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978-1-107-05724-1 - The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa:

A Church of Strangers

Ilana Van Wyk

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The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), a church of Brazilian origin, has been enormously successful in establishing branches and attracting followers in post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike other Pentecostal Charismatic churches (PCCs), the UCKG insists that relationships with God be devoid of 'emotions', that socialisation between members be kept to a minimum and that charity and fellowship are 'useless' in materialising God's blessings. Instead, the UCKG urges members to sacrifice large sums of money to God for delivering wealth, health, social harmony and happiness. While outsiders condemn these rituals as empty or manipulative, this book shows that they are locally meaningful, demand sincerity to work, have limits and are informed by local ideas about human bodies, agency and ontological balance. As an ethnography of people rather than of institutions, this book offers fresh insights into the mass PCC movement that has swept across Africa since the early 1990s.

Ilana van Wyk is a researcher at the Institute for Humanities in Africa at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

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University of Cape Town

International African Institute, London

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For my mom, Janelle and Tony

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Abbreviations

AIC	African Initiated Churches
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ARV	Antiretroviral
CV	Curriculum vitae
DCC	Durban Christian Centre
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HRC	Human Rights Commission
ID	Identity document
IURD	Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus
NILC	National Interfaith Leadership Council
PCC	Pentecostal Charismatic church
R	rand (South African currency)
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
SSHC	Stop Suffering Help Centre
TEASA	The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa
UCKG	Universal Church of the Kingdom of God
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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Glossary of Zulu Words

Words are listed as they appear in the text and with their English equivalent.

<i>abathakathi</i>	witches
<i>akinemandla</i>	I don't have power
<i>amadlosi</i>	ancestors
<i>amakhokheli</i>	prayer women
<i>amakholwa</i>	Christian believers
<i>amandla</i>	power/life-giving force
<i>bayathandaza siriyasi</i>	they pray seriously/strongly
<i>Bazakwane</i>	Brethren
<i>eish</i>	gosh (interjection)
<i>Ekamelikaba?</i>	In whose name?
<i>fafaza</i>	sprinkle a fluid
<i>geza 'muzi</i>	literally: wash or purify the house
<i>gogo(s)</i>	old woman(women)/grandmother(s)
<i>hawu</i>	wow (interjection)
<i>Hayibo!</i>	No way!
<i>hayiza</i>	shriek hysterically
<i>iladi</i>	type of religious festival
<i>imbuzi</i>	goat
<i>imphephu</i>	fragrant herb burned when communicating with the ancestors
<i>inhlanhla</i>	good luck/fortune
<i>inkomo</i>	head of cattle
<i>insanga</i>	fool/someone with crossed eyes
<i>insila</i>	body dirt
<i>inyanga(s)</i>	herbalist(s)
<i>inyoka</i>	snake
<i>inzilo</i>	mourning clothes
<i>isichito</i>	bewitchment that makes the victim repulsive to others
<i>isithunzi</i>	shadow/heaviness
<i>Isiwasho(s)</i>	Tuesday service(s) in which holy water is used

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<i>Isiwasho Esingcwele</i>	washing with the Holy Spirit
<i>ithwasa</i>	trainee <i>sangoma</i>
<i>izinkhukhu</i>	shacks
<i>'Ka Jesu</i>	Of Jesus
<i>lobolo</i>	bridewealth
<i>lutho</i>	nothing
<i>madimoni</i>	demons
<i>mahala</i>	free of charge
<i>makwerekwere</i>	derogatory name for foreigners
<i>mamlambo(s)</i>	witch's familiar(s) in the form of a snake
<i>mashonisa</i>	loan shark (literally: that cause impoverishment)
<i>moya umubi</i>	evil spirit
<i>muthi</i>	medicine/witchcraft substances
<i>nensila</i>	dirty (literally: with dirt)
<i>nesinyama</i>	shadow (literally: with darkness)
<i>Nkosi'yam'</i>	my God
<i>ofakazi</i>	testifiers
<i>Okuqabula okokuqala</i>	First kiss
<i>phakathi</i>	inside
<i>phalaza</i>	vomit after taking an emetic
<i>puma</i>	get out
<i>sangoma(s)</i>	diviner(s)/healer(s)
<i>Satani</i>	Satan
<i>sgebengu</i>	gangster/thug
<i>sgebengu kakhulu</i>	big criminal
<i>shebeen</i>	unlicensed drinking establishment
<i>shintsha</i>	change
<i>Sizwile kahle?</i>	Do we understand?
<i>sjambok</i>	heavy leather whip
<i>skoroskoro(s)</i>	dilapidated car(s)
<i>spaza</i>	informal shop
<i>spoki(s)</i>	ghost(s)
<i>stokvel</i>	rotating credit association
<i>thokoloshe(s)</i>	witch's familiar(s)
<i>twala</i>	form of witchcraft
<i>ubuso nobuso</i>	face to face
<i>ujeje</i>	a type of steamed bread
<i>umhayizo</i>	form of bewitchment
<i>umKhovu</i>	zombie
<i>umshwabadeli</i>	things you eat up/consume/eat greedily
<i>umthakathi</i>	witch
<i>uSatan' an'dawulapha</i>	Satan is not here
<i>uyasha</i>	(you) receive fire
<i>vala 'madlosi</i>	lineage sorcery (literally: closing the ancestors)

