INTRODUCTION

At Zuurbekom, west of Johannesburg, lies Silo, the impressive new headquarters of the International Pentecost Church (hereafter IPC). It was formerly (and is sometimes still) called the International Pentecost Holiness Church (IPHC). The complex at Silo, which was opened by President F.W. De Klerk in May 1991, has buildings worth many millions of Rands, including an auditorium seating twenty thousand people and a well-equipped restaurant to feed the multitudes who flock there once a month to be healed by “Father Modise.” This church was founded in Meadowlands, Soweto in 1962 by Frederick S. Modise, a former minister in the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). It is one of the largest and fastest growing African indigenous churches, and possibly the closest example of a “Messianic church” in South Africa today. It has some 165 branches throughout South Africa and as far afield as Namibia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. It is not a Pentecostal church in the strict sense of the word (despite its name); and it bears little resemblance to Pentecostal churches or to other African indigenous churches in this country.

In the first place, it is a Sabbatarian church; Modise declares that Saturday is the Sabbath, and the main activities in the church take place from Friday night throughout Saturday. On Saturdays in the townships of the Transvaal, particularly in the Pretoria and Witwatersrand complex, one will notice men dressed in the distinctive (and very Western) grey suits with maroon shirts that characterise Modise’s followers. Married women wear a maroon skirt and grey blouse with a white duku (headscarf), white gloves and shoes; and girls wear maroon skirts with white gowns, gloves and shoes. In the second place, Modise rejects the use of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and other

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1 The information contained in this article was gathered through empirical research conducted between 1990 and 1992, with the help of field workers. It involved numerous personal interviews with IPC members in Soshanguve, near Pretoria, and at the church headquarters in Zuurbekom, near Johannesburg. Some of the information is taken from a publicity booklet of the IPC, entitled International Pentecost Holiness Church (IPHC s.a).

2 Daneel (1987:42) discusses the use of the term “messianic”, which is often used too casually and categorically. In this article it refers to a church or movement where the leader has in effect become a “messiah” to the followers, thereby replacing Christ. The concept “messianic” was first used by Sundkler (1961:278-289), but he later modified his use of it (Sundkler 1976:161). The majority of African indigenous churches in South Africa should not be regarded as “messianic”.

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manifestations of the Holy Spirit which have come to be associated with Pentecostal churches. But nevertheless, there is a pronounced emphasis on "the Spirit", who is believed to have come upon Frederick Modise in a singular way, and on the gift of healing which operates mainly through him in the IPC. Modise’s emergence from the ZCC means that there is some continuity with this organisation, despite several characteristics to the contrary. The system of church conferences, leadership patterns, polygyny and the integration of (some) African cultural values, baptism by immersion (unlike the ZCC, the IPC practises a single immersion), the use of secret rules and even the badge of the church - are all reminders of the ZCC. At the same time, one must remember that the church is in most respects unlike the ZCC or any other church in this country, and has many Western features which hardly rank it as an “indigenous” church at all.

**THE CALL OF FREDERICK MODISE**

Frederick Modise’s church is founded primarily on his healing powers and strong personality. A short stocky man with a deep, gravelly voice, a broad moustache and dark tinted spectacles, Modise looks remarkably young for his 78 years. His offices are immaculately furnished, and the church emblem, a six cornered-star of David (one more corner than that of the ZCC, he pointed out) is emblazoned on the doors of the two Seven Series BMW cars parked outside. Born in Rooiberg, Transvaal in 1914, and brought up in a Tswana village near Hammanskraal, he joined the ZCC in 1939, then under its founder, Bishop Engenas Lekganyane. He was a ZCC minister in Meadowlands, Soweto, a carpenter and also one of the richest undertakers in the area. Although the details are unclear, it seems that he had a leadership clash with Bishop Edward Lekganyane, who thought that the Soweto ZCC congregations were becoming too independent over their choice of choir uniforms. Modise became seriously ill in 1959 with a stomach complaint, his business was broken into and his machinery stolen, and he lost everything he had, including his children, who died. Some people said he had been bewitched by Lekganyane because he had left the ZCC; but he denied this, pointing out that he had become sick while he was still in the ZCC. He went to ZCC prophets, to diviners and other healers, and then to medical doctors, but failed to find healing. At some stage he left the ZCC, but exactly when this happened is not clear.

