

**THE GOSPEL AND VENDA CULTURE:  
AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS WHICH HINDERED OR FACILITATED THE  
ACCEPTANCE OF CHRISTIANITY BY THE VHAVENDA**

by

**Muthuphei Rufus Ndou**

**Submitted as fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**Philosophiae Doctor**

**in the Faculty of Theology**

**Department of Science of Religion and Missiology**

**of the**

**University of Pretoria**

**Promoter: Prof. PJ Meiring**

**Pretoria**

**2000**

## **DEDICATION**

It is with pride that I dedicate this thesis to my late grandfather, Rev. Charles Rathogwa Ndou (Netshirondoni), who laboured hard under difficult circumstances in establishing the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Venda in 1928.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am delighted and deeply grateful to my promoter, Professor Dionne Crafford, who, before retirement, helped me immensely in the structure of the whole thesis. To the indefatigable Professor Piet Meiring, I give my heartfelt thanks for his critical and constructive ideas. Through his pleasant and positive guidance, thus I have reached so far.

This thesis could have been a fruitless venture, if I were not assisted by Professor Ralushai, who encouraged me by giving his untiring efforts and his sympathetic understanding in times of need. A word of appreciation goes to my interviewees, whose information helped me to collect the accurate data for my field of study.

I am also deeply indebted to the Human Science Research Council for the Scholarship grant I received, which enabled me to travel in order to collect data for the thesis. I appreciate the hard work undertaken by Michael Mohapi Makosholo, for his enormous work of editing the language of this thesis and Petrus Jacobus Maritz. My sincere appreciation goes to the typist, Munzhedzi Nelly Phadziri, for her untiring patience in typing the whole document.

I further wish to give thanks to my children, Rathogwa, Ndivhuwo, Elelwani and Tshamaano, for their supportive role. My achievements are an inspiration to them for furthering their studies. I am also indebted to my younger brother, Samuel Mukondeleli, and Johannes Mutshaeni for their support.

I appreciate the efforts of my wife, Ndanganeni, without whose invaluable assistance I could not have achieved this honour. I am also thankful to my late parents, who could not witness the achievement of their son, as they were deprived by their early departure.

I thank God for giving me strength, good health and guidance to achieve this field of study.

The members of the Charles Rathogwa Memorial Temple (African Methodist Episcopal Church), I thank for their support and understanding, as during my research period I could not nurture them fully as expected of me. A thank you is also due to Rev. A.K. Masehela, presiding elder of the Venda District, for her support and encouragement.

## CONTENTS

Dedication .....	2
Acknowledgements .....	3
Chapter 1	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Problem .....	1
1.2. Aim.....	3
1.3. Hypothesis .....	5
1.4. Method of study .....	5
1.5. Chapter Outline.....	6
1.6. Venda Society .....	8
1.6.1. The Venda Region .....	8
1.6.2. Language .....	13
1.6.3. Religion .....	14
1.6.4. Mission .....	16
Chapter 2	
BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COMING OF MISSIONARIES IN VENDA.....	21
2.1. Establishment of the white settlement in Venda.....	21
2.2. Mission work amongst the Vhavenda .....	25
2.2.1. Dutch Reformed Church.....	25
2.2.1.1. Alexander McKidd.....	27
2.2.1.2. Stephanus Hofmeyr .....	33
2.2.1.3. John Daneel.....	39
2.2.1.4. Lucas van der Merwe.....	43
2.2.1.5. Nico Smith .....	45
2.2.1.6. Louis Swanepoel.....	52
2.2.1.7. Faure Louw .....	54
2.2.1.8. Wilhelm van Deventer.....	55
2.2.2. The Berlin Missionary Society .....	56
2.2.2.1. Alexander Merensky .....	56
2.2.2.2 Carl Beuster .....	58
2.2.2.3. Erdman Schwellnus .....	63
2.2.2.4. Klaas Koen .....	66
2.2.2.5. Ludwig Giesekke, Ernst Friedrich Gottshling, Otto Klatt .....	68
2.2.2.6. Stephanus Makhado Masiagwala .....	71
2.2.2.7. Samson Rabothata .....	72
2.2.2.8. Nicodimus Masekela.....	73
2.2.3 Swiss Missionaries .....	74
2.2.3.1. Paul Berthoud, Ernest Creux (Tsonga mission).....	74
2.2.3.2. Numa Jaques (Vhavenda Mission) .....	83
2.2.3. The Reformed Presbyterian Church.....	85
2.2.3.1. DA Mc Donald.....	86