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<i>waroba</i>	you are robbing
<i>wena Satan</i>	you, Satan
<i>wena thokoloshe</i>	you, witch's familiar
<i>woza/woza lapha</i>	come here
<i>yebo</i>	yes
<i>yebo noma cha?</i>	yes or no?

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Blessed	Could refer to people, objects or events. Blessed people are healthy, happy, wealthy, fertile, have the strength to participate in the spiritual war and can overcome Satan. People work at ‘being blessed’. Blessed events and objects are ‘strong’ (see below) and can result in blessings for those who attend or use them.
Chains of prayer	Modelled on the Catholic novena (Freston 2005: 43), a chain of prayer refers to a commitment to come to church on the same day every week for at least seven consecutive weeks and to sacrifice money at the end of that time. This commitment spiritually binds and defeats demons that plague participants or that ‘block their paths’. To be effective, participants cannot break the chain of their participation.
Consecrate	To ritually transform a body in service of God, to cleanse or protect it from the work of demons. Things can similarly be consecrated.
Covenant	An agreement with God initiated in one of the church’s campaigns or chains of prayer through a monetary sacrifice.
Demand	A form of urgent praying and forceful being-in-the-world.
Evangelise	To advertise the services of the UCKG.
Faithful	Committed behaviour, i.e. to pay tithes regularly and to fulfil pledges in church.
Fight	To pray with urgency and conviction, punch and kick invisible demons during prayer sessions, participate in church campaigns and tithe faithfully. Also refers to an attitude that suggests to God that individuals are strong enough to inhabit their blessings or to protect those blessings from demonic attack.

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xx Terms and Terminology Used in the UCKG

Fighting spirit	Refers to dedicated churchgoing, faithful tithing and aggressive spiritual fighting.
In the same faith	People who go to the same church and who are convinced of its teachings.
In the same spirit	Refers to a shared will to overcome Satan and is a state of mind consciously willed.
Intelligent faith	An individual's rational ability to appreciate that God is swayed not by emotions but by faithful actions.
Manifest	Refers to the moment in which an invisible demon reveals itself and becomes audible and visible in the extraordinary behaviour of a possessed person.
Men of God	UCKG clergy, biblical prophets, disciples and other prominent Christian figures.
Miserable/misery	The opposite of being blessed, miserable Christians are not only unhappy or despondent but also have problems with their health and their financial, sentimental (see below) and family lives.
Overcome	Refers to actions such as church attendance, exorcisms and spiritual fighting. Also refers to an ontological state in which poverty, illness and unhappiness are actively held at bay.
Overcomers	People who have managed to actualise their blessings, i.e. to find a job, a marriage partner, a happy social life and health.
Sentimental lives	Refers to love or intimate lives.
Serve	To work for the UCKG.
Strong	Describes people who attend church services regularly, who tithe faithfully and who participate in the church's spiritual war with enthusiasm and energy. Prayers and sermons are 'strong' when they require intense concentration or when they elicit demonic manifestations from their listeners. In a similar vein, 'strong' demons and <i>muthi</i> refer to powerful or efficacious powers.
Take out of the spirit	Refers to an assistant or church member who, due to demonic influence, does not share in the spirit of a meeting.
Tithers	People who, in obedience to God, pay 10 per cent of their income to the church.
To be cut	To be expelled from the assistants' corps.
To be raised	Refers to promotions above regular members to positions in church.

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Two-step plan (to prosperity)	Firstly to tithe or sacrifice money; secondly to 'test God' by demanding your blessings.
Unbelievers	People in other churches or those who do not share the UCKG's views.
Upgrade	Refers to an endless process in which demons improve their knowledge and technologies to defeat humans. Also refers to constant improvements in congregants' defences against Satan, learning more about the spiritual war and utilising the church's technologies.

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Figure 1 Map of South Africa