CHAPTER 6

All Answers

On the Phenomenal Success of a Brazilian Pentecostal Charismatic Church in South Africa

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Entering the South African Religious Arena

In 1990, the South African government unbanned the African National Congress (ANC) and released Nelson Mandela from prison. These momentous decisions initiated an era of extreme violence, of intense political negotiations and of the intervention of various church and religious groups in national politics (Anderson 2000; Anderson 2004:109; Etherington 1996:212; Freston 2001b:171–172). In the process of mediating between political parties and of reckoning with the horrors of apartheid, the balance of power between various church organisations in South Africa shifted dramatically. The once powerful *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church), which used to rationalise and consolidate white support for the apartheid government, lost prominence in the new dispensation (De Gruchy 1997:163–165).

Less predictable was the South African Council of Churches (SACC)'s loss of eminence. Consisting of the country's established mission churches, the SACC had been openly critical of apartheid since the 1960s (Lemopoulos 2004), supported resistance leaders (Sapa 1997; De Gruchy 1997:162–165), called for international economic sanctions (Etherington 1996:212) and mediated talks between the apartheid government and the ANC (Anderson 2000; Anderson 2004:109; Etherington 1996:212; Freston 2001b:171). Having once mobilised religious opposition to apartheid, the SACC adopted a policy of "critical engagement" with the ANC in 1995. Consequently, when the ANC established a National Interfaith Leaders' Council (NILC), it excluded the SACC (Chidester 2012:173; Rossouw 2009:4). As the NILC became increasingly influential in government circles,[1] the SACC lost political ground to Charismatic- and to African

1 During the ANC's election campaign in 2009 for instance, Ray McCauley gave president Zuma an exclusive platform to speak in his Johannesburg church while the NILC took sides in a dispute over constitutional court judges and campaigned against South Africa's liberal abortion and same-sex laws (Alcock 2009:6; Chidester 2012:173; Mataboge 2009; Rossouw 2009:4).

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Initiated Churches (AICs),[2] both forms of Christianity that were once at the margins of respectability in South Africa (Anderson 2005:72–85; Freston 2001b:172; Gallagher 2002; Moon 2008; Tutu 1999; Wilson 2001:123–153).

Away from the political limelight and the jostling of established South African churches, the early 1990s also saw an influx of a number of Nigerian, Kenyan and Ghanaian preachers into South African townships (Anderson 2005:66–83). Men like Emmanuel Eni from Nigeria fascinated black audiences with their high-powered sermons and with their confessions of previous involvements with witchcraft and dark powers (Eni 1988). These preachers introduced the prosperity gospel to the townships and devoted large portions of their sermons to exorcisms and to a spiritual war against Satan (Anderson 2005:66–83; Gifford 2001:64). Apart from the high drama of these sermons, the African preachers offered their congregants an alternative Christian future in which their rewards were not deferred to life after death. Theirs was a Christianity of the here-and-now that found particular resonance with the concerns of South Africans on the cusp of a new age.

The Nigerian, Kenyan and Ghanaian preachers' twin emphases on prosperity and spiritual warfare were also the defining features of an international Pentecostal movement that started in the late 1970s (Coleman 2000; Freston 2001b:15–20; Robbins 2004a:121–137). The movement was especially popular in South America (César 2001:32; Corten & Marshall-Fratani 2001:5–10; Gifford 2001:64–71) and in Nigeria (Ayuk 2002; Ojo 1988), Ghana (Hackett 1998), Zambia (Ter Haar 1992), Malawi (Van Dijk 1998) and Zimbabwe (Maxwell 1998). Through established missionary and Christian networks, the movement reached South African shores within months of its inception. Although it gave birth to large Independent "third-wave" Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) such as the Rhema ministries[3] in South Africa, its impact was largely limited to white Christians[4] (Anderson 2005:76; Gifford 2001:62–63; Paul

2 During apartheid, AICs studiously avoided overt political action as they focussed on healing individual bodies (Freston 2001b:173; Schoffeleers 1991). Comaroff (1985) asserted that their focus on healing provided symbolic resistance to the ills of apartheid.

3 Other well-known PCCs in South Africa included the Hatfield Christian Church, the Durban Christian Centre, the Hillcrest Christian Fellowship, and the Victory Faith Centre (Anderson 2005:76; Paul 1987:11–13; Thompson 1995:88–89, 144).

4 Like PCCs in other parts of the world, South African PCCs initially shunned politics in favour of a spiritual approach to righting the world (Bialecki 2009:110–123; cf. Anderson 2005:74–76; De Gruchy 1997:164–168; Thompson 1995:3–15, 53–85, 125–130). Although the Durban Christian Church and Rhema ministries have welcomed black members since the late 1980s, other PCCs invited well-known American televangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart, Pat

1987:11–13; Thompson 1995:88–89, 144). Ten years later, as the state relaxed its controls over the movements of black South Africans and as travel restrictions to the country were lifted, the PCC movement started to penetrate the worlds of black Christians. In the townships, PCC adherents, also known as "Born Agains," denounced AICs, proclaiming their embrace of local "tradition" as un-Christian (Anderson 2005:69). Local young men connected to the new African preachers soon started their own ministries and churches (Anderson 2005: 69–81) and, like their mentors, tried to cultivate lucrative connections to international PCC networks (Maxwell 1997:148). For the most part however, they remained financially less successful than "white" PCCs (Anderson 2005:88).