The turning point in Modise’s life, like that of many traditional diviners, was a call associated with an incurable illness. After he was admitted to Coronation Hospital in Johannesburg, on 12 September 1962 at midnight a voice told him to pray. He heard the same voice the following night at midnight again telling him to pray and then to follow it. He saw a house with a thatched roof and he was told to climb on the rafters. There he saw a great crowd of people of all races kneeling down and praying, facing the east. This place, he later told us, was *Silo*. He was asked if he could hear the prayers of
the people. He replied that he only heard them pray “for the sake of the
name of our Lord Jesus Christ” because they did not know the Lord’s
Prayer. He told us that the whole world did not know how to pray in the right
way. He was also given secret instructions on how to “pray spiritually” after
confessing his sins. He was told to teach people how to pray like this so that
God could hear their prayers. On 14 September at midnight the voice told
him to get up from the bed, and that he would be home on 3 October 1962.
The voice now said “I am Jehovah your God who is discharging you from this
hospital.” This was on a Saturday, which the voice said was the Sabbath. He
proceeded to “spiritually heal” fifteen people in the hospital after they had
confessed their sins, before he was discharged on 3 October as he had been
promised (IPHC sa:5-6).

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Modise had been told that he would found a big church. After he was able to
heal the people in the hospital, it was evident to him that God was now with
him. He began to preach this new message in Meadowlands, where he built a
church; and in 1970 he moved his headquarters from there to Oskraal (a
Tswana village near Pretoria), where a large auditorium was built, called
Jerusalem. Members from the church, particularly in those early years, testify
to the healing that was received through the hands of Modise.

This church is based on the personality of Frederick Modise, and particu­
larly on his healing powers. This is the main reason why people flock to this
church; and indeed, it appears that a person who receives healing from
Modise experiences extreme pressure to join the church, and usually does. In
fact, one member of this church in Soshanguve told us during our research
that a healthy person without any problems did not need to come to this
church. I was told by Modise himself in a personal interview in August 1991
that our field worker could not attend the Friday night church service at Silo
because he was “not sick” - although we managed to get another field
worker in for a weekend a few months later - pretending to be sick! The
ability of Modise to heal the sick, coupled with a proclamation of the total
inadequacy of all healing methods offered by other churches, prophets or di­
viners, form the core of the IPC’s highly pressurised recruitment drive, par­
ticularly at Silo. In the outlying branches of the church, visitors are urged to
make the monthly pilgrimage to Silo and Modise. Once they do this they are
showed the major role that healing played in the initial phase of church ex­
ansion in Spirit-type indigenous churches in Zimbabwe. This was also the
case in South Africa, as I have pointed out elsewhere in the cases of indige­
nous church pioneers like Elias Mahlangu, Edward Motaung and Engenas

3 The name of the field worker who assisted in this research and who attended the healing service at Silo is Samuel
Otwang.
Lekganyane, amongst many others (Anderson 1992b:40-44). The IPC may be considered today to be still in its initial phase. This is probably the reason why healing is the main feature in its recruitment drive, possibly more so than any other South African church at the present time.

**SOME CENTRAL TEACHINGS**

Some IPC members during our research in Soshanguve said that the final authority in the church was the word that Modise heard from God and pronounced to his people. One member said that Modise’s teachings were not necessarily straight from the Bible, but that they were the words from God. Another said that Modise was the interpreter of the Bible for his people. When he explained the Word of God, it helped his followers to live in the right way. Other members expressed views about the Bible that were fairly close to that expressed by members of other churches. One member said that the Bible was God’s word which taught people the laws of God and enabled God to speak to people. In the IPC services we attended, the Bible was read as frequently as in any Pentecostal church we researched; and Modise himself makes extensive use of it during his preaching. It appeared that the Bible’s authority was upheld in the IPC by Modise and by his preachers, and that no significant difference existed in this respect between the IPC and other churches.

In the IPC Modise preaches material prosperity and physical health to his followers. The way this is achieved is through faithful giving. Give much to the church, he says, and you will receive much back from God. He declares that people, particularly IPC members, are not supposed to be poor or sick; it is God’s will that they have plenty and be healthy, provided they follow his recipe for success. One certainly feels that Modise practises what he preaches in this respect: he is the owner of several expensive luxury cars, including a Rolls Royce, a Cadillac and several BMWs, and he lives in the multi-million Rand headquarters complex at Silo.

