadimoni* (demons), *hamba*.” They stamped their feet on the ground, yelling and calling the spirit of the devil to desert them. They paced up and down with their hands raised. The pastor switched on the sound system and soft music was played in the background. The pastor instructed the congregants to put their hands on their heads and start praying, insulting the evil spirits and burning them. After that the pastor instructed the congregants to stretch their hands in the direction from where they came so that they should be able to expel evil spirits from their houses. It is believed that the bad spirits are responsible for their lack of prosperity. These spirits might be in their houses, but facing in the direction from where they came, would make the evil spirits go away.

Interesting is the fact that different crowds gather for different needs on all the days of the week. Most people who gather for the Monday sermons also attend the Saturday ones. Mondays are for financial security and Saturdays for prosperity. Of particular interest to me were the prosperity and the healing services. The healing services are on Tuesdays and the prosperity services are Saturdays.

In the prosperity services, the congregants keep on shouting “Jesus is our Provider, He is more than an Overcomer.” A woman who is the co-founder of the Universal Church in Thohoyandou was interviewed. This woman works in the government offices in Thohoyandou. She joined the church whilst she was in Polokwane in 1996. She went there when she was deployed to Polokwane after the new dispensation. A friend introduced her to the church. She said “my friend has a house and a car and I asked her what her secret was since life in Polokwane was so expensive. She said this is because of the Universal Church. I went there to pray for prosperity and God gave it to me.” Since

she joined the Universal Church her life had changed drastically. She further said: “When I first went to the Universal Church I was not faithful in my tithe but one day the pastor preached a message that suggested that if a person does not tithe s/he is stealing God’s money.” She then began to be a faithful tither. Today through the power of God, she sees prosperity in her life. She owns two taxis and a bakkie. This lady was separated from her husband but one day her husband came back to her and begged for forgiveness. She forgave him and a relative who was very happy about the reunion organised a white wedding for them. They are now legally married.

In the prosperity services congregants shout “*Phuma Sathane,*” Spirit of penury, there is prosperity in the house of the Lord. I claim the prosperity, money is in abundance in the house of the Lord, God will provide,” while stamping their feet on the ground and the pastor praying over them. Most of them would be crying, tears rolling down their cheeks and saliva running from their mouths. The prayer is quite intense and the pastor would be saying “pray harder and claim your money from heaven, write a blank cheque to Heaven, God knows how much you need.” The church would be in commotion until the pastor says “amen.”

When one looks at the congregants after the service one observes fatigue. The pastor would then announce that it is time for free will offering where they will each go to the fore to give their offerings to God, after that the service would come to an end.

### **3.19 The Sunday service**

The Sunday session which is a family service starts at 7 o’clock, parents and children gather for a service to praise God. The pastor opens the service with a prayer and then asks the congregants to lift their hands. He stresses the power of the Holy Spirit in Christians’ daily lives. He then goes on to say that many types of earthly suffering result from disobedience to God or are a result of demonic oppression. He reads the scripture and the congregants are asked to say “Goodbye devil! Goodbye suffering! Goodbye sickness!” After praying, the pastor asks the congregants to give a free will offering.

They are blessed with olive oil, thereafter a closing prayer is made and the service is over.

All services are attended by members and non-members, who only participated in one or two activities. The morning services are not well attended as compared to the afternoon sessions. In the morning people were at work, while in the evenings they have transport problems. For example, some might attend to get cured from their illnesses and/or to get financial prosperity. The crowd for prosperity seemed to be consistent, for example, one would find that the same people come for every service of prosperity every week. It would seem that they would want to claim prosperity and financial upliftment. For healing services on Tuesdays, one finds that there are different faces who came for different illnesses, but there are also those who are consistent particularly those who are members.

Most of the services are conducted in Zulu, Sotho and English. Most pastors come from Gauteng or other areas outside the Limpopo Province. If the pastor is Zulu, the whole service would be conducted in Zulu and English and if the pastor is Sotho, then the service would be conducted in both Sotho and English. There has not been a Venda pastor yet. These pastors also come for a brief period. The longest period they are supposed to be at a particular place is between six to nine months. This makes them not to become used to people in that area as this might make them to relax and lose focus.

### **3.20 General characteristics of the services**

The services' format is similar everyday and lasts for an hour or hours. The daily services consist of prayers based on a specific theme such as healing, family life, finance and spiritual life, amongst others.

Interesting is the fact that different crowds gather for different needs on all days of the week. All the services from Monday to Sunday are led by the pastor and if the pastor has gone to Polokwane then the church assistant will lead the congregation. The pastor will start off by praying and let each congregant pray individually, the reason being that

everybody should pray for himself/herself and tell God what he/she really needs from Him. The pastor will act as an intercessor between God and the congregants but the congregants themselves should tell the demons to go away by scolding them. Olive oil for blessing the congregants is in all the services and is used on all congregants-members and non-members of the church.

These services differ in terms of peoples' desires. On Monday most people tend to be those who were unemployed or retrenched and those who are employed, but still feel that they have to be blessed to get rich. Both males and females, young and old attend these services. Young males and females are quite prominent in these services. Males want to be employed in order to maintain their families while females are faced with the responsibility of feeding the family.

The Tuesday service is a healing service. The church earned a reputation for healing HIV positive people. Diabetics and those who are suffering from hypertension are anointed with olive oil in order to be healed. In these services old as well as young people are found and the numbers are more or less like those who attend the Monday and Saturday services.

Wednesday services are for the Holy Spirit whilst Friday is deliverance service. In these services the Holy Spirit burns whatever evil is in one's body. Demons that are sent by people in the form of snakes, baboons and hyenas are exorcised during these services. There is a belief that if people are unfortunate, unemployed or things are not going well in their lives it is because of the evil spirits, which have to be exorcised.

The Thursday service is for families. For all the services attended, this is the least attended. Mostly one would find that there are more females than males. Sometimes one would find couples in attendance. It is also rare that one finds older people in these services. One of the reasons may be that on Thursdays those who are not church members would be attending services in their own churches in the afternoon, for example, most churches hold women's prayers on Thursday afternoon.

### **3.21 Conclusion**

This chapter shows that there are real challenges that are facing post-colonial South Africa because a look at the services of the Universal Church reveals that issues that the present government promised to resolve seem not to have been fulfilled. For example, the interest in church services on financial upliftment is a way of people saying to the government that they seem to have failed in their promises for providing employment. Because government is unable to deliver, people are seeking refuge in Pentecostalism. Citizens are waiting for prosperity which seems not to be materialising, and as a result people are becoming disillusioned. Even if people who are in the church are a minority, they are trying to articulate their dissatisfaction. Poverty leads to sicknesses, people who are suffering from all kinds of illnesses are going to the church in order to be healed.

The different services in the Universal Church outline how the church functions. Despite the fact that the church does not have a large following, it still encourages entrepreneurship. People who go to this church are persuaded to start their own businesses in order to get money. There are testimonies of how members and non-members gained wealth. Wealth is gained through tithing and attending services. When these people become rich and get healed some people in Thohoyandou attribute such wealth to Satanism since the church is suspected of being Satanic.

The Universal Church helps improve people's lifestyles. Interviews held with members and non-members who attended the church show evidence that this church clearly provides a survival strategy for most of them. They go to the church to solve their family problems, to seek employment and prosperity and to get healed, amongst others.

Looked at differently there are members who are becoming poorer and poorer through tithing since they are unemployed. A tithing with the hope of getting something in return makes most of them live in poverty since they use the little that they have to tithe. Holding on to hope may discourage people from looking for employment. People's perceptions towards the church make it difficult for some to be members of the church.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE YOUTH AND THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the youth in the Universal Church. Almost two thirds of the church is made up of the youth. Given the history of the province, its rural nature and the high unemployment rate, exacerbated by the recent retrenchments in the various industries, the youth yearn for employment and material well being. The socio-economic situation facing the youth in Venda has influenced some of them to turn to the Universal Church for solace. This chapter attempts to explain what the expectations and yearnings of the youth are when they attend the services of the Universal Church. Differences between male and female youth as well as the nature of the membership of the youth in the church, will be explored.

### **4.2 The definition of youth**

For purposes of this study, youth is regarded as anyone from the age of fourteen to forty years. It is recognized that there may be people who fall outside this age range but who may experience similar circumstances to young people. The definition indicates the primary target group without excluding those who may share similar circumstances. It should be recognised that the term youth has a range of meanings and connotations within the South African social, cultural and political contexts. Since the youth uprising of 1976 and the subsequent mobilisation of young women and men against apartheid policies of racial oppression, the term youth has represented a potent and important element of the political struggle.

However, what we need to note here is that the terms youth and adolescent are social constructions which vary considerably from culture to culture and are subject to reconstruction (Jones and Wallace 1992:2). In many African societies, for example, one is considered a youth as long as one does not have authority to make decisions for him or herself or on behalf of others, is not married or unable to establish a separate household from that of his/her parents (Fokwang, 1999:55). In some South African societies, men who did not undergo circumcision in the 'bush' are referred to as women or boys. In

Cameroon, for example, there is a tendency towards elasticity in defining youth especially along lines of political inclusion and exclusion. According to the ruling CPDM (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement), youth is defined as young people between 15 and 25 years "But in practice, it is common to find members of its Youth wing, especially national officials, who are more than forty years" (Jua 2001:4)

Nowadays, the youth, to some extent, fend for themselves. In some instances they establish their own households apart from those of their parents. In many cases they are married and, are therefore, capable of making their own decisions. At the same time one would find that there are those who are unemployed. For resources they still depend on their parents. Defining youth therefore becomes difficult, under the current circumstances. To some degree, youth seem to have a deferred adulthood because young people are unable to establish total independence. Adulthood gives one rights and obligations of economic independence, decision-making, marriage and reproduction (France 1998:51). One also has to be responsible for his/her dependants and, in particular, for children. Most of the youth feel disillusioned because they cannot realise their dreams; they cannot provide for their dependants, worst of all for relatives who look upon them for resources.

The foregoing definition granted, it is proposed that youths, as a social category, are plagued with ambivalence especially in their relation to the postcolonial state. They simultaneously pose as "the terrors of the present, the errors of the past" and "the prospect of a future" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:46).

The National Youth Policy is directed towards young males and females aged between fourteen to thirty-five years. Young people in this age group require social, economic and political support to realise their full potential. Most young people go through dramatic changes in their life during this period as they move from childhood to adulthood. Whilst this transition period is characterised by youthful energy, enthusiasm, ambition, creativity and promise, it can also be equated with uncertainty, fear and

alienation. Young men and women may face many challenges and threats, which are unique to them as a social category (National Youth Plan 2000: 6).

According to Fokwang (2003:1) youth is a social category which is embodied by many uncertainties. He says that the substance of the Cameroon's statehood is revealed as basically patrimonial masked with the dubious concepts of nation building though little is affordable in terms of opportunities for an evergrowing body of skilled and modernised youth. Against this backdrop, an increasing number of youth have opted for greener pastures in Europe and North America through various networks, legal or fraudulent. The bulk of the disillusioned must face the fate in the postcolony by making use of different kinds of agency to dispel the threat of losing out in a world of increasing promises but fewer rewards.

A number of young people's adulthood has been deferred as a result of their inability to establish some degree of independence in South Africa. Prior to the democratisation of South Africa societies in the 1990s, youth development occurred within the context of political, social, economic and cultural oppression. This situation contributed directly to many of the current dilemmas young women and men now find themselves in. The Apartheid government did not address the development needs of young men and women as a specific category. The particular needs, challenges or opportunities faced by young people were either ignored, or not considered important enough to warrant more focused policy or programme interventions. The democratic government was no better to most youth since postcolonial South Africa according to the Comaroffs did not really meet the needs of the youth.

The youth in rural areas are either unemployed, employed on a part-time basis or employed in the informal sector. Unemployment can bring with it a number of other social ills including participation in crime, drug and alcohol abuse, poor health and loss of interest in participating in activities of broader society. Young people experience unemployment at levels that are greater than the broader population.

