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Volume 4

Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy



World's Best Black Soul Crusader

Dan S.B. Lephoko

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Justification Report

This is a scholarly book that commemorates the legacy of Rev. Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu who was born on 05 September 1909 at eNtumeni, a Lutheran Mission Station in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He was the founder of the Back to God Crusade in the 1950s that has become institutionalised within the Assemblies of God. He taught his church to be self-sustaining and he also encouraged material independence through hard work. He died on 07 October 1985 at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa. Many people in Africa have been influenced by his rich legacy as an evangelist, pastor, teacher and church planter. Bhengu combined evangelism with development which was critical for the black people who were under a repressive regime in South Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa. He was a religious revolutionary who 'planted' more than 2000 churches in South Africa and neighbouring countries by emphasising non-denominationalism without pressurising converts to discard their churches to join any. He was determined to build a movement that would be a vehicle to reach out to the continent of Africa through his churches. The book aims at providing academics and researchers reference material of interactions between spirituality, church dynamics, socio-economic development and political environment. Its contribution to existing research with regard to the formative growth of Christianity in Africa is significant and innovative. The book's target audience includes academics in the religious fields of missiology, church history and contextual theology, specifically researchers with intent to write scientific commentaries on the life history of Bhengu. Based on a qualitative research methodology, the author of this scholarly monograph conducted personal interviews using a structured questionnaire with specific questions designed to draw conclusive contributions for the subjects. Ethical clearance is endorsed by the permission granted by the subjects who were assured of the protection of their confidentiality as well as the published results in the book. This includes the audio-tape interviews of people in South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. These participants served as 'co-researchers' and they represent a cross-section of people who worked with Bhengu, family members, pastors, youth and women within the structures in Bhengu's work. Interviews were also conducted with people outside the Assemblies of God with an ecumenical focus. These include Apostolic Faith Mission, Church of the Nazarene, Africa Evangelical Church and para-church organisations. The records of interviews – as well as written submissions, Bhengu's taped sermons, telephonic interviews and annotated photocopies of primary sources – are in the possession of the author and they were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. No part of the book was plagiarised or published anywhere else, except to acknowledge that sections of the book represent a substantial reworking of the author's doctorate thesis, entitled 'Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy' at the Faculty of Theology, Department of Science of Religion and Missiology, University of Pretoria, South Africa. The author is a participant observer who has been a member of the General Executive of the Assemblies of God, pastor and worked with Bhengu over many years during his lifetime.

Dan S.B. Lephoko, Associate Research Fellow, Department of Science of Religion and Missiology, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Contents

Abbreviations, Figures and Tables appearing in the Text and Notes xv
List of Abbreviations xv
List of Figures xvi
List of Tables xvi
Biographical Note xvii

Introduction: Participant observer 1

Chapter 1: Impact of apartheid on South Africa (1948–1985) 5
Early settlers 5
Two political forces 8
African National Congress, 1912 8
National Party, 1914 9
The rise of apartheid 10
Separate development 10
Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, No. 44 of 1950 11
Natives Abolition of Passes & Coordination of Documents Act, No. 67 of 1952 12
Bantu Education Act, No. 47 of 1953 13
Extension of University Education Act, No. 45 of 1959 15
Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act, No. 26 of 1970 15
Repression 15
Two polarised political ideologies 16
Defiance 16
Growing opposition 19
Sharpeville 19

The Rivonia Trial 20
The State's case 21
The defendants 21
Student uprising 22
Repression 23
Apartheid's last days 24
Churches 24
Responses to apartheid 25
The Afrikaans churches 26
The English mainline churches 28
The Pentecostal and Charismatic churches 29
Initiatives to address apartheid 32
The Cottesloe Consultation, 1961 32
The Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism, 1973 33
The South African Christian Leadership Assembly, 1979 34
The National Initiative for Reconciliation, 1985 34
The Kairos Document, 1985 36
State theology 36
Church theology 37
Prophetic theology 38
The Evangelical Witness in South Africa Document, 1986 38
A democratic government 39

Chapter 2: A prophet sent by God 41
Family tree 43
Redemption 45
Employment 46
Rejection, trauma and anguish 46
Training 48
Job Chiliza 49
Alfred Gumede 50
Gideon Buthelezi 51

Marriages 51
Mylet Ndlela 51
Nokwethemba Mthethwa 58

Chapter 3: The history of the Assemblies of God 61
Early years 62
Changing policies 66
South African Assemblies of God 71
Constitution of the Assemblies of God 72

Chapter 4: Theological influence 77
Called by God 78
Africa Back to God! 79
The cry of their hearts 80
The open Bible message 80
To preach was decreed 80
Moses, Paul and Bhengu 81
Moses 82
Paul 83
Bhengu 83
Theological roots and training 84
Lutheran theology 84
Evangelical theology 85
Pentecostalism 86
Christian teaching and viewpoints 87
Evangelical teaching 87
Separation 89
Pentecostal teaching 91
Common beliefs 91
Spirit Baptism 94
Donald Gee 94
Du Plessis 96
Bhengu 96

Chapter 5: Teaching and preaching **101**
War, Sin and Crime 105
Superstitions 106
Centrality of the Cross 106
Audience 108
The story teller 108
Passion and compassion 109
Power in preaching 110
The itinerant evangelist 112
The Church of the Nazarene in Swaziland (now eSwatini) 113
The Pentecostal Holiness Church in Phokeng, Rustenburg 114
The mines of the East Rand 114
Port Elizabeth 114
East London 117
Healings and Miracles Ministry 118
The beginning 119
The healing of a woman 119
The healing of a man brought in a wheelbarrow 120
The crippled man of Nigeria 121
The demon-possessed girl 122
Changed lives 123

Chapter 6: Missional churches **127**
Churches for Africa 127
Missio Dei and *Missio Ecclesiae* 127
Biblical missionary task 128
World Council of Churches 129
Mission and Evangelism 130
Vision and structure 131
Church planting 132
The Back to God Crusade 134
Ingredients of the movement 135

Objectives of the movement 137
Constitution 137
Regional teams and leaders 138
The Mothers' Ministry 140
The Mothers' Easter Conventions 143
Women's Fund 144
White assemblies partnership 144
Donors 148
Bhengu Report, 1948 148
Eshowe Report, 1969 150
Msinga Report, 1970 151
Lesotho Report, 1983 152
Mylet Report, 1967 152
What is the church? 153
Roman Catholic view 153
Reformed view 154
Evangelical view 155
Pentecostal and Charismatic view 155
Who belongs to the church? 156
The church planter 157
Swaziland (now eSwatini) 158
King Sobhuza II and Bhengu 163
Zimbabwe 164
Geoffrey Bizeni Mkwanazi 165
East London 168
Church government 170
Pastor 170
Finances and administration in local assembly 172
District council offices 175
Self-supporting churches 175
Self-governing churches 176
Self-propagating churches 177
Opportunities for leaders 178

Chapter 7: Tensions in the Assemblies of God **181**
Leadership 182
Vision, mission and leadership style 183
Leadership theories 188
Blanchard 188
Avery 189
Bhengu 190
Leadership style 190
Leadership qualities 191
Missionaries 193
American missionaries 193
Elim Pentecostal Church Missionaries 195
Canadian 198
The Coastal Assemblies 199
Quest for unity 199
Signs of trouble 201
Why did I become restless? 201
Tensions in the Swaziland work 203
Northern Transvaal dissenters 205
Splits in the Church 206
Tensions in Bhengu's work 206
Teaching team and the executive 208
Bophuthatswana 209
Tensions in Zimbabwe 210
Bhengu's concerns with the tensions 211

Chapter 8: The Teaching Team and the Executive Committee **215**
The Back to God Teaching Team 216
Reasons for establishing the Back to God Teaching Team 217
Powers of the teaching team 219
Elders or Presbyteros 220
Deacons or *Diakonia* 221

Chapter 9: A South African Jeremiah **223**
Economic development strategies 224
Spiritual versus social Gospel 227
Politics 232
Bhengu 232
Chief Albert Luthuli 234
Lawrence Tutu 235
Bhengu responds 235
Sociopolitical activities 237
Political leaders 240
Preaching to the African National Congress 240
Preaching to his Majesty King Sobhuza II of Swaziland 241
Threat to the State 242
Socio-economic reconstruction and development 243
African socialism 243
Leadership through education 246
Women in self-reliance 246

Chapter 10: Caring for the Body of Christ **251**
Ecumenism 252
Theological differences 253
Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal divide 256
Ecumenical initiatives 257
Africa Enterprise 258
Campus Crusade for Christ 259
Africa Co-operative Action Trust 260
Federal Theological Seminary of South Africa 260
A call for prayer for Africa and its leaders 261
An ecumenist with an evangelical heart 261

Chapter 11: Homegoing **267**
Final farewell message 268
Death of Bhengu – A sad goodbye 269

Tributes 270
Funeral instructions 271

Chapter 12: A lasting legacy 277
A witness in a turbulent time 277
The preacher 279
The evangelist 280
The strategist 282
The prophet 285
The ecumenist 287
The leader 289
Visionary leader 290
Servant leader 291
The church 294
Money 294
Prayer 294
The Assemblies of God 295
Historical and structural formation 295
Bhengu's contribution 296
Hesselgrave's 'Pauline Cycle of Church Planting' 296
The grid of 'The Seven I's' 296
The 'Three Selves' 300
Develop young church leaders 301
Zimbabwe 301
Dearth of leadership in South Africa 302
Expatriate missionaries 303

References 307
Glossary 313
Index 315

Abbreviations, Figures and Tables appearing in the Text and Notes

List of Abbreviations

AE	Africa Enterprise
AGSA	Assemblies of God in South Africa, also known as International Assemblies of God (creation of the American Missionaries in South Africa)
AGUSA	Assemblies of God United States of America
AOG	Assemblies of God – Southern Africa
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
AFM	Apostolic Faith Mission
ANC	African National Congress
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BTG	Back to God
BTGC	Back to God Crusade
CCC	Campus Crusade for Christ
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
EFSA	Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa
EWISA	Evangelical Witness in South Africa
IMC	International Missionary Council
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NIR	National Initiative for Reconciliation
NP	National Party
PAC	Pan African Congress
PACLA	Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACLA	South African Christian Leadership Assembly

UDF	United Democratic Front
UNISA	University of South Africa
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialists Republic
WCC	World Council of Churches

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Bhengu's family tree. 44
Figure 3.1: Foreign mission boards. 73
Figure 3.2: Organisational structure of the Assemblies of God. 75
Figure 6.1: Bhengu's work organisation structure. 132
Figure 6.2: Bhengu's groups focus ministry. 133
Figure 6.3: Bhengu's approach to his work. 136
Figure 6.4: Mothers' Ministry structure. 143
Figure 6.5: Bhengu's Zimbabwe work structure. 166
Figure 6.6: An example of an A1 Form. 172
Figure 6.7: An example of an A2 Form. 173
Figure 8.1: Back to God Teaching Team responsibilities. 218
Figure 10.1: Bhengu's approach to addressing human aspects. 265

List of Tables

Table 4.1: An overview of the lives and calling of Moses, Paul and Nicholas Bhengu. 82
Table 6.1: Founding members of the Back to God Crusade. 138
Table 6.2: An overview of the leaders working in a designated area. 139
Table 6.3: The qualifications set for evangelists. 141
Table 8.1: The qualifications and duties of elders. 220
Table 8.2: The qualifications and duties of deacons. 221
Table 10.1: Membership of the South African Council of Churches, 1975. 254
Table 12.1: A comparison of the criteria proposed by Hesselgrave in 'The Pauline Cycle of Church Planting for the USA and overseas' and Bhengu's strategy. 297

Biographical Note

Dr Dan S.B. Lephoko holds a Baccalaureus Iuris (Legal) degree from the University of South Africa (UNISA). He also holds MPhil (Applied Theology) and MA (Theology), both with distinction, and obtained his PhD (Theology) in 2010 at 80 years of age, all three degrees being from the University of Pretoria. He has also completed a Management Advanced Programme from Wits Business School and a Senior Management Development Programme from the University of Pretoria, Graduate School of Management – now Gordon Institute of Business Science. Dr Dan received leadership training from Leadership Dynamics in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. He serves as an associate research fellow in the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology at the University of Pretoria. Dr Dan is an executive member of the Advisory Board of the Centre for Contextual Ministry at the University of Pretoria. Dr Dan has served as a credentialed pastor with the Assemblies of God and initiated N.B.H. Bhengu's Theological College. He has also served as the national director at Life Ministry (Campus Crusade for Christ International), former chairperson of Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa, former deputy chairperson of South African National Association for Specialised Education; he has also authored and co-authored with three professors at UNISA; he established the Christian Agency for Bursaries to assist black students to enrol at university; and he is the founder and executive director of both Leadership Focus and Children on the Move, which provides after-school care to 300 orphans and vulnerable children in Atteridgeville, Pretoria. Email: childrenonthemove707@gmail.com; danlephoko@gmail.com

Introduction

Participant observer

I write as a participant observer, an insider, born and raised within the Assemblies of God, who was privileged to have worked under Bhengu's leadership and many other great men and women of the movement.

***

In 1957, I was ordained as elder in the church led by H.C. Phillips, an English missionary whom Bhengu and his friends, Alfred Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi, joined in 1937 in Nelspruit. I became involved in church activities, serving on the District Council, General Executive of the Assemblies of God and the Executive of the Assemblies of God (Back to God).

Bhengu's teaching and preaching had a great impact on the social and political psyche of the people in South Africa and

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neighbouring countries. Through his Back to God Crusade, he, with great effectiveness, called people to return to God.

On 12 November 1974, Bhengu wrote to me (Bhengu pers. comm., 12 November 1974):

> Dear Brother Dan, Greetings in His Name! Your letter dated the 19th September reached me before I left South Africa, but I was too busy to reply and for this I humbly beg your forgiveness. Everything you said in your letter was nothing else but the truth. I felt very guilty as I read the letter statement after statement. One of the causes of our hesitation in encouraging you to get into full-time ministry was not that we did not appreciate your ministry but (1) your present position with its good pay and security [*sic*] (2) the health you have and that of your wife (3) and the children's future as we know we could not give you anything close to your present salary. The second reason is that I personally felt you could do as much as a part time worker. I am awfully sorry for all these. I knew your contribution of teaching and counselling especially in the Nelspruit trouble in Mkhaba's time and I was always aware of your budding ministry. Please forgive me for all the oversight. I am awfully sorry. In any case, I am glad you are now settled, and you will be giving God your best in your lifetime. I was only worried because of your health if you are to be in the evangelistic exercises and thought of your gifts in 'PEN WORK'. God leads His children along. If He had not led you into where you are it just [*sic*] could happen. So He has led you into an open door [...]. (n.p.)

I initiated the establishment of the Nicholas Bhengu Theological College, organising youth and Sunday School Ministry, and participated in the writing of the Constitution of the Assemblies of God, in particular Bhengu's section of the work.

John Bond has served as General Chairman of the Assemblies of God for 27 years. He later published his book, *For the Record – Reflections on the Assemblies of God* (2000). Afterwards, he wrote me a personalised letter in 2003, acknowledging and recognising my contribution within the Assemblies of God (Bond pers. comm., September 2003):

> To Dan Lepoko [*sic*], My very good friend, you are one of the few people who knew most of the characters mentioned in these memoirs. You were part of the unfolding developments I have tried to describe.

> I trust you will find my account accurate, fair and enjoyable to read. With warm greetings.
>
> ***

The story of Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu must be told.

Inside the book, you will find the story of Bhengu as interpreted by me. My goal was to present Bhengu as a man who was called by God to be a servant, to spread the Gospel in Africa and to the rest of the world, so much so that Roger S. Greenway commented about Bhengu being the 'Billy Graham' of Africa (Greenway pers. comm., n.d.):

> The fact that Bhengu was born, raised and educated as a Lutheran, and became a leader of Assemblies of God strikes me as being significant. Because today, across the world, the Assemblies of God is the most rapidly growing denomination, and it appears from D.S.B. Lephoko's research that Bhengu represented the core teachings of Assemblies of God, their missionary passion, and vigorous church planting strategy. The Assemblies of God missionaries whom I have known expected to sacrifice themselves and their families for the sake of spreading the Gospel. Most of them 'live on a shoe string', and they work night and day. If other denominations had half their zeal, they too might grow faster than most of them do. Was Nicholas Bhengu Africa's 'Billy Graham?' Given the times and circumstances in which Bhengu ministered, his relative shortage of material resources compared to those of Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and Bhengu's strategy of planting churches (more than 2000 of them in South Africa and neighbouring countries), with all due respect to Billy Graham whom God used greatly to spread the Gospel in his time, I would place Nicholas Bhengu ahead of Graham as an evangelist in the tradition of St. Paul. Paul's strategy always included three things: evangelism, instruction and training of leaders, and planting churches. In the African situation, church planting was crucial, just as it is today in many parts of the world such as China and India. It is needed also in North and South America, and in parts of 'old Christendom', where many of the traditional denominations are moribund. Across the denominational (and non-denominational) spectrum today, there is a rapidly growing awareness that planting new churches is by far the best way to reach the new generation that feels alienated from traditional churches and hence does not attend worship services anywhere. Furthermore, in many places, great numbers of people are out of reach to existing churches, and

> evangelists need to go out and reach them. Convictions along this line have led to a new vision at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI, USA. As a result, a plan has been developed that, God willing, will lead to the opening next year of an institute to be called the Global Church Planting Institute. The institute will stand firmly on historic Reformed theology but go beyond what was emphasised (almost exclusively) in the past. It will aim to equip students who feel called to missions, especially urban missions, with the 'how-to' experience that will equip them to plant, grow and multiply Reformed churches wherever ripe fields are identified. Congratulations, Rev. D.S.B. Lephoko, for writing a fine thesis based on the life and ministry of a great African leader in the service of our Lord. God bless you. Dr Roger S. Greenway, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 USA.

I sought to present Bhengu as one of Africa's greatest pioneers, from his evangelistic campaigns, planting of churches and establishment of a formidable women's ministry that to this day continues to raise millions of rand to fund the Back to God Crusade.

Bhengu did not waver from his calling.

Bhengu's life and work like that of many black people in South Africa regardless of their status or occupation in life was affected by the laws and policies introduced and applied by the National Party (NP) government.

He understood his calling despite criticism from government, liberation movements and his own people. The strategies that he employed to build a cohesive and successful movement – the Back to God movement in the Assemblies of God – established self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches, at a time when black churches were dependent on support from missionary-sending agencies. Through his Back to God Crusade, he, with great effectiveness, called people to return to God.

The impact of the movement is still felt in South Africa and the neighbouring countries, 33 years after his death.

I trust that you will agree that there is reason to consider Nicholas Bhengu's lasting legacy rightly earns the title – 'world's best black soul crusader'.

Chapter 1

Impact of apartheid on South Africa (1948–1985)

Early settlers

It was the Dutch who built a halfway station in the Cape between Europe and India. It was preceded by the shipwreck in 1648 of the Dutch East India Company ship, *Haarlem*, which broke up along the coast of the Cape of Good Hope. The crew survived the ordeal, went onshore and established a temporary shelter where they stayed until they were picked up by a returning ship. They came into contact with natives who treated them in a friendly manner. Among the crew of the ill-fated ship were Leendert Janssen and Nicolas Proot. Upon their return, they prepared a report which they presented to the United Chartered East India Company, indicating the financial gain that would accrue to the company if they established a victualing station at

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the Cape of Good Hope. Jan van Riebeeck was duly commissioned to settle in the Cape of Good Hope. He arrived on 06 April 1652, bringing with him a charter issued by the Chamber of Seventeen that forbade any Act that was designed to offend the inhabitants of the land, the Hottentots and the Khoikhoi.

Included in the charter was the following (Du Plessis 1970):

> [*A*]ccordingly, whoever ill-uses, beats or pushes any of the natives, be he in the right or in the wrong, shall in their presence be punished with 50 lashes that they thus may see that such is against our will and that we are disposed to correspond with them in all kindness and friendship, in accordance with the orders and objects of our employers. (pp. 19–22)

When Van Riebeeck settled in the Cape, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) became the official church of the new colony. This is understandable as the settlers represented the Dutch East India Company. Other churches such as the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist and Congregational churches were recognised much later and permitted to do mission work.

Another person who had great influence in reaching out to Hottentots was Van Lier. Van Lier was invited to the Cape at a young age. At age 22 he was inducted to minister to the slaves and Hottentots. In a sermon he preached to his European congregation on 17 May 1789 on the necessity of preaching the Gospel to every creature, he said (Du Plessis 1970):

> Of set purpose does Jesus use the expression to all creatures – in order to teach us that the Gospel must be brought to everyone who can bear the name of man – to the most ungodly heathen and the most barbaric nations, to the simplest and the most ignorant. No exception may be made. Jesus has anticipated all excuses. His Gospel must be proclaimed to every human being, however savage, ignorant, degraded or too sinful he be. No one is so virtuous as not to need the Gospel. No man, whatever profession of virtue or innocence he may make, can do without the Gospel: to no man, however guilty and depraved he be, may the Gospel be refused. (p. 63)

Lier was determined to proclaim the Gospel to every human being whether savage or ignorant; according to him, no one may be refused the message of the Gospel. It would appear that the early settlers were not obsessed with race.

The Dutch East India Company recognised four categories of people, namely, (1) company servants, (2) freemen, (3) slaves and (4) aliens (Khoikhoi and Bushmen). Freed slaves (black people) were seen as the equals of those white people who were servants of the company or as freemen (Adam & Giliomee 1979:86).

The Anglo-Boer War was fought from 11 October 1899 to 31 May 1902 between the British Empire and two Boer States – the South African Republic (then the Republic of Transvaal) and the Orange Free State – over the Empire's influence in South Africa. The parties conducted negotiations that led to the Treaty of Vereeniging which was signed on 31 May 1902, bringing the Anglo-Boer War to an end. The English and the Afrikaners formed the Union of South Africa in 1910. The agreement between the parties excluded African people from participating in the sociopolitical and economic affairs of the land of their birth.

Between 1903 and 1909, two prominent African leaders, Rev. John L. Dube and Tengo Jabavu, sought to persuade the British government to address African grievances – including Africans in the formation of the Union of South Africa – but to no avail. This was rejected by her majesty's government in an attempt to build bridges between English and Afrikaans-speaking white people in the country.

British interest was geared more towards appeasing white South Africans who were not opposed to the integration of white people and Africans. On the contrary, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, Governor of Natal, was opposed to any form of power sharing with black people (De Gruchy [1986] 2005:26).

It was only in 1911 that the *Native Labour Regulation Act*[1] criminalised black people for breaking contract on farms and mines and excluded black people from skilled industrial jobs (Lodge 1983:2).

1. *The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act,* 1953 (renamed in 1964 to *the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act*, in 1973 to *the Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Act* and in 1978 to the *Black Labour Relations Regulation Act*).

Two political forces

The coming together of the people followed after the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

African National Congress, 1912

African people were excluded from participating in the political affairs of the land of their birth in 1910. The exclusion of Africans led to the formation of the South African Native National Congress[2] on 08 January 1912 in Bloemfontein to fight for the rights of the African people. The formation was attended by men and women from different walks of life: chieftains, ministers, teachers, clerks, interpreters, landholders, businessmen, journalists, estate agents, building contractors and labourers (Lodge 1983:1).

On 26 June 1955, in Kliptown, Johannesburg, the ANC committed itself to the ideals of the Freedom Charter as set out below:

> We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:
> [...] that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people
> [...] that our people have been robbed of their birth right to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality
> [...] that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities
> [...] that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birth right without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief
> [...] and therefore, we the people of South Africa, black and white together, equals, countrymen and brothers adopt this Freedom Charter
> [...] and we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won. (n.p.)