In a service at Silo on 13 March 1992, Modise preached that all money, wisdom and knowledge belongs to God; therefore all this belonged to believers also. Modise and his ministers also frequently confront African traditional religious beliefs, particularly the ancestor cult and traditional divination in their preaching. A midweek service in Soshanguve in March 1992 had the preacher speaking on Matthew 6:24: “No person can serve two masters, that is God and ancestors.” In preaching, the IPC consciously confronts traditional religious practices, the healing practices of “false prophets” in indigenous Pentecostal type churches like the ZCC (Anderson 1992b:11-12), and in particular the uselessness of all other churches. During the weekend our field worker spent at Silo, a central theme of the preaching (which was always directed at the visitors rather than at the members present), made reference to the failure of other churches to accomplish what Modise and the PC had accomplished. The visitors were exhorted to leave “Egypt” (their
old churches) and join the “promised land” of Modise and the IPC. These churches were, declared one preacher, tombs of death and deception. There was no gospel and no healing in the other churches, said another preacher at Silo. Most of the preachers (except Modise himself) spoke about how Modise was able to heal people, and gave their own personal experiences. The IPC is also diametrically opposed to prophets, a common feature in many African indigenous churches. One IPC member said bluntly: “There are no prophets in our church, because prophets are deceivers. Even if they might prophesy the truth, you will find that they cannot heal you. They will lead you into greater problems and troubles.” This respondent went on to say that there were no prophets in the IPC because Modise, one much greater than any prophet, had come.

Entrance into the church takes place after a full confession of sins has been made to Modise, after which a person’s sins are “washed away” and a membership card may be purchased. Only after this does baptism then take place, by single immersion and always in a river - for Modise told me that Jesus was not baptised in a dam! Baptisms are usually administered by Modise’s two senior elders and other ministers at the time of the annual conferences. Baptism in the IPC enables a person to use the secret formula revealed to Modise, called the *dipaki* (witnesses) which must be recited secretly by a follower whenever he or she is in trouble or is sick. This goes in the vernacular something like this: “The water, the blood, the Spirit that burns, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the God that comes with fire.” (The association of God with fire in IPC doctrine will be discussed below). It is believed that the repetition of these words enables a person to receive healing and protection. Baptism entitles a person to put on the uniform and be a full member of the IPC, to use the secret formula revealed to Modise bringing healing and protection, and to attend the services or “classes” which are for members only, the “sheep” of God.

In the IPC, Modise practises strict discipline: like in the ZCC, members may not drink, smoke or eat pork; they may also not participate in traditional rituals; and there are very strict rules for menstruating women. As we have seen already, they may not participate in any community events on the Sabbath day (Saturday). In cases of serious breaches of discipline, especially in the case of adultery, it was reported that church members are whipped with a *sjambok* (a leather whip), which allegation Modise denied. Men in the church are encouraged to take second or third (up to seven) wives; and Modise himself had two wives at the time of our interview. He would not commit himself when I asked if he was intending to take another. It is also necessary for a person to receive the blessing of *Ntate* (Father) Modise before embarking on a journey.

On their understanding of salvation, IPC members believe that they are “saved” because they are in the church, because they obey the instructions of Father Modise, and because they read and obey the Bible. Several members of the IPC said that they were saved from doing things that displeased God like drinking, sexual immorality, gambling and smoking. The church mem
bers are the “chosen flock” of God who attend church regularly, and are therefore bound for heaven. One member of the IPC said that he had been saved from death. He told us how he had been thrown from a moving train in 1986 and had not died. Two others had died instantly. “There I saw God’s salvation”, he said, “and I joined the IPC.” Another member said that IPC members were not “saved”, but they were “chosen.” They were the “called ones” who had joined the IPC because of difficulties, problems and sicknesses. These difficulties were in fact proof that they had been “chosen” by God (or by Modise). After a person had been helped by Modise it was very important to obey implicitly the instructions he gave every new member. She said that IPC children would not get sick as long as their parents were “following the laws of Modise.” My impression is that IPC members, like members of some other indigenous churches, understand the means of salvation in legalistic terms of what one should or should not do; and they understand salvation itself primarily (but not exclusively) in terms of freedom from sickness, poverty and other “this-worldly” problems. At the same time they have not altogether forfeited the futuristic idea of salvation in terms of eternal life in heaven yet to come.