### 4.3 The age profile of the church members interviewed

**Table 6: The age profile of the church members interviewed**

Years	Males	Females
10 – 17	4	6
18 – 25	8	15
26 – 40	10	20
41 – 50	4	8
51 – 60	2	8
61-	1	4

The population above was selected by using non- probability sampling referred to as snowball sampling. Snowballing involves approaching a single case that is involved in the phenomenon to be investigated in order to gain information on other similar persons. In turn, this person is requested to identify further people who could make up the sample. The researcher proceeds in this way until s/he has identified a sufficient number of cases to make up his/her sample (Barker,1988:159). A member who gave names of other members in the Universal Church that may be interviewed was identified. As it can easily happen that the chain be broken each respondent was asked to provide four or five names instead of only one for further interview. This technique was effective in this investigation.

### 4.4 The Universal Church magazine

The Universal Church has a magazine known as “STOP SUFFERING.” This magazine originated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and promotes word-faith teachings. The magazine is not only for the youth but for every member of the church and also for those who are not members. It has a large impact on the youth because there are pictures of other youth from different congregations showing what they have gained materially by being members of the church. It contains mainly testimonies of believers. Articles range from those about people who were healed from different kinds of illnesses to those concerned with how people became rich after living in poverty for a very long time. Before the magazine came into being, church members would give testimonies on how they were

delivered from evil and how God provided them with what they wished for. In order for the message to reach a great number of people all over the world, the testimonies were documented. The magazine markets the church to all parts of the world. When people read about the testimonies that members of the church give, some become interested and join the church. Pastors in the church always say that the magazine attracts many people to become members of the church.

#### **4.5 The youth in the Limpopo Province**

The youth of the Limpopo Province, like all the other youth in South Africa, had high expectations of the democratic government. This was also evident from the 1994 election results when the province was among those that had the highest percentage in voter turnout. The province is both poor and rural. When the democratic government came into power, it was their wish to reduce poverty in the province. Despite this note of optimism, the current socio-economic situation does not offer much hope for many young people. There is a high unemployment rate and many people in the population lives below the poverty line. Youth are the hardest hit by this predicament, precisely because it implies that their transition to adulthood will be indefinitely extended. Needless to emphasise that youths differ in these perceptions of the problems at stake and tend to act based on these perspectives, which ostensibly change with time. The way in which youths have responded to the crisis will, in due course, be shown.

In the Limpopo Province, there are young people of school going age who do not attend school because they do not have the necessary resources or because they are young mothers who must support their children. With the R130-00 child grant that young mothers receive every month, the problem is not addressed sufficiently. These children may be in danger because after their seventh birthday the government no longer provides for them. Such children are potential street kids. They face a bleak future unless they find proper care, support and security.

Young women face a variety of difficulties in our society today because they experience higher levels of unemployment than males. The high number of teenage pregnancies also

suggests that young women require specific support measures in this regard. Another cause for concern among the youth is that those who live in rural areas are often more disadvantaged than their urban counterparts. They have less access to services and facilities and the opportunities for employment are far less than in urban areas. There is always a migration of youths from rural Thohoyandou to urban Thohoyandou in pursuit of jobs. Female youths seek employment in urban Thohoyandou as domestic workers or they engage themselves in the informal sector.

The question arising from this is: how does the present socio-political predicament facilitate or hamper the youth from achieving their goal of becoming 'successful' adults? But before we refocus the discussion, it is important to look at the situation of the family today. The family, which used to be the basic unit of economic production (Ly, 1988:150), has become (with varying degrees) a basic unit of consumption. More than the sum of the father, mother(s) and children, the family in many African societies, is characteristically extended. This means that as a unit of capitalist consumption, the economic burden has become even heavier with the decline of economic growth. Thus, changing economic realities are forcing us to redefine their concept of the family to fit present predicaments. This constitutes the disappearance of large kinship groupings and greater emphasis on the nuclear family of husband, wife and young people (Ly, 1988:153).

This means that the performance of its functional imperatives (Parsons, 1937: 41) is not without counters and competitors, occasioning a conflict of generations. The emergence of single-parent families (most often female-headed) is also a novelty, sometimes with too little economic resources to sustain the household. With increasing unemployment, youths have become more economically dependent on their families than ever before. A situation is thus witnessed where younger generations, though diametrically opposed to the generations of their parents, find themselves unavoidably dependent on their families in order to secure a future.

In Venda it is now common to see single-parent families which are headed by females. One would find that the family is striving to make ends meet, with too few resources to sustain the household. As the breadwinner in the family might not be employed this might make him dependent on the family head. With increasing unemployment, youths have become more economically dependent on their families than ever before. This dependency may be linked to the change in the family structure. Among the Venda people the family used to be a source of food production. It was an extended family system where a man could be married to more than one woman who would have fields that would enable them to provide food for the family (Hammond-Tooke 1974:84). Due to economic pressure, there are no longer many extended families but more nuclear families and single parent families.

Before Venda attained her “independence” in 1979, the youth in the Limpopo Province used to look for employment in the Reef (Gauteng) as migrant labourers. After Venda became an “independent homeland” most of the youth opted for “greener pastures” back in Venda. When Venda became independent, people were promised jobs and high salaries. Fifteen government departments provided jobs to people in Venda. Those who were migrant labourers came back from Gauteng, Tswane to be employed in the civil service. Many male youths became policemen because four police stations namely Sibasa, Dzanani, Tshandama and Vuwani started to operate. Females were trained in secretarial work. In 1994, Venda was again incorporated into South Africa and most of the youth now aged between thirty-five and forty years found themselves outside the mainstream economy because of retrenchments. Two parastatal bodies were closed down namely AGRIVEN (Agricultural Corporation) and VDC (Venda Development Corporation).

Many of the youth who are now aged between thirty-five to forty years fought against Venda being made a sovereign state, and they also became part of the struggle that led South Africa to attain her first democratic elections. When South Africa attained democratic rule these youths were happy because to them this political transformation

meant economic transformation as well. But they became disillusioned as this ideal failed to materialise.

The youth of South Africa and the Limpopo Province in particular, yearned for a democratic government. According to the youths the ruling elite are the ones who are denying the youth opportunities for economic advancement hence most youths find themselves in the same position in which they were before the democratic government took over since the government is unable to provide employment for the youth. This was one of its promises when it got into power. Many youths are lingering around without jobs and this is an indication that the government is unable to live up to its expectations. Youth then engage themselves in economies that are based on the belief in the supernatural. By engaging in such practices, these youths successfully establish “a counter-nation with its own illegal economies of ways and means, its own spaces of production and recreation, its own parodic patriotism” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001:57).

#### **4.6 The youths in the Universal Church**

The legacy of apartheid affects all young people. However, young black people have borne the brunt of many repressive and constraining policies and as a result, face a greater disadvantage. Since the 1976 uprising led by the youth and the subsequent mobilisation of young women and men against apartheid policies and racial oppression, the term youth has represented a potent element of the political struggle in South Africa. The Universal Church is trying to provide a means by which the development of a wide range of young women and men can be promoted in response to their social and economic circumstances. These youth see themselves as individuals or members of groups who aspire to be elites-in-the making.

There is a great difference between youth and adult members in the Universal Church. Youth focus on the material wellbeing, that is, how they are going to be rich and prosperous by being members of the Universal Church. Youth who are unemployed, for example, go to church to ask God to provide them with employment. Some go to the church to seek for marriage partners. Adult members go to the church mostly in order for

sicknesses to be healed. Some of them attend the church in order to be able to provide for their families, particularly those who are unemployed since, according to the church, being a member leads to financial gain.

Young men and women are socialised differently. They also have different expectations about appropriate social roles. There are differences between the position of the male and female youth. The male youth is mostly under pressure to find jobs while the females would love to have a home of their own. The male and female youth in the Universal Church from urban as well as rural Thohoyandou experience the same problems of unemployment and a form of instability in their lives. There is pressure on the male youth to find jobs in order to provide for the family. Despite the pressure, there are more females attending the church than males. Maybe this could be the case that there are more females than males in Thohoyandou according to the South African Statistics. My sample indicates the following figures: males are 18805 and females are 21949.

According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:291), who did a study in the North West Province (former Bophuthatswana) “the Universal Church holds services for all manner of passers-by during business hours, appealing frankly to mercenary motives, mostly among the young. Tabloids in its windows feature radiant, well-clad witnesses, from all over Central and Southern Africa, speaking of the gainful employment, health and wealth that followed their entry into the church, eloquent testimonies, these, to rapid material returns on a limited spiritual investment. The ability to deliver in the here and now, again a potent form of space-time compression, is given as the measure of a truly global God. Bold colour advertisements for BMWs and lottery winnings adorn the altars under the legend, delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” This confirms the contention that “the position and opportunities of young people in society are ultimately shaped by relations of wealth and poverty” (Wyn & White 1997:1)

This holds true for the youth in Thohoyandou as the church also holds services for the youth. The windows of the church are pasted with drawings and magazines of people

who went to the church unemployed or living in poverty. After some time of serious commitment in the church they became prosperous. Most of these drawings portray what a person gains by being a member of the Universal Church.

These youths who went to the Universal Church saw it as a response to the needs, challenges and opportunities experienced by young women and men. The church recognised the manner in which young men and women have been affected by the imbalances of the past and the need to redress these imbalances through prayers and dedication of oneself to God.

A question that one may ask oneself is: how are young people (especially those who have seen their adulthood indefinitely deferred) able to graduate from the category of youth to a status where they can achieve their goals of life? Achievement emerges at this point as a critical measure and affirmation of one's status in society-thus Nyamnjoh (2002:62) maintains that "Achievement...is always within and as part of, or on behalf of a group of people who legitimate and recognise that achievement." Thus we can appreciate as shall be seen later, why most youths "worry" about realising their dreams, their goals of life, not so much for their personal gratification, but concurrently for their kin groups and significant others. According to Wyn & White, (1997:1) "how young men and women negotiate their futures varies, depending on cultural and national context"

The youth that are members of the Universal Church in Thohoyandou are also attracted to the church because it promises them a relatively quick and easy way of acquiring essential goods and pleasure in order to realise their dreams. Furthermore, the church promises material wellbeing for its followers. This is evident in the case studies that will be outlined in the course of this chapter.

## **4.7 Case Studies**

### **Case 1**

The Universal Church is known for its prosperity gospel. Youths interviewed said that the church appeals to them because of its teachings on prosperity. Matodzi is a twenty-

one year old student from the University of Venda and lives in urban Thohoyandou. She is a brilliant young lady who is the eldest in a family of six, still dependent on the meagre salary of her mother as a domestic worker. Her mother used to work in the Thohoyandou industrial area before the Chinese who manufactured canvass shoes left the area just before the 1994 elections. After the elections there was hope that investors would again invest in the former Venda. Thus many people's hopes were raised when they heard that Venda would be incorporated into South Africa. The first democratic elections took place and time went by without any job opportunities. People started losing hope. Matodzi's mother was among those who were devastated because there was nobody to support her and her children. The family lives in abject poverty.

Matodzi managed to pass Standard 10, and obtained a matriculation exemption under very difficult conditions. There was nobody to send her to college or to university. She got employed at a restaurant in Thohoyandou, where she worked as a shop assistant. One day during her lunch hour she walked past a building labeled "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God." The building had a picture of a white dove encircled in red. Two men standing at the door of the church invited her in. Out of curiosity, she went in to find out what was really going on inside as she knew nothing about the church. The church's location was striking as she had never seen a church in a shopping centre before.

The pastor told her that they were God's servants and that they were there to help people who were in need of spiritual, mental and financial satisfaction. He asked if she did not want to be saved from the bondage of sins of this world. She said that she needed money to go to the University but she did not have any. They invited her to come to church everyday and ask God for help, particularly on Mondays and Saturdays. She started attending church on the said days.

After some time, the pastor asked if she had already applied for admission at any institution. She replied by saying she was in the process of applying for a place at the University of Venda. She then took both the application forms for admission and bursary to the pastor who prayed over them. She later returned the forms to the University.

When the University reopened, she was surprised to find her name among those who had been admitted and given financial assistance. She is now a registered student in the School of Environmental Sciences.

## **Case 2**

A young man of thirty said he looked for a job in vain. One morning as he was walking past the Thohoyandou Shopping Centre, he saw a lady selling tomatoes and holding a magazine entitled "STOP SUFFERING". The lady gave him the magazine after he inquired about it. He then asked for directions to the Universal Church and she showed him where the church was. He went to the pastor to explain his situation. He then started attending prosperity services on Saturdays. After six months, he received a temporary job, in a furniture shop. God later blessed him with a promotion to a permanent position for the first time in his life. He applied for a house from the Thohoyandou Transitional Local Council and he was fortunate enough to get one. God blessed him again with a car. Financially he can now provide for his family as he is now married. He also helps as a church assistant.