2. Today known as the African National Congress (ANC).

Included are the key phrases (Lodge 1983):

> The People Shall Govern!
> All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights!
> The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!
> The Land Shall be Shared among Those Who Work It!
> All Shall be Equal Before the Law!
> All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!
> There Shall be Work and Security!
> The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!
> There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!
> There Shall be Peace and Friendship!
> These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty. (pp. 73–74)

To a large extent, these ideals are still a guiding light for the ANC. No attempt is made to analyse the charter. Its ideals are in many respects self-explanatory.

National Party, 1914

In 1902, the Afrikaners were defeated in the Anglo-Boer War. In the years that followed, there was a growing desire among both the English and the Afrikaners to bring together the English colonies, the Cape and Natal, and the two Boer Republics, the Transvaal and the Free State, to found the Union of South Africa. In 1910, the Union of South Africa was formed in order to unite all white people in the country (De Gruchy [1986] 2005:28).

However, there were some among the Afrikaans speakers who were interested in building unity among the *volk* [people]. This philosophy of Afrikaner unity was promoted by Gen. Barry Hertzog and later by Dr D.F. Malan. Gens. Jan Smuts and Louis Botha on the contrary were seeking to forge unity among all white people – English, Afrikaans and others. In 1914, the NP was founded in Bloemfontein to 'foster Afrikaner identity, distinct language, traditions and religious institutions' (De Gruchy [1986] 2005:28). It is not clear whether the founding of both the ANC and the NP in Bloemfontein was by accident or by design.

Two years later, the NP was founded also in Bloemfontein. The NP and the ANC became the major contenders for the future of South Africa.

Decades later, the ANC and the NP became the parties that would dominate and direct the political, socio-economic, religious and racial configuration of South Africa.

☐ The rise of apartheid

Under the leadership of D.F. Malan, the NP wrenched power from Gen. Jan Smuts' United Party, in May 1948, with a majority of five seats. Gen. Smuts also lost his own seat (Suzman 1993:15).

The 1948 election was spearheaded by the Afrikaner Broederbond, headed by Dr D.F. Malan in the Cape. Key Afrikaner Broederbond members included J.G. Strijdom, in the Transvaal, C.R. Swart, E. Jansen Eben Dönges and Ben Schoeman (Wilkins & Strydom 1978:117–118). As soon as the Nationalists took power, they set out to bring about legislation that would bestow power to the Afrikaners and build Afrikaner nationalism. The NP was not the architect of racial discrimination and segregation in South Africa. Under the Nationalist rule, however, racial discrimination dominated every aspect of South African life: political, economic, educational and social (Suzman 1993:15).

After coming to power in 1948, the NP immediately proceeded to enact laws that would bolster and exacerbate racial divisions for almost five decades in South Africa, the effects of which the country is still struggling to shake off.

☐ Separate development

Apartheid not only divided people racially but also legislated job reservation and unequal work opportunities. Black people were to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. Bantu education consigned black people to inferior education so that they would not be able to compete with white people in the labour market.

There are several other laws that the NP introduced on the statute books, including the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, No. 55 of 1949*; the *Immorality Amendment Act*, *No. 21 of 1950*; the *Population Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950*; the *Suppression of Communism Act*, *No. 44 of 1950*; the *Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, No. 46 of 1959*; and the *Group Areas Act, No. 41 of 1950*. However, the following were the most repressive, *Suppression of Communism Act, No. 44 of 1950*; *Natives Abolition of Passes & Coordination of Documents Act, No. 67 of 1952*; *Bantu Education Act, No. 47 of 1953*; *Extension of University Education Act, No. 45 of 1959*; and *Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act, No. 26 of 1970.*

Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, No. 44 of 1950

It was Lenin who engineered and promoted Communism. The proletariat was to be the engine that drove the philosophy of Communism. Lenin's ambition was to harness all social energies to achieve common goals. He sought to destroy the barrier between the state and civil society and eliminate the distinction between 'public' and 'private'. His methods, however, were despotic, totalitarian – his will enforced by the police.

The aim of Communism was to eliminate class distinction and the oppression of the poor by the rich capitalists. Communism promised liberation and equality among all people. However, the brand of Communism which was propagated and practised in Communist countries in Eastern Europe, the Union of Soviet Socialists Republic (USSR), China and Cuba did not promote freedom among their people. Although the ANC was not Communist, it entered into an alliance with the South African Communist Party.

The South African government proclaimed Communism as the arch enemy of the state for various reasons: Communism preached equality of all people, whereas the state preached separation; it promoted fair wages, while the state practised and

created labour reserves in the homelands to provide cheap migratory labour for the mines and farming communities. However, Communism appealed to the masses of oppressed black people and came to be seen as a Saviour and a liberating force. Some African countries accepted funding and training from Communist countries such as Russia, China and Cuba. The Cubans were fighting alongside the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in Angola; Mozambique adopted the Marxist economic and political ideology.

Under the *Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, No. 44 of 1950*, any person or organisation that opposed government policy could be defined as Communist and banned with no right of appeal. The black liberation struggle was labelled the *Rooi Gevaar* [Red Danger]. It was generally said that 'the government saw a Communist under every bed'.

Generally speaking, the churches, especially the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, did not welcome Communism for at least two main reasons: firstly, they found its atheistic stance untenable. Communism did not accept the existence of a Supreme Being; religion to them was a means of keeping people from saving themselves. Secondly, the churches objected to the employment of violence to serve the proletariat and the arming of liberation movements. Although most Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were opposed to apartheid, they believed that liberation should be attained through negotiation and non-violent means (Moller 1989:16–22).

☐ *Natives Abolition of Passes & Coordination of Documents Act, No. 67 of 1952*

All the black people over the age of sixteen were required to carry a passbook and present it to police on demand. Apart from personal details, the book contained information on employment, poll tax and influx control. The pass laws of 1952 were among the most notorious laws that specifically affected black people in the

most inhumane ways. The pass laws were the most hated of all the laws introduced by the Nationalist government. In 1952, the government passed the *Natives Abolition of Passes & Coordination of Documents Act, No. 67 of 1952*. The 1952 law made it difficult for black people to travel, seek employment or reside in a white area not designated for black people. The law made it mandatory for all black people over the age of sixteen years to carry a reference book (popularly known as *dom* [stupid] pass among black people). The reference book incorporated all laws affecting the lives of black people, including the law on influx control. They were required to carry their passbooks with them at all times; failure to produce one on demand by the police landed them in prison. Under the influx control legislation, black people were allowed to live in the so-called white areas only if (a) they were born in the town or city or (b) if they had worked for one employer for 10 years or more. Should they break the service, they would either have to start all over again to earn the 10 years or be ordered out of the urban area. Rural black people or people from another urban area were allowed in an urban area for not more than 72 hours or faced arrest. The police would wake people up in the middle of the night, looking for persons that were in the urban area without permits. Millions of black people were arrested, and large numbers of families destabilised. A black household had a roster with the names of all members of that household and that would have to be produced for verification whenever the police arrived to check the legitimacy of the people in the house.

Bantu Education Act, No. 47 of 1953

This Act set down rules governing the curriculum for black education – a limited curriculum for black students. The Minister for Native Affairs could close black schools not adhering to this curriculum. Bantu education consigned the black child to an inferior type of education. It prepared him for a perpetual position of serving the white man. In short, the black man became the

hewer of wood and drawer of water. In introducing the *Bantu Education Act*, *No. 47 of 1953*, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, said (Suzman 1993):

> Racial relations cannot improve if the wrong type of education is given to Natives. They cannot improve if the result of Native Education is the creation of frustrated people who as a result of the education they receive have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled immediately, when it creates people who are trained for professions not open to them, when there are people who have received a form of cultural training which strengthens their desire for the white-collar occupations to such an extent that there are more such people than openings available. Therefore, good racial relations are spoiled when the correct education is not given. (pp. 34–35)

Bantu education henceforth came under state control. Verwoerd went on to say (Suzman 1993):

> What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? What is the use of subjecting a Native child to a curriculum which in the first instance is traditionally European? I just want to remind Honourable Members that if the Native inside South Africa today in any kind of school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. (p. 35)

The Bantu education designed by Dr H.F. Verwoerd, the then Minister of Native Affairs, was indeed one of the cornerstones of apartheid. Education was removed from church schools. The government was unhappy with church schools because some missionaries did not always support the government policy of apartheid and separate development. Black education was designed to provide black people with an education that would keep them subservient to white people. It was discriminatory in its application, budget and curricula. It was based on ethnicity: Zulu, Swati, Pedi, Xhosa, Ciskei and Transkei. Although both Ciskei and Transkei spoke Xhosa, schools were built for different ethnic groups in designated and ethnic locations. As a result of this policy, South Africa eventually had fourteen education departments: four white – the Transvaal, Cape Province, Natal

and Orange Free State provincial education departments – and a National Department of Education, and for each of the seven African languages – isiZulu, isiSwati, Xitsonga, Sesotho, isiXhosa (Transkei and Ciskei both isiXhosa speaking), Setswana and isiNdebele – as well as departments for people of mixed race and Indians.

Extension of University Education Act, No. 45 of 1959

This Act excluded all other races from white universities and established 'ethnic' universities. However, black universities such as the University of the North (now University of Limpopo) became institutions that produced student leaders such as Abram Tiro who mobilised and agitated for the liberation of black people; he was killed by a letter bomb sponsored by the state while in exile in Botswana.

Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act, No. 26 of 1970

All black South Africans were to become citizens of their tribal homelands, irrespective of whether they had ever lived there. They would then be regarded as aliens in South Africa.

Repression

Men were recruited from the homelands to provide cheap labour on the mines and farms. These men were housed in single-room hostels where there was no privacy. Black townships, such as Soweto, uMlazi, Mamelodi and others, were established many kilometres away from workplaces. Black townships were ghettos with few or no entertainment facilities – these areas became breeding grounds for crime and substance abuse. Family life in the homelands and townships was destroyed. Economic migrants were strangers to their families whom they visited only on holidays or during end-of-year leave.

Two polarised political ideologies

The ANC and the NP established themselves to promote the concerns of their constituencies. The ANC sought to do away with discriminatory laws that excluded black people from freely participating in the political, social and economic life of the country on non-racial grounds. The NP on the contrary was committed to protecting the political, social, economic and religious rights of the Afrikaners and the Afrikaner culture. Other non-Afrikaner white groups also benefited from the exclusion of black people. The two polarised ideologies later led to a conflict of such magnitude that South Africa was engulfed in protracted violence – violence sponsored by the state and counter violence by liberation movements, mainly by the ANC.

Defiance

Following the massacre of the 69 unarmed demonstrators against the notorious pass laws on 21 March 1960 by the police in Sharpeville, the ANC on 16 December 1961 decided to abandon peaceful negotiations for an armed struggle to free all black South Africans from the evil system of apartheid which dehumanised them. The decision to embark on an armed struggle by the ANC, Pan African Congress (PAC) and Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) to a lesser degree plunged South Africa into a prolonged liberation war between liberation movements on the one hand and government forces on the other hand. In the country itself, the war against apartheid was waged in the streets, at schools and boycotts of payment of municipal rented services and white businesses. Those who were suspected to be government collaborators were attacked, some of them lost their houses in petrol bombs and in some cases their own lives. South Africa was burning; the country had become a pariah state.

The government under P.W. Botha intensified its fight against what it termed an onslaught in the country by Communist-infiltrated ANC. Many liberation activists in the country disappeared without trace, some being incarcerated without charges proffered

against them, and a State of Emergency was proclaimed on 21 July 1985 in an attempt to control the situation that had already gotten out of hand. When this failed, the government brought in a new constitutional dispensation for the people of mixed race and the Indian population groups known as the Tricameral constitution in 1983. In that same year, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed to oppose the so-called new dispensation that excluded the majority of the people – the African people.

The church could no longer stand by and watch the country slide into anarchy. It launched a number of conferences, both at denominational and inter-denominational levels, to try and bring about a solution to a situation that was becoming uncontrollable on a daily basis: Cottesloe Consultation (est. 1961), Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism (est. 1973), South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA) (est. 1979), National Initiative for Reconciliation (est. 1985) and The Kairos Document (est. 1985). I was one of the participants at the Durban Congress and one of the organisers of the university student wing of SACLA. At the conference, I presented a paper to the youth section of the conference on rebuilding the broken walls (*Hoofstad Newspaper* 11 July 1979). The *Hoofstad* newspaper was critical of my paper, labelling it political. The church was not unanimous on strategy in dealing with the apartheid question. Churches affiliated to the South African Council of Churches (SACC) opted to support the armed struggle. The DRC supported apartheid on theological basis, and English churches (generally speaking) were vocal against apartheid, while Pentecostal and Charismatic churches opted for a spiritual solution. These were the times during which Nicholas Bhengu and many others had to minister. In the words of Mordecai to Esther '[a]nd who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this'? (Es 4:14). It was for such a time as this that Bhengu had been called to bring people back to God, the people of South Africa and neighbouring countries and indeed the whole world. He was called by God in a special way to bring a message of hope and salvation to a very troubled situation. He called people back to God. Bhengu did not only call people to be reconciled to God but

also initiated development projects for his people, education bursaries for young people to enter tertiary institutions to prepare them to be leaders in politics and business when liberation was achieved and imparting of skills for women so that they could earn money for themselves to feed their families and educate their children and run small businesses (Bradshaw 1993):

> Evangelism clearly states the Good News of Jesus Christ is salvation to all who believe. Development, on the other hand, attempts to relieve the vulnerability to pain and suffering that people experience when they live in deteriorating conditions. (p. 17)

Bhengu combined evangelism with development which was crucial for the black people under the repressive regime.

The socio-economic and political environment of the time was turbulent. It not only affected black people for whom it was designed but also affected all racial groups, including the white people, whom the government sought to protect and provide privileges for. Relationships between the groups were marred. White people became suspicious of black people. They feared that black people would take their wives and eventually drive them into the sea. The indoctrination of the white people by the Nationalist government ensured that they continued to vote the Nationalist party into power for security reasons although they invariably knew that apartheid would one day come to an end.

The circumstances in which Bhengu was born, raised, educated and called to ministry were created by the political, social and economic events of his time. It was indeed a turbulent era, a time that witnessed discrimination unparalleled anywhere in the world, perpetrated by two consecutive white regimes: the United Party and the NP. The United Party (before 1948) pursued a policy that relegated black people to the bottom of the political, social and economic order in South Africa. It was however the Nationalist government (after 1948) that perfected the system by introducing legislative measures that governed the lives of black people from birth to the grave. The coming to power of the NP was both dramatic and traumatic for South Africa. It altered the whole South African scene for decades to come.

To understand Bhengu's life and work and to evaluate his contribution, it is necessary to briefly sketch the South African context during the second half of the 20th century: South Africa during the time of apartheid. It is equally necessary to gain some understanding of the different ways in which the Christian churches reacted to the challenges of apartheid.

☐ Growing opposition

The struggle against apartheid intensified and was fought on multiple fronts: churches, trade unions, political formations, students both at primary and high school and university campuses, as well as civil society all took part. There were boycotts of white businesses, attacks on government collaborators such as councillors and sports boycotts by international bodies. A number of multinational businesses withdrew from doing business in South Africa and arms embargoes were imposed against the country.

☐ Sharpeville

In 1959, Dr Verwoerd, the architect of grand apartheid, became the prime minister. He was determined to implement apartheid to the fullest. There was growing resistance to the pass laws. Both the ANC and the PAC had been planning pass boycotts.

Then the ANC held a conference at Curries Fountain Sports ground attended by about 8000 people. A decision was taken that 21 March 1960 was to be an anti-pass day. On that day, there were going to be mass marches to the Bantu Commissioners' offices. On the other hand, the PAC established by Robert Sobukwe in 1959 wrote to station commissioners of the South African Police informing them that marches would be peaceful. Sobukwe also told his followers not to provoke the police. They were to leave their passes at home and present themselves for arrest. However, in Sharpeville, the police opened fire on peaceful and unarmed PAC demonstrators, killing 69 people.

The whole world was shocked at the action of the police. The government nevertheless took stringent action to restore law and order; it banned the ANC and the PAC and arrested the key leaders of the two organisations – Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe (Meer 1988:123–126).

Sharpeville was a watershed in South African politics. In 1961, the ANC and the PAC abandoned their strategy of non-violence. In an effort to achieve liberation for their people, they now embarked on an armed struggle, forming quasi-military groups – the ANC forming *Umkhonto weSizwe* [Spear of the Nation] and the PAC forming Azanian People's Liberation Army.

On 16 December 1961, a spokesperson for *Umkhonto weSizwe* explained their decision to adopt an armed struggle (Meer 1988):

> The time comes in the life of any nation when there remains only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means in our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom... We of Mkhonto have always sought to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. (p. 146)

☐ The Rivonia Trial

Insurgency and counter-insurgency by the government and liberation organisations continued until the unbanning of liberation movements and the release of political prisoners by the then State President F.W. de Klerk in February 1990.

A number of accused in the Rivonia case had been arrested at Lilliesleaf in Rivonia on Thursday night, 11 July 1963. The police arrived in two vans – one a dry cleaner's van and the other a bakery van. Those arrested at Lilliesleaf estate included Walter Sisulu (ANC Secretary General), Govan Mbeki (former President Thabo Mbeki's father), Lionel Bernstein, Bennies Goldberg, B.A. Hepple, Arthur Goldreich, Hazel Goldreich (Arthur's wife) and Dr Hillard Festenstein. Nelson Mandela was already serving a five-year sentence – three years for inciting people to stay away from work from 29 to 31 May 1961, and two years for leaving the

country without a passport. This was when he left South Africa on the instruction of the ANC to attend the Pan-African Freedom Movement for central, eastern and southern Africa in Addis Ababa early in 1962 (Meer 1988:146).

The State's case

The case was the 'State versus the National High Command and Others' in the Supreme Court of South Africa (Transvaal Provincial Division) – now the Gauteng North High Court. Dr Percy Yutar, who led the state prosecution team, introduced the case against the accused as follows (Meer 1988):

> [*T*]he accused deliberately and maliciously plotted and engineered the commission of acts of violence and destruction throughout directed against the offices and homes of state and municipal officials, as well as against all lines and manner of communications. The planned purpose thereof was to bring in the Republic of South Africa chaos, disorder and turmoil, which would be aggravated, according to their plan, by the operation of thousands of trained guerrilla warfare units deployed throughout the country at various areas by local inhabitants, as well as specially selected men posted to such areas. Their combined operations were planned to spread confusion, violent insurrection and rebellions, followed at the appropriate juncture by an armed invasion of the country by military units of foreign powers. (pp. 165–166)

The defendants

Nelson Mandela, who was accused number one, elected to make his defence statement from the dock without going into the witness box in which he would have had to take an oath and open himself to cross-examination, which could have had serious consequences for himself and his fellow accused. This strategy was a huge gamble; yet, it turned out to save him from a death penalty when he was found guilty of sabotage. He said (Mandela 1994):

> [*W*]e want to be part of the general population, and not confined to living in our ghettos. African men want to have their wives and children to live with them where they work, and not to be forced

> into an unnatural existence in men's hostels. Our women want to be left with their men folk, and not to be left permanently widowed in the reserves. We want to be allowed out after 11 o'clock at night and not to be confined to our rooms like little children. We want to be allowed to travel in our own country, and seek work where we want to, and not where the Labour Bureau tells us to. We want a just share in the whole of South Africa; we want security and a stake in society. This then is what the ANC is fighting [*for*]. Our struggle is truly a national one. It is a struggle of the African people, inspired by our own experience. It is a struggle for the right to live. During my lifetime, I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and to see realised. But my lord, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die [...]. (p. 354)

Student uprising

The government had instituted a policy of teaching 50% of school subjects in English and 50% in Afrikaans. Soweto students were, however, opposed to being forced to be taught in Afrikaans, the language of the oppressor.

On 16 June 1976, students in Soweto took to the streets to protest against this policy. It was a peaceful march. However, they were met with the full might of the state. Police were brought in to quash the protest and restore peace and order. Instead of keeping peace, the police fired at the marchers with live ammunition, killing some of the students including Hector Petersen, who became the first martyr of the 1976 student revolt and has since been honoured with a memorial in Soweto – the Hector Peterson Memorial.

The student protest was a turning point in the struggle against apartheid. Many young people left the country to join the ANC or the PAC, took up training and came back as freedom fighters. Many others were imprisoned, yet others were killed by the state, while some others simply disappeared.

The next day after the Soweto students' uprising of 16 June 1976, on 17 June 1976, a colleague, late Charles Maphosa, and I went to the University of Zululand to minister to students. After the evening service, we were informed that the Student Representative Council had called an urgent meeting to discuss the students' response to the Soweto student uprising. We had wanted to attend the meeting but were advised not to because if trouble erupted, administration would accuse us of having incited it, as we were not part of the university. On the contrary, we knew the students might suspect us of being police spies. The following morning, 18 June 1976, students attacked the administration building as well as the newly built DRC Church on campus with petrol bombs. They shouted 'Away with the DRC!' as they bombed the church. On our return to Soweto on Friday evening 18 June 1976, all we could see was the destruction of buildings and rising smoke.

Repression

In the wake of the student riots, the government was determined to deal with the situation in a strong-handed manner. The state banned publications such as *The World* and *Pro Veritatis*, news magazines opposed to apartheid. It also banned key figures like Percy Qoboza, editor of *The World*; Dr Beyers Naudé founder of the Christian Institute; and many other leaders. These measures by the government impelled the people to continue fighting. The government also declared a state of emergency and indemnified itself against legal action retrospective to 16 June 1976.

The 1977 Defence White Paper set out a comprehensive strategy to deal with the so-called Total Onslaught. In 1978, P.W. Botha described it as follows:

> The ultimate aim of the Soviet Union and its allies is to overthrow the present body politic in the Republic of South Africa and to replace it with a Marxist-oriented form of government to further the objectives of the USSR. Therefore, all possible methods and means are used to attain this objective. This includes instigating social

> and labour unrest, civilian resistance, terrorist attacks against the infrastructure of South Africa, and the intimidation of black leaders and members of the security forces. This onslaught is supported by a worldwide propaganda campaign and the involvement of various front organisations, such as the trade unions and even certain church organisations and leaders. (n.p.)

In October 1984, 7000 troops were deployed on a 'seal and search' operation (Operation Palmiel) in the Sebokeng township. By the end of 1985, more than 35 000 troops were on duty in the townships (challenging the state – churches as political actors in South Africa).

Apartheid's last days

In 1983, in addition to the National Parliament, the government decided to establish parliaments for Indians and people of mixed race – the Tricameral Parliaments. However, this backfired on the government. The constitutional amendments by P.W. Botha's government were met with even stiffer resistance. A wide range of organisations – churches, labour unions, political organisations and so on – came together to form the UDF. Dr Alan Boesak, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Frank Chikane and other prominent leaders gave leadership to the movement.

The UDF mobilised communities around the country to fight the apartheid system. Councillors who collaborated with the government were killed by stoning, necklacing and having their houses petrol-bombed. White businesses and the payment of rent were boycotted. Learners chose to forego education as the slogan 'Freedom before education!' took hold. The government realised that it was becoming increasingly difficult to control the volatile situation. The country was becoming ungovernable.

Churches

The mission of the church in South Africa had been to win the heathen nations of Africa for Christ. The expansion of the white

community during the 18th and 19th centuries into the interior brought with it its own dynamics, as well as conflict with isiXhosa-speaking and other indigenous people. Farmers began to discriminate against their own workers, who often were their fellow church members. Some farmers refused to have their domestic servants baptised and worship with them. It was, however, especially during the 20th century, in the apartheid era, that the church had to deal with a host of problems including apartheid laws, segregation in the church, conservative and liberal theologies, black theology and liberation theology. The church became divided on how to deal with a repressive situation and violence perpetrated by the government in the black community.