Modise adopts a hostile attitude to several traditional African beliefs. He and his ministers officially confront the ancestor cult; and the church has effectively reduced dependence on ancestors in the lives of many of its members. In a service attended by our field worker at Silo, Modise said that ancestors are an abomination to God, and another preacher there said that ancestors were “angels of Satan.” Modise told me in a personal interview that he did not believe in what he called “idols” and “superstitions”, referring not only to ancestors and traditional charms and medicines, but also to symbolic healing methods prescribed by the ZCC and other indigenous Pentecostal-type church prophets and healers. This is also propagated in the church newsletter Star of Silo. In the first issue (of which I had only one page) a picture of Modise’s house in Soweto is followed by a comment on what happened after his discharge from hospital in October 1962:

He removed from his house all medicine conventional or unconventional. All symbols related to traditional and ancestry [sic] worship were thrown out of the house. Idolatory [sic] symbols in the form of holy water, holy ash and strings were thrown out of the house. What he remained with was his trust, faith, hope and belief in his new found God and the world order and the civilization he had to implement.

In keeping with this official view, several different IPC members in Soshanguve said that ancestors were the “angels of Satan” and “evil spirits”; they were no help to people at all, as their only function was to bring sickness and trouble, to harm and destroy. Another member said that he did not believe in the existence of ancestors, because ancestors were people who worked with traditional diviners. Ancestors would only reveal themselves to those people who believed in them, he said, and this would be through the agency of the diviners. Another IPC member said that the dead were resting;
and that therefore the “ancestors” were not ancestors at all, but were “the devil’s angels.”

The church also has various other rules. No church member may marry someone who is not a member of the IPC; and Modise himself must apparently approve or disapprove the choice of a marriage partner. Women and girls are forbidden to greet men by any physical contact such as shaking hands. Traditional funeral and mourning practices like smearing windows with ash, changing the furniture, the wearing of black, and purification rituals are to be shunned. One IPC member told us that the IPC members do not follow the burial customs of “the people of Egypt” (meaning the whole African community). Funerals and weddings on Saturdays (even of a close relative) may not be attended, for it is the Sabbath. As most of these events in the community take place on this day, this practice tends to estrange IPC members from the community. IPC funerals are held only on Tuesdays and Fridays.

CHURCH LITURGY

In IPC church services uniform-wearing members are separated from enquirers and people seeking healing, who sit near the front in the middle. In Soshanguve the services are held on Wednesday nights in the local community hall. Visitors are ushered to the centre seats in the hall, while the members sit on either side separated by gender (a common practice in African churches) - women in red and white, and men in maroon jackets. All men are to wear jackets and ties in church services; women and girls are to wear head coverings, and may not wear jewellery. In the front of the huge auditorium at the church headquarters at Silo there is a throne-like chair in front of an altar-like table on which there is a round seven-globed table lamp. Modise explained to the visitors at Silo the meaning of the lamp: the centre red globe which stands higher than the others represents fire (which in IPC theology is the name for God - see below), and the six smaller lamps surrounding it are the Water, the Blood and the Spirit of Truth (the three witnesses of 1 John 5:7-8), the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This lamp is only switched on when Modise is present at the table. Modise sits on the large chair, often dressed in his high priest-like robe. IPC ministers at Silo wear red robes, similar to an academic gown. From sunset on Friday until Sunday morning Modise fasts and spends much of the time in the auditorium with the crowds who come to be healed. There is a choir and an electronic band at Silo; and music forms a very important part of the services, as does the taking up of various collections - only members partake in the collections. Several collections may take place during a service; and members are encouraged to give liberally, even up to an entire wage.

In the IPC services we attended in the Soshanguve community hall on Wednesday nights, great emphasis was placed on Frederick Modise and his powers - this was the central theme of the entire proceedings. Unlike most
other African indigenous churches (like the ZCC), there is no prophetic activity in the IPC, and no manifestations of the presence of the “Spirit.” There is more restraint in the proceedings, so that one might say that the liturgy resembles a Western, older church service. The services began with congregational singing (only members, not visitors, sing), followed by a short message from the minister (on the first occasion directed against the observation of the ancestor cult). After the message the whole congregation knelt for prayer; but instead of the simultaneous prayer which is common in Pentecostal and Pentecostal-type church services (Anderson 1992a:111), two people prayed one after the other; and the congregation responded with “Amen, amen.” Six members stood up to “testify.” They spoke about how they had been healed, set free from problems and from attacks of sorcerers and the tokoloshe (an evil spirit) through the intervention and prayers of Modise. These testimonies were directed at the visitors, urging us to join them in their monthly pilgrimage to Modise at the church headquarters Silo, where we too would have all our problems solved and all our sicknesses healed. During singing and “testimonies” much mention was made of Moemedi (“Representative”), referring to Modise. Several times people would give a loud “amen” and “hallelujah” for Moemedi, which would be echoed by the whole congregation. The IPC does not have services in Soshanguve during weekends, as members are encouraged to go to Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Oskraal, where Jerusalem is situated, is not too far from Soshanguve.