These two case studies are similar in one respect: both people wanted financial upliftment and stability. In the first case the family was so poor to the extent that Matodzi had to go and fend for it before she was registered as a student. She had to go and seek employment in a restaurant, while the man in the second case study was looking for a job but could not get one. These two people were really affected by the situation in their families. To them the Universal Church came at the right time when they were really financially desperate.

The youth who go to the Universal Church are only a very small segment of the Venda society and most of them go to the church for prosperity. Most of these youths still live with their parents. Most young women and men that were interviewed acknowledged that they were still dependent on their families for basic needs. Even though they were married, their parents provided them with material needs to survive on a day to day basis.

### Case 3

In another interview a thirty-eight year old unemployed man said that he was still dependent on his parents despite the fact that he had a wife and two kids. His mother and father earned old age pension. Each received R740-00 therefore their combined income is R1480-00. They bought mealie-meal at R130-00 a bag, and paid electricity for R120-00. They also bought food for his young brothers and sisters together with his family, and paid transport for his sister because she was still a university student. Every month, twelve people had to be fed from the meagre income. This case brings to the fore the fact that this man's youth has been prolonged due to unfavourable socio-economic conditions facing society. The consequences of this prolonged youth are that the man's adult status has been deferred. This man was really worried because his dream of moving out of his father's homestead and establishing his own was eluding him.

Seeing that the Universal Church preaches a prosperity gospel, many of those who come to know about it are tempted to become members in order to attain financial independence. The pastors in the church say that because they have the right message, they encourage their followers to give substantial amounts of money. This man went to the church not because he wanted to be a member of the church but to be eased from his financial burden. He started tithing in order for God to give him more in return. The church is based on the idea that if you give money to the church, God will repay you in some way. At the time of the interview this man was still waiting for God to reward him.

The media is so powerful that most of the youth are shaped by it. What the youth see on television, read in magazines and books really influences them. They see adverts of cars, beautiful houses and they envy those who have them because they also would like to have them. This is evidenced by responses in interviews where the youth, particularly males, talked of owning cars, while females always referred to a house and a happy home for their children. Those who are not employed are under enormous pressure because those who are employed are able to buy for themselves goods that they want.

The consumerist culture that is forever increasing is really putting the youth under pressure. The youths are attracted to modernity where people are moving in high-speed cars, living in mansions, as well as having nice clothes. Some youths can make it, that is, they are able to buy cars and build or purchase houses themselves because they might be employed, but there are those who yearn for these material gains but cannot find them. To those who are unemployed and yearning to have material things, the Universal Church seems to be the solution to their problems.

One woman aged thirty-four who was not a member of the Universal Church heard the pastor, one day as she was passing by the church, saying to one man “How many cars do you have?” The man said: “six”. A satisfied smile spread across the pastor’s face as he said “you see he had nothing when he came here, now he has six cars. This is what happens when you plant a seed.” Prosperity theology holds that a wise and an abundant giver will enjoy a life free of sickness and stress. If one does good things God will provide him with material goods, such as a new car, a big house, and a fat bank account.

#### **Case 4**

Venda youth, like any other youth where a gloomy future lurks, are quite hopeful about their future. There are times in the Universal Church when requisitions are made to God. I witnessed this one Monday morning. Pictures of BMW, Mercedes Benz and other big cars and houses were placed at the altar. The altar of the Universal Church is simple, with no elaborate decorations. The only distinctive feature is that it is surrounded by purple cloth. The cross is wrapped in gold paper. Members were told to write what they needed from God. Those requisitions were pasted on the cross. The pastor said that some notes were anonymous, and only the members knew what they were praying for, but others had names on. The pastor and the church assistants helped church members to pray for their needs.

These requisitions of BMW and flashy cars were mostly made by youth because they make them powerful and acceptable to society. The pastor encourages them to say what they want, if it is a better salary, they should tell God that they need a salary of X rands a

month. The pastor said “If one’s wish is to get a car, tell it to Him and also its make, but one needs to know how to ask in order to be able to receive.” I saw a drawing at the altar of a Mercedes Benz 230 C-class maroon in colour, inside the car was a driver and the prospective owner even wrote his name. Money is a sacred tool in God’s work according to the church. To give a tithe is to be a candidate to receive ceaseless blessings. According to the Bible, when we pay God the tithe, He has the obligation because he promised to keep His word, reproaching the devouring spirits, which disgrace man’s life, the pastor says.

Male youth are the ones experiencing pressure to provide for their families. African men are very proud if they are able to provide for their families. Because of economic constraints they are unable to do so, and this really frustrates them. Masculinity in this era is all about cars, clothes and big houses, and in order to achieve this, they turn to the prosperity gospel, in this instance, the Universal Church. For those who yearn for these commodities but are unable to acquire them, they would see the prosperity gospel as the answer.

Pentecostalism stresses the power of the Holy Spirit in Christians’ daily lives, and, in particular, promotes the teaching that many types of earthly suffering result from disobedience to God or demonic oppression. Youths who are unemployed are lured into the church because they are continuously told that a generous giver would be able to say goodbye to suffering, pain and unemployment. They are encouraged to give the little amount of money they have to God and He is supposed to send them back the money multiplied. For example, in one sermon it was said, “the more one gives money to God, the more God will give in return. Grace is bestowed upon those who part with their money as a contribution to the church. Do not lose your chance to be God’s partner. Be at His disposal with all that you own and start to participate too in all that God has.” These words were encouraging to the youth and other congregants to give what is due to God.

When the youth do not get their wishes fulfilled, they react differently: some will continue going to church despite the fact that they are not getting what they wanted. They would persevere and say that one day God will answer their prayers. Others who are impatient would go to the church and after being there for less than six months, will not go to the Universal Church again. Their focus would be on riches and if they can't get the wealth, they feel frustrated and leave the church.

Meyer (1999:160) also writes about a blank cheque in Ghana. In a pentecostal sermon the pastor asked the congregants to close their eyes and fill in a cheque in their minds which was then sent up to heaven. The people were assured that God would sign the cheque and that they would, in the future, receive the money requested if only they believed. Afterwards a woman stood up and gave testimony that she has sent such an invisible cheque to the Almighty some time ago and that shortly afterwards a relative in Europe sent her the very same amount for which she had asked, thereby implying that God had used the relative as His tool. One could hear similar testimonies in other pentecostal churches whose congregations would all offer special prayers for success in business. Testimonies such as these are given by some members in the Universal Church. This seems to be a big influence on the youth in the church.

People believe in instant success, for example, writing a blank cheque to Heaven and then getting money in return. Youth in the church are told that God provides for whatever one needs. Prosperity gospel ties in so much with Lotto Road to Riches where one pays R2-50 and expects to get a million, invest by tithing and reap multitudes. Young men and women would even take the Lottery tickets to the pastor that he should pray over them, in order for them to become millionaires.

One respondent said he goes to the Universal Church because in his church, the Catholic Church, they only preach about life after death. He was tired of that. He saw no reason why he should suffer in this world and expect to live happily after death. "What if God gives me life for ninety years, it means I should be suffering for the rest of the ninety years and expect to have eternal life," he said. The Universal Church preaches spiritual

as well as financial prosperity. While most other religions draw believers, promising a better life in exchange for sacrifice and a life of moderation, the Universal Church believes the rewards of the faithful will be given here on earth. Young people who need prosperity will go to the church to get material gain. This type of teaching draws most youth to the church.

The Comaroffs (1999:291) also talk about a credit card which registers no debt which is found in the Universal Church. Most young people would go to the Universal Church in order to have the credit card which does not register any debt. One can use the credit card as much as he/she needs but one would not be indebted to the banker. Prosperity gospel emphasises the point that you only have to pray in order to see yourself in the mainstream economy. Most youth want to be part of the global economy hence some of them will become members of the church.

#### **4.8. Conclusion**

From all this it can be concluded that the youth see the Universal Church as a sanctuary in which financial dependence can become a thing of the past. Many young males and females are seen as minors because they lack financial resources to support themselves and sometimes their families. They are frustrated because they are unemployed. Finally they resort to the Universal Church because they think that prosperity is being delayed. To these youth, the Universal Church is seen as an attempt to maximise accumulation of material goods that they are yearning for. This is also one way of reacting to the government's non-delivery of the services and development needs that were promised by RDP.

The majority of South Africans were dominated for a long time by colonialism and apartheid. A post-apartheid government has to deal with issues that have been insufficiently attended to such as unemployment and poverty. The difficulty is that these problems have grown very complex over time. Nonetheless, the majority expect that the state should be able to deliver on their needs, which is not the case. One contends that it is clear that the state has to address these problems of unemployment and poverty but

since it cannot deliver some youth have found an alternative to material gain, which is the Universal Church. This corroborates the contention that “modernity and globalisation are bazaars to which many are attracted, but few are rewarded or given clear cut choices” Nyamjoh (2002:11). This notwithstanding, economic misery has pushed many youth to actively seek refuge in Pentecostalism, the Universal Church in particular. Not only youth become members of the church in need of prosperity also elderly people are members of the church due to a number of reasons. The following chapter deals with the elderly members of the church.

## **CHAPTER 5: OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses important aspects concerning elderly members of the church. It focuses on why elderly people want to attend the church despite the fact that some people equate the Universal Church to a Satanic movement. The question is why would they, given the perception that people around Thohoyandou have, still want to be members of this church? What are the rewards, if at all, they gain in being members of the Universal Church? Most elderly people who are either members or non-members belong to other denominations and the researcher wants to establish what makes them part of the Universal Church.

The elderly population of the Universal Church is made up of members who are fairly well off. Most of them have joined the church for some reasons other than being poor. There is a vast amount of data that the researcher gathered from the youth whose parents are not necessarily poor but affiliate to the church for different reasons, which will be elaborated in this chapter.

Before a detailed account is given of the identity of the members, there are some contributory factors pertaining to modernisation and development which need to be put into focus. Modernisation is a process of change which also brings change in the value system of a people. Venda also, was affected by modernisation and development. Modernisation features among the Venda included urbanisation, which changed the family structure. With modernisation, the nuclear family was introduced into the Venda social system. Not all families were nucleated, some still maintained the old traditional extended family system, some mixed the old and the new. No pure forms of the family system existed but rather a combination of both systems. Formal education grew tremendously, development of mass media, heightened political awareness, participation in a democratic system and increased business opportunities through the provision of capital investment which was possible through the Venda Development Corporation as it provided loans to people for business activities. It also includes the replacement of

patterns of authority based on traditional loyalties (chiefs and headmen) with a system of law with a representative national government. Chiefs and headmen worked together in the new system; traditional authority was not replaced altogether by the new system as both systems are still functional.

In Thohoyandou when urbanisation developed, the kinship system was weakened, as people became primarily concerned with their own nuclear family. Extended families function positively because sometimes they enable individuals to mobilise capital and other resources essential for modern capitalist enterprise. For those who move to town in search of work, the extended family has weakened but it is still an important source of support.

The problem that arose in Thohoyandou as a consequence of development was the fact that the elite reaped the benefits. Problems such as inequality and unemployment remained high while the benefits were unequally distributed among individuals as well as between socio-economic groups. The gap between the rich and the poor also continued to widen. Those who were rich became richer and those who were poor became poorer.

The government, under the leadership of Mphephu, promoted these inequalities. There would be citizens who would come and look for favours from the president. This was also promoted by Section 13 of the Venda Constitution which gave the president powers to hire and discharge officials without giving reasons (le Roux 1988:3). Many corrupt officials would go to his royal kraal on the pretext of paying tribute and in the end they usually would return with the required promotions. Those who had this advantage used it to feather their own beds, leading to divisions and discontent in his government. The hiring and promoting of civil servants during weekends clashed with the Public Service Commission whose responsibility was exactly the appointment and promotion of civil servants. The result was the creation of a bloated civil service and the budget was taken up by the payment of salaries (Taylor Commission 1990:159).