Helder Camara (in Oosterhuizen et al. 1985:88–89) mentions three types of violence:

- The violence of injustice (violence as unjust oppression – violence no. 1)
- The violence of the oppressed (violence as rebellion against this injustice – violence no. 2)
- The violence of repression (violence as repression of such rebellion – violence no. 3).

Violence thus attracts violence and gives rise to what Camara calls a 'spiral of violence'.

Violence no. 2 is followed by violence no. 3, the violence of repression in which violence no. 2 is countered by police or military action in order, firstly, to resist the change proposed by those perpetrating violence no. 2 and, secondly, to maintain the status quo. The three kinds of violence were all experienced in South Africa.

Responses to apartheid

Churches responded in different ways to apartheid. Some churches, especially English-speaking churches, were more outspoken against the system, while Afrikaans-speaking churches

supported and abetted apartheid. Christian denominations in South Africa were mainly those that were established by missionaries from overseas: Dutch Reformed, Reformed, Hervormde, Anglican (the Church of the Province), Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Assemblies of God, other Pentecostal churches and Charismatics. There were other African-initiated (Indigenous) churches; other faiths included Jewish, Hindu, Islamic and African traditional religions. Among Christian churches, the DRC became the official church in South Africa in which most government ministers and officials were members.

The Afrikaans churches

The DRC is the largest of the three Afrikaans churches, with 37.4% of the members of all Afrikaans churches in South Africa belonging to it, 2.8% belonging to the Reformed Church and 5.4% belonging to the Hervormde Church (Oosterhuizen et al. 1985:22). The DRC exerted greater influence in the political arena than the other two although they also played a significant role in the maintenance of the apartheid ideology. Arthur Koestler wrote 'The history of the Afrikaner nation cannot be written without the history of the Afrikaans churches' (Wilkins & Strydom 1978:291).

The Afrikaans churches were opposed to 'integration and blood mixing between white and non-white' (cf. Wilkins & Strydom 1978:n.p.). A commission instituted in 1950 by the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* [Dutch Reformed Church] came to the conclusion that (Wilkins & Strydom 1978):

> [*E*]very nation and race will be able to perform the greatest service to God and the world if it keeps its own national attributes, received from God's own hand, pure, with honour and gratitude [...]. God had it to be so, He also perpetuates it [...]. (pp. 291–292)

The DRC soon earned the label of 'Nationalist government in prayer'. It exerted great influence on the Nationalist government.

The DRC supported separate development despite the fact that it had brought untold suffering among disadvantaged communities. People were uprooted from the land of their birth and taken in truckloads to areas such as Dimbaza and so on, with little or no facilities and basic amenities. People of mixed race were removed from District Six in Cape Town to the Cape Flats; in Johannesburg, black people were removed from Sophiatown to Meadowlands and so on. Citing theological and biblical grounds, the DRC defended the apartheid system. Although the church rejected racial injustice and discrimination in principle, it nonetheless accepted it as desirable for harmonious living among races.

The DRC was only too well aware of the serious problems with respect to personal and interracial relationships in South Africa. It sought to achieve the ideals of social justice, human rights and self-determination for people and individuals, based on God's Word, as did other Christian churches. It was also convinced that it was imperative for the church to fulfil its prophetic calling, to be sympathetic, to give guidance according to Scripture and to intercede on behalf of all men. If the DRC differed from other churches, the conflict was not owing to a different view of the situation in South Africa and the teaching of God's Word in this regard. There was no difference in ideals and objectives, but merely disagreement on the best methods of achieving these ideals.

At a conference held at St George Cathedral, there was a heated debate between members of the Dutch Reformed Sending Kerk and the DRC. Prof. Johan Heyns and one of the DRC pastors sought to downplay the impact of apartheid in the country and within the Dutch Reformed family.

Dr Alan Boesak responded passionately as follows (Wallis & Hollyday 1989):

> The time has come to call apartheid by its true name – a sin – and to dismantle apartheid. The Dutch Reformed Church must do it with the same energy as they used to establish apartheid, and we must help them. We understand the pain of the Dutch Reformed Church in hearing these things. We don't enjoy this. Is the Dutch Reformed Church willing to look its history in the face? (p. 6)

Professor Heyns said today, 'we are blood brothers'. I want to believe that with all my heart. But you do not treat blood brothers the way you have treated us, the way you have treated the people of South Africa. We keep coming back to you again and again. We say this in love and charity, and we will stay with you as long as we can (Wallis & Hollyday 1989:6).

The English mainline churches

In November 1948, the Episcopal Synod of the Church of the Province issued a lengthy statement on the race issue. The bishops identified themselves fully with the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference earlier that year which declared 'that discrimination between men on the grounds of race alone is inconsistent with the principles of the Christian religion'. The South African bishops then stated that human rights are not extraneous to Christianity but rooted in Christian anthropology. They condemned the newly proposed apartheid legislation and stated (De Gruchy [1986] 2005):

> The only hope in our judgement for the future of the men, the women and the children of Southern Africa lies in the creation of harmonious relationships between our various racial groups. And harmony can only be achieved if the Europeans […]. But if, on the other hand, Europeans seek to preserve for themselves the exclusive benefits of Western Civilisation, and to allow the non-Europeans merely its burdens, South Africans will inexorably draw apart into mutually antagonistic racial groups. (p. 53)

The 1949 Rosettenville Conference, which was the first conference to take a stand against apartheid, communicated the following truths (De Gruchy [1986] 2005):

1. God has created all men in his image. Consequently, beyond differences remains the essential unity.
2. Individuals who have progressed from a primitive social structure to one more advanced should share in the responsibilities and rights of their new status.
3. The real need of South Africa is not 'apartheid' but *eendrag* [unity through team work].

4. Citizenship involves participation in responsible government. The franchise should be accorded to all capable of exercising it.
5. Every child should have the opportunity of receiving the best education that the community can give, and for which the child has the capacity.
6. Every man has the right to work in that sphere in which he can make the best use of his abilities for the common good. (pp. 53–54)

Other English-speaking churches like the Methodist Church and Roman Catholic Church were also vocal in their opposition to apartheid.

The Pentecostal and Charismatic churches

The Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, generally speaking, are apolitical in their theology with regard to political and social issues. They believe that structural change, whether political, social or economic, can only occur when men and women come to know about Christ and their lives are transformed by the power of the Gospel.

The AFM church and the Assemblies of God did not vocally oppose apartheid. Both the Full Gospel Church and the AFM are Afrikaans denominations with established daughter churches among black people, people of mixed race and Indians.

The white AFM churches supported or abetted the apartheid system. A number of black Christians suffered persecution at the hands of some AFM members who served in the Special Branch. Dr Frank Chikane, a prominent pastor of the AFM church, for instance, was suspended from the ministry by the church for being political although he had not joined a political party.

Dr Chikane relates how he encountered the viciousness of apartheid as practised by his church, the AFM (Wallis & Hollyday 1989):

> The first time I encountered a serious problem with this structure was when I said to my father, who was then an elder in charge

> of our congregation, that I would like to join Pastor Gschwend as a missionary to preach the Gospel to the world. It was then that I discovered that, structurally, this was not possible. According to this classical, traditional concept of mission, Europeans or Americans, and for us, 'whites', were the only people who could be called missionaries, or work as missionaries. Those who were the objects of missions, black people in South Africa, could only be assistants in this mission to their people. So, when Pastor Gschwend approached me to work with Pastor Bonke, it seemed to be a bridge to get beyond the obstruction of the apartheid structure of the church. My meeting with Pastor Gschwend was dramatic. He made an appointment with me to meet him in Pietersburg, where he was going to attend a meeting, and gave me the address of a white pastor of the white church in Pietersburg. When I arrived at the house, I knocked at the front door. A black woman appeared at the door, asked for my name and what I wanted, and then said to me: 'No, there is no such person in this house'. I insisted that Pastor Gschwend had said I could meet him at the house. She then said: 'Let me call the "missies"', closing the door behind her. The 'missies', who happened to be the local pastor's wife, opened the door after some minutes and asked: 'What do you want?' I explained my story again. She told me Pastor Gschwend and the local pastors were still at a meeting at the church. I asked whether I could wait for them, and she said that she did not know how long they were going to be at the church. After saying that I was quite happy to wait, she told me I could wait outside [*and*] not in the house. Feeling hurt, I drifted toward the church where I found them closing the meeting, and together we went back to the same house. This event reminded me of a visit with my father to our district missionary chairperson. My father was in charge of a congregation in Soweto, but when we arrived at the house in Krugersdorp we were told to use the back door. At the back door we were shown a garage where we were to meet the pastor. Not in his house. Not for blacks. I could not understand why Christians behaved like this. Now I understand. (pp. 73–74)

In an interview with Wallis, Chikane relates how a white deacon from the white AFM had tortured him while in detention (Wallis & Hollyday 1989):

> Wallis: 'How often have you been detained and under what circumstances?'

> Chikane: 'I've been detained five times since 1977. The first one was in January 1977, for 7 days. Within an hour after the first detention, I could not walk. They used brutal, third-degree methods of torture. And then I was detained again from June 1977 until 1978, and I went through 6 weeks of torture. It was during that detention that the deacon of my church in the white congregation supervised the fifty-hour period where I was interrogated around the clock. During the forty-eighth hour, when I realised the torture was affecting my mental state, I told him, 'I'm not going to answer any more questions. You can do what you want'. And they tried for two more hours and then got me out of the chains and dropped me in solitary confinement, where they ignored me for six months. But that deacon simply believed that he was doing his work. He knows I'm the pastor of a church. But he believes he's stopping the Communists and the terrorists of this country. Whites in this country are worried about a Marxist takeover; we are worried about a Christian government which oppresses other Christians.' (pp. 73–74)

The Assemblies of God differed from the Full Gospel Church of God and the AFM in that the latter two established black daughter churches.

The Assemblies of God was established as a black church from its inception by expatriate missionaries working among black people as far back as 1908. Right from the beginning, the Assemblies of God never practised segregation in its work. The Assemblies of God always had multiracial and multicultural General Conferences and a General Executive consisting of white people, black people, people of mixed race and Indians. However, the Assemblies of God was not immune from the effects of apartheid. Bond in his book *For the Record – Reflections on the Assemblies of God* (2000) writes of his experience at the Durban Congress of 1973:

> I found the experience traumatic. Having at that time served on the General Executive of the Assemblies of God for about 13 years, and having actually been General Chairman for five years, I thought I knew the feelings of black Christians from the inside. I had spent many hours learning from black leaders like Gideon Buthelezi, Alfred Gumede and Nicholas Bhengu. (p. 37)

Bond further tells of his great shock to find that in his own denomination there were problems regarding apartheid within the church:

> But when our own brethren recalled how as children their mothers had scared them by saying, 'Look out, here comes a white man!'; and then they confessed to a continuing apprehension scarring their relationship even with us, it struck like a whip. Some said they were reticent to extend a hand to shake hands in case their white brethren rejected it. (p. 39)

Bhengu did not allow his ministers to be involved in party political activities for fear that they could be swallowed up by political systems operating at the time. Political activities by pastors would cause division among pastors and congregants and would blunt their message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Initiatives to address apartheid

The church as a collective embarked on a number of initiatives to address the evils of apartheid.

The Cottesloe Consultation, 1961

Sharpeville was followed by the banning of the ANC and the PAC and their leaders, including Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe, being arrested. Many black people left the country to join the anti-apartheid movement overseas.

The Archbishop of Cape Town, Joost de Blank, wrote to the World Council of Churches (WCC) (De Gruchy [1986] 2005): 'The future of Christianity in this country demands our complete disassociation from the Dutch Reformed attitude [...] Either they must be expelled, or we shall be compelled to withdraw'. The WCC responded by calling for a consultation conference of member churches in South Africa to be held in Johannesburg. It sent a delegation of five representatives led by its Gen. Sec. Dr Visser't Hooft.

The conference issued the following statement (De Gruchy [1986] 2005):

> We recognise that all racial groups who permanently inhabit our country are a part of our total population, and we regard them as indigenous. Members of all these groups have an equal right to make their contribution toward the enrichment of the life of their country and to share in the ensuing responsibilities, rewards and privileges. No one who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any on the grounds of his colour or race. The spiritual unity among all men who are in Christ must find visible expression in acts of common worship and witness, and in fellowship and consultation on matters of common concern. Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd was upset at the support the DRC delegation had given to the decision of the conference. He said that only their synods could make such a decision. The upshot of this conference was the withdrawal of the DRC from the WCC, which widened the gap between the English and Afrikaans churches even further. Afrikaner author W.A. de Klerk commented, 'The ghost of Cottesloe would return to haunt the Afrikaner's wayward theologising. There was evidence that, in spite of the silencing, recantation, bowing of heads and deep cognation, something remained. The Church could never quite be the same again.' (pp. 61–62)

The Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism, 1973

The congress was held in Durban in 1973. It was the brain child of Michael Cassidy, founder of African Enterprise in Pietermaritzburg. It brought together a whole range of denominations – the DRC, the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Pentecostals and Evangelicals.

At the conference, church leaders were provided with the opportunity to face one another over the evils of apartheid. The congress ended with rallies at Kingsmead Stadium in Durban and Wanderers Cricket Stadium in Johannesburg, both were addressed by Billy Graham. Graham had refused to come to South Africa unless audiences were desegregated. I was privileged to be at the congress and to attend both closing rallies.

I attended both the Kingsmead and Wanderers rallies. At Wanderers, Billy Graham preached from John 3:16. I can clearly still hear his thunderous voice proclaiming, 'God loves the black world, the white world, the yellow world and the Red world (Communist World)'. Which was a brave thing to say in a country where Communists had been banned and their name used to scare the white people? At rallies both black and white people flocked to give their lives to God as a sign of repentance.

The South African Christian Leadership Assembly, 1979

The SACLA was another attempt to compel the church to address the challenges of apartheid. Once again, it was spearheaded by Michael Cassidy, David Bosch and other church leaders. It was held in Pretoria.

Regional groups and home cells were established all over the country to continue with the work of the SACLA. I was a member of the Pretoria Regional Group with a number of prominent leaders from different denominations, including Bishop Robin Briggs, Dominee Eddie Bruwer and Prof. Johan Heyns (all three are deceased).

Individual churches opened their doors to political activists to conduct political gatherings. Pastors were involved in supporting families affected by arrests. They buried victims killed by the police in the townships. These were the times and context of Bhengu's ministry. It called for cool heads and decisive action to try and make sense of a volatile situation.

The National Initiative for Reconciliation, 1985

One of the initiatives taken by the broader Christian community in the fight against apartheid was the National Initiative for Reconciliation held in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, in September 1985. The conference was held during political

violence unleashed by the state in the townships through its security forces. The focus of the conference was on reconciliation between black people and white people. It also sought to define the meaning of reconciliation as defined by both black and white people in the country. For the white people, reconciliation 'helped to consolidate their control over restive black population'. Black people on the other hand perceived white people's efforts in the direction of reconciliation as a conscious or unconscious attempt to weaken the resolve of the black people majority to throw off their shackles (Nürnberger & Tooke 1988:5).

Key speakers at the conference included Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Michael Cassidy of Africa Enterprise, Frank Chikane, Klaus Nürnberger, the late Prof. David Bosch, Mvume Dandala and many others.

Bosch was a towering theologian locally and internationally. He was a missionary in the former Transkei and later the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Head of Missiology at UNISA, a man of outstanding ability and a bridge builder between black and white people, and between his church and English-speaking churches in South Africa.

He was involved with the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA), SACLA, the National Initiative for Reconciliation and numerous other attempts to bring sanity among the people of South Africa during the most turbulent times in the country.

As an Afrikaner, he was better qualified than anyone else to speak on the process of reconciliation and demands of obedience at the National Initiative for Reconciliation Conference.

At the National Initiative Reconciliation Conference, Bosch presented twelve theses in which he dealt with the fact that the Afrikaner was held responsible by the world for the evils of apartheid (Nürnberger & Tooke 1988). I selected only three:

- He asked the following question: who are the Afrikaners? According to Bosch, 'the majority of Afrikaners are convinced

that they have been engaged in a battle for survival and that this battle is today being fought more fiercely than ever before'.
- He postulated that reconciliation does not come cheap, it demands repentance and conversion; pointing of fingers at the Afrikaner, especially by white English-speaking South Africans, is hypocritical because their history of oppression and exploitation of others speaks for itself.
- He concludes by reminding his audience that reconciliation is not a human possibility but a divine gift. (pp. 100–112)

The Kairos Document, 1985

The Kairos Document was a response to the challenges of apartheid facing the country. A group of theologians from different churches and individuals came together to challenge the government, churches and individuals to address what they called KAIROS, the moment of truth.

The preface to the statements reads (The Kairos Document [1985] 1986):

> The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. (p. iv)

State theology

The document is a critique of the State Theology and Church Theology and replaces these theologies with what it calls a Prophetic Theology and a challenge to the church to participate in the struggle on the side of the oppressed. It critically analyses Romans 13:1–7 which deals with obedience to the governing authority and payment of taxes as there is no authority apart from that which is appointed by God, 'The State is there to serve God for our benefit' (Rm 13:4). The crux of the critique is that an oppressive state cannot be said to be a servant of and of benefit

to the people. Just as the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans were oppressive and did not serve God and the best interests of their citizens, so was the South African government.

Turning to law and order, the document accuses the state of institutionalising disorder and oppression. The declaration of the State of Emergency, for example, placed many Christians in a situation where they had to say like Peter, 'We must obey God rather than man' (Ac 5:29).

It accuses government of labelling anything that seemed to challenge the status quo as 'Communism', without understanding what Communism means or seeking to understand why people would turn to Communism. The document also accuses the state of blasphemy by invoking God's name in the preamble to the constitution of the Republic, as follows (The Kairos Document [1985] 1986):

> In humble submission to Almighty God, who controls the destinies of nations and their history; who gathered our forebears together from many lands and has guided them from generation to generation; who has wondrously delivered them from dangers that beset them [...]. (pp. 3–8)

In claiming that God gave them the land which was taken from the people who lived on it, they were in effect saying that God was on their side, which implied that God was against the poor.

Church theology

The Kairos Document recognises the fact that English churches criticised the apartheid system, albeit 'in a limited, guarded and cautious way'. The reconciliation they preached failed to recognise the fact that different situations called for different methods to bring about reconciliation. This reconciliation is tantamount to reconciling good and evil, God and the devil (The Kairos Document [1985] 1986:10).

Prophetic theology

The Kairos Document continues to suggest a solution to the problem facing the country and the church by proposing a 'prophetic theology'. This theology includes social analysis, reading the signs like Jesus did (Mt 16:3; Lk 12:56). The church is implored to study oppression in the Bible and Christian tradition in dealing with tyranny – tyranny being the enemy of the common good (The Kairos Document [1985] 1986:17).

The Evangelical Witness in South Africa Document, 1986

Evangelical Christianity is an important grouping in South Africa. Evangelicals comprise various denominations and organisations such as the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa (EFSA). In November 1985, EFSA organised the South African Conference of Evangelical Leaders. The purpose of the conference was to discuss a united action towards denouncing the oppressive and draconian laws of the South African government. The conference ended by producing a document entitled 'A Charter for Mobilising Evangelical Unity' (EFSA, 28 Boyd Road, Pietermaritzburg).

According to Resane (2017):

> However, the conference ended on a bitter note as EFSA split into three groups. The three groups [*are*] Concerned Evangelicals mainly composed of black people; EFSA composed mainly of white people and the progressive blacks; and the United Christian Action composed mostly of foreigners who were far to the right in their thinking. (p. 156)

In July 1986, the Concerned Evangelicals published an Evangelical Witness in South Africa (EWISA) document. Among other issues, the EWISA document's criticism of evangelicalism is that most of the evangelical groupings were imported from either the USA or Europe and were therefore not relevant to the South African context but were largely catering to the interest of their origins.

A democratic government

In 1995, the Nelson Mandela government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deal with the hurts and sufferings of the people who experienced the ugliness of the system. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided both the perpetrators and the victims, together with the families of those who died during the course of the conflict, a platform to meet so as to allow a restorative process to take place. The perpetrators had the chance to come clean with regard to their actions and to ask for forgiveness from their victims; on the other hand, victims and/or their families had the opportunity to receive and give forgiveness to those who had caused them harm.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999) quotes Colonel Eugene de Kock, former head of Vlakplaas, headquarters of a police death squad:

> Myself and others in the security forces [...] have been sold out by cowardly politicians – in the NP especially, he told the court. They want the lamb, but they don't want to see the blood and guts; they are cowards. (p. 200)

The impact of the laws and policies of the NP government had enormous social implications for the victims of the system which was regarded by black people as dehumanising and sinful.

Chapter 2

A prophet sent by God

Nicholas Bhengu burst onto the world scene on 05 September 1909 at the eNtumeni Lutheran Mission Station. The mission is situated some 21 km north-west of Eshowe in KwaZulu-Natal. The original mission station church is now old but still towers over the beautiful rolling hills and valleys in the area. From Bhengu's parents' home on the Eshowe–Nkandla road to the church, it is about 2 km as the crow flies; otherwise, the road meanders alongside a huge forest that stretches for a few kilometres down the slope to the eNtumeni Lutheran Mission Station.

We were led by the late Rev. Simeon Zulu, a retired pastor of the Lutheran Church living in the area, whose sister was married to Shadrack, Bhengu's younger brother. Rev. Zulu also took us to Bhengu's old homestead which no longer exists in its

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original form. In its place, there stands a beautiful new house which is occupied by his niece Esabel, Jeconiah's daughter; to the east of the homestead is the chief of eNtumeni, Chief Ntombi Dube's kraal.

On the mission station are some old buildings that include a school which was being renovated at the time of our visit. The first church was built in 1870 by Rev. Hans Schreuder, the first Norwegian Lutheran missionary to settle at eNtumeni. The first church no longer exists; instead, there is an equally old church built by missionaries. We were unable to ascertain the age of this church. Next to this church are graves with tomb stones of some of the pioneer missionaries and that of Bhengu's brother Jeconiah and his wife Augasta. Jeconiah is the father of Professor Sibusiso Bhengu, the first Minister of Education in Nelson Mandela's cabinet of democratic South Africa.

Hans Paludan Smith Schreuder, born in 1817, was an early Lutheran missionary in Zululand. He initially failed to get permission to start work. When King Mpande had a bad attack of rheumatism, however, a visiting chief advised him to send for Schreuder. Schreuder managed to cure Mpande and was allowed to start a mission station near Empangeni. Schreuder moved to Eshowe in 1860 together with Mpande to escape the malaria epidemic. He later established the eNtumeni mission.

Schreuder was appointed as the Norwegian bishop of the country in 1866. Schreuder became a Zulu scholar and writer and was one of the few missionaries for whom King Cetshwayo had any respect. Nevertheless, Bishop Schreuder left Zululand for Natal at the outbreak of the Zulu War. Cetshwayo appreciated Schreuder's role as God's messenger. During the hostilities, the mission land was allocated to John Dunn, but once the crises passed Schreuder claimed eNtumeni back. After major attempts to retain the land, Dunn had to relent.

Schreuder supported the division of Zululand into chiefdoms from 1879 until his death in 1882. He felt that these conditions would favour Lutheran 'state churches' in Zululand.