**PROCEEDINGS AT SILO**

At Silo, the liturgy is similar, but on a much larger scale. On the weekend that our field worker attended, the visitors who arrived were directed to queue in the basement of the auditorium to have their personal particulars and sicknesses written on forms, after which they received cards with numbers on it. As stated already, our field worker had to be “sick” in order to be admitted. After receiving their numbers, the visitors had to wait for the commencement of the service. The twenty thousand seat auditorium was filled to capacity; and thousands of others remained outside. Members in their brilliant red, white and maroon uniforms (some with badges only) sat behind at least two thousand seekers of healing (at that stage non-members), who occupied the front and the centre of the auditorium. Men and women were separated in seating arrangements. On the platform sat all the ministers and the choir. As in Soshanguve, the entire proceedings were directed at the visitors in order to bring them into the church fold. For every speaker in the auditorium there were three interpreters, so that the four languages of Sotho/Tswana, Zulu, Tsonga, and Venda were used. This made proceedings rather lengthy. As in the ZCC and other indigenous churches, there were usually several preachers before Modise himself preached. Congregational singing by members only (visitors were not supposed to stand and sing) and choir items were rendered in between the preaching. The singing was led by
women singers with microphones, with an electronic band. Well known hymns were sung as well as adapted praise songs for Moemedi. Members danced while they sang. Prayer was usually by two volunteers from the members in the congregation, one after the other, with the congregation and the visitors kneeling; and a minister led everyone in the Lord's Prayer. Every preacher (only men spoke) told of how he was helped by Moemedi, especially in being healed. This was the main theme of all the preaching. The IPC has its own particular form of greeting: "We thank God for Jesus; we thank Jesus for the Comforter (Moemedi)." This greeting precedes every speech, testimony and sermon in the IPC, except that of Modise himself. Modise was not present during the first three hours of the service; he entered at about 23:00 in his resplendent robe, and everyone stood to their feet. As he reached his chair the seven-globed lamp was switched on. Modise then proceeded to preach his main sermon of the weekend, which lasted until the early hours of Saturday morning. It is very important that nobody misses the words of Modise, for this is how healing is received. Ushers moved up and down the auditorium waking up exhausted visitors. After he had finished, a few more proceedings took place before the visitors were instructed (at about 03:00) to go outside to rest. Members remained in the auditorium for their own instructions.

The visitors then had to file in the basement to be arranged according to their numbers for the Saturday night healing service. About fifteen of them at a time were taken into the auditorium to confess their sins to Modise, after they had been searched for "fetishes." The healing line continued right through Saturday night until Sunday morning. Some visitors slept in the long queue. On Sunday morning those who had confessed their sins were given final instructions by ministers before boarding the buses for home. Included in these instructions were cautions against ancestors, diviners and other traditional practices, a ban on using the word "fire" (it is the name of God), a warning against eating blood or an animal that has died of itself, and the need to consult Moemedi before choosing a marriage partner.

HEALING IN THE IPC

The leader of the IPC, Frederick Modise, practises healing of the sick without using any symbolic objects such as those found in other Pentecostal-type churches (Anderson 1992a:160). These things he describes as "idols", which he was told to throw away at his "conversion" on 3 October 1962. This is the most noticeable departure from the practices of most indigenous Pentecostal-type churches. Before Modise will heal people they must first confess their sins to him - evidence of the widespread belief in Pentecostal and Pentecostal-type churches of the relationship between sickness and sin. Modise does not "lay hands" on the sick. Several members alluded to the fact that Modise heals "only by the words that he speaks." One member said that "Only the word of Jesus Christ can heal you. You must listen to Moemedi"
who preaches the word." This listening to Modise is so important that ushers at Silo go up and down the aisles waking up any hapless person who has fallen asleep in the early hours of the morning. This emphasis on healing by "the Word" (meaning the word of Modise) was mentioned by many members as well as by Modise himself in his preaching. His healing method consists of giving instructions to the afflicted, which if obeyed are believed to bring certain relief. In fact, he sometimes does not even speak to those who come to him for healing. One member of the IPC considered that Modise's healing methods proved that he was the Moemedi (representative) of God. There also seems to be opposition in the IPC to the use of medical science. One member said that it was necessary to get the permission of the church leaders before consulting a medical doctor, because "going to the doctors is despising God's Word".