This created disillusion amongst many Venda people who were not part of the Mphephu regime. Mphephu did not want people who could erode his powerbase. Similarly, those whom he suspected of not showing complete loyalty were also sidelined (Nemudzivhadi 1985: 38). Mphephu's increasing involvement with the civil service in the later years of his rule created problems which led to further maladministration in the government. People who were members of the defunct opposition opposed his rule in silence, since his government did not give room for self expression. This led to Venda becoming a strong African National Congress base.

When Venda became independent, a lot of senior posts were created. Each and every department had a Director General and a Deputy Director General, senior officials and ordinary clerks. The ministerial portfolio was the highest and the Director General was the second highest portfolio and it carried status and prestige. These people had innumerable benefits; for example, free housing, medical aid benefits, a pension fund, and free transport and a car scheme. They were accustomed to a life free of financial constraints. Their children would attend the most expensive schools in Polokwane and beyond the borders of Venda. They were at liberty to appoint whoever they wanted without these persons even being subjected to an interview.

Ultimately the Venda government was overthrown in 1990. When the democratic government came into power in 1994, it was given a lot of support by Venda citizens. Civil servants were very happy that democracy had now dawned and they would be able to voice their grievances. The democratic government also had its own problems. When the African National Congress government got into power it had its own hiccups. Many civil servants were transferred to Polokwane which is now the capital city of the Limpopo Province.

When Venda was reincorporated into South Africa most elderly people who were civil servants lost all their powers, authority and above all, prosperity. They had to vacate official residences and had to go back to the rural areas or buy a four or six-roomed house

in urban Thohoyandou. They were no longer used to such a life and this had an impact on their lives. Financially they would no longer manage their high-class lifestyle.

When government departments moved to Polokwane many people could not compete for high profile jobs because many were underqualified for the posts. Many of them occupied administrative positions then and many did not have any administrative qualifications. As a result the posts were then filled by young people with the necessary qualifications. Most of them were members of the African National Congress (ANC), because that was the ruling party. Most civil servants who did not manage to ascend the ladder felt that they had been excluded from the mainstream. This created a financial problem as they were now worse off. They feared that they would never cope in the world without financial muscle. They looked for alternatives (religion being one of them) in order to make the world around them meaningful again.

In order to level out the disparities alluded to earlier, some people went to the Universal Church. This was, in a way, a response to the challenges of modernity. Since everybody was affected by modernisation, some were able to secure employment and there are those who were unable to get jobs in the labour market. The two categories joined the church for different reasons. The former joined in the hope of being recognised as part of the modern world in which they stand a chance of driving expensive cars and live in luxurious houses. The latter joined the church for reasons of improving their health and also to ensure that through prayers, they will retain their status. The two groups believe that by praying and tithing, God would provide them with their needs.

Mr. Z, who was fifty-eight years, found himself in an unfortunate position after a reshuffle; his department was redeployed to Polokwane. In some departments radical measures of reinterviewing civil servants were used. This stance was destined to have disastrous effects as most people who had high profile posts in Venda were not interviewed when they got employed. They got their jobs through favouritism which was part of the nepotism of the time. Mr. Z was a Deputy Director General who was used to prosperity in the then Republic of Venda. He was not reemployed in the new system

because he only had Standard 10 as his highest qualification. He was devastated. To forget his problem he resorted to alcohol because it seemed as if there was no solution. Everyday he would drink in an attempt to overcome this stressful situation. He said “I was used to signing documents, earning a good salary, now I do not have anything. I have “eaten” my pension money in 1992 when Brigadier Ramushwana successfully negotiated that Venda citizens be given their pensions. I was given my leave gratuity and pension.” He ran into debt because when he did not have cash he would even buy beer on credit. His children were attending the so-called Model C schools because initially he could afford to let them study there. The children were expelled because of his inability to pay for their school fees.

## **5.2 Case Studies**

Mr. Z was forever drunk until one day while he was in the Thohoyandou Shopping Centre he saw a flyer on which was written “STOP SUFFERING”. He said, “I read it carefully because I knew I was suffering. I was used to big money, now I was penniless.” These words were written on the flyer: “if you suffer from an incurable disease, bad luck, blocked ways, unemployment, addiction and many other things, visit the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.” He went into the church and found the pastor who asked him what he wanted God to do for him. He explained all his problems and the pastor prayed for him. The pastor explained that he has to come on Monday to attend the services in order to have a good financial life. Looking at his miserable state of life, he trusted that his prosperity would one day be restored. He went to church in order that his prosperity should be restored. He has overcome alcoholism, but he is still longing for his prosperity. What he needs now is economic upliftment.

One senior administrative officer in government service said “instead of using worldly methods for achieving financial prosperity, people must deposit their money with God (by giving in the form of tithes and offerings) who will then give them an inflation-free return on their investments. Do you want your money to multiply? If you tithe you are really laying the foundation for financial success and abundance. You are establishing deposits with God that can be used when you need them.”

This man is a former Venda Government employee who occupied a senior position. In the new dispensation, he managed to get a position in Polokwane but only as an ordinary government clerk. He was used to huge sums of money and when he was employed again in Polokwane he got a salary reduction and almost half of his benefits were cut. A friend introduced him to the Universal Church in Polokwane where he was told that the church also had a branch in Venda. He went to the church regularly. During weekdays he would attend services in Polokwane and on weekends he would attend in Thohoyandou.

This man was a member of the Anglican Church but he was gradually attracted to the Universal Church. He prayed that God should promote him so that he could go back to where he was and be as prosperous as he used to be. He became very faithful in his tithes and offerings. He said his life began to change dramatically. In May 2001, God blessed him with promotion at work and his salary was increased by almost 18%. He said “People who are members of the Universal Church and become faithful in their tithes become very prosperous. I am not yet back to where I was but I am heading towards that direction. The Anglican Church did not provide me with that sense of belonging.”

These case studies show us that these men want to have what they usually had, prosperity. The Universal Church seems to be very instrumental in restoring their prosperity as the new church ties in so much with the neo-liberal economy. They do not have anywhere else to turn to besides the prosperity theology because it seems to them that the democratic government has robbed them of their prosperity. Old people, particularly those in Venda, feel that after the new dispensation they were left disempowered and that the youth has sold them out to the new government. They do not have anywhere to turn to hence the Universal Church is their refuge.

There is an important church member who is fairly well off. He was a high profile senior member in the then Venda government. He also managed to ascend the ladder of success to Polokwane in the democratic government. This member initially belonged to one of

the mainstream churches. He claims that he started experiencing witchcraft spells. Almost everyday in the early hours of the morning he would hear the engine of his “C-Class” metallic blue Mercedes Benz car running. When he went to the garage he would see nobody. He has a very big house in one of the suburbs in Thohoyandou. The gates are remote controlled and the whole house is fitted with an alarm system. But he was never alerted of any intrusion by the tight security system that was installed in the house. This really tormented him. He went to an “*nanga*” (traditional healer) who came and performed cleansing rituals to drive away the evil spirits from the house. She also gave him red and yellow medicine to wash the car with and mix with water in order to sprinkle the whole yard in the evening. This did not help in any way because the evil spirit kept on coming.

He shared this with somebody at work. He also told the elders in his church who said that he was beginning to believe too much in witchcraft as nobody could start a car without keys. They dismissed this as a dream. At work somebody told him to try the Universal Church. He went to the church reluctantly though because he was a member of a highly recognised church in the area and also served in the church council. He went to the Universal Church and began to attend their services. He narrated his story to the pastor. The man and his family started attending the Universal Church’s services at 7 o’clock every Sunday morning and then they would go and attend their own church service. As time went by they stopped attending their church all together and joined the Universal Church.

This man managed to go to Polokwane but said that he knew that people he worked with were the ones that were bewitching him. “They also wanted a share in this new government and so they were really surprised at how I managed to be re-employed. Some of them were my fellow Christians. The Universal Church saved me from the evils of this world. In my former church nobody was prepared to help me because they did not believe in evil spirits. Even when I went to the traditional healer I did not tell anybody because I knew it was against the laws of the church. My wife and I knew it. Even my children did not know because I was afraid they would tell it to other children and that

would eventually reach their parents who will then expose it to the whole church.” This man was fortunate because he was employed again, but his problem was that there were people who, he feels, were jealous of him and who wondered why and how he got employed. So they sent evil spirits to come and torment him. That would have eventually robbed him of his prosperity.

Mr. Y who is a former Venda Director General, is now a member of the Universal Church. He said, “after reincorporation, I was selected among those who were supposed to be reinterviewed. Five candidates had been shortlisted. Only three people were needed to fill the vacancies. I knew that I would be among the three because I had the necessary qualifications, skills and experience. As the interview date approached I started experiencing pains in the whole body. The pains were so intense that I had to be hospitalised. The first time the interviews were postponed. I was then discharged from hospital and a new interview date was set. I was in Polokwane by that time.”

“Three days before the new interview date I experienced severe headaches, nervous disorders and a stiff neck. I immediately went to see a doctor who recommended that I be hospitalised again. This time the interviews were not postponed. I was asked to come for the interviews later. I did not perform to my satisfaction due to ill health.”

The former Director-General had an interpretation of the whole scenario. He said that among the five candidates there was one who did not like him. He suspected that he was the one who was responsible for all the misfortunes that befell him. He dismissed the doctor’s diagnosis of anxiety, stress and panic attacks. According to him the culprit was his competitor. Witchcraft in this case was the underlying factor, according to him. He believed that he had been bewitched. He said that when people go for interviews they consult “*dzinanga*” who will make them strong. If the “*dzinanga*” are strong enough they overcast you with their shadow and then all these terrible things will happen to you. These cannot be seen through microscopes or detected by stethoscopes, but can only be seen by “*dzinanga*.”

He was, nevertheless, given a job of a lesser rank and that really frustrated him. He kept on whining until one cleaner in his department told him about the Universal Church which had the power to drive the evil spirits away. He went to the pastor who prayed for him. The pastor said that he had demons which needed to be driven out of his body. A chain of prayers was held in order to cast the demons out of his body. The Universal Church addresses exorcism of demons. He then became the Church's convert because they are concerned with healing and they also address witchcraft-related cases. They talk about witchcraft openly. He said: "The pastor really helped me together with the church assistants. The demons were exorcised from my body. After they had been driven out of my body I was offered a promotional post which really showed that before my body was filled with demons. When the panelists at the interview saw me, they saw demons and evil spirits, not a human being. I believed that the questions, which were asked during the interview were not answered by me but by the little devils in my body. I have my health and my prosperity back through the Universal Church."

Older people who are in the Universal Church are an insignificant number as compared to other Pentecostal churches. The reason behind this may be that the Universal Church is a newly established church. Most elderly people already belong to other churches. Those who go to the Universal Church have reasons why they are members of the church or why they attend some services of the church. From this study, it appears that those who go to the Universal Church want to claim back what they had before the new dispensation in terms of health and prosperity. Those who go also believe that witches are becoming more powerful. It is said that witches know how churches such as the Lutheran, Apostolic Faith Mission and other Pentecostals function. Since the Universal Church is still new, they are not yet used to its tactics.

One old woman maintains that "witches nowadays are so powerful, they also drive cars and travel to places. Those in the olden days used to ride on hyenas' backs. New situations need new magic. The Universal Church is a new church. The mere fact that there are services to exorcise demons for the whole day means the Universal Church acknowledges the power of the evil spirits." These people see the value of the Universal

Church for the maintenance of their status quo. According to Mavhungu (2000:1), the Venda people, like any other group, believe in the supernatural. They also believe that the powers of the supernatural can be tamed. “*Vhuloi*” is an evil act performed by the people through the use of medicine of plant and animal origin. The “*vhaloi*” have secret powers or knowledge to inflict harm on others through occult supernatural beings. The act of witchcraft can happen during the day or at night. Also in his report on the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft and Violence, Ralushai et al (1996:45) say that a belief in witchcraft practices form the basis of cultural traditional customs of Africans, South Africans and the Limpopo Province in particular.

To the Venda people anyone who stands in the way of others’ progress or makes others suffer is termed “*muloi*.” This view is also shared by Haviland (1996:379) who says that witchcraft is an explanation of misfortune based on the belief that certain individuals possess certain innate, psychic power capable of causing harm, including sickness and death. No one wants to resign oneself to illness. If illness is caused by magical means then magical countermeasures should cure it. Those who believe that they are bewitched would seek divine intervention from the Universal Church to cure their illnesses. Their belief is that because the illness was caused by supernatural powers the illness should also be cured by magical means. In this case the spirit of God has to intervene. One would find out that witchcraft discourses intertwine in an amazing way with modern changes.