In 1906, during the Bambatha Rebellion, the eNtumeni Church was destroyed. The church tower with the bell collapsed into dust. The bell split into two halves. In 1978 when Chris Henstock and his father were looking for trees at eNtumeni, he found one growing through a bronze ring, which was the base of the bell. The second half of the bell was subsequently found nearby, buried in the soil. The bell is now on display at the Eshowe Fort.

Family tree

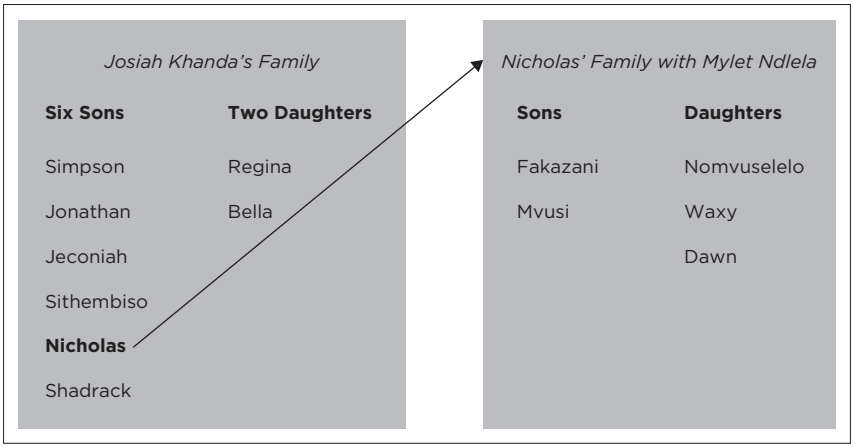
Often when a child is born, there is no knowing how that child is of John the Baptist, so the people asked '[…] what then will child be?' (Lk 1:66).

The genealogy of Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu was submitted in writing to me by Geoff Bhengu, Bhengu's nephew, son of Jeconiah, as follows: Nicholas ka Josia Khanda, kaYele, kaMuthi, kaQanda, kaHlangabeza, half-brother to kaNkungu, kaLamula, kaDlabazane kaMepho, kaNceyane, kaNgcolosi, kaMadladla kaBhengu, kaSibalukhulu who left for Swaziland after a royal dispute within the Zulu Kingdom.

It is not clear who Hlangabeza was, but it would appear that he was a chief. It is likely that he was the same Hlangabeza who had a fight with Chief Gayede[3].

3. On one occasion, two chiefs, Gayede and Hlangabeza, who lived near Untunjambili, quarrelled about a very small matter and began fighting. The armies were camped near the Tugela River. The strife had begun. Some were wounded, while others had fallen. When Nils Astrup heard of the battle, he took his faithful evangelist Samson with him and went down into the valley on the dry river bed. As he took his stand in front of the two armies, he raised his cane into the air and called out, 'Hlangabeza and Gayede, cease your fighting until I have spoken with you'. He parleyed with the one and then with the other, with the result that both chiefs told their men to go home (Lawrie n.d.).

Although in his lineage, one of Bhengu's ancestors was a chief, he was born into a poor Christian family with strong Christian values. His father Josiah Khanda was an evangelist with the Lutheran Church, while his mother (born Nxele) was a woman of prayer who raised her children in Christian faith despite their poor background. Her children became men and women of great influence in the community and in the church. Jeconiah and Shadrack became ministers of the Lutheran Church, Jotham became a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, while Nicholas and one of his two sisters, Bella, ministered alongside her brother as an evangelist in the Back to God Crusade having been trained at the Assemblies of God African Bible Institute in Witbank (now eMalahleni). The eldest of his five brothers, Simpson, was a secretary and interpreter to the Zulu King, King Solomon kaDinizulu, kaMpande great grandfather to King Zwelithini, the reigning Zulu King. Figure 2.1 depicts Bhengu's family tree and his family.



Source: Geoff Bhengu (Son of Jaconiah Bhengu).

FIGURE 2.1: Bhengu's family tree.

Redemption

The story of his conversion is related by Hollenweger (1972) in the following words. It is quoted in full:

> The upheaval that led to his subsequent career was his conversion in the course of a mission by two young Americans belonging to the Full Gospel Church. He broke off his connections with the Communists, the Bible Students and the Seventh Day Adventists. Two things in particular had attracted him in the revival preaching; the American pronunciation and intonation of English, and the simplicity of the interpretation of Isaiah 53. Verse for verse, line for line, the two evangelists built up their preaching on their personal experience. Thirdly, the joy and sincerity with which they proclaimed their message aroused in him the desire to be one of their followers. But he asked himself whether people of his race could equal the two young white men. Bhengu gives a vivid description of the inner restraints he had to overcome before he could manage to speak to the preachers. He would willingly have gone forward when sinners were called to the penitents' bench. But he was afraid to lose prestige in the eyes of his girlfriend. At least he did not want to be the first to come forward, and no one else led the way. But the conviction that if he were not converted that night, he would never be saved and would die a sinner drove him to ask to speak to the preachers. Bhengu's account clearly indicates that it was fear of eternal damnation, which drove him to this step. From his own experience Bhengu now hammers home to his audience the lesson: 'Do not delay the decision! Tomorrow may be too late! Do not wait for another to take the step first!' Bhengu had to overcome other psychological difficulties before he could come to the knowledge that he was saved. After talking and praying with one of the preachers, he was asked whether he now felt he was saved. Bhengu said 'I do not feel anything yet'. The preacher then asked whether Bhengu had any money on him and could feel that. Just as he had no need to feel the money to be sure that he had it with him, so he could take his salvation for certain. 'From that time faith came into my heart. I did not wait for feelings of any kind, but took the Word of God and thanked him in prayer'. But he felt the effect of his conversion the next morning, when he found himself incapable of smoking and drinking as usual. The mere smell of tobacco and gin made him feel sick. He asked, 'What's gone wrong with me? A thought came – maybe this is the result of salvation. I knelt down to pray for the first time from the heart and I said, "Thank you God for Jesus your Son who died my death and now I am saved and have eternal life. My name is in the Book of Life"'. (p. 127)

Employment

Driven by poverty Bhengu started looking for work quite early in life. His first employment was with a white man in the area. His employer would often send him to buy meat for his dogs but never gave him any of the meat. Bhengu says he had grown up eating *izinkobe* [samp, maize meal] which he later hated and forbade his children to eat. He also developed an acute aversion for dogs so much so that he did not want to keep dogs. He also worked as a health inspector at Makhathini Flats, a malaria-infested area. He later moved to Durban where he was employed as a court interpreter. Bhengu secured the job although the advert was for typist. In his search for greener pastures, he migrated to Kimberley in the Northern Cape renowned for its diamonds (Dorothy & Constance pers. comm., 02 July 2003). No doubt Bhengu had hoped for a better life for himself and perhaps for his poverty-stricken family back at home in Zululand. Instead of material riches, he found someone more precious than diamonds or gold. He found his Saviour Jesus Christ. From here on, Bhengu became Jesus' slave (Rm 1:1–6) until taken up to be with his Lord having fought a good fight, finished the race and kept the faith (2 Tm 4:7–8).

Rejection, trauma and anguish

After his conversion experience in Kimberley, Bhengu returned home to eNtumeni and tried to give testimony of salvation to his own people but was rejected by his church. His testimony was not welcomed. The church accused him of teaching heresy because it said it was not possible to get saved on this side of the grave. When he tried to join the Salvation Army, he was refused membership by a white group on racial grounds (Hollenweger 1972:127–128). At many conferences, Bhengu spoke about his rejection and the fact that even in his old age he was rejected from eNtumeni when he tried to build his retirement home there. On 26 October 1985, the *Daily News* used the caption 'Death of

heretic' when reporting the death of Nicholas Bhengu. It said, 'The Rev. Nicholas B.H. Bhengu who was labelled "heretic" by his mission has died in Cape Town at the age of 76'. The report is an indication of how Bhengu felt about his relationship with the Lutheran Church.

The rejection of Bhengu by his church was something that caused him trauma and anguish all his life. This is aptly illustrated in his funeral instructions. With regard (Point 5) to the announcement of his death on the air and in the press should be as follows (Funeral Instructions):

> Nicholas Bheka, son of Josiah Khanda, son of Yele Bhengu. Born on September 5th, 1909 at eNtumeni Mission Station, expelled twice for his faith by mission as a heretic, first as a young man, 21 years old. Came back to settle down in his father's land, built a home and was forced to leave in 1973 and settled at Mtunzini. Died at so-and-so on so-and at the age of so-and-so. Nothing else should be said, absolutely nothing! No watch night services anywhere and no substitutes. (p. 217)

In spite of his bitter rejection by his church, he still valued the influence of the Lutheran Church on his life. In his address on the National Church Thesis at Assemblies of God Conference, Witbank (now eMalahleni) on Wednesday 10 October 1955, he said (*Assemblies of God Fellowship Magazine* September–December 1955):

> What we are today is the direct contribution of missionary enterprise and nobody else's. I am personally indebted to the missionaries who brought about the conversion of my grandmother whose husband, my grandfather, had died. He was a Chief in the Pomery Area and had many wives. My father was brought up by the missionaries and finally became a worker for the Mission and crossed with the Norwegian Lutheran Missionaries to Zululand. We were thus born in the Mission Station and educated and disciplined by the strong hand of the Norwegians as their own children. (p. 6)

From the above, it is clear, therefore, that he received his primary education at the Lutheran Mission Station, although it could not be established with any certainty as to the level of the education he received at the mission station.

One of the people who opposed Bhengu was Bishop Austrup, a Lutheran pastor on the station. He was opposed to Bhengu visiting houses of congregants, conducting prayers and preaching of his new Gospel. Austrup accused Bhengu of bringing *imimoya emibi* [evil spirits] among the people. A case was brought against him at Eshowe Magistrate's Court. The magistrate dismissed the case and said to Bhengu, 'Young man, go back to eNtumeni and preach so that people can stop drinking' (Ndabezitha pers. comm., 09 January 2003).

Professor Mangethe said that Nicholas Bhengu was not well received with his new brand of evangelisation. He wanted to build a church on the mission station; it was this that was rejected by the people. He was nonetheless at liberty to build his home there as he was a son of the soil. He was permitted on numerous occasions to pitch his evangelistic tent from which he preached and many people on the station, including some of Bhengu's own family members, came to accept Christ as their personal Saviour. Professor Mangethe himself was saved at Bhengu's Clermont campaign in Durban in 1956 (Mangethe pers. comm., 05 January 2006).

Training

After his conversion in Kimberley, Bhengu returned to Durban and having been assured of his call to ministry, he proceeded to KwaDumisa Bible School (now Union Bible Institute in Pietermaritzburg) where the Rev. Fred Suter served as the principal. According to Bond, Rev. Suter was the man Bhengu 'loved better than his own father'. Rev. Suter was one of the most outstanding evangelical Bible teachers of his time in South Africa. He was nicknamed 'the man who loved the Zulus'. He had been fellowshipping with the Full Gospel Church under which the American evangelists had been preaching when he was converted. Bhengu was at KwaDumisa from 1934 to 1936. He subsequently went to Taylor University in Indiana, USA, to pursue a degree in theology which he unfortunately did not complete.

He had to return home when Mylet became ill with tuberculosis; she was hospitalised in Port Elizabeth.

The following people were Bhengu's first associates: Job Chiliza, Alfred Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi became directly involved in assisting Bhengu in ministry.

Job Chiliza

Leaders of the church in Kimberley commended Bhengu to Rev. Job Y. Chiliza of the Full Gospel Church of God in Durban.

Job Chiliza was born in Mzumbe on the South Coast in 1886 and died in 1962. His original church was the American Board Mission in which he and his friend M.D. Mseleku were ordained as preachers by the Church. In 1925, he was troubled by words, which he understood to be the Word of God calling upon him to go and preach the Gospel.

Rev. Cooper was preaching on the Holy Spirit, a subject for which Chiliza was searching. After the service, he approached Rev. Cooper and asked if he could baptise his converts, to which Cooper agreed.

In 1942, Chiliza left the Full Gospel Church of God and joined the Pentecostal Holiness Church. However, Chiliza had already established his church as African Gospel Church in 1920. In the Holiness Church, Chiliza and his people were allowed to retain their property under their own name. Because they were coming in as a church into another church, they were given a new name, the African Gospel League (Mabaso pers. comm., 25 September 2004).

In 1946, Pentecostal Holiness Church informed Chiliza that they were going to dissolve the African Gospel Church. However, a pastor named Lucas assisted him to have the African Gospel Church registered by the government in Pretoria. It appears that Chiliza had great influence on Bhengu regarding his philosophy of being independent from white domination in ministry.

I saw Chiliza at one of the Assemblies of God Conferences in Witbank in the late 1950s. Chiliza addressed the conference. He was old and frail.

It can be reasonably inferred that the 'African independent spirit' in Bhengu was to some degree developed during his association with Chiliza.

Alfred Gumede

Alfred Gumede was born on 03 May 1910 at Illovo in the district of Umzinto. Gumede trained as a teacher at Marianhill College near Durban. He was at that time a nominal member of the South African General Mission. Gumede died on 17 July 1990.

In 1931, while teaching at a Lutheran School at Mpaphala in KwaZulu-Natal, he began to hear about Bhengu. He left Mpaphala at the end of 1931 and took up a teaching position at Kwa Dumisa in the South African General Mission School till 1933 and went to teach at an Anglican School in Malizayo.

During school holidays, he would visit the Bible School at KwaDumisa. In 1933, Gumede was converted under the ministry of Rev. Suter, Principal of the Bible School where Bhengu trained for ministry, in the meanwhile. Bhengu had heard of this teacher who had recently come to the Lord and started corresponding with Gumede. They had as yet not met.

In 1934, Gumede heard of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and wanted to experience the same. The following year, he visited people who had been baptised in the Holy Spirit. That year he heard that Bhengu had been invited to speak at an Easter Convention. He walked many kilometres to go and meet Bhengu at the convention. He met Bhengu and another man; together they went into the church to pray and thank God for bringing them together. Bhengu and the other man started praying. Gumede hoped they would stop so that he too could pray but they did not.

Gumede on tape relates the events of that meeting (Gumede pers. comm., 27 October 1986):

> I started praying too. I opened my mouth and prayed in my language, 'Father who is in heaven', after saying these words I could not pray any longer. I felt like it was a real physical hand that touched me. Its power on me was so heavy, it gently pushed me. I then found myself lying on the floor. I felt something welling up in my belly. This power filled me with joy and started shouting Amen. I could not stop and went on and on. The experience went through my whole being and I can't express how I felt. I was rolling on the floor not because I wanted to; it was the experience that caused me to roll. I rolled until I came up against the door. I was shouting and rejoicing. (n.p.)

Gideon Buthelezi

Gideon Buthelezi was one of the first people Bhengu met after his conversion when he returned to Durban. He met Buthelezi in a restaurant in Durban. He overheard Buthelezi sharing Christ with someone in the restaurant. He went over to him and together they shared how they each had met Christ. From that day they became friends. Grandmother Mkhize and her husband were Buthelezi and Bhengu's first converts in Hill Crest, Durban. Buthelezi started work in Durban and in Northern KwaZulu-Natal; when Buthelezi died on 07 July 1957, his work was taken over by Bhengu (Dlamini pers. comm., 04 January 2005).

Marriages

Mylet Ndlela

Seeking a bride he approached Mylet's mother and asked if he could marry her student nurse daughter. She was educated at Inanda Girls Seminary in Durban North where she showed her leadership skills by captaining the school tennis club (Dorothy & Constance pers. comm., 02 July 2003).

Bhengu had been conducting an evangelistic campaign around Pietermaritzburg when he met Mrs Ndlela (née Mkhize), Mylet's mother, a devout woman of prayer. He told her that he wanted to get married and asked if she had a daughter that he could get married to. He had at that stage not met Mylet who had been training at King Edward VIII Hospital, in Durban, to become a nurse. In 1937, he married Mylet Ndlela with whom he had five children: Nomvuselelo Adelaide (first born) Fakazani, Ruth Waxy, Mvusi and Dawn. After their marriage, Mylet never went back to complete her Nursing Diploma. Mvusi passed away on 02 April 2014. I spoke as a family father in Mvusi's funeral service in Johannesburg.

According to Rev. Mogapi and Mrs Ndlovu, Rev. Kenneth Spooner, a black missionary of the Pentecostal Church in the USA, who was the first missionary in Phokeng, Rustenburg, invited Bhengu and his wife Mylet to come and conduct evangelistic meetings for him in the area. It was during the preaching tour that their first child, Nomvuselelo, became ill and died along the road next to a farm. Bhengu asked the farmer if he could bury their child on the farm. The farmer agreed and was willing to give them some planks for a coffin, instead Bhengu and his wife emptied their tin trunk and used it to bury their child along the side of the road (Mogapi pers. comm., 16 February 2009).

The passing away of Mylet on 26 May 1971 was a huge blow to Bhengu and their children, Waxy, Mvusi and Dawn, and the family of the Assemblies of God. In honour of his wife, Bhengu penned the following to his departed friend and companion of many years in ministry:

A valediction to a departed friend – Mylet Bhengu
by Nicholas Bhengu

1. You began from nothing and saw nothing ahead,
Before you there was blankness and at times a mirage;
The desert, hunger and want were your food,
But in you was an indomitable spirit to press on,
In you was the will to look up and go on.

2. Your mate whose mind was made of flint enwrapped in lightning,
Whose heart was more than that of a lion,
Whose horns of faith overcame the bulls of Bashan,
Drank his inspirations and saw his visions, with you.
Forsook all like the Abraham of old.

3. You and your mate welded together by God's Spirit,
He and you became one in one by God's hand,
Both of you had nothing but the love and the will.
Your God, the Saviour, the Holy Spirit and the Bible to lead you.

4. These were your weapons and sources of strength,
Your portion was in humiliation, opposition and poverty,
Sickness also decided to assail you more than your mate,
Your will and faith to bring up your children in the fear of God,
And to work for God alongside your husband, were your food.

5. Toward sunset you saw unprecedented success,
In Africa, where the sons and daughters rose from dust,
To be honourable citizens of both heaven and Africa,
Orphans became doctors, nurses, teachers and lawyers,
Ministers of the Gospel rose from nothingness yearly.

6. Alas, my true friend, the angel was counting your years,
Twice you bore excruciating pain's periods.
Without complaint your faith and will were compensated.
Prayer plus all available care succeeded,
You recovered to cover more for God and humanity.

7. The last count came, the third period of suffering,
Prayer rang throughout the world where your name
Was known through your mate and your labours of love,
Medical science was resorted to in every instance,
But the angel had his last and final count.

8. Wednesday morning May 26 1971
will never leave our memory,
When your life's friend, husband and partner in tears and sadness,
Was left bereft, forlorn, bewildered and puzzled,
Ruth, Mvusi, Dawn, on his side
Under a dark cloud of sorrow, hopelessness and despair

9. But the morning star rose from the Lord our God,
Your beloved is not dead, she has gone home before you,
You are also under a count, sooner or later you will follow.

Rejoice therefore, rejoice with the angels above,
For she loved and served the Lord to whom she has gone now

10. Sleep therefore, sleep my beloved friend,
Sleep for a while,
Rest in peace in the bosom of your beloved Saviour,
Sing with us and we shall sing with you,
'JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING'
Soon your beloved friend will join the march on the golden streets,
He is left to rectify his mistakes and set God's work in proper order.
'GOOD NIGHT MYLET, GOOD NIGHT'

Imbali township, west of Pietermaritzburg (uMgungundlovu the Capital City of King Dingane king of the Zulu nation), was descended upon by hundreds of thousands of people from southern Africa, rest of Africa and abroad who had come to pay their last respects to a woman who led from the front in leading and motivating women of faith in raising thousands of rand for her husband's Back to God Crusade. Her legacy lives on; now the women raise millions for the cause of the supporting the Back to God Crusade work.

Tributes also came from John Bond, Chairperson of the General Executive of the Assemblies of God, and Leah Mangope (wife of former President Mangope of Bophuthatswana); L.B. Potgieter, Secretary-General of the Assemblies of God, preached a moving sermon. In a sense, I was privileged to have been assigned as the official interpreter for the occasion.

Some of the key phrases in the poem are highlighted below to help examine Bhengu's thinking and how he and Mylet responded to suffering, their calling, commitment to God, their tenacity in serving him and their longing for heaven:

- Verse 1.3: 'The desert, hunger and want were your food'. *There* were times when they had no food to eat. Bhengu would recount their suffering to his people and yet they would survive.
- Verse 2.1–2.3: 'Your mate whose mind was made of flint enwrapped in lightning whose horns of faith overcame the bulls of Bashan'. Bhengu experienced opposition from many

directions inside and outside the Assemblies of God, even from his own people at eNtumeni who refused him a site to build a home a few years before his death. However, he never lost faith in God. The bulls of Bashan goaded him. In all this, Bhengu did not lose faith in God. Like a flint he remained focused in his vision – a flint used with steel to produce an igniting spark (Pearsall (ed.) 1999:543).

- Verses 3.1, 3.3–3.4: 'You and your mate welded together by God's Spirit [...] Both of you had nothing but the love and the will, your God, the Saviour and the Holy Spirit and the Bible to lead you'. They put their faith in the Bible and the Holy Spirit to lead them in adversity. They were first welded together in marriage late in their ministry and their complete trust in the Bible and the Holy Spirit guided them.
- Verse 4.2: 'Your portion was humiliation, opposition and poverty'. Wilson during an interview said: 'Bhengu had sold his house in Vryheid and poured all the money into ministry. He had nothing, no wealth, but gave his all to God. He never asked or told anyone about his lack. He would sometimes wear a shirt that was torn on the back and would not take off his jacket for fear of exposing his bare back.' Ms. Creamer and her family would once in a while send him some money for the work of God in Port Elizabeth (Wilson pers. comm., 19 November 2003). This statement is confirmed by Dr Gamedze. 'He would wash a shirt and wait for it to dry and wear it and would do the same again and again'.
- Verse 5.1–5.5: 'Toward sunset you saw unprecedented success, in Africa, where the sons and daughters rose from dust, to be honourable citizens of both heaven and Africa, Orphans became doctors, nurses, teachers, and lawyers, ministers of the Gospel rose from nothingness yearly'. Bhengu exhibits a spirit of triumphant exuberance in his ministry; the fruit of his and Mylet's labours are exhibited for all to see. Apart from their own children, Bhengu and Mylet had educated many others at their own expense. It is these children that Bhengu is parading here for others to see. He is obviously elated with Mylet's cooperation in this venture.
- Verse 6.3–6.5: 'Without complaint your faith and will were compensated. Prayer plus all available care succeeded,

You recovered to cover more for God and humanity'. Without complaint Mylet endured excruciating pains, she had lost her health when she contracted tuberculosis (TB) but because of prayer and support from many people her condition improved. Those times of reprieve from illness were used to do more for God and humanity, something Bhengu must have appreciated.