The field worker, Samuel Otwang, who attended the weekend celebration at Silo during March 1992, had to line up with over two thousand visitors outside the huge auditorium on Saturday night to be "healed" by Modise. These people had had to throw away their "fetishes" onto tables set out in the basement before coming to the door - cigarettes, alcohol, traditional charms used for healing and protection, necklaces, strings and ropes and other symbolic healing objects used by Zionists and Apostolics, including plastic water containers used to carry "holy water." They had been given numbers before the service and were to queue in that order. About fifteen were taken through the doors at a time. They were first subjected to a body search by a man at the door. Anyone found to have "fetishes" was not admitted and was told to wait outside and return the following month when the objects had been thrown away. Eventually Otwang was admitted into the auditorium. After he had ascended the platform he was told to turn around and walk backwards towards the table at which Modise sat, with a file in which all the particulars of each seeker are inscribed by secretaries before the healing service. Once the sick reach Modise, they are to confess their sins to him to ensure their healing. Otwang was suddenly swung around by the assistant to face Modise, and was told to confess his sins. He, being a committed Christian, did not have any to confess, but he thought that "unbelief" would be appropriate. This, however, did not satisfy the assistant, who told him to confess "adultery." No, said Otwang, he had only one wife and had never committed adultery; and so he offered "lies." The assistant persisted: "If you want our Father to help you, you must confess your adultery." This exchange went on for some time; and Otwang felt the extreme pressure. All this time he was looking at Modise who was staring at the file in front of him without saying a word, maintaining an air of mysticism and aloofness. In order to extricate himself from this situation he reluctantly agreed: "Go joalo" ("It is so"). He had to then say to Modise: "Forgive the sins I have done." The assistant ushered him off the stage with the warning: "You must leave adultery." It appears that the confession of sins to Modise, and faith in his power to heal and the words that he utters, are the prerequisites for healing and salvation in the IPC.
Our field worker's encounter with Modise at Silo raises the issue of the importance of the confession of sins for salvation. In many indigenous Pentecostal-type churches, confession of sins precedes baptism and therefore is a prerequisite for the cleansing and admittance to the company of the “saved.” In the IPC, however, confession of sins must be made to Modise himself, the “Representative” of God, before healing can be received. Only a person who has been “healed” in this way (Modise calls it “spiritual healing”) can be admitted to the chosen flock. There is believed to be no salvation outside the IPC and Modise. The fact that Modise has the power not only to forgive sins, but to identify what the sins are and to force a confession, is of extreme theological importance in an assessment of the IPC. He thereby becomes exclusively the one in whom salvation is deposited, alone holding the keys of the gate to the kingdom of heaven.

THE “REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD”