2.2.3.2. Mc Donald's assistants and successors: Mrs Mc Donald, Lamont, Nkhabide, Aitken, Charity Majiza .....	91
2.2.4. Reformed Church (Gerformeerde Kerk in Venda) .....	94
2.2.4.1. The First Pioneers: Dirk Postma, Pieter Bos.....	94
2.2.4.2. Hugo Du Plessis .....	96
2.2.4.3. Koos van Rooy .....	98
2.3. Factors which hindered or facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel in Venda.....	99

### Chapter 3

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS, CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES OF THE VHAVENDA.....	107
3.1. Introduction .....	107
3.2. Nwali .....	107
3.3. Nwali shrines.....	115
3.4. Ancestor veneration .....	118
3.5. Intermediary agents. ....	121
3.6. Christ as Brother Ancestor.....	128
3.7. Belief in spirits and supernatural power. ....	133
3.8. Form of manifestation. ....	135
3.8.1 Dreams.....	136
3.8.2. Disasters .....	136
3.8.3. Possession .....	138
3.9. Traditional healer .....	142
3.10. Witchcraft.....	147
3.11. Factors which hindered and facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel .	151

### Chapter 4

THE RISE OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES AND THEIR APPROACH TO VENDA CULTURE .....	161
4.1. Healing of the invalid.....	162
4.2. Praise and worship .....	168
4.3. Polygamous marriage.....	174
4.4. Kingly church leadership.....	180
4.5. Inheritance .....	186
4.6 Dreams and visions .....	188
4.7. Factors which hindered or facilitated the acceptance of Christianity .....	191

### Chapter 5

POLITICAL, COLONIAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS WHICH HINDERED OR FACILITATED ACCEPTANCE OF CHRISTIANITY .....	201
5.1. Traditional leaders .....	201
5.2. Colonialism .....	211
5.3. Social life.*.....	216
5.4. Factors which hindered or facilitated the acceptant of the Gospel.....	221



Chapter 6	
EVALUATION.....	232
6.1. Definition of Mission.....	232
6.2. Proclamation (Kerygma).....	233
6.2.1. God.....	233
6.2.2. The person of Jesus.....	236
6.2.3. Ancestral veneration.....	238
6.2.4. Sin.....	240
6.2.5. Comprehensive Gospel.....	242
6.2.6. Polygamy.....	245
6.2.7. Colleagues.....	247
6.2.8. The missionaries' wives.....	249
6.3. Diakonia.....	251
6.3.1. Individual healing.....	251
6.3.2. Church community.....	253
6.3.3. The broader community.....	255
6.3.3.1. Schools.....	255
6.3.3.2. Hospitals.....	256
6.3.3.3. Community projects.....	257
6.3.4. The relationship with the traditional leaders.....	258
6.3.5. Land issues.....	261
6.3.6. Economical empowerment.....	262
6.4. Koinonia.....	264
6.4.1. Building up of the church.....	264
6.4.1.1. Sharing of meals.....	264
6.4.1.2. Church services.....	265
6.4.2. Ecumenical relations.....	266
6.5. Leitourgia.....	269
6.5.1. Western style of worship.....	270
6.5.2. Baptism.....	272
6.5.3. Communion services.....	273
6.5.4. Circumcision.....	275
6.6. Motives of missionaries.....	277
6.6.1. Positive Motives.....	278
6.6.1.1. The kingdom motive.....	278
6.6.1.2. Ecclesiological Motive.....	279
6.6.1.3. The obedience motive.....	279
6.6.1.4. Love and compassion as motives.....	280
6.6.2. Negative Motives.....	280
6.6.2.1. Imperialism.....	281
6.6.2.3. Paternalism.....	282
6.6.2.4. The debt motive.....	283
6.6.2.5. Cultural or development motives.....	284

Chapter 7	
CONCLUSION.....	286
7.1. Summary of all chapters .....	286
7.2. Main findings and evaluation of the hypothesis.....	288
7.3. Recommendations .....	291
7.3.1. Challenges to the church and mission.....	291
7.4. Areas for future research .....	294
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 296
Interviews .....	309
Personal Interviews.....	309
Telephone Interviews.....	311