- Verse 7.4–7.5: 'Medical science was resorted to in every instance, but the angel had his last and final count'. In the end, prayers from around the world and medical intervention in every instance were to no avail. The angel had the last word and she was gone.
- Verse 8.4–8.6: 'Was left bereft, forlorn, bewildered and puzzled, Ruth, Mvusi, Dawn on his side under a dark cloud of sorrow, hopelessness and despair'. Bhengu admits to human spiritual frailty. Even as a preacher the death of his wife left him totally bewildered and in despair with his children by his side. How often do we hear Christians say 'This is a revival' when referring to the death of another Christian. Here Bhengu pours out his emotions under a dark cloud of sorrow and hopelessness, but this is tempered by the words in stanza 10: 'Sing with us and we shall sing with you' and 'JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING'.
- Verse 9.2–9.3: 'Your beloved is not dead, she has gone home before you, you are also under a count, sooner or later you will follow'. This explains his assurance and conviction about a new life in heaven. Indeed in 1985 Bhengu joined his wife in heaven. He must have been looking forward to walking on the streets of gold together; something he tried to give his people through his preaching of the Gospel of love, forgiveness and the certainty of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Verse 10.7: 'He is left to rectify his mistakes and set God's work in proper order'. Bhengu always thought there was a better way of doing God's work. He continually sought through prayer and dedication of himself and the team to God to find that better way. One of the reasons why he refused to write a book was the fear that he would not be able to change whatever he might have written should God show him a better way. This is what he told me in his office in Soweto in May 1985, the year he died, when I encouraged him to write about

what God had done through him. Bhengu welcomed the establishment of a teaching team as he hoped they would help rectify his mistakes by setting things in order in the assemblies. He never flinched from admitting his mistakes openly and in public whenever necessary.

Mrs Jas Mullan noted 'her price is far above rubies' (Pr 31), a very gracious lady:

> Among those who spoke movingly in tribute to Mrs Bhengu were: Chief Mangope of Mafikeng, Batswanaland, T. Maloyi, Chief Mini, Mr Mzutle – in fact so many it was hard to single them out. Of the Europeans, Bro. Bond's word was broken – 'A branch has been ripped from the tree. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away'. (v. 10)

Every tribute paid bore evidence of the lowliness and humility of Mylet Bhengu having brought glory to the Lord. Of her excellent work among women, showing them how to keep the home and care for their families; of her inspiration and zeal towards her husband's Crusade and the wonderful results, supplying tents and collecting cash up to R32 000 last year to help spread the Gospel – all procured from the sacrificial gifts and works of the Women!

Bro. Gilbert Mxhego from East London gave an illustration. 'When a man rises high, his wife steadies the ladder so that he does not fall'. Thus did she support her husband, in prayer and work, in loneliness and self-sacrifice. Bro. James Mullan reminded us all of Psalms 116 verse 15 and of how she now sees him whom she served so well. Mr Ndlela, brother of the deceased, told of her humble family and home – uneducated, lowly – yet now as he saw the hundreds gathered before him he knew God had exalted her beyond measure and used her greatly. A letter of sympathy received from Sibuza II, King of Swaziland, was read – expressing sincere and deep appreciation of the good work done in his country by Mr and Mrs Bhengu. There was a request that the family stand, and as they did so, it was moving to see our beloved Bro. Bhengu lift his head, as he once again was encouraged to go forward in the work to which he was called. As Mr Nkumalo said, 'Bhengu is a Christian man who has been able to cause the nations to come together'. Mr Gametsi, Minister of Education in

Swaziland referred to his visit to the USA and remarked on how God has raised up Billy Graham. He saw here in Africa that God has raised up a Billy Graham in Nicholas Bhengu.

'Goodbye, mother. We shall meet you tomorrow', was the general ending to messages. As Chief Mangope (pers. comm., n.d.) said:

> We are the fruits of her labour and prayer. She was a truly gracious hostess, worthy of recognition. I count it a great honour to know this family. Thank God for what he has done for me through Sister Bhengu. I was always revived in faith when she talked with me. (n.p.)

Nokwethemba Mthethwa

Three years after the death of Mylet on 26 January 1974, Bhengu married Nokwethemba Mthethwa, a school principal, in Durban. She came from outside the Assemblies of God but was saved in Clermont Township in Durban during one of Bhengu's Back to God Crusades.

Nokwethemba was not well-known within Bhengus' work. She was nonetheless accepted and took over the leadership of the women's ministry. She was mentored by some of the stalwarts in the ministry: Mrs Doreen Sikiti, Mrs Hlubi Qina, Mrs Dina Mofokeng, Mrs Monica Tembe and others. These women were trained and nurtured by Bhengu and Mylet over many years of leading the women. She quickly adjusted although not fully accepted by some section of the movement.

In September 1974, Bhengu and Nokwethemba went to Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham where he was a visiting professor in Mission and Evangelism. According to Nokwethemba, Bhengu attended other professors' classes to broaden his knowledge of religion. This was confirmed by Bhengu himself in a letter to me (Bhengu & Lephoko pers. comm., 12 November 1974):

> I lecture and do research work extensively. I also attend classes of other professors. It was a bit difficult at first as I lecture to graduates

> mostly but the Lord is helping me through. I wish you could have had this opportunity, as you are younger. There is nothing much I can do at my age. (n.p.)

It was not easy for Nokwethemba to step into Mylet's shoes. Mylet and her husband had started the Mothers' Ministry. It was therefore not easy to adjust to working with women who had been led by a charismatic and gifted person such as Mylet.

She worked with other women who were already key and capable leaders in the work: Doreen Sikiti, who was secretary during Mylet's time, H. Qina, B. Nodada, Monica Tembe, N. Bafo and D. Mofokeng. Sikiti took over the chairmanship after Mylet's death with Qina becoming secretary. Nokwethemba became chairperson of this work after the death of Sikiti. Sikiti, Nododa and Bafo have since passed on.

Nokwethemba also testified to Bhengu's simple lifestyle. He would not spend the church's money on himself. All the money had to go towards mission and evangelism to bring people back to God. He lived in a four-room matchbox house in the township among his people. He warned his ministers not to live beyond their means. Bhengu did not have children with Nokwethemba.

Born of peasant parents on a mission station in rural KwaZulu–Natal, Bhengu received strong Christian foundation from his devoted Christian parents, father Josiah Khanda and mother (born Nxele), a Christian praying warrior, which later proved to be the foundation of his life and ministry. Most of his siblings were Christian ministers in different denominations – two of his brothers were ministers of the Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church; a sister who was an evangelist was with the Assemblies of God; and he himself was a minister of the Assemblies of God. His eldest brother, Simpson, was a secretary and interpreter to the Zulu nation under King Solomon kaDinizulu.

Despite his poor background, it pleased God to call him to ministry and use him in a remarkable way to call Africa back to God. This confirms the words of Paul (1 Cor 1):

> [26]Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. [27]But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. [28]God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - that he might nullify the things that are, [29]so that no one may boast before him. (vv. 26–29)

History has a way of endowing societies with men who are a notch above the ordinary folk. The history of religion is no exception.

And so it came to pass that the South African world of black theology was blessed with one Nicholas Bhenkinkosi Hepworth Bhengu – a towering religious revolutionary who carved a neat saintly niche for himself within the parameters of human failings.

When the old pied piper of the pulpit was laid to rest at his Pietermaritzburg home a few weeks ago at the ripe old age of 76, it brought to a close the fading reign of an evangelical enigma. Nicholas Bhengu had all the material and psychological rearing that was to catapult him into his role as an international evangelist with some of the stature of a homespun Billy Graham: the son of an authoritarian Lutheran pastor whose pronounced limp goaded him to devise unorthodox means of not sparing the rod, a strict Zulu tradition of authority, and a feature that is never strange to black rural families – poverty (Tutu 1986:112–113).

Chapter 3

The history of the Assemblies of God

Other people have also written on the history of the Assemblies of God – they include:

- James Mullan, *Early History – Assemblies of God South Africa*. James Mullan was an Irish missionary to South Africa and the founder of the so-called White (Group) Assemblies of God.
- John Bond, *A General History of the Assemblies of God*. He was the Chairman of the General Executive of the Assemblies of God for 27 years and one of the leaders of the White Assemblies of God work.
- Edgar D. Pettenger, *Republic of South Africa*. He was one of the early American missionaries to South Africa.
- C.A. Chawner, *Review of the Development of the Assemblies of God Movement in Southern Africa*[4]. He was a Canadian missionary of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

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4. Including some notes concerning the Pentecostal work in the early years.

I chose to write about the history of the Assemblies of God which was commissioned by the General Executive. This history was approved and endorsed as the true history of the Assemblies of God. There have been several other developments that could be included as part of this history, however space would not allow.

Early years

Andrew Murray's teaching on the baptism of the Spirit was of great influence on the Pentecostal Movement in South Africa. At its inception, Pentecostalism in the United States of America was dogged by racism. Seymour who was a student of Parham's Bible School in Houston was not permitted to attend classes with white people; instead, he was allowed to sit in the hallway and listen to the lectures through the door in order to remain segregated from the white students (Hamilton 2008:8). Oliverio (2012) remarks:

> Early Pentecostal theology inherited its core doctrines and habits from four streams of Anglo-American pietistic Christian faith and practice: the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, the broader legacy of American revivalism and radical Evangelism, the Keswick movement and the coalition of premillennialists. (p. 19)

Murray was a Scott who had come to South Africa in 1838 with his brother John. In South Africa, he worked with the Dutch Reformed Church as a minister (Hollenweger 1972):

> The former is that work of the Holy Spirit, by which He convinces us of sin, leads to repentance and faith in Christ, and imparts a new nature. Through the Spirit God thus fulfils the promise: 'I will put a new spirit within you'. The believer is now a child of God, a temple ready for the Spirit to dwell in. where faith claims it, the second half of the promise is fulfilled as surely as the first [...] How are these two parts of the Divine promise fulfilled? Simultaneously or successively? [...] From God's side the twofold gift is simultaneous. The Spirit is not divided [...] and yet we have indications in Scripture that there may be circumstances, dependant either on the enduement of the preacher or the faith of the hearers, in which the two halves of the promise are

> not so closely linked [...] [*here follows a discussion on the relevant passages in Acts*]. When the standard of spiritual life in a Church is sickly and low, [...] we must not wonder that, even where God gives His Spirit, He will be known and experienced only as the Spirit of regeneration. (p. 114)

This baptism of the Spirit, which is 'something higher' and 'different' from conversion, is imparted 'through laying on of hands and prayer' (Hollenweger 1972:115).

The work of the Assemblies of God of South Africa can be dated back to March 1907. This was the date when Charles William Chawner arrived in Cape Town from Canada to take up his life's work in South Africa.

Chawner made his way from Cape Town to De Aar and then to Ladysmith in Natal. Then, he went to Weenen and from there to Zululand. He settled for approximately two years in Vryheid. After a fruitful ministry there, he moved to Morgenzon in southern-eastern Transvaal.

Feeling that the Lord wanted him to return to Canada for his wife and family, he moved on to Pretoria and Johannesburg and in both places he ministered for a very brief time.

In 1914, he returned to Toronto, Canada, and was reunited with his family. He spent a short time ministering and testifying about the work in Zululand and then returned to South Africa together with his wife and two children.

His son's name was Charles Austin Chawner, and he grew up in Zululand and shared the privations of missionary life with his parents.

Chawner's first introductory meeting with gold miners in the Johannesburg mining compound elicited the following response: 'Hm! He is one of us'. This was a unique response to the introduction of this pioneer missionary of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Only a few white people could be afforded that status of being accepted as 'one of us'. Chawner planted hundreds of churches in South Africa, Mozambique and

Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In Mozambique alone, he established close to 300 churches. Chawner was an author, translator and printer. Chawner was a linguist and could speak, write and translate in six different languages. He spoke Shangaan fluently and together with his wife Ingrid wrote many songs, some in Shangaan. Chawner attained several university degrees by correspondence and was awarded an honorary doctorate degree by an American college. Despite these achievements, he was modest and never mentioned them. Chawner served as the general secretary, treasurer and later the chairman of the Assemblies of God.

Austin Chawner became an outstanding linguist. He developed into a diligent worker in the mission field and in later years played a very important role in the growth of the Assemblies of God. He, ultimately, became an executive member and shared the posts of general secretary and also chairman together with others.

In 1908, Mr and Mrs R.M. Turney, who had been in the Baptist ministry in the USA, were filled with the Spirit during the great Pentecostal outpouring. They felt led to travel to South Africa and to engage in missionary work. They established a mission station at Doornkop, in the Middleburg District of the Transvaal. God blessed their ministry there with an outpouring of the Spirit.

Later in the same year (in 1908), they were joined by Miss Hannah A. James from England. A very good work among the Pedi people was soon built up in the Middleburg area.

Bro. R.M. Turney visited Pretoria and gathered a group of people which became the nucleus of an assembly, known as the Pentecostal Assembly. He pastored this work for some time, and he entrusted its oversight to Archibald H. Cooper, who later became one of the founders of the Full Gospel Church. From this assembly, workers were ordained and sent out, among them Bro. Stoddard, who later went to India as a missionary. He had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit prior to the 1906 outpouring of the Spirit, while walking along a country road in Scotland.

The name ‘Assemblies of God’ was not used by these early workers as this name had not yet been coined. However, it is quite a scriptural name and serves to show that the various Assemblies of God’s people in southern Africa are independent units brought into being by the operation of the Spirit of God, through the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that each of these Assemblies of God’s people being independent of each other is not a mere sectarian organisation as a whole but testifies to the oneness of the Body of Christ as composed of ALL believers.

When the name ‘Assemblies of God’ was adopted by a Conference of Workers, representing a good number of independent assemblies, meeting at Hot Springs, Arkansas, USA, the name immediately appealed to many people throughout the Christian world.

Mr and Mrs Turney, being from USA, felt that it would be good to link up with the newly formed ‘Assemblies of God’ in USA. They applied for recognition as missionaries and this was granted.

Mr and Mrs J.H. Law came to South Africa and joined with the new work, as also did Mrs A. Richards and her son, John S. Richards. Then, Mr and Mrs Charles J.H. Bennett from Assemblies of God in England linked up with the work.

Immediately after being granted recognition by the newly formed Assemblies of God in USA, Mr and Mrs Turney registered the South African work with the South African government as the ‘Assemblies of God’.

Until 1935, the South African ‘Assemblies of God’ operated almost exclusively among the non-Europeans. In that year, however, a decision was taken to give recognition to brethren and assemblies working among the Europeans. The first to link up were Mr Louis B. Potgieter, and Mr and Mrs W.F. Mullan. This was in the early part of 1936.

At the General Conference held in Johannesburg on 30 December 1936, the following were elected to executive

office: Chairman – W.F. Mullan; Secretary/Treasurer – C.J.H. Bennett; and as members – J.S. Richards, W.J. Gillespie and Mrs A.R. Scoble.

On 26 July 1929, Bro. C. Austin Chawner became the proud owner of a small printing press, shipped out to him from Canada. It was installed at the mission station at Shingwedzi, near Louis Trichardt. After a few years, he thought of moving the printing press to Lourenco Marques (Maputo). He discussed the matter with Bro. H.C. Phillips, who also was keenly interested in printing. The discussion resulted in the small printing press being moved to Nelspruit in 1938; additional printing presses were added in 1939, and the press became known as the Emmanuel Press. The Emmanuel Press has been a tremendous success and is today a flourishing work for God, under the direction of David Newington.

Early in 1937, Bro. H.C. Phillips discussed with Bro. W.F. Mullan the possibility of the Emmanuel Mission which Phillips represented, linking in fellowship with the Assemblies of God. Certain difficulties to a merger of this nature were obvious. The Emmanuel Mission was linked with certain bodies in England and held properties in trust on their behalf. These overseas bodies wanted assurance that such properties were not endangered. The Assemblies of God had a policy of central government, and this involved property holding. A two-year trial period (in 1937 and 1938) was agreed upon.

■ Changing policies

The General Conference in December 1938 was held in Nelspruit, and at this conference, the decision had to be made regarding the association and fellowship of the Emmanuel Mission with the Assemblies of God.

A historic moment was reached on 14 December 1938. The Chairman, W.F. Mullan, requested the Secretary, C. Austin Chawner, to meet with him during the lunch period. They sat facing each other on the sidewalk of the gardens at the Emmanuel Mission.

Bro. W.F. Mullan drew a large circle in the dust, with several smaller circles inside the large one. The large circle, he explained, represented the Assemblies of God of South Africa. The smaller circles represented the various sections of the general body, namely the Canadian Section, the American Section and so on.

They felt that the time had now come to amend the existing policy of the Assemblies of God, and to give all sections complete autonomy, with the right to hold their own properties and govern their own affairs relative to their overseas boards.

When the matter was explained to the conference, the change of policy plan was adopted unanimously, and Bro. H.C. Phillips declared: 'This is a very real and wonderful decision, for it has removed all barriers to continued fellowship and cooperation'. Later, it was decided to use the term 'Fellowships' rather than 'Sections' or 'Divisions'.

During the ensuing years, the work of the Assemblies of God has grown very rapidly from a mere handful to approximately 1000 ministers, involving Bantu, mixed race, Indian, European and now Chinese ministers, and many, many thousands of members:

> When an acorn is planted in the ground, it germinates and slowly grows until it becomes a great strong Oak. In its early stages, it was not called an Oak tree, but when it developed and grew the name was bestowed upon it. (n.p.)

So was the case with the Assemblies of God of South Africa. In the beginning, a few workers dedicated themselves to the task of winning men to Christ. The name was not given at the beginning but when development took place and workers and assemblies grew in number, the name 'Assemblies of God' became attached.

The labours of the early pioneers have been rewarded. Some planted, some watered, but 'God gave the increase' (1 Cor 3:6). Praise His Wonderful Name. The work of the Assemblies of God was now growing very rapidly. The work among the

Europeans was developing and many places hitherto untouched were being opened.

In the first brief outline of the story of the early history of the Assemblies of God of South Africa, the year 1938 was reached. At the end of that year, the Emmanuel Mission became an integral part of the Assemblies of God of South Africa. This merger brought into closer fellowship such men as Hubert C. Phillips, James E. Mullan, Nicholas B.H. Bhengu, Alfred H.L. Gumede, Gideon Buthelezi and others who played important roles in the building up of the Assemblies of God:

- Hubert C. Phillips. He had been in the service of the Lord for many years, not only in South Africa but also in England. James E. Mullan had been a missionary in the Belgian Congo (as it was then known) and was an associate of W.F.P. Burton in the Congo Evangelistic Mission since 1926, and before that had been active in ministry in England.
- James E. Mullan. He watched over newly formed assemblies and the new workers, infusing into them some of the zeal which was his own impelling force. Looking back at the marvellous work which he accomplished, and noting the health and strength which he exhibited, the only conclusion which one can arrive at is that 'This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes' (Ps 118:23). What God did among the Europeans through James E. Mullan was repeated among the Africans through the ministry of Nicholas B.H. Bhengu who was being greatly used by the Lord in very large tent campaigns. The Lord seemed to have placed his hand upon James E. Mullan, who with an untiring zeal traversed the country from north to south and from east to west, and with an enthusiastic devotion to the cause of the Lord, unmatched by any, opened assemblies and encouraged and sent workers into the field. At these great tent meetings, many thousands gathered, and wonderful miracles of healing were taking place and countless numbers of souls were finding Christ as Saviour and Lord.
- Nicholas B.H. Bhengu. He was born at eNtumeni in Zululand (near Eshowe). He was converted under the ministry of two young Americans. He attended the S.A.G.M. Bible School in

the Durban area. After leaving the Bible School, he became a court interpreter for a very brief period. His heart was in the Lord's work, and he linked up with the Emmanuel Mission, and thus became part of the Assemblies of God together with the other members of the Emmanuel Mission. His outstanding ministry bore the imprint of the hand of the Lord, and soon he became known as the 'black Billy Graham of South Africa'. At this point, it is not necessary to go into more detail concerning this outstanding man of God. Others much more capable than the writer of this article will take up the story of the great 'Back to God Crusade' which is very closely linked with the life story of Nicholas Bhengu. It is hoped that men who were closely linked with Bro. Bhengu and the Back to God Crusade will provide the material needed and desired.

- Alfred H.L. Gumede. Alfred Gumede was born on 03 May 1910 at Illovo in the district of Umzinto. Gumede trained as a teacher at Marianhill College near Durban. He was at that time a nominal member of the South African General Mission. He joined the Emmanuel Mission of H.C. Phillips and later the Assemblies of God together with Bhengu and Buthelezi. Gumede was a Bible School teacher of note and was also known as Prince of Preachers.
- Gideon Buthelezi. Gideon Buthelezi was one of the first people Bhengu met after his conversion when he returned to Durban. He met Buthelezi in a restaurant in Durban. He overheard Buthelezi sharing Christ with someone in the restaurant. As it was with Bhengu and Gumede, he also joined the Emmanuel Mission of H.C. Phillips and later the Assemblies of God with them. He supported Bhengu financially when Bhengu moved to Port Elizabeth in 1945.
- Others. Sony Koch, an ex-army sergeant major, launched out to Tzaneen and later to Durban. Charles Enerson, a fitter on the SA Railways from East London, and Paul Lange, a bank teller from Port Elizabeth, both elders in these assemblies, launched out in full-time service, Bro. Enerson to Queenstown to establish a new assembly and Bro. Lange remaining in Port Elizabeth. Others followed later. These brethren will take up their own stories in future articles.

The fires of revival were spreading far and wide, and assemblies were being established; workers were enthused and were going out to win their fellow men; and the great 'Back to God Crusade' became instrumental in gathering in many thousands of people into the Kingdom of God.

Work among the Indians and people of mixed race began to develop; assemblies were established under the ministry of Stephen Govender among the Indians in Natal, and Robert Jacobs among the people of mixed race in the Transvaal. There were also many other excellent workers among the people of mixed race in the Cape and elsewhere.

In the mid-1930s, Pastor F. Langeland-Hansen and his wife launched out in work among the people of mixed race and people of Indian origin. The Bethshan Gospel Mission, Sydenham, Durban, was the means of giving expression to their desire that the people might come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour.

Finding a great need for the welfare of the children of the area, the Bethshan Children's Home was started. The Lord set his blessing upon the work, and it is a testimony to the faithfulness of God and the dedication of Bro. and Sis. Langeland-Hansen. Praise God for the work at Bethshan.

With the work growing all over the country, a large conference ground became a pressing need. In this connection, Fred H. Burke, a missionary from USA, felt the leading of the Lord to secure a small farm in the Witbank district. On this land, he built a house for himself, and other buildings to be used in his work as a missionary, plus certain dwellings for some of his family.

Then in 1951, he donated a portion of the ground to the South African Assemblies of God and a similar portion to the American missionary section. One portion would be used as a conference ground and the other as a Bible School, a project in which Bro. Burke and the American missionaries were keenly interested. The conference ground has been a great blessing to the work,

and we are deeply grateful to Bro. Burke for the donation of the ground for this purpose.

Some of the American missionaries representing the Foreign Missions Department at Springfield, Missouri, submitted a letter on 27 July 1964, tendering their resignations from the South African Assemblies of God. Their letter intimated that this action was taken with the approval of the Foreign Missions Department Council of the Assemblies of God in USA. They felt that the time was opportune to commence their own work.

It would have given us great pleasure to have had the American missionaries remain in fellowship with us, but as this was not possible, we were compelled to accept the decision to separate as something we could not alter. However, we are now glad to report that they, as well as ourselves, have made great strides in the Lord's work. It is to our mutual advantage to cooperate in fellowship and understanding on every possible occasion, and this is what is being done.

Since then, the Assemblies of God work has continued to grow steadily, and new assemblies have been opened up and church buildings erected.

It is almost impossible to talk about the Assemblies of God without also talking about Bhengu. He came into the Assemblies of God with his friends, Alfred Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi. In 1937, Bhengu saw an advertisement for a teacher in *Ubaqa*, a Christian magazine in Pietermaritzburg. It had been placed by Rev. Hubert Phillips, an English missionary from the Elim Churches of England, a Pentecostal denomination. Rev. Phillips had established the Emmanuel Mission in Nelspruit in 1925.