It is against this background that the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), a PCC of Brazilian origin, first entered South Africa. Like the Nigerian, Kenyan and Ghanaian PCCs that preceded it, the UCKG entered South Africa without much fanfare and with no connections to established church networks. The church opened its first South African branch in 1992 among a small, white, Portuguese-speaking community in Johannesburg- with modest success (Pires 2004:24). In 1993, the UCKG shifted its missionary focus to black South Africans and started to attract large numbers of followers. It quickly became one of the fastest growing churches in South Africa (Freston 2005:33–65). To date, the UCKG has opened 320 branches and is a visible presence in all major towns and cities in the country's nine provinces (UCKG website 2014[5]). The church distributes hundreds of thousands of free newspapers weekly, has a sophisticated website, a national call-centre and a pastor training centre in Johannesburg.[6] It also produces and runs daily television- and radio programmes on the national broadcaster's networks. Moreover, the UCKG has ambitious expansion plans and builds large cathedrals in prime urban locations. My fieldwork in the UCKG, which started in 2004, coincided with the building of the "Cathedral of Faith"[7] in Soweto, which was to be the largest church in South Africa with a seating capacity of over 8 000 people. Both pastors and members boasted about the cost of the church, which was expected to run into "billions of Rands." These costs were to be borne by South African

Robertson and Kenneth Copeland to preach in their churches. These pastors praised the supposed "Christian values" inherent in apartheid (Anderson 2005:71; cf. Walshe 1983:384).

5 The UCKG publishes the addresses of all its branches on its website: www.uckg.org.za/about/locations. Accessed:26/05/2014.

6 The UCKG does not publish its current intake of new pastors but in 1999 the church already talked of "preparing 500 native pastors for Africa in Johannesburg" (Freston 2005:50).

7 At the start of my fieldwork in 2004, these buildings were known as "Cathedrals of Faith." In the last two years, this changed to "Cenacles of the Holy Spirit."

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church members. By all indications, the UCKG could comfortably cover these costs. Although its financial returns were not made public,[8] evidence suggested that by 1997, South Africans were contributing more than $10 million per year to the UCKG's coffers (Freston 2005:33–65). Given the UCKG's enormous expansion since then, this income has probably increased at least ten-fold.

The church continues to grow at a phenomenal rate and has become the Brazilian church's most successful foreign mission (Freston 2005:33–65). It attracts large numbers of South Africans who stream to the church to be healed of their poverty, illnesses, emotional- and social problems. Like other PCCs, the UCKG preaches the prosperity gospel and urges its members to engage in a spiritual war against Satan. However, unlike other PCCs, the UCKG actively undermines the formation of church communities by discouraging "Christian charity," socialisation within its ranks and the formation of strong bonds between congregations and pastors. As noted elsewhere (Van Wyk 2010:189–203), the UCKG's constant transferral of pastors between branches and the pastors' minimal engagement with congregants outside services undermined lasting bonds or loyalties between the clergy and congregations. The vast majority of UCKG branches also did not have choirs, prayer groups, women's and youth organisations or tearooms where congregants could participate in the social life of the church.[9] Baptisms, funerals and weddings were not celebrated as community affairs while pastors frequently cautioned members against the probable evil intent of their fellow churchgoers. For their part, individual members explained that they came to the UCKG because in it they did not have to deal with the gossip, "dressing competitions" and politicking common in other churches; in this church people did not know one another. Most members attended the church alone and often kept this information secret from their loved ones because the church was widely reviled in local townships. Such was the work involved in being anti-social in church that many of my interviewees took public transport to attend branches that were not situated in their local neighbourhoods. These patterns were also discernible among the only stable "community" in the church- its volunteer assistants. Among this group, "strong" assistants constantly guarded against the dangerous intimacies of fellowship which could "take [them] out of the

8 The UCKG does not publish its financial records and is secretive about its financial affairs (Birmann & Lehmann 1999:156), but in occasional court cases brought against the church, financial details are often leaked (Azzoni 2009).

9 The UCKG's "flagship" branches in Soweto and Pietermaritzburg seemed to be exceptions to this rule (see van Wyk 2014).

spirit." In this at least, the church presented an ethnographic anomaly (Van Wyk 2010:189–203).

It is an anomaly that counters a large body of literature that attributes the popularity of churches in Africa to their intense social nature and to the consequent social benefits that accrue to members that participate in these churches. In this tradition, AICs were first described as islands of intensive socialisation where recently urbanised Africans learnt to adapt to the alienating city and it's challenging new economic realities (Daneel 1974:23–55; Fernandez 1978:212–217; Kiernan 1981:142; Sundkler 1961:80–85; West 1975). Studying these "community enterprises" (Fernandez 1978:217), anthropologists emphasised the symbolic and ritual continuities between AICs and the village- or rural society from which African Christians came (see Devisch 1996 on healing churches in Kinshasa). In a similar manner, scholars explained the popularity of PCCs in terms of their social functions; their ability to "liberate" individuals from webs of local kinship obligations (Meyer 1998a; Van Dijk 2001:216–232), to offer an alternative, tight-knit and enabling community and to shape individuals to better adapt to modernity (Hackett 1998; Mate 2002; Maxwell 2005; Ojo 1988; Van Dijk 1998)- with uneven results (Meyer 1995:236–255; 1998b:772–773).

Few authors have paid attention to the UCKG as an "antisocial" church and have instead attributed the UCKG's success to the structural similarities between South Africa and Brazil (Freston 2005:33–65),[10] to neoliberalism and processes of modernisation (Comaroff & Comaroff 2003:528; Corten 2003:144) and to the receptivity of previously marginalised South Africans to the millennial promises of the UCKG's prosperity gospel (Corten 2003:137–146; Freston 2001b:203; Oro 2004:139–156). In this chapter, I offer an alternative explanation that takes account of the UCKG as a religious organisation while also paying attention to local understandings of prosperity, efficacy and belief. My interpretation of the popularity of the UCKG also tries to account for the church's peculiar social formations.