Morran and Schemmer (1984:10) maintain that all suffering, whether of a physical, psychological or material nature, is caused, according to faith or prosperity teachings, by Satan who either possesses people directly or oppresses them indirectly. Illness or psychological problems can be the result of demonic oppression or possession. Born again believers are saved from poverty, sickness and death. Basically the message is that poverty and illness are caused by Satan who oppresses in various ways. If they are not redeemed from poverty they do not meet conditions of God’s word. The implications are clear according to the prosperity gospel, poor people are poor and sick people are sick

because they are not fulfilling certain spiritual requirements hence they are subjected to the oppression of Satan. The Pentecostal message promises solutions for the present felt needs, like healing and protection against bewitchment (Anderson 1999:222).

One may become a victim of Satan if he is a churchgoer and not a born again Christian. The Universal Church, like most Pentecostals, see themselves as the “born again” people of God with a strong sense of belonging to the community of God’s people. Those who have been chosen from out of the world to witness the new life they experience in the power of the Spirit. The cornerstone of their message is the born again conversion experience through repentance of sin and submission to Christ, and this is what identifies them, even to outsiders (Anderson 2000:91-92). If one needs to be saved he or she must be converted to become a Christian. Once that is done, then money, health and a prosperous life will be enjoyed. Witches and Satan are invisible and they can cause disaster for all those who do not have faith in God. If one does not want to be possessed by Satan, he must be possessed by the Holy Spirit.

Broadly, there is a belief that there are individuals who have access to mystical powers which they employ for destructive purposes. It might either be to enrich themselves at the expense of others, or to pull down those who have made successes in certain sectors of societies. Thus this belief affects everyone, for better or for worse. It is in an atmosphere like this that it becomes impossible for anybody to be above suspicion (Wessels 1997:364). It is against this background that from the interviews conducted, the members of the Universal Church always do not see God without his counterpart who is the devil or Satan.

The South African judiciary, for example, makes it very difficult for members of the community to rely on it in cases of witchcraft allegations. Instead those who want to solve the issues surrounding witchcraft will rely on churches. The Witchcraft Suppression Act 53 of 1957 makes it a crime to indicate someone as a witch, to claim that one has been bewitched or to make confession that suggests that one possesses occult powers that allow one to bewitch someone. In 1995 the burning of witches demonstrated

political disapproval which Africans showed for the judiciary. Witchcraft legislation denied or forced Africans to denounce their belief in witchcraft by legislating against it. From the point of view of witchcraft victims the law protected witches because it was illegal to approach the court of law and complain that one has been bewitched.

By implication witches were given the right to harm others for so long as they did not say so, their acts were not legally punishable. This being the case, the law seemed to actually encourage witchcraft. As a consequence of the Act, African traditional institutions that were put in place to deal with witchcraft cases were dismantled or forced underground because the very basis on which these institutions operated rendered them illegal in terms of the law. This weakened the chief's legitimacy because South African chiefs could not handle witchcraft. This had an impact on Pentecostalism because it realised the need for people to deal with witchcraft issues. The Witchcraft Suppression Act drove people to Pentecostalism. The Universal Church incorporates or tolerates this African belief hence some old people who were initially members of other denominations are now relocating to the church. Cox (1996:219) suggests two vitally important and underlying factors, "for every religion to grow in today's world it must possess two capabilities." First "it must be able to include and transform at least certain elements of preexisting religions which still retain a strong grip on the cultural subconscious." Secondly, "it must also equip people to live in rapidly changing societies." He finds these two key ingredients in Pentecostalism. The Universal Church, being a pentecostal church caters for that.

The other category of elderly people who joined the church was simply because they were under threat of losing the prosperity they had when Thohoyandou was still the capital of the then Venda Republic. Anderson (2000:91) says that the will of God is for people to prosper or succeed in every area of life. He further says that poverty and lack are God's curses. This curse of law definitely included financial reversal. Price (1984:54) says that in order not to lose prosperity one has to operate in God's plan. Hill (1984:96) also maintains that ignorance, unbelief and disobedience rob us of the manifestation of the prosperity promises of God. If promises of prosperity had been

robbed from us, it has to be claimed back. Some elderly members of the community wanted to claim their prosperity back by obeying God's laws.

There are people who were drastically affected and who found the Universal Church quite attractive. Civil servants were in a position to secure mortgage bonds for themselves in the previous Venda government. When the new era dawned, rationalisation affected them. Mr. and Mrs. X had a mortgage bond house in a suburb in Thohoyandou. Mr. X was retrenched. Mrs. X was employed in the Post and Telecommunication Services but was unable to pay the mortgage bond while taking care of all the other expenses in the family. They decided to go back to the rural village where Mr. X came from. Mr. X has bought a bakkie from his retrenchment package. He is now selling fruit and vegetables. His wife is now a member of the Universal Church. She says: "Since I became a member of the Universal Church my husband's business is flourishing because we are focused in our prayers. We attend the Monday and Saturday services for financial upliftment and prosperity. We would also like to buy a house in Thohoyandou suburb since God is blessing us. Now we are moving slowly to the position in which we were before my husband was retrenched and we know we will get there with the help of the Universal Church. I am really praying hard so that God should restore our prosperity."

Eunice is a divorcee with two children, a son and a daughter. Eunice was married in 1978. She and her husband lived in a village, 40 kilometres from Thohoyandou. Her husband was a civil servant in the then Venda government. In 1984 they moved to Thohoyandou town to stay in a four-roomed house. In September 1993 they divorced and Eunice could not continue staying in the house. What made it worse was the fact that they were not legally married as the marriage was only customary. Marriage goods "*thakha*" was paid and all the necessary rites were performed. The fact that Eunice and her husband were not legally married made her lose a lot of the marriage property accumulated whilst living together. Eunice had only Standard Eight when she divorced. She took all her clothing and went back to her mother. She had two sisters who were already married when she came back home. Eunice went back to Standard 9 and then

proceeded to Standard 10. She completed her matric. Her mother helped her by looking after the children. Eunice knew what living in the city felt like. She then registered at the Academy of Learning where she studied computer literacy skills. Eunice's father had died in 1990 and left a large herd of cattle. Eunice purchased a site in Thohoyandou Block G where she built a house.

She used resources from the rural village to build a house in the urban area. Her mother sold all her father's cattle and Eunice received a substantial amount which was used for building the house. Eunice was very fortunate because she once again went back to the urban area, a place she had become accustomed to. After completing her computer literacy training she was unemployed for some time. She then met a friend who told her about the Universal Church. She found it very appealing because she really focused on unemployment in her prayers. There was a list of things (needs) that one was supposed to pray for. So for Eunice, the focus was on employment. She continued to fast and pray so that she could be employed and one member of the church introduced her to an attorney who needed a typist.

Eunice became a potential candidate as someone who was really close to the attorney had introduced her. The attorney employed her as a clerk/typist. Eunice is proud of the Universal Church and she remains a staunch member of the church since her unemployment prayers were answered. In a follow up interview she expressed her happiness because she had been promoted to the level of personal secretary. She attributed this to her tithing. She said that the more one tithes, the more God blesses one.

One woman who is a member of the Universal Church found out that her husband was cheating on her. They had concluded a civil marriage which was in community of property. This woman had a lot of property when they entered into the marriage. She had inherited the property from her parents. This woman was an only child in the family. When they met the man was a teacher. Considering the responsibilities that his wife had, that of running a supermarket and a shop, the man resigned from his teaching post. The business went on very well for almost eight years. Her husband started having extra-

marital affairs with young girls. He used money from the joint estate to entertain his concubines. It was a frequent thing to take these girls to expensive hotels. He considered Tusk Venda Hotel, which was the best hotel around Venda, as of a lower standard. He would take these girls to more expensive hotels. Before he got involved in these illicit affairs the businesses were really injecting money into the family. The income far exceeded the expenses and that was a good sign of a prosperous business. The unfortunate thing was that when he went to expensive hotels, the employees got a holiday as well. They stole money and did exactly what they liked. The income started to decline and the expenses became hard to handle. The woman was unaware until she got hold of the balance sheet of the supermarket. She went to the bank and asked for a bank statement. She noticed that a substantial amount of money had been drawn. The credit cards were also overdrawn. The woman became disillusioned and she squandered the money as well in order to get back at the husband. She bought expensive clothes and she started spending money on drinks. The supermarket business was liquidated. There were insufficient funds to buy stock and Indians then took over the store. The messenger of the court attached their house and they had to move to a smaller one which they initially rented.

Their children were sent home from school because they were unable to pay their school fees. They both went their separate ways. The woman went to her parents' home and the man went to stay with his younger brother. The man could no longer go back to teaching because teaching posts had become so scarce, he tried to apply for vacant posts but he could not be employed in the current state of the teaching profession, where there was a lot of redeployment of educators. Both of them did not have jobs.

A friend introduced the woman to the Universal Church. She went and asked for deliverance and employment. She got encouragement and that boosted her morale. She went out to look for employment but could not find it. She kept on praying and ultimately she found a job as a shop assistant. She felt as though a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders. After working as a shop assistant for six months, she became a regular tither and she was promoted to supervisor, where she now earns a

substantial amount of money. The Universal Church taught her how to make peace with herself and other people. She is now reunited with her husband and they are living happily with their children. In the view of the members there are a lot of incentives that one gets by being a member of the Universal Church.

From these case studies one can conclude that some people join the church out of desperation. Most adult members in the church belonged to other denominations when they heard about the Universal Church. They then went to try their luck and most of them seem to have been successful. The church was seen as an agent to improve people's lives. They thought that the church had solved their socio-economic problems. This was also a way among those who went to the church to alert those who were in power that not enough was done in terms of improving people's lives, so people tended to believe in the irrational to solve their socio-economic problems.

These experiences in the Limpopo Province make one skeptical about claims made by modernisation theorists that when a society becomes more complex and as modern science and technology are introduced, irrationality amongst people disappears. This seems not to be true because people still believe that occult power can influence the capitalist market. The pastors took the role of reassuring members that if they prayed hard enough they would be rewarded.

### **5.3. Conclusion**

Pentecostal preachers, the Universal Church in particular, maintain that God meets all peoples' needs including their spiritual salvation, physical healing, and other material necessities. Pentecostal churches provide places of spiritual and social security to societies unsettled by rapid social change. They proclaim and celebrate a salvation that encompasses all of life's experiences and afflictions and they offer an empowerment that provides a sense of dignity and a coping mechanism for life. Healing and protection from evil are among the most prominent features of the Pentecostal full gospel. The African conviction that spirituality and healing belong together is enacted. Pentecostalism goes a

long way towards meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people, offering solutions to life's problems and ways to cope in a threatening and hostile world.

This really challenges the modernisation thesis that modernity and irrationality are incompatible. Why is it that belief in the irrational has not died as modernists have claimed? It is because these have continued to be meaningful to people's lives. Where everything else seemed not to work, Pentecostalism tended to provide an answer to a particular problem, namely getting promotion in a post and retaining prosperity that one initially had. In order to retain prosperity, some people sought the intervention of the occult so as to help themselves survive in an otherwise competitive environment.

Most of the elderly people, who participate in the activities of the Universal Church, have moved from other denominations. Those interviewed claim they did that in order to retain what they had when Venda was still independent. They were employed in the civil service in high profile positions and after the democratic government came into power, they were disadvantaged because Venda was no longer considered as a state. Most departments moved to Polokwane which is now the capital city of the Limpopo Province. To be in the same position as they were before some joined the Universal Church with the belief that everything would be better. Some people in the area see this from a different perspective. They do not perceive the Universal Church as helping out in resolving socio-economic issues. Non-members perceive the church as a Satanic movement, some as a pentecostal church which cheats people of their money in a clever manner. The next chapter is going to address the views of non-members.

## **CHAPTER 6: THE VIEWS OF NON-MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the views of non-members of the church. Some people had negative feelings about the church whilst others regarded it as having a positive effect in the lives of the people in and around Thohoyandou. This chapter looks at why most youth, adult men and women in Venda do not attend this church despite its potential attraction because of its pentecostal nature.