As mentioned before, members of the IPC constantly refer to their leader, Frederick Modise, as the Moemedi ["Representative"], the ever-present one who is able to exercise supernatural powers and mediate between his followers and God. He appears in their literature with the oft-repeated English titles of “our Father” and “the Comforter.” Modise is a controversial figure among Christians in South Africa today, particularly in the black townships, and discussions about him and his church are frequently encountered in the media. The question to be asked is to what extent he is regarded by his followers as a sort of living messiah, a mediator between humankind and God. Members of this church do not agree in their views of Modise - although it would appear that all believe that he is some sort of mediator. To some he undoubtedly has divine status, and a personality cult centres around him. Modise’s picture appears above the “altar” in the centre of the auditorium at Silo, on shirts worn by the faithful, on all official church literature and throughout the offices at the headquarters. The faithful buy photographs of Modise and hang them on the walls of their homes. One IPC member told us that she believed that these photographs brought Modise into her home; he looked after the home and guarded the property. Another member told us that Modise was a mediator who prayed to God on people’s behalf, and that through him people could know the will of God. He was the only one who knew how to “pray spiritually” (Modise told us that himself); and he was teaching his followers how to pray. Whenever the faithful encountered difficulties they would pray according to Modise’s instructions. One member said that she also prayed to Modise himself: “I pray to him to heal me even when he is not present. He is able to heal you even though he is (physically) absent.” She also said that when she or a member of her family went to a medical doctor they would enter “in the name of Modise Moemedi, who is able to reconcile you with the doctor.”
Moemedi is also used in Tswana Bible translations for the term “counsellor” or “advocate” in the English Bible - a title describing the mediatorial work of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. In English he is referred to as the “Comforter” (with a capital “C”) in printed literature of the IPC, which in the old Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible is a title of the Holy Spirit. Modise is praised in singing by this name, which often takes the place of the name of Christ or of God in hymns and songs which are well known in Pentecostal churches. People are exhorted in every IPC service to go to Silo to meet Modise himself, who will heal them from all their sicknesses, solve all their problems, and bring them success and prosperity. Modise was addressed in our presence as “my Father” by his most senior assistant, Reverend Mphulo, a man at least in his sixties. He is also “our Father” to his followers, and they are “his children.” These various appellations appear to go beyond traditional respect. In the official, somewhat dated brochure of the church (IPHC sa:24) a lady member, Priscilla Malete, testified that she saw a glorious light appearing at the pulpit whenever Modise spoke, and when she looked at his photographs. In the centre of the light were the words in Tswana “Ke nna Jehova Modimo wa gago” (“I am Jehovah your God”). In typical IPC ambiguity, it is uncertain whether these words were to be applied to Modise or to God. One of the most illuminating interviews in Soshanguve revealed that Modise is, at least in the minds of some of the members, divine. A woman who has been a member of the IPC for eight years, and has photographs of Modise all over her house, believes him to be both omniscient and omnipresent:

Our teachings are above the teachings of the prophets. Modise is not a prophet. He knows all of us who are his children. He protects us when we are sick. When I am sick I simply remember him and he heals me....

She went on to say that Modise was the Holy Spirit:

The world will never have true freedom apart from Modise. The world is waiting for Moemedi ... Even the Whites are waiting for him; but they don’t know that he has already come. Jesus said “If I do not go the Moemedi will not come.” Fortunately, he has come, on 14 September 1962 [the date on which Modise was healed, marking the birth of the IPC].

When she was pressed to explain the relationship between Modise and the Holy Spirit, she was even more explicit:

The Holy Spirit came during Pentecost, and lastly when he entered Father Modise. No-one in this world has the Holy Spirit except him; in fact, he is the Holy Spirit himself. Jesus was rejected and denied. Modise is also being rejected and denied, because people say he is a mere person - they said that Christ also was a mere person. He (Modise) is the Moemedi, or the Holy Spirit.

She went on to say that the proof of Modise’s divinity was that he healed people “without touching them.” He heals people “when he forgives their sin.” “Father Modise is my God”, she concluded. “I trust him in everything I
do. God is one with him. He is a member of the Trinity - God the Holy Spirit - because he has been chosen by God.”

This respondent was one of the more outspoken on the subject of Modise that we encountered. We cannot assume that every member of the IPC has the same feeling for Modise that she had; although several expressed similar sentiments. During the lengthy proceedings at Silo attended by our field worker in March 1992 several speakers made reference to Modise in terms that accorded him divinity. One minister (in Modise’s presence) said that those people (the *bazalwane*) who spoke about accepting Jesus into their lives were deceivers. Jesus had gone away from this world and had sent *Moemedi*. People now should not accept Jesus, but they should accept *Moemedi*. Another minister told the two thousand or so visitors who had come that weekend that there was no-one else like *Moemedi*. He was God, because he had power to forgive sins. The visitors should simply humble themselves and accept his words. I have already discussed the implications of Modise’s power to reveal and forgive sins, and the coercive nature of the confession to him before healing. The television programme *Mahlasedi a tumelo* on the SABC on 29 March 1992 had a discussion with IPC members. A young woman said emphatically “*Modise ke Modimo*” (“Modise is God”). She knew this because she prayed to him and he answered her prayers. A former member of the church said that she was present on one occasion when Modise preached that he was with God in heaven when Jesus was sent to the earth. “You do not see God”, he declared, “but you do see me.” His followers would reply “Our sins are washed away, because the great one (Modise) was there.”