10 Freston (2005:62) argued that the UCKG's global success was a "phenomenon of Christian poverty" in which an "awareness of inequalities" stoked "the fires of economic desire, thus discouraging…acceptance and preparing the ground for the "revolt" against one's conditions which the Universal Church preaches" (Freston 2005:43). Like Brazil, South Africa was apparently ripe for such "revolt" because it displayed gross economic disparities and "spiralling crime rates" (Freston 2005:48). However, like Brazil, the country combined these serious problems with good infrastructure, extensive urbanisation, "a certain cosmopolitanism and racial diversity." As such, the UCKG appealed to both "the disappointed as well as to those who need moral reinforcement to take advantage of the new opportunities" (Freston 2005:54).

The "All answers" Event

On the 20th of September 2010, an announcement on the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God's (UCKG) website declared that 60 000 people had attended its "All Answers" event at Currie's Fountain Sport Stadium in Durban (Titus 2010). Before the event, the organisers were confident that they would be able to fill the stadium's 15 000 sheltered seats[11] but were worried that the predicted cold and rain on the day would keep people from occupying the pitch and grass embankments. There was some talk of moving the temporary stage closer to the stands so that there would not be an embarrassing void between the two. In the parlance of the UCKG's "strong" members, these fears were not only unfounded but of demonic origin. They asserted that God would not allow the church to be "defeated" and vowed to "fight" Satan so that the event would be a success. Their faith was rewarded when thousands of people streamed through the gates with umbrellas and plastic sheeting to protect them from the elements. Entrepreneurs at the stadium's entrances also sold plastic bin bags, umbrellas and pieces of tarpaulin to the unprepared.

The "All Answers" event was attended by church members from all twenty branches of the UCKG in Durban.[12] Since these branches were situated in the city's townships and working class areas, and since these areas were still burdened by apartheid's legacy of racial segregation, UCKG members were generally black and relatively poor. The church's pastors started to advertise the event in late July and repeated the invitation in almost every one of their six daily services. For UCKG members, the "All Answers" event was the culmination of a period of concentrated financial sacrifice, of "prayer chains" and of "spiritual fighting." Many hoped that their attendance would mark the start of a flow of God's blessings into their lives as they had surrendered large portions of their income and time in the preceding weeks so that God would bless them with wealth, health, love and happiness. UCKG members were especially excited that the head of the UCKG in South Africa would preside over the event. Bishop Marcelo Pires was known as a "man of God." In his editorials in the church's weekly newspaper and on its website he frequently asserted that God would "answer" or bless those who "depend on" and "trust in Him" (Masengemu 2010). Furthermore, in promotional literature for the event, the UCKG promised that Bishop Pires would "share the secret to a fruitful life."

11 The stadium has an official seating capacity of 15 000 (Miya 2011).

12 The church's website published all the addresses of Durban branches (http://www.uckg.org.za/about/locations/, accessed 12 July 2012).

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Eager for "answers," UCKG members showed up for the "blessed" event early and secured standing room near the stage. Many of them were clutching slips of paper on which they had written their requests to God. Although the church's uniformed assistants were handing out prayer requests by the handful, many people had brought theirs from home. They had received these pieces of paper in the church's services in the preceding months and had anointed them with holy oils, -water and strong prayers on a daily basis. Waiting for the event to start, several members were silently fingering their requests.

Like other major events hosted by the UCKG in Durban, this one had an "open door" policy. The church's spokesperson[13] explained that the UCKG did not turn non-members away because they wanted to show people "what the church is about" and how to "get help." These were also reasons why non-members attended the "All Answers" event; large numbers of them came to learn the "truth" about the UCKG while others hoped to get healed, blessed or to receive a prophecy.[14] A small group also came for the lively hymns and the "word of God."

To many passers-by and Christians in the city the "All Answers" event offered a spectacular kind of entertainment. Apart from the excitement of being in a large crowd, the impressive sound system relayed the Johannesburg UCKG gospel choir's performance while hymns during the service were accompanied by live music. In conversations after the event, many "unbelievers" commented that they were amazed by the Bishop's "strong prayers" and by the fierce exorcisms over which he presided. They were particularly impressed that the Bishop could force demons to "manifest" and to "confess" their sins. For many of these "unbelievers," the most impressive part of the event, however, was the testimonies by "blessed" members.

At Bishop Pires' call for testimonies, people thronged to the stage to testify about how the church helped them to "overcome" the demons that made them poor, ill, unhappy or unpopular. They told how joining the UCKG's spiritual war saw them transformed into wealthy municipal directors and businesspeople after a lifetime of unemployment and "second-hand clothes." Some testifiers bore witness to miraculous cures, "blessings" and unexpected jobs. After listening to these testimonies, some attendees asserted that "God had called them for a reason" and that they "feel blessed already" (Titus 2010). Like many UCKG

13 Telephone interview with Mrs Nametso Mofokeng, 13 July 2012.

14 The UCKG pastors do not "prophesise" and the church does not have prophets. However, both the practice and the role of prophets are elaborated in many local Christian churches.

members, they embraced Bishop Pires' assertion that Christians should not accept their "miserable" lives and that they should strive to live "blessed" lives like those of Biblical characters such as King Solomon. They believed that God gave them "faith as a weapon" and vowed to "fight for what is rightfully [theirs]" (Titus 2010). In the service, they shook their raised fists at Satan, shouted at him to "*Puma Satani*!" [Get out/leave Satan!], and stomped their feet on his defeated demons.