The Universal Church cuts across all sections of the community. It appeals to the poor, the rich, the middle class, the youth, adults, rural and urban people. The majority of its members are women. In most gatherings, the number of women was visibly higher than that of men. One contributory factor could be that many families were female headed and poor. The women could be divorced, widowed, separated from their husbands, or never married. A closer look at the population of Venda suggested that a minority of people attended the Universal Church. There were a number of issues associated with the church that did not make it popular among some people in Venda. There was also a stigma attached to the church by people who were not members thereof.

### **6.2 Comments about the church**

Some women and men criticised the church heavily for the way in which it generated money. The gatherings were very similar in every temple. In some places the church services lasted for an average of two hours three times a day, weekly. Half of the time was dedicated to preaching and interpretation of the Bible while the other half is set aside for the collection of money. It is true that in most churches money is collected during every church service but the Universal Church collected money in three successive sermons on a daily basis. This was seen by those who did not attend the church as undue enrichment, that pastors were making money and did not care whether one was poor or not. In the Universal Church it was common for the preacher to start the bidding high like in an auction until everybody made his or her contribution. The bidding could start

from R200 going down to 5 cents until practically everybody had approached the Bible to leave his or her contribution.

In one worship service in Thohoyandou, the pastor talked about the hesitation of some in giving. The pastor said: “there is war inside each one of us. God wants you to give, but the devil is there holding onto the wallet. Come, come now, tomorrow you might be dead. If you don’t pay God, you are paying the devil.” In order to get money one was expected to spend money. This scared and made some people uncomfortable.

One youth explained how the Universal Church worked. “They know better than anybody how to work in the business world. They deal with money without any feeling of guilt. For them money is something positive and very desirable. In Venda we have seen their entrepreneurial vision, they seem to be milking both young and old who come to the church for their own benefit. Going to the Universal Church means surrendering your money.”

One man said: “I have been attending the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God for close to three months. I have always sensed in my spirit that something is not right with this church. One day as the pastor went into church he said there was a ‘campaign for Israel.’ The pastor said this campaign was very important because that is where the bishop and pastors intercede for members of the church “*bazalwane*” (fellow Christians) to get blessings from God. Each one of us had to participate in the campaign. What we had to do was to write our prayer requests on a piece of paper and place them in an envelope with the largest amount of money we can afford. The largest sum could be any amount from R100-00 to several thousands. We had to give the envelopes to the pastor who would then give them to the bishop and senior pastors so that they would pray over them.” What amazed this man was the fact that money should be enclosed in an envelope. But he believed that God actually answered prayers anytime, and He did not care whether it was in Israel or Venda. “How do I know whether the pastors and the Bishop are not enriching themselves with my money? How do I know that the pastors and the Bishop would really pray for it?” These are questions that were mind-boggling to

him. The man stopped going to church. He saw this as a way to get money from people who were really desperate for prosperity.

A colleague once asked “in which church are you doing your research?” “the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God,” I responded; “Are you not afraid of taking risks? That church is Satanic and people who go there have Satanic riches.” He said that God did not like gambling and that the Universal Church was a gambling church. It was like a casino. You went there with R10 and you would be expected to net thousands. They persuaded people to give money to God and tell them that they would be given more in return. If they observed that the riches were not manifesting they would then say one was possessed by demons. One would be compelled to make a donation or an offering so that God should be merciful. One would find out that instead of becoming better, one was getting further in debt than one never ever thought of, because one would be persuaded to give more offerings in order for God to forgive one.

Another individual maintained: “These people play with people’s minds. They make it appear as if one is in real trouble and they are the only ones who can help. Because people want to get out of trouble, get out of debt and find solace, they are sometimes hooked into believing that they really are in trouble.”

My sister told me that she would never go to the Universal Church because the pastors and church assistants defraud people. For example they ask people to bring ATM slips and enclose them in an envelope so that the pastor should pray over them for the congregants to have more money. Sometimes they would go and deposit money into that person’s account so that when she went to the bank there was a lot of money in her account. This was a way to lure people to the church so that they should believe that the church brought prosperity and wealth. They knew that once you believe that God had given you prosperity you would not look back. These people knew that if they deposit an X amount of money into somebody’s account that person would bear testimony that if you go to the Universal Church, God would provide. This would make them famous and a lot of people would come to the church to increase the church’s wealth.

One old woman interviewed said that she did not like to be part of the church because she saw it as a gimmick to make money by pastors and church assistants. She saw it as probably the single most dangerous religious trend because it caused further impoverishment of the poor in the Third World. It focused on people's needs and greed. You gave money to the church and you were supposed to get multiple returns on your investment. Venda is poor and people were urged to give money to the church and this always benefited church leaders. The problem with the church was that even if one was old and was the breadwinner the pastors did not care. They did not give out food parcels or blankets to the poor but they wanted to get money from the congregants.

A youth who did not want to be named said "the church is the most aggressive collector of money I have ever seen in a church service." The Universal Church preached materialism more than salvation. The church sold empowerment to those who felt left out from the mainstream economy. In Venda there were many youths but only a fragment of them went to the church. Promises of riches entice Venda's poor youth. Those who knew about the church said, "We cannot go because we are weary of their emphasis on money." The church took advantage of Africa's political instability, unemployment and other economic ills. The critics needed money so they did not want to give it to pastors. People felt that they did not have to buy money from God, that if God wanted them to be prosperous then He would give them the wealth without their buying it.

There are many young people in Venda who are unemployed, and cannot provide for their families but who are not members of the Universal Church. Those who go to this church are looking for prosperity, and those who do not are afraid of the magical means to prosperity. One man who is thirty-six years old said, "people in this world are not afraid of Satanic riches, but I would not go to [the] Universal Church, because whatever prosperity they have got, is magical. You are told to ask God and he then provides. Who knows that it is God who brings the prosperity? These people are very superstitious. You are expected to write to God any amount you need, that is sheer nonsense. I am

unemployed and have three children to look after and my wife, but I would never go to the Universal Church.”

One woman said that she was very suspicious of the Universal Church. She went to the church after a neighbour introduced it to her. She lived with her three granddaughters who were orphans. Their mother was not married and in the year 2000 she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and died in February 2002. The daughter did not have a job and her three daughters were still at primary school level. A friend of hers came along one afternoon and said to this old woman: “why don’t you go to the Universal Church, maybe the church will be of help to you. Pray for financial prosperity and also that God should bless you in order to be able to raise these children.”

Out of desperation the old lady went to the church. She was not a regular participant, but one day during the Thursday service, the pastor said that those who did not have anything to eat at home, should go and buy a loaf of bread so that he should pray over it. God was going to multiply it. She took the loaf to the pastor but it did not bring any change to her family situation. They kept on saying people should bring money to God and He would provide for them. The old woman said that these people were cheating people of their monies. The church appeared to be geared towards those who were suffering, depressed, have a low income, were vulnerable and desperate. That is where they got money from because those who were rich did not bother going there for prosperity.

A young adult said for most of her life she had been searching for a church. She was tired of being a Swiss Missioner, so she wanted a pentecostal Church. She was thrilled by the powerful prayers, songs and by young pastors who seemed very energetic and powerful. These pastors were so powerful that they could even exorcise demons. This really impressed her. Two years down the line the darkest patch of her life began. She took her family along to the Universal Church. Within three years she ran out of money and was in danger of losing her home, her marriage and her mental health. She said: “the Universal Church is cruel, it gave me a lot of suffering. I do not even know what to say. I am now broke, my family depended on me. Not only did they leave me and my family

broke, but they also used the person that I loved the most, God, and they have also taken advantage of my faith. They took all my money and in return I thought I would get something, which I have not got to date.”

They told congregants that God was not content with small amounts of money. If people wanted to prosper, they had to give until it hurts. You had to give something you can't afford, something you so desperately needed like money for rent, for groceries and for your children's school. That was when you put your destiny in God's hands. The pastor of the Universal Church said that it was unfortunate that the Universal Church in its concerted efforts to help people who were down and out was criticised and gained negative publicity. The objective of the church was to bring people who were suffering out of the misery of drug abuse and alcoholism so that they could be rehabilitated and become normal human beings in society.

Many people would make comments on how the Universal Church made money from members and non-members of the church. Despite the fact that others would feel that the Universal Church made money in a bad way some also believed that it was Satanic.

I also interviewed a pastor from a pentecostal church in Venda. He asserted over and over again that the Universal Church was Satanic. “Why do they always call “Satan” when they pray? They always say “go Satan” as if they are glorifying him. Mind you Satan has power because he was once God's angel and by forever saying Satan they are really elevating him. In each and every line in their prayers they yell “Satan” at the beginning or at the end. This is quite scary. His powers may easily manifest in them because they call his name.” So he said: “I do not think that they really call Jehovah more often than they call Satan, how can God's power manifest itself in them? The Universal Church is just fronting as a church, it is actually a Satanic cult which appeals mostly to people who are after material wealth, particularly those who are poor.”

“I used to be a member of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. I no longer go to this church and I have stopped suffering,” said one old woman. Everybody in the

Universal Church was said to be sick whilst they were not sick at all. She only went there like anybody who would like to be a member of a specific church. “After attending six to eight services the church assistant told me that when I pray, I shake and this is an indication that I am possessed by demons. These demons need to be exorcised. I did not agree, I told the church assistant that there was nothing wrong with me and they said I should come to the Friday sessions where demons are exorcised. They say that once you have been healed of your evil spirits; God will provide you with prosperity.” The woman said it was not about the Bible, it was about money. Daily church services were often turned into theatrical dramas in which members were told they were possessed by demons and that only the church could expel them. Believers were promised healing and riches for a price daily. The more one gave the more miracles one would reap. They said: “When you give freely, you will prosper. If you don’t give, God does not solve your problems.”

The biggest challenge facing the Church was the fact that the Universal Church claimed to be curing AIDS. In addition to the theatrics of their worship with miracles, exorcisms and personal accounts of the church’s effectiveness, it also offered a cure and solution for any kind of problem, be it financial, sentimental or health. Afflictions as diverse as depression, vice, unemployment, family disharmony, insomnia and headaches could be healed according to the church.

There were people who had been attending the services for a long time but they had not been cured. If you are not cured the church makes you feel that you are not taking God’s word seriously. Everytime you felt not holy enough to receive God’s blessings then they would demand more money. One youth said the Universal Church was a social institution. It was a therapy to many youth because it helped many people change their lives from kicking drug habits to reuniting families. The church gave people a high self-esteem. He said poverty was easy to solve. The church seemed to be a one-stop shop for every social ill.

This means that there are people who believe that the Universal Church employed some magical means in order to fulfil people's needs. Most of them did not really understand how it operated and this led them to conclude that the church was Satanic. Most of the comments suggested that instead of helping those who were in need, the Universal Church seemed to be taking away people's wealth by asking them to give money to God. What the people would accept was if the Universal Church was providing for their financial needs without demanding money from them. They regarded the Universal Church as a money collector and not a real church. However those who were in dire need of prosperity did not see this as a financial scam by pastors and those in authority. They saw this instead, as God's way of providing for those who believed in Him and listen to His word.

The negative perceptions of the Universal Church were not only levelled by some people in Thohoyandou. The church has been controversial also in its place of origin, Brazil. People say that the Universal Church's theology and practices are far outside those of normal biblical Christianity, that this movement might be considered to be a cult of Christianity. Believers are promised healing and riches for a price. The more one gave, the more miracles one reaped. A preacher was heard saying "Give \$500, \$200, \$50, when you give freely you will prosper." There was a perception that a higher donation bought a better blessing. A person who gave \$500 was going to get more blessings than someone who gave only \$100. One ex-pastor said that during a decade of preaching in Brazil, Portugal and Brooklyn, his superiors instructed him to tell the people that "If you did not give, God would not look at your problems" (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus 2001:1).

According to sources, over the past twenty years Macedo has built up a fortune of some \$100 million. The church asked members to contribute 10% of their income every month. The leaders of the church had a luxurious lifestyle (yacht, international travel with stays in luxurious hotels, parties). Seven members of the Brazilian parliament and countless elected officials in state parliaments belonged to the church. The pastors evangelised to high profile people in order to get more money. This gave them an

advantage to live in luxurious houses and to drive posh cars (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus 2001:11).