South African Assemblies of God

At a conference of missionaries from the USA, Ireland, Britain, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden and other parts of the world held in Shingwedzi in 1932, with the consent of their home councils,

it was decided to form a South African Chapter of the Assemblies of God. At this conference, the following Constitutional Declaration was adopted (*Action* magazine October 1972):

> Whereas the Councils at Springfield, US America, and London, Ontario, Canada, have sanctioned the dissolving of the Joint Field Council and the forming of a self-governing field Organisation, subject to the conditions attached hereto; and, whereas the Joint Field Council had been dissolved in order to form the new body; therefore, be it resolved, that we, a body of Pentecostal Missionaries representing the Overseas Councils at Springfield, Missouri, US America; London, England; Zurich, Switzerland; and London, Ontario, Canada; and our co-workers here in South Africa, recognise ourselves as a cooperative fellowship of Missionaries, Christian workers and believers from the local assemblies, to be known as the 'South African Council of the Assemblies of God' whose purpose is to work in complete harmony, cooperation and fellowship with the councils of the Assemblies of God in other lands, for the promulgation of the Whole Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Southern territories of Africa, and for the promoting of scriptural methods, unity and fellowship in the work established throughout these territories; and be it further resolved that this field Organisation take over the entire constituency and work as well as the properties, rights and privileges of the Joint Field Council, which has been dissolved. Dated at Shingwedzi Mission Station, Zoutpansberg District, North Eastern Transvaal, this third day October 1932. The suggested Constitution was then adopted during the sessions of this October 1932 General Conference. Brother C.J.H Bennett of the Assemblies of God in Great Britain was elected Superintendent and Brother C. Austin Chawner of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada elected Secretary. I have the original document in my possession. (n.p.)

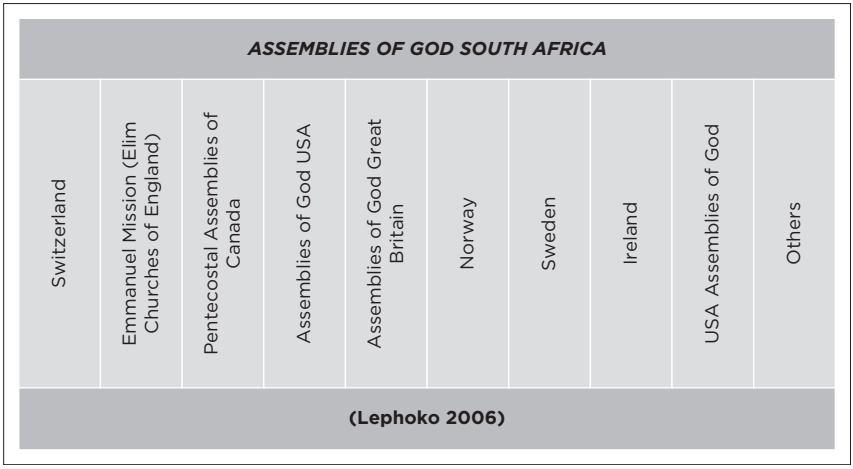
In this structure, Bhengu and his friends found an umbrella body that would allow them to preach the Gospel without any hindrance.

Constitution of the Assemblies of God

The Constitution empowers the formation of groups (Appendix 1 Constitution Section 7-Definitions [a–f]). This section defines groups or associations and their powers (see specifically

subsections [a], [e] and [f]). Sovereignty: PART IV (Assemblies: Recognition, Sovereignty, Organisation, Discipline and Relationships), Section 38 (a) – Organisation of Assemblies stipulates as follows:

> The spiritual and temporal leadership of a recognised assembly is exercised by a local oversight acceptable to the said recognised assembly. This can be augmented, if the assembly so desires, by the inclusion of some person or persons of mature spiritual standing, accepted by the assembly, provided that such person or persons are approved as overseers by the Executive. This subsection enabled assemblies and groups of assemblies to ask for Bhengu's oversight. Bhengu had a well-run administration, was a powerful leader and provided his people with a sense of dignity and respect. Some missionaries only recognised black ministers as evangelists although this had nothing to do with their giftedness or ministry. This was done to make a distinction between a white missionary and a black minister. There was also a huge disparity with respect to stipends paid to a missionary and those received by a black worker: Missionaries received their support from their home mission boards. Black workers were paid by missionaries. In the Bhengu group there was parity in this area of financial support even though what they received was not enough to meet their needs. (cf. Figure 3.1)



Source: Lephoko (2006).

FIGURE 3.1: Foreign mission boards.

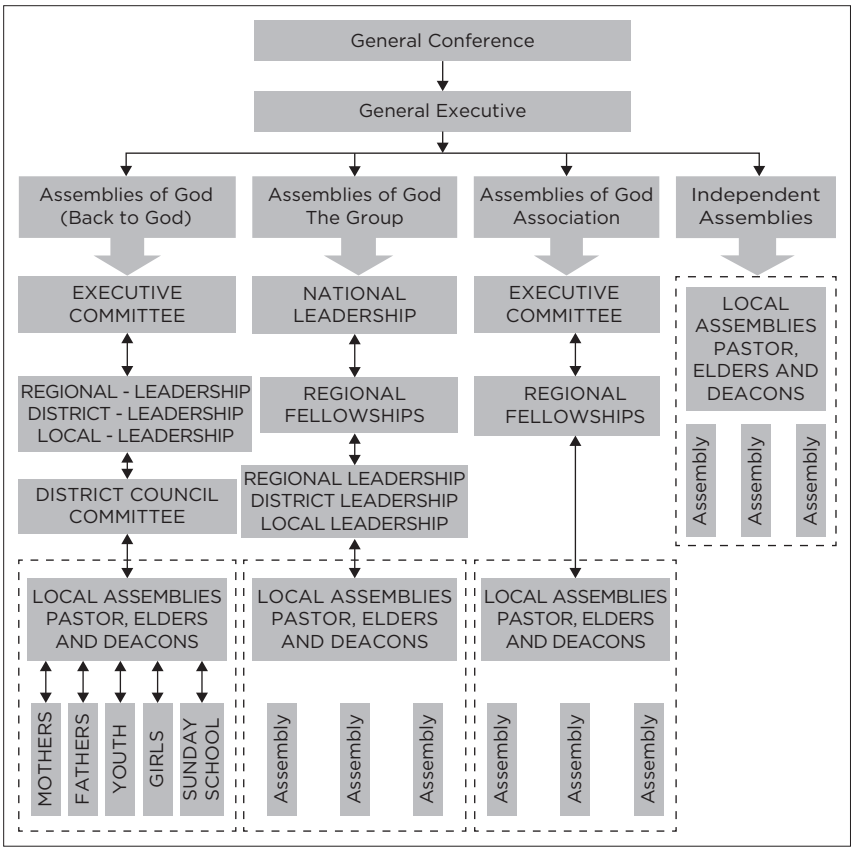
In an undated memo titled *How did I Come Into the Assemblies,* Bhengu explains how he joined the Assemblies of God (A storm in a tea cup n.d.):

> I joined the Emmanuel Mission in 1936; and in 1938 I left the government service to do evangelistic work in Eastern Transvaal. I soon found out from Pastor Phillips of the Emmanuel Mission (Elim in England) that they were not recognised by the Government in South Africa as the latter was not recognising any new church. He informed me they were negotiating with the Assemblies of God which accepted churches into the federal structure and so I agreed to join the Assemblies of God on Federal lines. (n.p.)

Figure 3.2 depicts how the Assemblies of God in South Africa was structured and organised.

Bhengu exerted a huge influence on the Assemblies of God. This was not easy as La Foy, former general secretary of the Assemblies of God, explains (La Foy pers. comm., 01 October 2003; cf. Lephoko 2006):

> I think first of all he made a tremendous impact, a tremendous mark of respect across the board. The respect for Nicholas Bhengu as the minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ transcended the Assemblies of God far, far beyond that, within the Assemblies of God cross-culturally. He was held in tremendous high esteem and I think he was instrumental to break down a lot of the black-white taboos, because people began to see a black man of God, speaking the truth of God's Word under the unction and the power of the Holy Spirit. And the very old mindset of racism was challenged, not because he challenged it, racism was simply challenged by the demonstration of God in his life. That for me was one of the powerful things that had people sit back and re-think the black-white issue by the simple demonstration of the giftedness of God which was in him. The Assemblies of God to me, when it comes to cross-cultural relationships was far ahead of every other major Pentecostal church in South Africa. It was the only Pentecostal church that did not inscribe racism into the constitution. It was the only Pentecostal church that had one conference, one General Executive elected on one floor. That did not happen because we have different white people in our church. On the contrary we have people who were saved, converted from the same sick society. They came into the church, they were delivered from alcohol immediately, but they were never delivered from racism.



Source: Lephoko (2006).

FIGURE 3.2: Organisational structure of the Assemblies of God.

What made the Assemblies of God so different? I believe it was the stature of Nicholas Bhengu that created respect for people of colour and prevented the application of apartheid to a degree that is applied to any other church. I speak as a minority group as a so-called coloured. And I want to say that if it was not for the stature of Nicholas Bhengu, the Assemblies of God could very well, probably have gone the same way, because we have the same sick people in our church, but they could not do it against the man of that stature. For me that makes the Assemblies of God different. Not the people but Nicholas Bhengu made the difference. (pp. 84–85)

From the foregoing, it is clear that Bhengu was able to steer the Assemblies of God away from the agony of apartheid suffered by other Pentecostal churches such as the Apolistic Faith Mission and The Full Gospel Church of God who had to deal with racial conflicts within their own ranks. Although the Assemblies of God was not constituted on a racial basis and had never practised racial discrimination from its inception, it is probable that without Bhengu, Gumede, Buthelezi, Mjaji and other key black leaders, it too could have easily followed the way of the AFM and Full Gospel Church of God.

As a leader, Bhengu was a visionary and a prophet *par excellence*. He did not labour for the Lord within his denomination only; he was an ecumenist who embraced all Christians regardless of their denominational affiliations. In his Farewell Message to the church, he wrote, 'Build the Church of God. The names of our churches are our own inventions and not of God's. Let the Christians come together as God's children'.

Chapter 4

Theological influence

Bhengu was greatly influenced by both Evangelical and Pentecostal theologies which made him a balanced preacher and teacher.

In order to establish Bhengu's manner of preaching and the theology that influenced it, it is important to look at his call to ministry and the church environment in which he was raised – the *Lutheran* Mission – the theological training he received at an Evangelical Bible School at KwaDumisa and the impact of *Pentecostalism* on his ministry. I will seek to show that all of the above had some influence on his ministry, to a greater extent it was Pentecostalism through his five decades of association with the Assemblies of God, but that he still in many ways remained a Lutheran in his liturgy.

According to Hlongwa, the liturgy introduced by Bhengu in his churches was the result of his Lutheran background (Hlongwa pers. comm., 10 January 2005). Hlongwa's assertion is supported by Bhengu's two daughters, Waxy Vilakazi and Dawn Bhengu. They say Bhengu often sang Lutheran hymns at home with the family. He was also proud of his Lutheran background as can be

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seen from the thesis he presented at the Assemblies of God Conference in Witbank on Wednesday, 10 October 1955. In it, he said among other things, 'we were thus born in the mission station and brought up and educated and disciplined by the strong hand of the Norwegians as their children'.

Bhengu was also well travelled. He preached around the world and spoke at numerous international conferences, which exposed him to many leaders in business, politics and diverse Christian circles. In order to understand Bhengu's preaching and the theology behind it, it is essential to analyse the vision God gave him.

Called by God

Bhengu often spoke about his being called by God. I remember talking to him and Mr Mkansi at whose home he was staying during his evangelistic crusade in Nelspruit in 1956 and 1961. He told us that God had spoken to him specifically in a vision, summoning him to go and preach Jesus Christ to the masses who were enslaved by sin and living in poverty and oppression.

Dubb quotes a first person account of what happened (Dubb 1976):

> The Lord explained to me that I was authorised to serve Him, but I did not know how to go about it. He showed me a great ocean to which He brought me. There I heard the voices of many people crying in fear of death. They were all under the water and their hands and feet were bound with chains. But they were trying to set themselves free. They all had black faces. When I listened I noticed that one could hear their voices. They were speaking in all African languages and dialects, and yet I was able to understand them all. They were all pointing at me for I was standing on dry land, and said: 'We are dying, we are dying. We are perishing. Help us out of here'. I felt a great sympathy and wanted to help them all out of there. But they were as many as the sands on the seashore. The more I tried to help them the more I sank into the water. Bewildered, I called on the Lord. Jesus appeared and lifted me out. He showed me an open Bible and said: 'This is the Word of Life; study this Word, and through the

> words of this book you will break these fetters and free your people from the chains of sin, in which they have been bound for centuries. I wish you to do this.' (p. 10)

Dubb describes Bhengu's vision of African people as being as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. They were drowning in a great ocean and calling out to him to rescue them (Dubb 1976).

'The Lord explained to me that I was authorised to serve him', Bhengu believed he was authorised and mandated by the Lord to preach the good news. He never doubted that the authority to preach had come from the Lord. Bhengu often spoke about the call of God upon his life.

I remember Bhengu's illustration of a traffic officer who was standing in the blistering sun directing traffic, who said to him, 'Do you think I like standing here? I am under orders to be here'. He believed he was under orders to preach. He was consumed with the vision, like Paul who also said, '[...] I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven' (Ac 26:19). It can also be said here that Bhengu was not disobedient to the vision. He never flinched, not even under political pressure and socio-economic conditions of deprivation.

Africa Back to God!

Bhengu narrates a story of the vision he had about people he saw in this vision. 'They all had black faces', in this context they were African. 'They spoke in all African languages and dialects, but he was able to understand them all'. It is not surprising that he had a vision and passion to preach the Gospel from Cape to Cairo. He also had a special interest in speaking African languages: isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Tshivenda and Xitsonga – he spoke most of these languages fluently and wrote most of his church circulars in isiXhosa. His clarion call 'Africa Back to God! Africa for Jesus – Jesus for Africa!' fits well with the vision of black Africans to whom he felt specifically called. Although the faces of the people were black, Bhengu understood

that the Gospel was to be preached to all nations (Mt 28:18–20). He preached to all nations around the world in the USA, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Canada, Japan and other countries.

☐ The cry of their hearts

The people Bhengu saw in the vision were all pointing to him and appealing to him to rescue them. They cried, 'We are dying, we are dying! We are perishing. Help us out of here'. They were nobodies in the South African scheme of things. Bhengu saw his people (i.e. black people) as people needing help. They were drowning under the yoke of sin, poverty and political oppression by successive white regimes, from colonialism to apartheid.

☐ The open Bible message

In the vision, the Lord showed him an open Bible and said (Dubb 1976):

> This is the Word of Life, study this Word and through the words of this book you will break these fetters and free your people from chains of sin, in which they have been bound for centuries. I wish you to do this. (p. 10)

In one of the articles in his Declaration of Faith, Bhengu declares that the Bible is (Hollenweger 1972):

> [*T*]he supernatural plenary inspiration of the Scripture, that it is inerrant in the original writings and of the supreme, absolute and final authority, in all matters of doctrine, faith and conduct. (p. 518)

The open Bible is a sign of the authority of the message God wanted him to preach to his people in chains of sin (Hollenweger 1972:4).

☐ To preach was decreed

From the vision that Bhengu saw, it is clear that the Lord decreed that Bhengu should preach. 'I wish you to do this'. It can be

deduced that he was propelled by these words in pursuance of the Lord's will for him.

Scripture is clear that it is God who calls his servants to his service. He called Moses (Ex 3:10–14), Jeremiah (Jr 1:4–10), Isaiah (Is 6:8–13) and Paul (Gl 1:1–2, 15–24). Luther says (Ebeling 1964):

> For if God does not summon you to do a work, who are you, you fool, that you dare to take it upon yourself? [...] A calling is necessary for good work [...]. (p. 17)

Spurgeon (1954) after raising the question 'How many a young man knows whether he is called or not?' proceeds to identify a number of indicators. Only three of these are mentioned below:

1. The first sign of the heavenly calling is an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work. In order to experience a true call to the ministry, there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst to tell others what God has done to our own souls. This desire must be a thoughtful one.
2. In the second place, combined with the earnest desire to become a pastor, there must be aptness to teach and some measures of the other qualities needful for the office of a public instructor.
3. In order to further prove a man's call, after a little exercise of his gifts, such as I have already spoken of, he must see a measure of conversion work going on under his efforts, or he may conclude that he has made a mistake and, therefore, may go back by the best way he can. Spurgeon decries the fact that 'Hundreds of young men have missed their way and stumbled against a pulpit'. (pp. 26–31)

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book *Preaching & Preachers* (1971) says: 'to me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called' (Lloyd-Jones 1971:9).

Moses, Paul and Bhengu

An attempt is made to compare the call received by Bhengu to those of two great men in the Bible: Moses, who led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, and Paul, who was called to be an

TABLE 4.1: An overview of the lives and calling of Moses, Paul and Nicholas Bhengu.

Action	Moses (Ex 3:1–17)	Paul (Ac 9:3–6)	Bhengu (Vision)
Vision	The vision of a burning bush. (Ex 3:2)	Vision on the Damascus road. (Ac 9:3)	He saw a great ocean.
God speaks	God speaks out of the bush. (Ex 3:4)	Jesus speaks to Paul from heaven. (Ac 9:4–6; 26:14–18)	Jesus speaks to Bhengu in a vision on the seashore.
Message	God tells Moses that he has heard the cries and seen the affliction of his people. God spells out the task. Moses is to bring his people out of Egypt. (Ex 3:7–10)	Jesus sends Paul to preach to the Gentiles and their kings. Acts 9:15–16 'also […] and how much he must suffer for my name'	Bhengu hears the cries of the people who are drowning.
Task	God sends Moses to rescue his people from bondage in Egypt. (Ex 3:10)	Jesus sends Paul to preach a message of deliverance to open their eyes from darkness, to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in him. (Ac 26:14–18)	Jesus sends Bhengu to deliver his people from the chains of sin and death (Dubb 1976:10).

apostle to the Gentiles and their kings. Below are some similarities between Moses, the Apostle Paul and Bhengu. All three men were called and sent by God in extraordinary ways (Table 4.1):

- Moses met God in a burning but unconsumed bush while grazing Jethro's sheep.
- Paul saw the Lord on the road to Damascus.
- Bhengu met God in a vision in which he was standing on the sea shore.

Moses

God spoke to Moses and commanded him to go and bring the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. The call was specific and was accompanied with power and authority.

The Lord said (Ex 3):

> (7)I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned

about their suffering. (8)So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey [...] (10)So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. (vv. 7–10)

Paul

Paul's call was also specific. He had been persecuting the church, authorised by the Jewish high priest to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem to be tried (Ac 9:2). On the road to Damascus, Paul met Jesus who struck him down with lightning and called him to be his minister to the Gentiles.

Giving evidence before King Agrippa, Paul defended himself by presenting the circumstances leading to his call (Ac 26):

(16)Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. (17)[...] I am sending you to them (18)to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (vv. 16–18)

Paul said about his call, 'so then King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven' (Ac 26:19). Paul was able to call himself 'an apostle sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead' (Gl 1:1). He added:

(15)But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased (16)to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. (17)I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were Apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. (vv. 15–17)

Bhengu

Bhengu's followers called him an apostle, prophet and evangelist. They sensed the special calling in his life and ministry. Refer to the previous section, 'called by God'.

Theological roots and training

It is postulated that Bhengu's preaching and theology were influenced by at least three theological schools of thought: Lutheranism, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.

Lutheran theology

As a young man, he grew up in the Lutheran Church; his father was an evangelist with the Lutheran church, while two brothers, Jeconiah and Shadrack, were ministers with the same church. It is conceivable that the Lutheran Church would have had a considerable influence on his theological background. This view is also supported by Prof. Mangethe, Bhengu's nephew, who reports that Bhengu used to go back to the mission station, pitch a tent and preach there. His two daughters, Waxy and Dawn, say that their father used to sing Lutheran hymns at home.

The three theological schools of thought that influenced Bhengu's ministry, namely the Lutheran, Evangelical and Pentecostal theologies, are discussed below.

Some aspects of Luther's theology may have influenced Bhengu's theology. Five of Luther's doctrines that might have had an impact on Bhengu's teaching and message are the following:

- *Sola Scriptura.* The Bible held, in Luther's view, supreme authority. Neither the church nor the pope possessed authority that could militate against the authority of the Bible. Scripture is God's Word with the power, the majesty, the authority and infallibility of God himself (Hanna 1984:119).
- *Justification by Faith.* Luther was struck by Romans 1:17, 'for in the Gospel righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith'. It was this verse that shook Luther and later the Roman Catholic Church and the world. In 1545,

Luther wrote 'it was about the justice of God that I pondered' (McKim 2003:88–90).

- *The Law and the Gospel.* According to Luther, the law relates to 'all statements of Scripture that uncover the sins of humans and accuse them. In contrast, the Gospel includes all statements that promise comfort, redemption and the grace of God' (McKim 2003: 106). Luther said the proper understanding of the distinction between the law and the gospel was the hallmark of a theologian. Virtually, the whole of the Scripture and the understanding of the whole theology depend on the true understanding of the Law and the gospel. Anyone who can properly distinguish the Gospel from the Law may thank God that he is a theologian (Ebeling 1964:111).
- *Luther's Attitude towards authorities.* Luther believed that temporal authority was God-given and necessary for the maintenance of external order without which the church would be unable to exist. He believed though that the church had authority to bring about church reform based on the Gospel which may be against official church government (McKim 2003:107).
- *The Human Free Will.* Luther disagreed with Erasmus, who defined free will as 'that power with which humans can turn towards or away from what leads them to eternal salvation'. Responding to Erasmus, Luther argued that Erasmus's doctrine of free will was ineffective without any reference to Christ, because in essence it meant that humans would receive God's mercy through their own merit. He believed that human will was based on the acceptance of the fact that Christ had redeemed mankind (McKim 2003:110).

Evangelical theology

Bhengu received his theological training from KwaDumisa Bible College, which later became the Union Bible Institute, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. He trained under Rev. Fred Suter, one of the well-known and respected evangelical Bible

teachers of his time. Suter was nicknamed 'The man who loved the Zulus'. According to Bond (2000), Bhengu said of Rev. Suter:

> He was a real father to the students, an excellent Bible teacher of matured [*sic*] and a gentleman in the true sense of the word. I personally loved him above my own father. He was so loving. He called me his son, and his teachings had a real power to my soul. (p. 47)

Bhengu sent some of his ministers to the Union Bible Institute even though he was unhappy with their opposition to the Pentecostal message of speaking in tongues. As an Evangelical himself, Bhengu believed in the fundamentals of evangelicalism, among them that 'the transforming work of God in people's lives through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit results in a life of repentance, worship and personal relationship with Jesus Christ' (Olson Spring 2003).