Religious Politics and Kitsch Christianity

To the city's old anti-apartheid activists, the UCKG event must have seemed very familiar. In the first instance, attendees at the event were, in the main, black, poor and disenfranchised. Very few of them had their own cars and most came to Currie's Stadium in overloaded busses, minibus-taxis and trains. Economically, the plight of black Durbanites had changed little in a post-apartheid dispensation. Although the new South African government introduced various laws[15] to improve black people's access to employment, local jobs were fast disappearing. The restructuring of the country's economy removed trade barriers that bankrupted Durban's textile industry and made many migrant mineworkers to the Witwatersrand redundant (Crotty 2001; Davies 2001:2; Le Roux 2001:226; Weeks 1999:795–811). These mineworkers returned to Durban's townships and augmented the numbers of unemployed. In the latest census, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) put the number of unemployed black people in Durban at 25% (StatsOnline nd). Stats SA, however, used a minimal definition of the employed as "those aged 15–64 years who, during the reference week: did any work for at least one hour; or had a job or business" (Statistics South Africa 2011:xvi). Surveys of the city's townships using a more conventional definition of unemployment put the number of unemployed at between 55% (Rausch 2002) and 60.8% (Mohamed 2002:5). For many black families, meagre state pensions for the elderly and government child support grants were their major, if not only, source of income.

Beyond demographic similarities, the UCKG's event was held at Durban's "most historically charged [political] site" (Rosenberg 2008:30). The area in which Currie's Stadium is situated was historically classified as a "non-white" area. Being close to the city centre, the stadium offered an ideal location for political rallies against colonial and apartheid authorities (Harrison 2004:78;

15 For instance, the Employment Equity Act (1995) and the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (2003).

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Rosenberg 2007). It was here that black Durbanites launched the Defiance Campaigns[16] of the 1950s (Harrison 2004:78; Rosenburg 2008:30) and that leaders of the struggle addressed crowds in the 1970s and 1980s (Rosenberg 2008:30). People also gathered here during the political unrest of the early 1990s (Harrison 2004:78; Rosenberg 2007; Rosenburg 2008:30). In post-apartheid South Africa, Currie's Stadium remained true to its working class roots and was still a major meeting place for disgruntled municipal- (SAPA 2011) and mine-workers (Anon 2012). The ruling ANC also sponsored annual May Day celebrations at the stadium[17] (Ngwenya 2012).

There were many parallels between the content of the UCKG's "All Answers" event and anti-apartheid rallies. Fiery church ministers often presided over anti-apartheid rallies[18] (Ramphele 1996:99–117; Sitas 1992:640), praying for God's material intervention, assuring "comrades" that their participation in the struggle was a moral duty and declaring that God would deliver them from the "absolute evil" of apartheid (Kairos Theologians 1985:2–28). Influenced by Black Consciousness and Black Theology (Etherington 1996:210–212; De Gruchy 1997:163–165), liberation was not just a narrowly political project but a millennial one that promised imminent and radical changes in the material fortunes of those dispossessed and marginalised (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999).

Some people in Durban's townships were very critical of the UCKG's "All Answers" event- and of other events that the church held at local sport stadiums and in the streets of Durban. Their main concern was that these events "confused" people because they were not clearly advertised as prayer- or evangelical meetings; most meetings had headlines such as "Enough!," "All Answers" and "March against HIV/AIDS." Such critics pointed out that "desperate people" would mistake these rallies for political meetings and that they did not have the necessary wherewithal to question the church's promises of riches and healing; they were also supposedly too vulnerable to resist the UCKG's

16 During the Defiance Campaigns, black South Africans protested against the Group Areas Act of 1950 which demarcated certain areas in cities for white occupation while forcefully relocating black residents to "townships" on the margins of major cities.

17 However, despite the stadium's continued use, its historical importance as well as its location at a major transport and trade node in the city, it is a rather neglected space. Forming part of "Durban's backyard" (Rosenburg 2008:29–31), Currie's Stadium is poorly maintained and memorialised, echoing the fate of its patrons.

18 During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the South African church establishment was further polarised with the rise of Black Consciousness and Black Theology, especially as it manifested in the University Christian Movement (Etherington 1996:210–212; De Gruchy 1997: 163–165). The UCM articulated a theology of resistance and a radical style of worship that alienated the SACC.

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demands of large sums of money. According to the UCKG's critics, the church's promises were fictional but due to their desperate economic circumstances, the poor were the most likely victims of its swindle (see Ngema 1995). In the townships, the UCKG was well-known as a church that "like[d] money." The church's critics thus accused it of cashing in on the symbolic political capital of venues such as Currie's Stadium to trick unsuspecting innocents out of their hard-earned cash.

In Brazil, the UCKG[19] similarly expanded its activities and presence beyond church buildings to sport stadiums, public auditoriums and cinemas. The church also owned the second-largest television network in Brazil (Freston 2001a; Kramer 2002:29–30; Oro & Semán 2001:183) and elected UCKG candidates for municipal-, state- and federal elections (Kramer 2002; Oro 2003: 53–69). However, despite its enormous success, the UCKG was not a widely respected institution in Brazil (Birman 2006:52–59; Birmann & Lehmann 1999:145–164; Kramer 2002:41) and its leadership was often denounced for deceiving poor and naïve people into making large financial contributions to the church (Freston 1993:111). Apart from this, the Catholic and secular media regularly condemned the church for its supposed theological superficiality and for the ways in which it commercialized faith (Campos 1997) and fetishized money (Oro 1993). For their part, scholars often hinted that the UCKG was nothing but a multinational corporation that erected an elaborate Christian façade to hide its fundamentally commercial interests (Freston 2001b:17–21, 54–55; Oro 1996).