In an interview with Frederick Modise in August 1991, I asked him about some of these allegations. Modise laughed heartily and said that this was the first time he had heard these “lies.” He was a man and not God, he said. Another IPC member, who had no pictures of Modise in her house, said that Modise is definitely not God nor the Holy Spirit, and that Modise himself had told his followers that he was not divine. He was God’s messenger, the one who stood before God on behalf of people’s sicknesses, weaknesses and problems. This was the meaning of his title *Moemedi*, she said. When IPC members prayed, they prayed to God and not to Modise. Modise was a sinner as much as anyone else, she said; but God healed him in hospital and spoke to him. He is “special” because he just speaks the Word, and thousands are healed simultaneously. Another IPC member gave a similar view when she said:

*Modise is not God - he is simply the overseer of the church. I also call him God’s messenger, *Moemedi*, because he is the one who stands on your behalf for whatever sickness or problem you have. He is not the Holy Spirit, but is a person like us. We do not pray to him; we pray to God. Some of the things people say [about Modise] are not true.*
CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing, there are some grounds for characterising the IPC as a “messianic church.” The teaching in the church seems to indicate that although Modise is not Christ, he has taken the place of Christ, at least in the opinion of some ministers and members. There is actually no real place for the Holy Spirit in IPC theology. The references to the Holy Spirit in John 16 are consistently applied to Modise. The greeting repeated by the IPC faithful at every service: “We thank God for Jesus; we thank Jesus for Moemedi” appears to accord him a place in the Trinity itself, whether consciously or not. But this is a subject for which there are no certain answers at present. There are many secrets in the church which outsiders are not permitted to know. Modise also told us that God had revealed to him the meaning of the number 666 in the Book of Revelation, and that he alone knew the real name of God. Together with the “Lord’s Prayer” and the secret formula to be used by members, these things can only be revealed to the members. There are therefore some secrets which only the “elect” may know. For these reasons there remains much mystery attached to this church, about which more research needs to be done. Nevertheless, the widespread belief by both church leaders and members that Modise has divine status and is in some way part of the Trinity has apparently not been effectively or actively repudiated in the IPC’s preaching and practice. For these reasons, the IPC is the only church encountered during my current research where the term “messianic” might be appropriate.

The IPC seems to be at least a movement on the way to becoming messianic. Modise’s status in the church is clearly rising among his followers, as is evidenced in his title changing over the years from Ntate to Moemedi. One wonders whether his status will rise even further after his death. To many IPC members Modise has become a divine figure who stands as the “Representative” of God. He has indeed taken the place of Christ in this church, at least in the perceptions of some of its members. He alone wields divine power to reveal and forgive sins; he alone has the power to heal sicknesses with his words; he alone knows the secrets of God and the mysterious divine name; to many he is in fact the Holy Spirit personified. For these reasons, I consider the IPC to be one of the closest examples that we have in South Africa of a “messianic” movement.

In the IPC there appears to be such an emphasis on the person and powers of Modise that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are eclipsed. A curious situation exists in that although God (in Sotho languages Modimo) is regarded as the general name for God - much like Elohim in the Old Testament - Modise has had a “revelation” of the true name of God (“fire” or molo in Sotho languages) to which he claims exclusive knowledge. Members are not allowed to utter this name, except in the secret prayer that Modise has taught them to recite. Modise himself, in a sermon to his followers at Silo in March 1992, said the following:
The name of Jehovah was the Hebrew word for “fire.” They respected it. The word must be honoured and never used in vain. “Our God is a consuming fire” [Hebrews 12:29]. Jesus’ name also is “fire.” A human being also is “fire.” This is the three in one - God, Jesus, and fire.

This type of “theology” is frequently found in Modise’s utterances. His entrance into the cathedral at Silo heralded by the lighting of a lamp is symbolic of this enigmatic knowledge of God. This appears to give Modise a special revelation of God which is unlike that of any other Christian church, and which in fact places him in a position of unequalled privilege among mankind. God once more is relegated to the periphery, and becomes the mysterious, transcendent somewhat remote being that he is in traditional religion. Modise, however, as the human “Representative” (Moemedi) of God takes over the functions of the ancestors in traditional religion. Whenever there is a focus on the privileged position of the Spirit-controlled leader or prophet, there is a danger that theology and Christology may be obscured, no matter how often God and Jesus may be mentioned. The traditional African notion of only approaching a superior authority through a go-between, has sometimes resulted in a concept of a God who cannot be approached except through human mediation.

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