Pentecostalism

Two churches, the Emmanuel Mission, founded by H.C. Phillips, and the Assemblies of God also had an influence on Bhengu. His first contact with Pentecostalism was in Kimberley where he was converted under the ministry of two white American Full Gospel Church evangelists. After his conversion, Bhengu returned to Durban and was placed under the guardianship of Rev. Job Chiliza, who was at the time a minister of the Full Gospel Church of God in Durban. Chiliza explains how he was baptised by the Holy Spirit (Sundkler 1976):

> In 1922 on a Sunday, I was baptised by the Holy Spirit. I felt as if I was flying right up. Only after a while I realised that I was still here on earth. (p. 56)

In 1938, Bhengu joined H.C. Phillips of the Emmanuel Mission in Nelspruit. Phillips was a missionary of Elim Foursquare Church in England, a Pentecostal church. In 1938, Phillips took Bhengu, Gumede, Buthelezi and James Mullan with him into the Assemblies of God. Jean Phillips (H.C. Phillips' wife) writes (Jean Phillips pers. comm., n.d.):

> HC Philips was the Superintendent of the African schools for many years. As he was having a lot of trouble with the teachers, he

> decided to advertise in the Zulu paper *Ubaqa* for two teachers of impeccable character. Mr Bhengu who was a court interpreter saw this advertisement and wrote to H C P explaining that he was not a teacher, but was interested and would like to see the Emmanuel Mission constitution. H C P sent this to him and the reply came: '[…] I believe like you do, I would like to come and work with the Emmanuel Mission, not as a teacher but as an evangelist'. Having trained in the Dumisa Bible School under the Rev. Suter, H C P knew that he was well versed in the Word of God. As Bhengu was about to be married, arrangements were made for him to come to Nelspruit with his new bride in the New Year. This he did. From the moment he began his ministry the Lord put his seal upon his ministry and blessed him in a very wonderful way, when the Emmanuel Mission amalgamated with the Assemblies of God, Mr Bhengu, who was then a member of the Emmanuel Mission, joined in with us. This was the beginning of his fruitful ministry in the Assemblies of God. (n.p.)

Christian teaching and viewpoints

Doctrine is defined as 'Christian teachings' (Richards 1985:236). Such teachings are considered authoritative. Among mainline Protestants, Evangelicals and Pentecostals, a theological debate on the baptism in the Holy Spirit has been going on for decades, some of it very sharp and divisive, with each group taking a firm stand regarding what it perceives to be the correct interpretation of disputed scriptures. Bhengu, ultimately, had to define his position in this regard. It is important to determine, briefly, the various viewpoints.

Evangelical teaching

The traditional view on Spirit Baptism is portrayed by three eminent Evangelical leaders:

- Billy Graham's teaching on Spirit Baptism. Billy Graham, one of the leading evangelical church leaders, a world-renowned evangelist who saw hundreds of thousands of people – if not millions – come to Christ through his

evangelistic crusades, has this to say: However, in my own study of the scriptures through the years I have become convinced that there is only one Baptism with the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer, and that takes place at the moment of conversion. This Baptism with the Holy Spirit was initiated at Pentecost, and all who come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour share in that experience and are baptised with the Spirit the moment they are regenerated. In addition, they may be filled with the Holy Spirit: if not, they need to be. The scriptural usage of the word baptism shows that it is something initiatory both in the case of water baptism and Spirit Baptism, and that it is not repeated. I can find no Biblical data to show that the baptism with the Spirit would ever be repeated: 'For by one spirit we were all baptised into one body' (1 Cor 12:13). The original Greek version of this passage makes it clear that this baptism of the Spirit is a completed past action (Graham 1978:62–63).

- Unger's teaching on Spirit Baptism. Unger asserts that this baptism of the Spirit as taught by Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals and Charismatics is the '[…] new errors to trouble the peace and doctrinal purity of the church' (Unger 1974:35). He also asserts that miraculous signs, gifts of healing and tongues gradually disappeared from the church after the Apostolic age when the New Testament was written down.
- Scroggie's teaching on Spirit Baptism. A careful examination of the New Testament leads us to believe that the miraculous speaking tended to cease even during the Apostolic period, and was operative chiefly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. when the Chosen People were de-nationalised, for the time of the present age of grace (Scroggie 1956:32).

From the foregoing evangelical leaders, believe that Baptism with the Holy Spirit takes place at regeneration, there is no other such baptism as taught by Pentecostals and Charismatics. They also believe that miracles gradually disappeared as the church was firmly established.

☐ Separation

Probably the first evangelical scholar to break ranks with the evangelical stance on Baptism in the Holy Spirit was R.A. Torrey, in his book *What the Bible Teaches* (1957). Torrey was the principal of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, USA, a highly respected Evangelical Bible college established by the world-renowned evangelist, D.L. Moody. He taught Baptism in the Holy Spirit as a second blessing after salvation. This happened to equip the believer with power to witness for Christ. This was obviously a brave step and possibly one that attracted dissent from his peers within the evangelical fraternity.

On the subject of Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Torrey begins by quoting extensively from the scriptures on which Pentecostals base their doctrine of Spirit Baptism: Acts 1:5; 4:8; 10:44–46; 11:15–17; 19:2–6 and so on.

Torrey quotes all the above verses in full. Below I quote only the texts that mark Torrey's departure from the stance taken by evangelicals: 'God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will' (Heb 2:4).

Torrey put twelve proposals on the table to substantiate his views, from which three are quoted below.

- Second proposition. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is a definite experience of which one may and ought to know whether he has received it or not. Here was a company of regenerated men pronounced so by Christ himself. 'Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you', and John 13:10 'Jesus said to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all'. And yet the baptism with the Spirit lay for them some days in the future. 'But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised' (Ac 8:12). There were certainly in this company of baptised, both men and women,

some regenerated people, but we read in verses 15 and 16, '[...] who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus)'. Regenerated but not baptised with the Holy Ghost. We see the same thing in Acts 19:1,2: And it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost'. Compare verse 6, 'and when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied'.

- Third proposition. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is an operation of the Holy Spirit distinct from and subsequent and additional to his regenerating work. A man may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and still not be baptised with the Holy Spirit. There is an impartation of power and the one who receives it is fitted for service. Every True Believer has the Holy Spirit. But ye are not in the flesh, not in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (Rm 8:9; cf. 1 Cor 6:19). But not every believer, as we shall see, may have the Spirit. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit may be received immediately after the new birth – as happened to the household of Cornelius. In a normal state, every believer would have the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, as in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 12:13 – 'For by the one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit'). In such a normal state of the church, the Baptism with the Holy Spirit would be received immediately upon repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. However, the Baptism with the Holy Spirit has been allowed to drop out of sight, and the church has had so little expectancy along this line for its young children that a large portion of the church is in the position of the churches in Samaria and Ephesus, where someone must come and call the attention of the believers to their privilege in the Risen Christ and claim it for them.
- Fourth proposition. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is an experience connected with and primarily for service.

> The baptism with the Spirit is not primarily intended to make believers happy or holy but to make them useful. In every passage in the Bible in which the results of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit are mentioned, they are related to testimony and service. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit has no direct reference to cleansing from sin. It has to do with gifts for service rather than with graces of character. It is the impartation of supernatural power or gifts in service, and sometimes one may have rare gifts in service, and few graces.

Pentecostal teaching

Classical Pentecostalism is viewed as having developed from the Wesleyan-Holiness movement with its tradition of two-stage model: first conversion and then sanctification as a subsequent second blessing at a specific moment in time in which canal human nature is removed and the heart of the person becomes totally pure in love. Pentecostals added a third dimension that of Spirit Baptism accompanied by speaking in tongues as its initial (physical evidence) (Lederle 1988:16).

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues was first experienced at Seymour's mission church at 312 Azusa Street Los Angeles in 1906. Seymour was Parham's student at Topeka, Kansas, Bible School.

Common beliefs

Among Pentecostals, there is a general agreement on the central doctrines of the Christian faith. These include the following distinctives (Clark & Lederle 1983):

1. That Jesus Christ can/should be personally encountered as Saviour of the sincerely repentant sinner, resulting in regeneration to a transformed life.
2. To every believer there is an experience of God's Spirit available according to the pattern of Spirit Baptism found in the history of the first-century church in Acts.
3. The power of God is revealed today in the lives of individuals and communities as it was in the early Christian communities.

4. A sincere attitude of praise and worship should mark the life of the individual believer and the liturgy of the whole group.
5. The regenerate is obliged to reveal a distinctively Christian lifestyle based on discipleship of Jesus.
6. The goal of the individual believer, of the local church and of the large Pentecostal community, is to further the mission of Jesus.
7. Jesus is coming again, to judge the world, and to apocalyptically renew creation. (p. 17)

John Bond of the Assemblies of God lists the following key doctrines common to Pentecostals:

- The Bible. As I have already indicated, the Bible is accepted as verbally inspired and as the all-sufficient guide for doctrine and practice. Herein lies the greatest strength of the Pentecostal churches. They are people of the book. Let me not take time to speak of 'redemption and life'. Suffice it to say that the mere fact of having a book to study has a civilising effect upon any people or group.
- The Cross. In common with all evangelicals, Pentecostals believe in the justification of sinners by the blood of Christ. They believe in the life-transforming work of the Holy Ghost through the Cross. While not unique in their faith, they hold to the doctrine with great if not unique intensity.
- Revival – the work of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal Movement is a revivalist movement. They believe in and depend on the action of the Holy Spirit in their services to convict the hearers and empower Christians for service and sanctified living.
- Miracles. Throughout church history, there have been manifestations of miraculous power but the emphasis on the miraculous in Pentecostal circles is uniquely Pentecostal in the present day.
- The demonic. Casting out of demons is by no means confined to Pentecostals, but the emphasis on the devil and the demonic certainly characterises Pentecostal theology, oftentimes to the point of being bizarre.

- The Sacraments. Pentecostals focus on baptising their converts. Almost universally the person is immersed as an adult or at least as a believer able to make an intelligent decision. The act is regarded as a step of obedience and as a Christian initiation but not as being necessary for salvation or as being a means to regeneration. Like all churches other than the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends, they partake of the Eucharist. Many do so once a month. Others follow the pattern of the Plymouth Brethren and break bread weekly. I think it must be acknowledged that usually the attitude to the elements of bread and wine betrays a doctrinal shallowness and even savours of superstition. Sacerdotalism is rejected in its theological claims, but one feels that sometimes the communion table in a subtle unconscious way is treated as an altar, and the officiating pastor very often acts somewhat as a priest.
- Eschatology. Pentecostals believe that the world as we know it is proceeding towards a goal laid down by God. Usually, there is a belief in a physical rapture of the saints, of a 7-year tribulation and a millennium, but these concepts, while broadly accepted, do provide a fertile field for controversy. All Pentecostals believe that the world we know is not the world as God intended it to be but that God in divine sovereignty will ultimately break into human history in a final act of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ.
- Evangelism. Pentecostal churches are usually characterised by a thrust towards evangelism. Their attitude to the world is that 'Christ is the answer'. If enough people get converted, this world's problems will be ameliorated. The compassion of Christ prompts the Pentecostal believer to a caring evangelistic attitude towards his neighbour. It is also true that the pioneering phase of existence in which most Pentecostal congregations are found brings about a strong necessity for recruitment. There is a pressure to grow which is not keenly felt by the older, more established churches. At best, such pressure gives a zeal for evangelism. At its worst, it engenders unwholesome proselytising attitudes (Clark & Lederle 1983:138–140).

Spirit Baptism

Donald Gee

Warner in a foreword to Gee's book *Now That You've Been Baptized in the Spirit* (1978) writes:

> For many years the late Donald Gee was a leading Pentecostal preacher and writer. His pulpit and writing ministries contributed much to not only his own British Assemblies of God but to the worldwide Pentecostal Movement as well. During his long and fruitful lifetime he served as pastor, editor, writer, church official, and throughout the world as a speaker, visiting at least 60 countries. And several of his books were translated into as many as nine languages. The publisher is pleased to add *Now that You've Been Baptized in the Spirit* to the Donald Gee book series so well received by Christians in many lands. (pp. ii–iii)

Gee (1928), in his book *Concerning spiritual gifts*, says the following concerning the Baptism in the Holy Spirit:

> With them it was no mere intellectual assent to some article in a creed defining an orthodox doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit. Neither were they satisfied to acquiesce to a vague idea that in some indefinite manner the Holy Spirit had been imparted upon conversion. They gladly and thankfully recognised his gracious operations in their regeneration and sanctification, but their own personal reception of the Holy Spirit was an intensely vivid experience. They knew when He came, where He came, how He came. Nothing reveals this more than Paul's searching question to certain disciples whom he immediately sensed to be spiritually lacking in a vital part of their Christian inheritance: 'Have Ye *received* the Holy Ghost?' (Ac 19:2). The challenge was to experience, not to doctrine. How significant! An Ephesians 'Pentecost' speedily rectified their shortcoming, and it was an experience as vivid as all the rest had received: 'They spoke in tongues and prophesied'. (p. 4)

The above passage, like its parallels, reveals that there is an intimate connection between the supernatural gifts of the Spirit and the initial Baptism with the Holy Spirit. They constituted one of the accepted results of that blessing in the corporate life and activity of the assemblies, and the spiritual gifts with which their

gatherings were enriched all arose out of the fact that the individuals comprising them were personally filled with the Spirit.

Gee, however, warns against what he calls disappointing baptisms. He categorises them into three groups (Gee 1978):

- First group. The first group are people who have experienced no change in their lives after the Pentecostal baptism.
- Second group. The second group are people who, when they receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, receive some of the gifts of the Spirit, but they do not have any fruit of the Spirit. They seem to be able to speak in tongues but do not have love. They have the outward manifestation of the Spirit but we are sorry to say their lives and testimonies are very far from what they ought to be; there is something wrong with a Baptism in the Holy Spirit that only gives gifts and doesn't make them more holy. It is a disappointing baptism – if not to them, it is to others.
- Third group. The last group are those who have gifts and also fruit and yet who do not have any real power. They can speak in tongues and their lives are blameless, but you could not really say they have power in their lives. 'Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you'. (pp. 24–25)

From the above self-criticism by Donald Gee, one of the foremost pioneering fathers of Spirit Baptism, Spirit Baptism does not create super Christians.

I met Donald Gee in 1956 when he visited our church in Nelspruit after Bhengu's revival in January 1956. He preached on how as a little boy he had a tomato garden in the yard of their home. He would get up every morning to check if there were any tomatoes. One night while he was asleep his mother tied a beautiful red tomato to a branch. He said that he was ecstatic when he saw the red tomato; he was however disappointed when it fell off as soon as he touched it. The point he was making was that tangible fruit grow over time unlike spiritual gifts which one can receive almost instantaneously.

Du Plessis

Gee was supported by David du Plessis, known as Mr Pentecost, one of the renowned Pentecostal leaders of the 20th century, who travelled the world introducing the ministry of Spirit Baptisms to Protestant churches as well as to the Roman Catholic Church. Du Plessis (1970) explained his views:

> The Church is the agent, water is an element and the new Christian is the object. This then becomes the second event in his life. He has now received the Spirit (Ezk 36:26; Jn 1:12, 13; Jn 3:6–18) and has been accepted into the Church. The regenerated sinner, now a new member of the Christian Church, must be baptised in the Holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. Christ is the agent, the Holy Spirit is the element, and the believer is the object. Being baptised by the Spirit into the body is not an encounter with the Church but with the Holy Spirit. Baptism in water is not an encounter with the water but with the Church. The baptism into the Holy Spirit is not an encounter with the Spirit but with Christ the baptiser. This means total surrender and absolute commitment to Jesus. Without this He cannot baptise you in the Spirit. (pp. 70–71)

Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals alike tend to agree (Clark & Lederle 1983) that:

> Pentecostalism experience is important, and most acknowledge that it is not experience per se, but experience of the Holy Spirit which is critical. Pentecostals insist that this 'new' emphasis on experience is in line with the church situation the first few decades of the after Pentecost. (p. 37)

Bhengu

In a taped message, Bhengu gives his testimony with regard to his own baptism in the Spirit. The part of his message that relates to the baptism in the Spirit is quoted in full below (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> When Jesus went to heaven he promised that he would send God the Holy Spirit and he came. Some people believe that we are the tongues people: Many people see me and say, 'We are very sorry Bhengu, because you joined the tongues movement'. I belong to

Jesus but I also believe in the baptism in the Holy Ghost and I believe in the baptism in the Holy Ghost (he repeated for emphasis), that Holy Ghost with no difference from the first experience of the first Church. I belong to Jesus, I believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Are there two or three Gods, no, there is only one God [...] no one can explain that, if one can explain that, then God ceases to be God, he becomes our equal. When I got saved I had nobody to teach me and I had no Bible. One day, the same week I was saved, something said to me I must go to the rubbish bin. I did not know why I should go there; I started digging and saw an old Bible without covers. It was a Xhosa Bible. I took it out, that was my first Bible provided by God himself. From there on I read the Bible – the Word of God. I started talking to people about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit after I had heard Stephen Jeffries in Durban and Bloemfontein. People were arguing, but I said, 'It is written'. I had no one to teach me but the Spirit of God made me believe that what Stephen Jeffries was doing was right. As I was reading my Bible I saw water baptism mentioned in the Bible. I went from Kimberley to Bloemfontein to be baptised. I came back; I believed in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. For five years I prayed to be baptised in the Holy Spirit. I went to many people; some shook me and did lots of other things, others spat on me. I will never forget one day. I was preaching, God was baptising my converts but not me. It was because of my unbelief. I went to Bible School, I had given up hope and thought God did not like me, he did not want me to be in the company of these crazy people. I joined the Evangelicals. I went to Bible School to obtain a diploma and prestige. Our text book at the Bible School was Torrey's book 'What the Bible Teaches'. The book was being translated into Zulu by the Principal. He wanted people who spoke pure Zulu to assist him; we were busy reading the book and proofreading it. The book was again prescribed for the second year. When we got on to the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I read it with all my heart and mind, I wanted to know what the doctrine was all about. I will never forget the day when I got to know that one can be baptised in the Holy Spirit. The book said, 'It was the same way you were saved. You did not wait, you believed that when you prayed and asked God for something you must believe that you had received it and you would receive it'. It was nine in the morning. Something in me said, 'You have been worrying God for all these years. The first day you prayed, God baptised you, but you did not believe'. We used to stop classes at nine in the evening. We had to go to our dormitories, by 9:30 pm all lights had to be out and everyone had to be in bed. I invited four of my brothers to go and pray for

> the Baptism in the Holy Spirit at a Bible School where they did not believe in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, but believed in Torrey's book. I said, 'Young men, tonight I am going to pray alone'. I said I was going to ask God to fill them, but that I was going to thank God because he had already filled me. They said that they were going to join me. One of them started praying, thanking God. Heaven came down and I followed. I only said three words and all five of us were baptised at the same time. We did not know where we were. We shouted, we closed our ears, we were down on the floor, we made noise, we were crying, we were weeping, we were giggling, we were laughing, we did not know what to do. I was the only one that had been at Pentecostal meetings. The rest of the group knew nothing about Pentecostals; they were Congregationalists and all kinds of denominations. I will never forget that day [*sic*] evening. We were there until 2 am. We knew we had broken school rules, we did not know what to do. We held each other's hands and tiptoed to the door, but as soon as we opened the door, the whole thing started all over again. We ran back to the chapel. Each time we tried to open the door it would start all over again. We ran back and forth. I took out a handkerchief and muzzled the people. (n.p.)

In his testimony, there is no evidence that he spoke in tongues as an initial evidence of Spirit as taught by Pentecostals including the Assemblies of God. It is significant that not once does he mention that he or the others spoke in tongues. This phenomenon was also true of Gumede; he too never spoke in tongues at baptism, yet both Bhengu and Gumede had a definite experience of baptism in the Spirit.

Noel Scheepers, a minister and a member of the Executive of the Assemblies of God, was responsible for raising funds in white churches to support Bhengu's Back to God Crusade. He was also Bhengu's best-man when Bhengu married his second wife Nokwethemba Mthethwa as he wrote in a letter 'After the obvious elation of being Bro. Bhengu's "best-man" in 1974'. Scheepers affirms that Bhengu did speak in tongues but never promoted it by laying hands on people to receive Spirit Baptism. He remembers (Scheepers pers. comm., 1992 n.d.):

> We in the predominantly westernised way of thinking understand speaking with tongues in more Biblical terms, we were strict that

> there would be interpretation. Among predominantly black people it was very difficult to control the movement of the Spirit among them. In those days when he preached, the Spirit came down and people were healed. People became emotional and hysterical. Bhengu would totally control the situation. He did not like the American general speaking in tongues. He himself did speak in tongues, he also had prophecy and various other things. He encouraged me. Personally, in all the years that I knew him I never saw Brother Bhengu praying for people to speak in tongues. He prayed for God's Spirit to come down: It was however the presence of the Spirit, fullness of the Spirit in the meetings that was the thing that caught everybody and those who were leaders used to speak privately in tongues. This was what was judged by the American Assemblies of God where they had a message in tongues and a message in interpretation of tongues and they judged that he was not a Pentecostal man because he did not have that in churches. When people babbled it was ecstatic utterances and it was not to be seen to be man, it was an ecstatic utterance of joy in terms of the fullness of the Spirit of God, but he didn't like it to take place in public too much because it caused chaos rather than order. That was the beginning years of the Pentecostal message. (n.p.)

Scheepers' observation is supported by Bond, who has the following to say on Bhengu and tongues (Bond 2000):

> Nicholas Bhengu had reservations on that dogma, initial evidence. He believed strongly in speaking in tongues, but he deprecated the insistence of some Pentecostal enthusiasts on trying to get people to speak in tongues. The reasons for his reticence are understandable. For one thing, he used to say that were he to lay hands on his converts, some of them would make such a big thing of it that forever after they would claim a special charisma because his hands had been laid on them. He understood the people he was ministering to. He also used to claim that if he told them to speak in tongues they would say something, whether true or false, genuine or simulated. He preferred to trust God to come down in his meetings in spontaneous outpourings of the Holy Ghost. In his evangelistic crusades he used to expect this to happen. He used to speak of the event as a 'breakthrough'. When the 'breakthrough' came, as invariably it did, wonderful things would happen. People would be baptised in the Spirit. Healings would take place. The power of God would sweep over the people with mighty revivalistic force. Bond continues, in 1964 when missionaries from the American Assemblies of God, split from us this matter of the

> 'initial evidence' as they called it, was used as a stick to beat Bhengu with as though he were doctrinally unsound. (pp. 71–72)

Bond believes that Bhengu probably had more of the Spirit's working in his life and ministry than any other person he ever knew.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the baptiser in the Holy Ghost and that this baptism, as a distinct experience from the new birth, is promised to every believer (Part 6 of the Assemblies of God Constitution. Section 61, n.p.).

However, in the section dealing with spiritual gifts, the following is articulated (Part 6 of the Assemblies of God Constitution. Section 63):

> We believe that God has never removed the gifts referred to in 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14, and that whenever the Holy Ghost moves upon the Church in power, these gifts are manifested. We believe it is contrary to the Apostolic command for any to 'forbid to speak in tongues'. (n.p.)

Bhengu believed that the Triune Sovereign God could not be limited to one method only of Baptism in the Holy Spirit just as it was with him and Gumede. Both men exercised the gift of speaking in tongues.

In the words of Donald Gee, both Bhengu and Gumede, 'knew when He came, where He came, how He came'.

L. William Oliverio Jr in the footnote of his book, *Theological Hermeneutics in the Classical Pentecostal Tradition – Typological Accounts* (2012), refers to Fee:

> For Fee, being a Pentecostal is not a matter of adhering to the subsequence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit or tongues as its evidence but the Pentecostal experience of charismatic life in the Spirit. (p. 168)

Chapter 5

Teaching and preaching

Bhengu found it necessary to develop for himself and his church statements of belief to protect his work. The members of this mission declare their belief concerning (Hollenweger 1972):

1. The Trinity of the Godhead, that is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; co-equal and eternally existing in three persons as one God.
2. The deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, that he was begotten of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, possessing a sinless nature; that his death was penal, vicarious and substitution; and that he was raised bodily from the dead on the third day.
3. The personality of the Holy Spirit, and that as promised, he came down from Heaven on the Day of Pentecost, to dwell permanently in the church and in the body of each believer, and that he is the efficient power for godly living, Christian service and spiritual worship.