McDannell (1995:6) asserted that such analyses rested heavily on a "Puritan model of religious historiography" that assumed that "whenever money is exchanged religion is debased." Her criticism has influenced a number of anthropologists who have tried to undermine the idea that PCCs such as the UCKG are "missionaries of American capitalism," "'Junk Jesus' merchants" or that they promoted "Christian kitsch" (Coleman 2004:423–424). In their work, they drew attention to the subtle ways in which Christians in PCCs created meaning, community and a relationship with God through the construction of spaces and the exchange of money (Bialecki 2008; Coleman 2004:421–442; Coleman 2006:175–180; Lindhardt 2009:41–67).

In the case of the UCKG, some anthropologists in Brazil have suggested that the church's involvement in national politics and the media as well as its erection of impressive buildings and its expansion beyond the narrow confines of its church buildings had more to do with the church's spiritual war than its bottom line. Thus the UCKG did not only enter politics to stop their public

19 In Brazil, the UCKG is known as *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (IURD).

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"persecution" (Freston 2001a:54) and to protect their financial interests, but also to affect "spiritual reform" in what the church deemed to be a spiritually corrupt and unjust system (Oro 2003:57–60; Roca 2007:319–339). For this reason, the church did not start its own party but elected "Politicians for Christ" (Feliciano 2005:9) across the Brazilian political spectrum. By putting "God at the centre of politics" (Feliciano 2005:9) and in every political party, the UCKG aimed to fundamentally reshape Brazil into a theocratic state (Oro 2003; Roca 2007:319–339).

When looking at the UCKG's business, missionary and media ventures in Brazil, scholars have similarly shown that there was more at work than "pure" profit motives. For one thing, there are indications that the UCKG's foreign missions, and especially its African operations,[20] run at a loss (Freston 2005:37–40). On a more theoretical level, Kramer (2005:100–108) asserted that the UCKG's spectacular services, its monumental buildings and dramatic media visualisations were attempts to express the church's spiritual dominion in visual form. Roca (2007:319–339) similarly argued that the UCKG's infiltration of various economic sectors and its appropriation of money contributed to its political project of Christianising the country by reframing money as an object of divine agency. Its circulation then was sacralised, extending God's dominion into the nation (Roca 2007:319–339).

Multinational Religion

The South African UCKG, echoing its parent organisation in Brazil, frequently emphasised its eminent role in the "war against Satan." It portrayed other religions and Christian churches as the creations of demonic powers and as major facilitators of evil in the world (see Crivella 1999:25). In church services, UCKG pastors denounced Catholics for venerating "false idols," condemned AICs such as the local Shembe- and Zion Christian Churches (ZCC) for praying to the ancestors, criticised mainstream churches for their ignorance of spiritual warfare and accused fellow PCCs of "wasting" words and energy on "emotional" forms of worship. "Strong" members similarly denounced their former churches as ineffective, weak or ignorant. They framed the UCKG's expansion, organisation, public events and financial emphasis in terms of a spiritual war and identified themselves as "overcomers"; as people that triumph against the devil.

20 This excludes South Africa. Freston (2005) asserts that the South African mission funds the church's expansion into the rest of Africa.

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At insinuations that the "All Answers" event for instance would be smaller than expected, UCKG members vowed that they would not be "defeated." In church services in the week leading up to the event, they fought the demons that would make people "lazy to come," that sapped their "spirits" and that made them forget about the event. Some members even asserted that the expected foul weather on the day was not an "accident" and that Satan must have had a hand in it- as he did in all the obstacles the church faced.

Many members also interpreted the UCKG's expenditures on massive cathedrals, public events and sleek television programmes as attacks on Satan. Seeing the church's continued expansion, they lived in anticipation of their own looming fortunes. The UCKG pastors justified these beliefs by declaring that "the language of the world is money." As the most important currency of value, the pastors asserted that money was the medium through which people should engage with God and through which Satan would attack them most fiercely. At the same time, the pastors often declared that "God is the owner of all gold and silver" and that he would bless those who were "faithful" in their tithes. God's blessings then were quantifiable, visible and in proportion to an individual's faith. In order to inhabit such blessings, UCKG pastors stressed the importance of learning to work with money, of managing it properly and of multiplying it. They urged UCKG members to imitate the rich, to learn from successful businesspeople and to cultivate expensive tastes in readiness of God's blessings.

By the same token, the UCKG as an organisation had copied the business models of successful multinational organisations in its expansion, staffing and diversification. Unlike other Pentecostal churches, the UCKG did not trust the expansion of the church to individual pastors' "calls" from the Holy Spirit to start or join a church in a specific location (cf. Maxwell 2001:504; Muller 1999; Robbins 2004a:130–131). Instead, these decisions were made by a small group of bishops in Brazil and were based on considerable planning and research (Freston 2005:38; Kramer 2002:30). Once a possible foreign mission was identified, the church determined its viability by setting up commissions to investigate the probabilities of success. These commissions evaluated the most appropriate local discourses, studied relevant tax- and property laws as well as laws on religious expression and nongovernmental organisations. Based on this research, they devised a legal constitution for the church, determined the best location for its branches and rented or purchased buildings as required (Freston 2001b:199; Freston 2005:37). Once these structures were in place, the Brazilian bishops sent pastors and bishops abroad to fill and run the new churches (Freston 2005:38). In their new stations, the pastors were subject to

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the authority and command of a national bishop who in turn reported to high command in Brazil.