People in Brazil had problems and held negative views on how Macedo accumulated his wealth. Bishop Macedo was barely surviving and had less than 100 followers when he started his church. It was Maria Veronesi, a woman who believed herself to be cured by him and was still in the church, who sold a lot she had inherited from her father, giving money to Macedo. He used it to buy 10 minutes a day airtime at Rio's Metropolitan radio. By 1980, the bishop had already a daily half hour programme at Rio's TV Tupi and had opened a temple in Sao Paolo, together with a programme at Radio Cacique in Greater Sao Paulo (Uneasy Feeling 2002:5).

Some people who were not members of the Universal Church would say that those who parted with their money as contribution to the church were the most favourable to Macedo. They quote some of Macedo's statements that he made in Brazil during the church's service. "Don't lose your chance to be God's partner. Be at his disposal with all that you own and start to participate too in all that God has. Money is a sacred tool used in God's work. To tithe is to be a candidate to receive ceaseless blessings. When we give God the tithe, He has the obligation (because He promised) to keep his word, reproaching the devouring spirits which disgrace man's life. If we want a better salary, we had to tell God "Lord, I'd like a salary of x dollars a month. If my wish is to get a new car, then I had to ask for a new car, and tell its make and so on. We need to know how to ask in order to be able to receive" (Nascimento 1995:9).

The pastors accumulated money by making a parallel with what the government deducted as taxes. This view, according to some people, is to get money from the converts in a wrong manner. In the New Jersey temple, for example, the minister reminded the faithful that the American government took 30% of their pay check. Ten percent for God went the argumentation, is a real bargain. Ten percent of gross income is what the Universal Church asked for and nothing more. During a recent worship service at headquarters, a pastor explained the reasoning behind financial contribution, "the more you give to the

church, the more you would receive. There are many people who got new cars and bought a home after coming to the church". He also talked about spreading the Universal Church's message: "We have churches in all countries all over the world, but still need more. That's our only hope to one day destroy the devil". This statement is not said in a positive way since by building more churches they would be netting more money from people.

The Universal Church is well known for its relentless fund raising tactics. Rick Ross, an international cult expert, says the Universal Church is the greediest religious group he has encountered. "It is the most aggressive collection of money I have ever seen in a church service, and I've been attending church service and observing groups for about 20 years," says Ross, who testified on behalf of an elderly Salvadoran woman who sued the church after falling and breaking her arm while in line for holy oil after a Los Angeles service. Members face not one or two offerings every service but as many as three or more with pastors exhorting them to donate as much as \$ 1,000. In an early training film, the fiery and dynamic Macedo is shown slamming down a Bible as he counted piles of money, and telling pastors, "If they don't pay, they can get out" (Jones 2001:5).

There are allegations that the church engages itself in illicit business. This has led people to have negative views about it. There is a certain Miranda who joined the Universal church back in 1977 when Macedo was just another street preacher. By 1990 Miranda had become Macedo's right hand man with the number two position in the church and with insight into its finances. That year, however, Miranda left the church and went to the Brazilian press with lurid stories of alleged money laundering by high ranking church officials. He told the press that Bishop Macedo had flown him and a group of pastors with their wives in a private jet to Columbia. Once there, he (Miranda) and other pastors had been asked to carry back with them \$1 million from the cocaine dealer of the Cali cartel, which had agreed to help the church buy Rede Records. Miranda refused, he said, but the rest of the pastors and their wives hid the money in suitcases and the underwear they were wearing.

Miranda also alleged the church had smuggled large amounts of high tech radio equipment from the United States into Brazil by bribing custom agents. Miranda's allegations prompted investigations by Brazilian authorities, but no evidence to substantiate them was ever found. Macedo denied all these charges. The bishop told the Brazilian press that Miranda's accusations against the church were ludicrous. The "accusation was just too ridiculous", said Felisberto Pinto, one of Macedo's lawyers. If it had been \$ 50 million, it might have been intelligent. But why would he take such a risk for \$ 1 million if he already has \$45 million (to buy network) (Uneasy Feeling 2002:7).

One man in Brazil said that he had an uneasy feeling about the church. This is what he said about the church. "I had been attending the Universal Church of Kingdom of God for close to a month and although I was feeling better physically I had always sensed in my spirit that something was not right with this church. First of all, I saw an advertisement on television stating that an English speaking service of miracles would be held every Sunday at 3 pm in which every person received blessed roses. In this service we were to place the roses either in our home or place of employment. And then any evil that was there would go into the roses. After that we destroyed the roses by burning them. I thought this could be a marketing attempt to have repeat attendance or perhaps a psychological mind game. They also had rituals of hand washing with water and then touching whatever represents your financial life. Then it supposedly would be blessed. I did believe in giving tithes and offerings. But they seemed to use what I would call seduction tactics. They read stories from the bible about giving, which everyone listened attentively to. It seemed we are told these stories though, to promote contributions. Once a scripture was actually reversed, which said essentially, "freely you have received so freely give to others; freely you give so freely you shall receive." When reversed its meaning was changed and a different suggestion implied (Jones 2001:9).

One member recounted the following: "During church services our Bishop cleverly started requesting large amounts and then gradually declined. I believe he covered himself legally by saying, "Well, if you don't have money then put your hand on the bible and believe by faith." Our church also had a "campaign for Israel." We were to

write our prayer request on an envelope with the largest amount of money we can give enclosed and when pastors and bishops went to Jerusalem they would pray over them. But I believe God actually answered our prayers anywhere. Another practice in our church is making a chain prayer for 12 or 13 consecutive Thursdays or Fridays and being warned that if you broke the chain you had to start all over again. This seemed strange to me. There are many other techniques that were used to raise money. Too many to mention

I questioned our bishop about all this but he never gave me an answer. Instead, he avoided my questions and even suggested that I didn't want to be helped ... simply because I questioned the methods used to obtain money in some of the rituals in the weekly prayer service. When I talked with the Bishop he warned me to be careful how I spoke to him and to choose my words carefully.

While in the Bishop's office I noticed a jar of salt crystals there and asked him about it. He hesitated to tell me , but finally admitted that this was " salt from the Dead Sea" (In Israel) and if by faith someone adds water to this in their home evil or demons would be destroyed in water. I know for a fact this is also a ritual used in the occult or Voodoo. And our bishop is from Brazil (where such occult rituals are practiced). I wonder if he was mixing the Gospel with the occult.

Another thing I noticed was that our bishop often told people to look into his eyes and those that do seemed to get results fast in their lives. Many times he had told me to look into his eyes, but I did not because he used to be a spiritualist in Brazil. Perhaps his heart was in the right place, but something just seemed very strange.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God appeared to be geared towards those who were suffering, depressed, low income earners, vulnerable and desperate. I am very concerned for myself and others. There are church branches located in New York and all over the world. Many people who left the Universal Church blame it for their economic problems.

Maria de Fatima Santos remembers her minister telling worshippers that if they just gave to the church and believed in God, they would have a life full of joy and health, and no sickness. Santos gave her money, she says, but the minister kept asking for more. After years of giving she was broke and her husband continued to be an alcoholic. She eventually lost faith and left the Universal church. "He kept insisting people should give more money, and then I had more problems," said Santos, 41. "Eventually, my husband felt more and more diminished because the demons he had inside him never abandoned him," she said. "They said alcoholism and finding wealth were easy to solve. Then I saw that it was not so easy." Like companies, this church made a lot of money. It is only a way to take people's money. How can you pay to obtain God's blessing? God did not work that way.

From the research done, it was evident that people had negative views and perceptions about the Universal Church. These were not only people in Thohoyandou but also in areas where the church originated and where it spread its wings to. They were uncomfortable with how it accumulated money from people. For most people the system left much to be desired.

Despite criticisms levelled against the church, there were also positive perceptions by people who were not members of the church. There were positive testimonies that some gave about the church. Mashudu, a non-member of the church, suffered from suffocating bouts of asthma. It seemed to be a disease that she had inherited from her mother. She had to carry medication everywhere she went and was always fearful of when the next attack would come. Now after consistent prayer in the Universal Church and learning about faith and God's great power, Mashudu was completely free from asthma. She said: "Indeed, God set me free and healed my disease."

Ndivhuwo Ntsandeni said: "my financial life had always been tied up." She worked for almost a year underpaid. She spoke to her superiors but nothing ever changed as there were no vacant posts for promotion. A friend of hers invited her to the Universal Church

where she made a chain of prayer on Mondays for her financial life. A new post was created and she was promoted to that position. She said that the Lord Jesus blessed her professional life. She later bought a brand new Golf 4, 1.6 comfort line.

One man said that his family had daily fights and arguments. He had endless problems. His wife would try to calm the situation and talk to him about the difficult situation, and in return he would shout at her and would not listen to her. The situation nearly destroyed his marriage. He was a member of the Lutheran Church. One day a friend invited him to the Universal Church and he decided to take his family to attend a service and received strong prayer. From that moment God changed his life and he decided to go to the Universal Church only on Thursdays on behalf of his family. They then had love and peace at home. There were no more arguments and fights.

This showed that to some people even if they were being told that the Universal Church was Satanic, still went there and got help. In the case studies above, people confessed as to how the Universal Church helped them. If one takes the scenario where an individual was cured of asthma after consulting several doctors without much help one can deduce that the Universal Church did offer help to some people.

People went to the Universal Church for specific needs besides being members of the church. Abuse was rife and domestic violence common. The man who went to the Universal Church to seek peace in his family, which he got, was a classic example. There were different perceptions by non-members of the church. Some looked at the Universal Church as a centre of hope where their needs were satisfied, but there were those who considered the church Satanic. These perceptions depended on how one viewed the church or how the church was introduced to one.

There were also people in Brazil who still had positive views about the Universal Church. "Jesus was never poor" Macedo said to Veja in Portugal. He (Jesus) said, "I am the Lord of Lords and Kings of Kings. A king is never poor." Mario Justino, a former pastor who worked for the church from 1980 till 1991, believed that preaching materialism instead of

salvation for the soul was the reason for the success of Macedo's message. The church sold empowerment to those who felt left out the mainstream (Demons on Broadway 2001:3).

"We are like an omelet. The more they beat us, the more we grow". This statement was said by an assemblywoman, a sister of Edir Macedo, the self appointed bishop of the Universal Church. She said that Macedo and his ministers seemed to fill the void left by other religions. While most of the religions promised life after death, the Universal Church promised rewards here on earth. One had to live happily on earth before he went to Heaven. She maintained that the Universal Church catered for people in the here and now and not only the afterlife (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus 2001:9). These sentiments were shared by a lot of people who held positive views about the church.

Some saw the Universal Church as providing a helping hand to some institutions. In Brazil in 1992 the church had been helping, with at least \$15 000 a month, a traditional institution which took care of mentally handicapped children who spent the day at the organisation. This institution helped another 2000 handicapped youngsters every year. The church had also opened a health clinic in conjunction with the neighbourhood association. Their main function was family planning and distribution of contraceptives. To some they were seen as having a social responsibility, the doctors that were employed there were not all members of the church (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus 2001:9).

In the Gauteng Province in the year 2000, the Stop Suffering Centre remembered the underprivileged as well on Christmas Day. The regional churches of South Africa made this day special to the lonely, homeless and street kids. There was a special team of people who volunteered their services to the needy. They attended services and even received counseling from the pastors. This was done in the Gauteng Cathedral. The aim was to bring people to the Lord Jesus and gave them the love they needed. When they left they were given food hampers (Universal Church Newsletter 2000:6-7). The initiative was still continuing to date and not only in Christmas but most of the weekdays and weekends.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has relevance to the study because despite the fact that the church was new and it was a Pentecostal church, many people were not interested in becoming members. Membership of the church was minimal although it was a pentecostal church. This study also gauged people's perceptions towards the church. This chapter gives an idea on how people situate the church. The comments that people made equated the church to a Satanic movement, a church which operated by deceiving people to give money to the pastors and those who were in authority. These perceptions were aggravated by the fact that the Universal Church was introduced in Thohoyandou coinciding with the preaching of Satanism, when people were being conscientised that there was a Satanic cult moving around. Most people did not like to be associated or have any dealings with it because they were afraid that people would refer to them as Satanists since the church is allegedly associated with Satanism.