Interestingly, the UCKG central command did not allow pastors or bishops to stay in one place for more than a few months and constantly moved them from one branch to another. This instability preserved both the survival and the reputation of the church in different locations. In the first instance, the constant movement of pastors undermined the ability of individual charismatic pastors to build up loyal followings that could potentially split from the church. This was in sharp contrast to other local churches, and especially Pentecostal ones, that were plagued by frequent schisms and consequent losses in members (e.g. Memela 2009). Furthermore, the pastors' constant relocation and the centralisation of decisions that guided this movement also made it impossible to tell whether a pastor was expelled or transferred. This secrecy served as a "built-in" reputational damage control measure since pastors were not linked to the sex-, fraud- and money scandals that often rocked local churches. This upheld the church's own narrative that its pastors were "strong men of God" who "overcame."

Beyond its staffing and centralised command, the UCKG also diversified its financial interests beyond the narrow concerns of other churches. The UCKG owned the second-largest television network in Brazil, scores of AM and FM radio stations across the world, publishing houses, various newspapers, construction companies, furniture factories, a bank, a travel agency, a commercial airplane, recording studios and other parallel businesses (Freston 2001; Freston 2005; Kramer 2002:29–30; Oro & Semán 2001:183). These commercial enterprises were highly profitable and complementary but were not administered by the church. Instead, the administration of the UCKG's vast business empire had been devolved to a holding company called LM Consultoria (Freston 2001b:15–58; Oro & Semán 2001:183).

Local Efficacious Faiths

The Durban "All Answers" event showcased an organisation that successfully translated its message in a location culturally very different from its native Brazil (cf. Freston 2005:33–65). Even more remarkable was that the church realised such translations in 320 branches across South Africa as well as in thousands of branches abroad.[21] Unlike earlier mission churches (see

21 The church claims a presence in over 80 countries (Freston 2005:34) and estimates its membership at over 10 million people.

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Etherington 1978; Meyer 1999; Ranger 1993) however, the UCKG's sophisticated indigenisation or localisations were done by people with no historical connections to South Africa, whose grasp of local languages were at best incomplete, and who were constantly moving from one branch to another. It was also done with no elaboration of a specific hermeneutics of understanding or reading the Bible in the church. Indeed, very little Bible reading got done in this church while members openly declared that memorising verses and rereading well-known passages were "useless" in the spiritual war (see also Engelke 2007 on the Masowe, the "Christians who do not read the Bible"). This of course begged a few questions. Given the church's neglect of words and their meanings, what was the content of their religion? How did locals understand the pastors' message? And why had the UCKG found such local resonance among South African Christians?

To answer these questions, we return to Durban and to the reasons why people attended the church's "All Answers" event. People attended the event to "learn the truth" about the church, to receive blessings or to enjoy the Christian entertainment on offer. Those who came to learn the "truth" about the church were familiar with the various rumours that circulated in the townships about the UCKG. These rumours centred on the UCKG members' and pastors' supposed invisible communion with occult forces and on the "strange" things that allegedly happened in the church. In a context where people widely ascribed misfortune, bad luck and illness to the work of witches and invisible evil forces, these rumours were not just stories; they warned of the dangers and ambiguities inherent in the communion with the invisible. In the UCKG, this communion saw pastors not only contacting God but also conversing with demons in their exorcisms. Many newcomers to the church expressed their amazement that Bishop Pires could force such confessions from unwilling demons. As with the local *sangomas* (healers), they suspected that Bishop Pires and his pastors must have known something about the evil they were confronting to be able to command and communicate with it.

These truth-seekers were also surprised at the magnitude of blessings in the UCKG; in their experience, invisible sources exacted heavy tolls on humans for their generosity. In the townships, there were many stories of taxi-owners, politicians and ambitious people who, either knowingly or naïvely made pacts with invisible forces to deliver the kind of blessings that UCKG members testified about. Once rich, powerful, healed and popular, these unfortunate people were forced to kill their loved ones to satisfy their bloodthirsty benefactors. Since witches and people that communed with evil forces were indistinguishable from regular people, it was hard to trust people on face value- even if they were preachers. For this reason, not all truth-seekers that attended

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the "All Answers" event were convinced that the UCKG was an innocuous Christian organisation. They muttered about the uncertainties of the testifiers' futures and about the impossibility of penetrating the intentions of powerful people. What all of them agreed about was that the UCKG had access to enormous power.

Not everyone listened to "stories" and many attendees came to the UCKG event for help or for the communion with other Christians. Although black Christians in Durban often declared strong affiliations to certain churches or denominations, their attendance at broadly defined Christian events and at other churches in the city was rather unrestrained. Township residents constantly invited their neighbours, family and friends to attend their churches for special sermons and celebrations, to be healed or blessed or just to visit. Welcoming newcomers and visitors was a regular feature of most church services in the townships. Recruiting new members was another. As in other parts of Africa, Christians in Durban changed religious affiliations fairly often. This was seldom for doctrinal reasons. Most people were in search of religious efficacy and constantly renewed their commitment and "will to believe" in each church they joined (Kirsch 2004).

Durbanites certainly had a wide range of churches to choose from- with more churches and prayer groups constantly cropping up all over the city. The city's historic mission churches included the Methodist-, Presbyterian- and Anglican churches, various Baptist churches, German and Scandinavian Lutheran churches, the Dutch Reformed-, Wesleyan- and Roman Catholic churches. Older Pentecostal and Zionist churches met in the city's open fields where circles of white-painted rocks demarcated their ritual space while members wore long, flowing white robes. Since the end of apartheid, the city had also seen a raft of PCCs from other parts of Africa and American-style gospel churches setting up church in the townships. These new groups often shared established church buildings with other denominations or erected large tents on open fields while smaller groups met in front rooms, school halls, garages, and backyards.

Beyond these overtly "religious" spaces, Durban's independent iterant preachers frequently addressed people on trains, minibus taxis, public squares and on busy city corners. Among regular churchgoers, evangelising was common and taken up with great enthusiasm in public spaces and in the privacy of people's homes. Since an estimated 80% of black South Africans were Christian (Stats SA 2001), Christianity formed an integral part of township life. Business, social and political meetings in the townships often started with a prayer while gospel music and gospel ringtones for mobile phones were very popular. Local football, netball and athletics teams often only ran onto the field once they had

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a team prayer with many sports stars attributing their success to the intervention of God or Jesus. For their part, minibus taxis and shops in the area commonly plastered Bible verses and Christian symbols on their walls to ward off criminals and accidents. Many township residents similarly decorated their homes with church calendars, pictures of their church founders or pastors, Biblical scenes and verses, church uniforms and paraphernalia from church celebrations. Local newspapers published Bible verses on their letters pages while most local radio stations aired religious programmes.

Although the UCKG's "All Answers" event formed part of the overall Christian landscape of the city, it was also somewhat unusual. The event was much larger than the weekly Christian offerings in the city and consciously catered to "unbelievers" or non-members. Most churches in Durban were small and could seat but a few hundred people at a time. In the townships, where space was limited, this number often dropped to the capacity of a single room. Mega-churches of the size of those in Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia and Kenya (Ayuk 2002; Hackett 1998; Ojo 1988; Ter Haar 1992), where hundreds of thousands of people congregate on a weekly basis, had not emerged in Durban.[22] The city's largest churches, namely the Durban Christian Centre's Jesus Dome and the UCKG's main cathedral could seat about 2 000 people each. A rally of 60 000 people was certainly unusual, especially if it was open to all.

The UCKG's event was also extraordinary for the emphasis it placed on an efficacious, materially orientated faith; a faith that delivered "all answers." Although local Pentecostal churches and AICs offered faith-healing as part of their ministry (Anderson 2000; Maxwell 1999:247–251),[23] the UCKG made this and other "results" the cornerstone of theirs. Its pastors denounced other local churches for "wasting" words and energy on "emotional" forms of worship instead of "fighting Satan." They were especially scornful of churches that encouraged people to "rest in the spirit," that spoke in tongues and that ignored the poverty and "miserable lives" of their congregants. Instead, the UCKG

22 The Nazareth Baptist Church, also called the Shembe church, held annual meetings in Judea near Eshowe where 25 000 gathered. Similar numbers of people also gathered at Nhlangagazi on the first Sunday of the New Year.

23 Pentecostalism first came to South Africa in 1908, two years after the movement started in Azusa Street, California (Maxwell 1997; Sundkler 1961:32–38; Thompson 1993:1–22). Pentecostal preachers in South Africa quickly embraced divine healing, which became a distinctive feature of the South African movement (Maxwell 1999:247–250). This, and the adoption of certain Pentecostal features within AICs at the time, made it hard to draw clear distinctions between Pentecostal churches and AICs in South Africa (Daneel 1970; Sundkler 1961).

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encouraged their members to cultivate a "strong intelligent faith." Intelligent faith referred to an individual's rational ability to appreciate that God was not swayed by emotions but by faithful actions. Urging people to use their "intelligence," the pastors often pointed out that there was a pattern to God's behaviour; in the Old Testament, God not only prescribed sacrifices and tithes but also "honoured" those who were faithful in their tithes and generous in their sacrifices. They assured their congregations that "God [did] not change" and that if they used the same "technologies," they would be blessed. At the "All Answers" event, Bishop Pires assured newcomers that all their problems could be solved in the UCKG –if they joined the fight against Satan, if they tithed and if they "praised" God with money.

Unlike other local churches, the UCKG's "answers" did not require individuals to convert, to become "Born Again" or to confess their sins publicly. As one of my friends in the church remarked, "In those churches you are just born again and again and again and that mama (lady) will tell the same story every week…but nothing changes, her life is the same." Although Thandi called herself a member of the UCKG, she did not fill out a membership form or buy a uniform or sign up to committees in church nor was she baptised in the church; the UCKG required none of this. When she left the church to join the Durban Christian Church, none of the pastors came to her house to try and dissuade her. Similarly, no one ridiculed her when she returned to the UCKG a few months later; few of the people she knew in the church were still there. It was in this same spirit that the UCKG's spokesperson accepted that many of those who came to the "All Answers" and other events would not become members and that they would "leave again as soon as they received help." It was an attitude very different from other local churches and one that placed little emphasis on conventional Christian concerns with church community or ecclesia (see Tennent 2005:171–177).

In its lack of sociality and its emphasis on a materially efficacious faith, the UCKG resembled what Augé (1995) referred to as a "non-place." Like people who entered supermarkets and airports, UCKG members were not concerned with their relational or historical connection to the church, its leadership or other members but shared a desperate commitment to attain their own blessings. The UCKG seemed to not only support but positively encouraged this drive. Its clergy insisted that all problems were caused by demons and that these demons often resided in other people. Apart from their possible infectiousness, other people were also said to act as unwitting instruments of Satan. To overcome these demons, people had to join the invisible fight against Satan. In the UCKG, this meant that individuals had to stop relying on other people, the "word informations" of the Bible and the "useless" praise and

worship services in other churches. Instead, the UCKG pastors enjoined their congregants to *act*. Acting against Satan meant that people had to attend regular church services and exorcisms. They also had to make "Chains of Prayers," pay their tithes and sacrifice money in church. Since these actions were carefully prescribed but not analysed, usually incorporated a material element and were touted for their efficacy, they resembled religious "technologies." The dearth of socialisation and doctrinal explication in the church then meant that UCKG members' interpretations of the church's services, the efficacy of its technologies and its "war against Satan" relied heavily on a wider, non-UCKG social and religious imaginary.