People alleged that members drank human blood. This was a serious allegation because it suggested that they performed ritual murder and sold body parts. Among the Venda, ritual murder was a way to enhance one's chances of accumulating wealth. As it was mentioned earlier the Universal Church preached the prosperity gospel. Most non-members are convinced that the prosperity is not from God, but this are tactics used by bishops and pastors to get money from the members of the church. God was just used as a front. The wealth was acquired through illegal means. The body parts could be used for medicinal purposes and then the medicine was given to church members in order to be rich.

The church preached a prosperity gospel but the allegations of it being a Satanic movement are so rife that it really had a negative impact in the membership of the church. My observation was that people were moving away from mainline churches to pentecostal and/or charismatic churches but there was a slow movement of people moving from their churches to the Universal Church. Pentecostal ministries established after the Universal Church came into being have, by far, a greater number of members comparatively speaking than the Universal Church. The Universal Church among the

Venda people does not have a large following. This may be ascribed to the negative views that some people hold about the church.

The Universal Church was founded by Edir Macedo in 1977 who was a former lottery worker in Rio de Janeiro. According to the non-members, Macedo had seen how people get millions in one bet since he worked in a casino. He used the skill to get millions from people in God's name. He was seen to be manipulating people to meet his own selfish needs. He saw that people are suffering from illnesses and then claimed to offer solutions for all manner of illnesses, depression, joblessness, family and financial problems. These people saw this as an authentic criminal organisation whose only goal is to enrich itself. They see it as an extreme form of religious merchandising. This perception prevents many people from being members of the Universal Church.

According to these people the leaders of the church had luxurious lifestyles. The leaders took the envelopes to Israel, the Holy Land where they claimed to pray on behalf of their followers. Everything that they did was ostensibly based on the Bible. However when they returned they reported they had no firm results, therefore new "blessed" envelopes were handed out to the members with the request for an additional gift. The church recruited mainly among common people, the ones who were down and out, had no work, are homeless and did not have much education.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This study explored the socio-economic conditions of people in Venda, Thohoyandou in particular and how Pentecostalism influences them. It started by giving an account of the Universal Church. The study again focused on how irrationality and modern society interfaced, since in the beginning it elaborated how people have accepted Pentecostalism to survive in a society that is encumbered by socio-economic uncertainties. The global changes that have taken place have excluded a majority of the world's population. Those who have been excluded from the benefits of modernity often tend to believe in the irrational so as to make sense of the world around them. For most of the poor, belief in the irrational is a defensive protection against the various changes that have occurred globally. When the Universal Church arrived in Venda, some people took it upon themselves to be part of the church in order to defend themselves in the face of global and local inequalities.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is a phenomenon of religious growth and success. It was founded in 1977 in Rio de Janeiro by a civil servant called Edir Macedo. He was from a poor family. He converted to Pentecostalism in 1963 when he was 18 years old. Until then he had frequented the Catholic Church. The Universal Church now has 2014 churches in Brazil and 236 in 65 other countries. About 4 million people are assisted by its bishops, pastors and unpaid helpers in its five daily services (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001:183).

Throughout its existence the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God has become worth an estimated 400 million dollars. Among its property are a television network, about thirty radio stations, publishers, recording studios, a newspaper, a magazine, a construction company, a furniture factory, a bank, a travel agency and a holiday company which administer all the church's business. The Universal Church is one of the key religious institutions in the southern part of the Americas that has adopted the prosperity gospel. This theology suggests that giving is a part of liberation which allows one to receive blessings. This is what legitimises their insistence on monetary offerings (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001:184).

In Brazil and Argentina the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God finds acceptance among higher levels of the lower classes and the lower levels of the urban middle classes. In both these countries adherents hope to find, through the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God a chance of overcoming the socio-economic crisis and of realising the dream of well being. Preferred members are those who are negatively affected by globalisation. In Argentina the church started in 1990. By 1997 it had forty-six churches. This number shows the speed of growth in that country (Nascimento 1995:13).

In 1995 South Africa had seventeen churches. According to recent Universal Church of the Kingdom of God statistics, its greatest success is in Portuguese-speaking Mozambique (thirty), Colombia (forty-seven), Argentina, South Africa and Portugal. In all these countries, stress has been laid on social work as a means of gaining the sympathy of the population. South Africa may now rival Portugal as the strongest Universal Church of the Kingdom of God outside Brazil, and is said to cover the financial losses from all other Universal Church of the Kingdom of God churches in Africa. In 1998, it filled Ellis Park rugby stadium for a ceremony which included dances and joyful songs of praise, mostly in African languages. By that time, it claimed a hundred and fifteen churches and two hundred South African pastors, presumably black. South African pastors are also used as missionaries throughout Africa, Jamaica, England and the United States. At the church in Pietermaritzburg, frequented by blacks and occasionally a few poor Afrikaners, services are in a mixture of English and Zulu. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God can appeal both to the disappointed as well as to those who need moral reinforcement to take advantage of new opportunities.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2000:310), say that the dawning of Millennial Capitalism has seen the global proliferation of "occult economies". They further say that these have a material aspect which aims at conjuring wealth and another aspect is for accumulating wealth. This is done in a way that is beyond conventional means of either acquiring or accumulating wealth. These days occult economies are on the rise. In their 1999 article they demonstrate that there has been an explosion of occult related activity, much of it violent, arising out of accusations of ritual killing, witchcraft and zombie conjuring since the late apartheid years.

This also includes pyramid schemes, sale of body parts for magical purposes, Satanic practices etc. They further say that “all of these things have a single denominator: the allure of accruing wealth from nothing. Occult economies, then, are a response to a world gone awry, yet again: a world in which the only way to create real wealth seems to lie in forms of power/knowledge that transgress the conventional, the rational, the moral-thus to multiply available techniques of producing value, fair or foul.”

Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:279), say that postcolonialism did not bear the fruits of modernity and this exclusion is considered by those who are excluded as unbearable. Going to the Universal Church may be considered as a way in which the youth articulate their dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions that they are confronted with. These experiences make one skeptical about claims made by modernisation theorists that as society becomes more complex and as science and technology are introduced, belief in supernatural beings disappears. Experiences have shown that some people do not only rely upon the expertise of the western market consultants in order to survive the pressure of business competition, but they also invoke the supernatural who they believe possesses occult powers that could influence the capitalist market. These powers took upon the role that can be said to belong to marketing consultants in the context of the western world, for example, if we consider the case material of Venda by Minaar et al (1992:21), who observed that human body parts can be used for medicinal purposes. That means that one is killed and their body parts are removed from them. Dismembering of the body takes place while the victim is still alive. This is done because it is believed that if victims are dismembered whilst they are alive the medicine will be potent. These medicines are, in turn, sold to business people who use them to attract customers to their businesses.

Each body portion sells at a different price because different body parts are said to perform different functions. For example, a hand is believed to attract customers to come and buy. This function is critical since it determines the success and failure of the enterprise, so buying a human hand is bound to be expensive. Ritual murders took place in the 1980s. This is a time when South Africa had already been introduced to science and technology. A substantial proportion of the population was Christian and in many ways a part of the

capitalist global economy. This leads one to believe that people still rely on the occult as maintained by the Comaroffs in order to be part of modernity. The medicine men, together with their clients, believe that customers are not only attracted to businesses simply because they are properly catered for, but because they have “*muti*” in order to attract customers to a particular business. These practices have continued to survive because they are meaningful to people’s lives. When everything else fails or does not seem to work or provide an answer to a particular problem, then the supernatural and occult economies are invoked.

Apartheid ideologues argued that apartheid was a systematic way of introducing Africans step by step to a modern project although whites were regarded as primary beneficiaries of the project. What were the consequences for those who were not major beneficiaries? African business personalities who were marginalised by the apartheid project cast eyes back to the African distant past. From it they recovered ritual murder. Those who used ritual murder retrieved it from the past and used it to solve their modern problems. This was a maximising claim to the benefit offered by modernity. The benefits are money, material goods as well as social status associated with the rich and progressive in modern society. Pentecostalism as well, is an attempt by individuals to grapple with modernity and make sense in our time.

As maintained by the Comaroffs, there also exists a form of witchcraft in the Northern Province known as zombification. It is believed that someone believed to be dead is actually kept alive by a witch. The victim is kept in the property of the captor to work at night for the personal gain of the witch concerned. Transforming someone into a witch requires one to cut their tongue and remove their soul from their body. After the kin of the deceased have buried the deceased their captor retrieves them to employ them as slaves. In most cases the talented and gifted are likely to fall victims to zombification because someone who is a zombie is said to continue specializing in the same trade as when they were still alive.

Ritual murder and zombification led to violence which was rampant in the Northern Province. Witchcraft related violence showed an intergenerational character. The

perpetrators appeared to be youth and victims old and female (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999:279-280). What is of importance is that witchcraft related violence was an idiom with which the youth articulated their dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions. Comaroff and Comaroff further argue in this manner to substantiate their second argument that the rural youth mass action may have delivered the vote, but it brought them no nearer to the wealth and empowerment that the overthrow of the apartheid government was supposed to yield. It was quite the reverse, trade sanctions had dramatically increased unemployment. The big question is, how do some people respond to the vicious realities induced by global changes? The poor and the excluded in the Third World respond amongst other things by joining pentecostal churches. These churches promise people health and protection against evil spirits. They also evolve discourses that help them to deal with these conditions. One of these discourses is the eradication of poverty, God has sent poverty to people as a sign of being angered by people who do not listen to His Word and also that HIV/AIDS is also a sign that God is angered by sin and has decided to send ill health to the world in order to punish evil. One, therefore, concurs with Devisch's (1996:560) writing about Kinshasa regarding the argument that the proliferation of healing churches is a response triggered by exclusion from the benefits of modernity.

Venda, being in a marginal rural part of South Africa always had unemployment as a major problem. This was exacerbated by the fact that when Venda was incorporated into South Africa after liberation, the employment rate dropped. The poor and the excluded, amongst others, joined pentecostal churches and the Universal Church in particular. These churches promised people wealth, health, prosperity and protection against evil spirits. These churches also involve discourses that help people to deal with these conditions. One of these discourses views poverty as a sign that God is angered by people not tithing and has then decided to send unemployment to the world in order to punish evildoers.

This study looked at the prosperity gospel which, according to Anderson (1999:224), is putting faith in action and lets God deliver his promises. Faith gets God to work and put simply, faith gets the job done. He further says that a person's faith is seen in the results. Prosperity becomes evident if one has more faith. Prosperity, healing and success are

primary evidence that a person has obtained the favour of God by faith. People who go to the Universal Church go there by faith in order for God to give them what they need. For example, God provides them with all the material comfort that they need to be seen as part of the global economy.

These people believe that their needs may not be catered for through prayer alone, they also have to tithe. They have a belief that irrationality and rationality have to be employed to achieve success. The belief in the supernatural has survived because where everything else seemed not to work the irrational has tended to provide an answer to a particular problem, namely conjuring wealth and ensuring success.

Rural mass action may have delivered the vote but it brought the youth no nearer to the wealth and empowerment that the overthrow of apartheid was supposed to yield, the reverse is instead the result. These days there is a dramatic increase in unemployment in South Africa although one concurs with the view that there was no period in South Africa when there was full employment. Even when the economy was booming, employment was not created in the rural areas. Economic boom therefore, has always meant that employment was created mainly in the major metropolitan centres of South Africa.

The Universal Church is an attempt to use irrational means to maximise benefits offered by modernity. The benefits referred to are money, material goods as well as the social status associated with the rich and progressive in modern society. This practice is an attempt by individuals to grapple with modernity and to make sense in our time. Disillusionment amongst the youth is an endeavour to make sense of a harsh reality with no promise of a better tomorrow.

The Universal Church does not promise rewards after death. It does not wait for the transaction from the mortal world to an immortal one where life is anticipated to be better and rewarding. It promises that the world is rewarding even before one dies. Some churches promise that this world is not rewarding as there exists another world which is Heaven, an irrational one that promises all the deprived rewards in the future.

Flowing from this work one contends that in the era of late modernity, the rational and the irrational have been enmeshed into each other. This is contrary to modernist predictions that the irrational would be phased out of modern society and rationality prevail. Some of those who have been excluded from modernity use Pentecostalism to quicken the process of their inclusion into modernity. From this study one concludes that unemployment, poverty and illnesses are rife to the extent that some people use irrational means, for example, by moving away from the norm in an attempt to solve these problems. Ordinarily, if one wants money s/he has to work, but in this case s/he would rather pray.

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