In many ways, the UCKG's religious "technology" picked up threads from various local traditions and beliefs. Its emphasis on a transactional relationship with God paralleled the prescriptions of local *sangomas* and AICs who urged their clients to remedy relationships with their ancestors in order to effect healing, prosperity and social harmony. *Sangomas* often asserted that the ancestors needed to "eat" before they could help their progeny and prescribed various animal sacrifices to realise this transaction. Like the UCKG, *sangomas* also emphasised that the act of sacrifice was not enough and that it had to be accompanied by strong petitions to the ancestors to restore a flow of blessings. In AICs, prophets and preachers similarly tried to appease and petition the ancestors because they were said to act as mediators between the living and God (Anderson 2000; Vilakazi, Mthethwa & Mpanza 1986).

The UCKG's assertion that illness, poverty and social discord stemmed from demonic blockages in the flow of God's blessings was very close to local conceptions of "bad luck." People in Durban's townships, and in other parts of South Africa (see Ashforth 2005; Niehaus 2001), often did not separate health issues from family problems, unemployment, poverty or unhappiness but treated them as things of the same kind. Problems in any specific sphere of life were merely manifestations of a general condition of being "unlucky" or bewitched. Witches, like Satan and his demons, were then said to "*vala'madlosi*" (to block the ancestors) in order to cause misery and harm.

The UCKG's conception of Satan and his demons was also analogous to local ideas about evil. Whereas witches were once thought to only attack their family and friends, there was an increasing awareness in Durban's townships that witches were able to transcend their traditional boundaries to attack people beyond their own kin and neighbourhood. And, like demons in the UCKG, these witches were constantly "upgrading" their tactics to overcome those that obstructed their evil in the world (Van Wyk 2010). The UCKG's conception of the work of demons was in sharp contrast to other PCCs. In churches such as Rhema Bible Church and the Durban Christian Church, converts were given

the opportunity to rid themselves of the influence and sinful pollution of their earlier attachments through being "Born Again" (Maxwell 1998; Meyer 1998a; van Dijk 1998; van Dijk 2001:218–222). In the process, these PCCs did not only combat but also contained evil (Ciekawy & Geschiere 1998:8; Marshall-Fratani 2001:98–102), largely because they maintained that the power of the Holy Spirit was superior or was of a different order than the supernatural powers of witches and demons (Meyer 1999). This was not the case in the UCKG; even strong Christians empowered by the Holy Spirit could be overcome by demonic forces through no fault of their own and often as a consequence of their spiritual fights against Satan.

Whereas other local churches attributed demonic possessions to the moral agency of the victim, the UCKG insisted that demons upgraded their tactics and spread like viruses. Anyone could pick them up "in the road," through their contact with other people and by unwittingly touching things infected by witchcraft. Demons also spread through emotions and thoughts while witches, family members and "unknown" people could also send demons into someone's life. The very nature and abilities of demons combined with the spiritual permeability of the human body made demonic possessions inevitable and the spiritual war inescapable (see also Lindhardt's contribution to this volume). In the UCKG, this inevitability was exacerbated by the very technologies that the church deployed in their fight against demons. UCKG pastors and members noted that each exorcised demon created seven demon-shaped holes in the body's firmament.[24] Despite facing exponential dangers as they fought against the demons that undermined their lives, UCKG members insisted that people could not live with demons and that they had to be exorcised. Dismissing the possibility of redemption, the UCKG's view was pessimistic. However, for many of its members, the UCKG's "realism" was more plausible than the "words and emotions" of other PCCs while its pragmatism offered temporary relief. In many ways, such views stroked with the church membership's real-life experiences of continued poverty, illness and social strife.

Conclusion: Some answers

The UCKG's phenomenal success in post-apartheid South Africa had been a source of much speculation. Scholars generally attributed the church's growth

24 Christians in the PCC tradition often quote Matthew 12:43–45 to prove that an exorcised demon would return with "seven other spirits more wicked than itself" (New International Version).

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to new political and economic processes while the South African media and the church's critics suspected that the UCKG's attraction was carefully manipulated by a predatory multinational business. Beyond the structural reasons why the UCKG might be attractive to South Africans, I have paid attention in this chapter to local "cultural" reasons why the church had such wide appeal. I showed that the church's prosperity gospel and its spiritual warfare provided "answers" that were almost immediately grasped by people in search of religious efficacy. The UCKG's "answers" were also contingent in ways that converged with local ideas about witchcraft and the flow of prosperity from the spiritual to the material world. Unlike other Christian churches then, the UCKG did not offer attendees at its services an escape from the work of evil in the world. Instead, the church depicted Christians as fundamentally constrained because of their situatedness in the world and their fallibility as transactors with their spiritual benefactor. In the UCKG then, people were often told that their blessings would not materialise unless they tithed and sacrificed to God. Although this version of Christianity was arguably less poetic or hopeful than the millenarian promises of other PCCs, it rang true for many South Africans who remained poor, ill and unhappy despite political liberation. As one of my friends in the church remarked, "They are not new but their message is very strong."

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