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4. The supernatural plenary inspiration of the Scripture, that it is inerrant in the original writings and of the supreme, absolute and final authority, in all matters of doctrine, faith and conduct.
5. The ruin of the human race is universal, total and irremediable by human effort whatsoever.
6. The shedding of the blood of Christ is the only ground of justification by God, forgiveness of sins and peace with God.
7. The necessity of the new birth as the only ground of entrance into the Kingdom of God.
8. Salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ.
9. The observance of the ordinance of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
10. It is the privilege of all who are born-again through faith in Christ Jesus to be assured of their salvation, and that they are at present in possession of eternal life and delivered from judgement and the wrath to come.
11. Satan is a living personality, a veritable being.
12. The true church which is his body, of which Christ is the absolute head, is composed of regenerate persons.
13. That the Gospel of Christ issuing from his death and resurrection should be preached without reserve or qualification to every creature under heaven.
14. That the return of the Lord Jesus will be personal and premillennial, and so far as the church is concerned it is imminent.
15. The literal resurrection of the body of both the just and the unjust.
16. The eternal blessedness of the just and the eternal punishment of the unjust. (pp. 517–518)

The Bhengu Declaration of Faith is similar to that of the Assemblies of God, *Things Commonly Believed Among Us*, except the inerrancy of Scripture, Baptism in the Holy Spirit and miracles, among others.

A closer look reveals that Bhengu's Declaration of Faith is in every respect *evangelical*. The only section that may be regarded to suggest a semblance of a link to Pentecostalism is Statement 3 on the Holy Spirit (Hollenweger 1972):

> The personality of the Holy Spirit, and as promised, He came down on each believer, and that He is the efficient power for godly living, Christian service, and spiritual worship. (p. 517)

The phrase 'spiritual worship' was the central focus of Bhengu's liturgical Sunday worship service which he based on 1 Corinthians 14:26–33, 37, 39, 40. These verses are read every Sunday at the beginning of the worship service. Verses 34–36 are however skipped because they suggest a restriction on women's participation in church worship.

Although the worship service is directed by men, women participate fully in the service – speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, reading of scriptures, singing of hymns, prophecy and so on, with the accompanying controls as set out in these verses: 'All these must be done for the strengthening of the church' (1 Cor 14:26) and 'But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Cor 14:40). Doing things in a fitting and orderly way was Bhengu's objective.

Bhengu's credo reflects the traditional views of Classical *Pentecostal* churches as well.

The doctrinal statements of all three major Pentecostal churches – the AFM, the Assemblies of God and the Church of God (Cleveland) – are mentioned by Hollenweger. These include the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and divine healing. Speaking in tongues is regarded as the proof of Baptism with the Holy Spirit. According to the AFM (Hollenweger 1972):

> The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is a gift of power upon the sanctified life; so when we get it, we have the same evidence as the disciples received on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2, 3, 4), in speaking in new tongues. (p. 513)

As seen by the American Assemblies of God, 'The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance' (Ac 2.4). The Church of God (Cleveland) states, '[…] speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance […]

that is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost' (Hollenweger 1972:513–518).

Bhengu did not teach speaking in tongues in his Back to God Crusade campaigns because he believed that speaking in tongues was not the essence of the Gospel that brings people to repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. He did, nonetheless, believe in tongues, especially in the use of tongues to speak to God in private. In this way, he was following Paul's teaching (1 Cor 14):

> (18)I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. (19)But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. (vv. 18–19)

In 1976 at the first Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) Executive Seminar in Plettenberg Bay to which Bhengu and his wife Nokwethemba had been invited (CCC, a typical evangelical organisation that rejects speaking in tongues), Bhengu invited me to his hotel room and asked me, 'How do those who do not believe in speaking in tongues speak to God?'.

Bhengu was not an ordinary preacher. He was specially gifted in speech and in his command of languages. James Stalker quotes the German theologian Tholuck as saying: 'A sermon ought to have heaven for its father and the earth for its mother'. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes that 'the business of preaching is to relate the teaching of the scriptures to what is happening in our own day' (Stott 1982:150).

Professor Ian Pitt-Watson writes (Stott 1982):

> Every sermon is stretched like a bowstring between the texts of the Bible on the one hand, the problems of contemporary human life on the other. If the string is insecurely tethered to either end, the bow is useless. (p. 150)

Bishop Stephen Neill develops another metaphor. 'Preaching is like weaving', he writes (Stott 1982):

> There are the two factors of the wrap and the woof. There is the fixed, unalterable element, which for us is the Word of God, and there

> is the variable element, which enables the weaver to change and vary the pattern at his will. For us that variable element is the constantly changing pattern of people and of situations. (p. 150)

Bhengu's message and manner of preaching may be summarised in at least four ways:

1. The centrality of the cross and redemption through the death of Jesus Christ
2. Addressing specific areas of need of his audience
3. The use of stories from daily life, to illustrate his sermons
4. Total dependency on prayer and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Schlosser (in Hollenweger 1972) says the following about Bhengu's preaching:

> Bhengu adopts the latent perfectionism of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements and he teaches that Jesus' redemption is final. The *simul justus, ac peccator* of Lutheranism is completely incomprehensible to him. (p. 129)

According to Schlosser (in Hollenweger 1972), Bhengu accused white missionaries of an indiscretion:

> The white Protestant missionaries definitely give a false interpretation of the Bible 'when they always drag the burden of sin around with them'. This is a doctrine of which as Africans they can make nothing. For the white missionaries easily conclude that the blacks have to bend their backs to carry the burden of sin laid upon them. (p. 129)

War, Sin and Crime

Bhengu declared war on sin and crime. Thousands were converted, including thieves who returned stolen goods by the van-load and murderers who confessed and gave themselves up to justice. Many 'tsotsis' (i.e. African gangsters) were converted and some became able ministers of the Gospel. An amazed police major told James E. Mullan, an Assemblies of God missionary from Ireland, 'Mr Mullan we have confidence in Mr Bhengu and we want this work to go on by all means'.

Superstitions

Bhengu was not obsessed with ancestral worship; he believed the Gospel that accepting Jesus Christ would deal with that (Roberts n.d.):

> It surprised me to find that there were so many people who didn't believe in the existence of God. I was amazed at that discovery, and thanked God that I was an African. In Africa, we have not yet reached that stage where intellectualism controls our thinking. We learn of such things as evolution and we study them in order to pass our examinations, but we make fun of such things when we are at home. Most African people don't know how to serve God and most have never set foot in a church in their lives, but if you tell them that there is no God, they will laugh at you. They believe that somewhere there is a God who exists. I have struggled with American and English missionaries at inter-denominational conventions, telling African people that, because you can never find God by rationalising. When people believe in God superstitiously – a word about superstitions – I just tap into the same belief they have and switch them onto God. That is the beginning of great things to speak to them about 'My big God'. (p. 8)

Centrality of the Cross

The Cross was central to Bhengu's preaching. In his book *We Serve a Big God* (n.d.), Roberts quotes from a sermon preached by Bhengu in the USA (Roberts n.d.):

> The cross is our starting point, and I preach the cross of Jesus Christ as a starting point for Africa. The Bible says the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that are perishing but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. It is a starting point for the one, who has lost his way and has wandered far from God. The backsliders had God before they lost their way, they do not know their way back, and often wander from church to church trying to find peace for their souls, but they have no peace until they make right with God. Jesus Christ died on the cross, went to the place of the skull, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Golgotha, and Jesus Christ himself carried his cross to Golgotha. He expects us to pick up our cross and deny ourselves if we are to follow Him. You wonder how we can win the souls of people in Africa and the world. We lift up Jesus, the

> Saviour who died on a cross and prayed for all the guilty. He paid our penalties and on the cross became sin so that we can be forgiven for our sins, and from the cross find our way home. Backsliders who had given up on God find their way back through the cross. We are preaching the cross in Africa, and many people who have never heard of Jesus Christ are coming to the Lord. We preach in very simple terms they understand and the Spirit of God touches their hearts. (pp. 26–27)

In one of the Assemblies of God Conferences in 1959, I remember him preaching on Jesus on the Cross 'along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left' (Lk 23:33). He showed how the criminal on his left insulted Jesus while the other on his right pleaded for forgiveness and was instantly forgiven, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise' (Lk 23:43). He proceeded to illustrate his message with a story of a hobo who lived in a dirty, dilapidated shanty until someone gave her a bunch of beautiful flowers. She took the flowers home, placed them on the table, then realised that the tablecloth was dirty; she washed the cloth and discovered that the walls were filthy. She then started cleaning up the whole house. Jesus made the difference in her life.

The following sermon is an extract from a cassette taped message preached by Bhengu at one of his conferences. The title of his message was: What do we emphasise? Bhengu proceeded to outline what he emphasised (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> As I grow old I begin to value every minute, I realise that we did not do what we should have done: to be disciples, bring forth disciples who will in turn bring forth disciples. Our message did not create the impact it should have. We just scratched the surface. The Gospel has not failed. But God forgive us, and God help us in the little time we have at our disposal. What is happening in Africa and rumours of war it's because the Gospel has not made an impact. It is our message, our highest message and our best message. We do not emphasise things about Him, but we emphasise Him. What do we say about Him? (n.p.)

Below he deals with the person of Jesus Christ, the second member of the Godhead – the One God (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> We preach Jesus – why? Because this Jesus we are persuaded, we are convinced and we are convicted that this Jesus is God, nothing less, nothing more. He is God! We are also persuaded that this Jesus is the only Saviour of mankind; We are also persuaded that Jesus died for us all and paid our debt on the cross of Calvary. We have a message to give to the nations that Jesus and nothing else but Jesus, and nobody else but Jesus is the Saviour of mankind: and that this Jesus having accomplished everything, having paid our penalties, died on the Cross, gave up the ghost and was buried; but on the third day he rose from the dead. We have a living message and therefore our message is alive, because our message is alive, it is living Jesus rose from the dead. All that is left is for the sinner to accept the work that Jesus died on the Cross, what Jesus did. It is not the amount of agonising, it is not the amount of sins that we brought, it is the acceptance of the work of Christ on the Cross. (n.p.)

Audience

Bhengu understood the psychological and emotional make-up of his audience; he raised and answered questions people were asking. An example of some of the questions he answered during his Back to God Crusades are (Bhengu pers. comm., 10 January 1959):

1. Was Jesus a European?
2. Did Jesus visit Africa or Europe?
3. Did the white people write the Bible?
4. Are we Africans cursed forever?
5. What is the black man's future?
6. Is there any future in apartheid?
7. Does Jesus really save and change similar [*sic*]?
8. Does Jesus heal [*sic*] bodies today? (n.p.)

The story teller

Bhengu was a great story teller. He told stories to explain his messages – like the parable of the sower (Mt 13:3–9) and the parable of the seed (Mt 13:24–30). He talked to people about spiritual things using earthly examples people could relate with.

At one level, Bhengu was easy and sociable, a charming companion, always interested in one's conversation, and for his part ready to launch into appropriate anecdote to beguile whatever company he was in. He was unequalled as a raconteur, and I never heard him repeat a story. He boasted to me once that he could preach a different sermon on each of the 365 days of the year without repetition and he had a different story to embellish every sermon he preached. In conversation, his language was precise and his flow of thought explicit.

Yet at another level, Bhengu was an enigma. John Bond has this to say about Bhengu 'sometimes I found that while I could understand perfectly the words and sentences he was using, I could not fathom the thought processes behind what he was saying' (Bond 2000:93–94).

Passion and compassion

Bhengu's preaching or proclamation – that is, his *kerygma* – was marked by passion and compassion (Stark 2007):

> He made heartfelt appeals to the people to turn to God and forsake sinful living. He preached hope instead of condemnation, without judging the people who were in a hopeless situation of social, economic and political deprivation. (p. 101)

Bond in his book *For the Record – Reflecting on the Assemblies of God* (2000) writes on Bhengu's preaching (Bond 2000):

> Bhengu was making an altar call. The dust had powdered his face as though it were a mask. I saw two black stripes on his cheeks as his tears made a rivulet there. He was pleading with souls to accept Jesus as Saviour. 'My girl, my boy, come as you are. Jesus loves you. He died for you. Come as you are. Jesus loves you'. As he pleaded and wept over them, my heart and eyes were weeping too. Such tenderness! (pp. 57–60)

Bond also tells of Bhengu preaching to about 1000 people in Lamontville, Durban. Bond's heart was stirred up as he heard Bhengu shout fiercely over the loudspeakers, 'Forget about

Bhengu! Forget you! The Assemblies of God can't save you! Only Jesus can save you!' Jim Mullan looked at me in the car afterwards and said, 'Old Bhengu was really giving it stick today'. He truly was and often did.

In one of the meetings in Zambia, there were no chairs, so he squatted on his heels while he preached to the people who squatted around him, telling them a story of a caterpillar crawling out of fire on a twig placed by George to illustrate salvation. In Malawi, he stood in the shade of a thorn tree, preaching the Word of God to his fellow Africans which was unforgettable (2000:58).

Power in preaching

Bond describes how powerful Bhengu's preaching was, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Bond 2000):

> To listen to Nicholas Bhengu at his most anointed was an elemental experience. One of our white ministers who had heard George Jeffries, the famous Welsh evangelist preach in the early days in England said of Bhengu 'It's like hearing George Jeffries in the Royal Albert Hall'. When Jeffries went into a 'hwyl' they would switch off the microphones and he could he heard in every corner of the vast auditorium. (p. 59)

Bond (2000) continues:

> I have a personal reason for remembering Nicholas Bhengu as a preacher. I had an adopted sister, Pat, of whom I was very fond. She never went to church, (professing) to be an atheist. I think there had been a sadness in her life and she was wounded in spirit. Unfortunately, she had a strong dislike for Africans. In the 1950s when I pastured a small congregation in Durban, the church bought an old YMCA hut in Moore Road which could serve us as a place of worship. My sister came to the dedication service we held. Nicholas Bhengu and several others were invited as speakers. Shortly before he was due to speak I noticed he was jotting down notes on a scrap of paper with a stump of pencil. I realised he was preparing his address at the last minute while sitting there on the platform. 'You old scoundrel', I thought fondly to myself. When his turn came, he spoke for about 20 minutes. He transfixed us all. Afterwards my sister Pat confided to me, 'I like Nicholas Bhengu, John; he's the only black I don't hate!'

> Please pardon the sentiment. It was she who felt it, not I. Some weeks later she said to me, 'I like your little church, John; you can count me as a member'. (p. 60)

Another testimony reads as follows:

> During those remarkable days in East London, God so poured out his Spirit that it was like the Acts of the Apostles all over again. As Bhengu preached, a crippled suddenly jumped up, shouted and threw away his crutches. As he walked and then ran, there was an uproar. It was God at work! Nicholas Bhengu said, 'We did not pray for him, Jesus healed him and he shouted and the people knew that Jesus heals today'. On another day, a crowd of over 7 000 were assembled in the open air. While they were singing a simple Christian chorus, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon the household of Cornelius when Peter was preaching in Acts 10. This happened at half past ten in the morning and a great crowd was still there when darkness fell. Small boys of just 12 years old talked in tongues and prophesied. It was impossible for Bhengu or anyone else to preach. The news of what was happening spread and sightseers came and they too were converted. The numbers continued to increase and the Lord continued to save and baptise them with the Holy Ghost and fire. The people were so under the power of God that they could not walk. Many of them were prostrated and lay as though they were dead. Bhengu sent for buses to come and take the people to their homes but as soon as the bus drivers and conductors tried to pick them up they themselves came under the power of the Holy Spirit. They said to Bhengu, 'As soon as we touch them this comes into us'. In 1971, a Zulu queen was baptised in front of a crowd of 5000 witnesses. Influential African political leaders were among the converts. (n.p.)

Bhengu is now 75 years of age and respected by black people, white people and people of mixed race, throughout South Africa. He has preached throughout Africa and visited Japan as well as Britain, Canada and North America.

Dr Gamedze, a leading evangelical leader in Swaziland, a man who knew Bhengu very well, attributes the power of Bhengu's preaching, his works of miracles and the thousands of people who gave their lives to Christ to three things:

1. He was a born-again and anointed man of God.
2. He was a man of prayer.

3. He was commissioned – he understood his calling very clearly. It was really a gift of the Holy Spirit that was propelling him.

Gamedze further explains in an interview (Gamedze pers. comm., 18 October 2003):

> Bhengu was not a 'show off' person, especially in the area of tongues. He understood or used tongues to charge his batteries. Anointing would fall on him as he delivered his sermon. When he delivered his message, the audience would be swept and fall under the anointing. (n.p.)

When Nicholas Bhengu passed away, South Africa – indeed, Africa – lost one of its most gifted preachers and teachers. Gleaning from his rich background, his Lutheran roots, his evangelical training and his Pentecostal passion, he had much to offer. He set an example that should be studied carefully, and should be followed, by generations to come.

The itinerant evangelist

Bhengu had an understanding of people and human nature (Lloyd-Jones 1971:110). Katesa Schlosser says the following about Bhengu's preaching and reason for his success (Schlosser 2003):

> Bhengu works with psychological means. First, he tries to provoke curiosity so that people can come to his services. He also knows how to deal with people's needs to socialise and to assert themselves. The service should never be boring. Important for him is the sense of community within the congregation. Apart from that people join Bhengu out of a desperate need of their psychological and physical needs. (n.p.)

Bhengu began his evangelistic work as an itinerant evangelist. He preached for several denominations including the Church of the Nazarene and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. He also preached on the mines on the East Rand before he started planting churches.

Bhengu tried to reach out to sinners and build a new society. Through his work many lives were transformed. Green (1992) says:

> Evangelism is not an optional extra for those who like that kind of thing. It is not an acceptable pastime for the person who likes making a fool of himself on a soap box in the open air or titillating his ego by addressing a large gathering in a public hall. Evangelism is sharing the good news of what God has done for us all. It is the sacred duty of every Christian. Evangelism is not shallow. It is, of course, often regarded as shallow by those who don't do it, and by some who do. Indeed, a lot that passes by the name of evangelism is shallow. But that is not how it is meant to be. It is intended to be the good news of how God takes sinners and builds them into a new society which constitutes the first instalment of God's kingly rule in a rebel world. There is nothing shallow in that message and its implications. It affects the intellect, the outlook, the relationships – everything. (pp. 14–15)

☐ The Church of the Nazarene in Swaziland (now eSwatini)

The Church of the Nazarene in Swaziland was founded in 1908 by Dr David Hynd Senior at eNdzingeni near Piggs Peak. Dr Hynd Senior also founded a hospital and a Teachers Training College in Manzini. According to Dr Samuel Hynd, son of the founder missionary of the Church of the Nazarene, Bhengu was quite remarkable (S. Hynd Jr pers. comm., 18 October 2003):

> Bhengu had a way of ministering to people (like African to African). He had a very powerful evangelistic ministry. His messages were so simple. He preached God's Word with authority – which gave him a degree of honour and respectability. He, as a black man (not a white missionary) preached the Word of God in a very powerful way. His messages were convincing. Bhengu was authoritarian in terms of God's Word and people responded to him. He was a wonderful man. He was like a president of South Africa in the spiritual sense. If he were a politician, he would have been a very strong politician. His message was plain Gospel and he never pushed people to speak in tongues. He was a wise man who had a way of engaging his audience. Nazarenes were not open to tongues and were never imposed upon or pushed to speak in tongues. Bhengu never pushed people to give him anything. Bhengu's influence grew and 'others were inviting him'. The King also invited him to speak at special occasions. When the King brought churches for prayers together as the result Bhengu became closer to the King. (n.p.)

Dr Hynd Junior also met Bhengu in Scotland when he was on preaching tours in the United Kingdom or to attend conferences as one of the leaders. In Scotland, he used to fetch Bhengu and take him to meetings; 'so Scottish people knew him as a hero; they said he was a lot accepted there'.

The Pentecostal Holiness Church in Phokeng, Rustenburg

According to Mogapi and Ndlovu (pers. comm., 16 February 2009):

> Bhengu also preached for the Pentecostal Holiness Church in Phokeng. The church was founded by a Rev. Kenneth Spooner, an African American missionary. Spooner was the first person to bring the Gospel to the area. Spooner and Bhengu preached on surrounding farms. (n.p.)

The mines of the East Rand

After joining H.C. Phillips in 1937 in Nelspruit and after preaching in Nelspruit and surroundings, he moved to Benoni on the East Rand where he ministered on the mines and established his first church in South Africa in 'Twatwa' in 14th Avenue (now Actonville township) for Indians after the National government removed black people to Wattville and Daveyton. According to Mogapi and Ndlovu, the church started in Rabothatha's house in Brakpan. The church grew and moved to Rabothatha's garage, the garage also became too small and a new church was planted in Benoni. Bhengu asked Alfred Gumede to come to Benoni to look after the church, while he went to Port Elizabeth (Mogapi & Ndlovu pers. comm., 16 February 2009).

Port Elizabeth

Bhengu was invited by James Mullan to join him in Port Elizabeth. Mullan was an Irish missionary working for Emanuel Mission

in Tzaneen under H.C. Phillips. He had felt a call to go to Port Elizabeth to start work among the white people. He also had a burden to reach the black people but needed someone to minister to the black people. He invited Bhengu to join him and work among the black people. In a memo, Bhengu explains how he went to Port Elizabeth (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> Forty years ago, after meeting me at the Annual Conference at Nelspruit, he (Mullan) invited me for a series of meetings at his mission station near Tzaneen. He held Bible classes every morning with the workers and I attended those classes. To my astonishment I found this man different from all others. He taught exactly what had been revealed to me, but I was afraid to use it. We became tight friends and that was why I went to Port Elizabeth a year or two after he had already started a small white assembly there. (n.p.)

As the church in Port Elizabeth was established, Bhengu organised classes where men were taught leadership skills in the church: how to live in harmony with their wives and raise children. Women likewise were taught how to take care of their husbands and children. They were also taught basic hygiene and how to work with their hands to support their families.

Bhengu having been a health inspector before becoming a preacher, he was committed to educate his people on purity, cleanliness, education, industriousness, prayer, Bible study and the spreading of the Gospel (Hollenweger 1972):

> In heaven the streets are shining gold and the dresses shining white. Let us, as good Christians, be as clean and shining in our appearance as we can, even here [...] It is difficult for people to break away from their old customs. Africans in the country like to relieve themselves in the bush, but here we have lavatories. Use them. I shall not be pleased to hear that dirty paper is lying about in them. I see that you are even too lazy to flush the lavatories. That is being very dirty. This church, too, is cleaned every day, but look at it just now, with all these papers lying around. It is this kind of thing that makes the location streets unnecessarily dirty too. (p. 134)

In Port Elizabeth, Bhengu was assisted by a Durban choir from the Full Gospel Church of God with which he had been associated from the time of his conversion. He called his meetings a garage

where souls were restored to God and bodies were healed. He told people he was not starting a church. On Sunday mornings, he told people to go back to their churches and come back in the afternoon for his meetings. Those who were not churched demanded a Sunday morning service because they had nowhere to go. After establishing his first church in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, he brought in Alfred Gumede and Mr J.J. Dlamini to teach in the Pilgrim Bible School, which he had established in the church: Bible School classes were held in the evenings for those who wanted to enter the ministry and those who just wanted to enrich their spiritual lives by getting into the Word of God for themselves. He also brought Pastor Nebe from Benoni, Transvaal (now Gauteng) (Dlodlo & Zungu pers. comm., 13 September 1986).

Two weeks later, Bhengu went to Korsten where he preached in a community hall. The same *modus operandi* was followed. People were healed from diseases and many were saved and had their lives transformed by the Gospel Bhengu preached to them. Many who came to Christ were from different cultural groups: Zulus, Xhosas, people of mixed race and so on. There was, however, opposition from mainline churches who were concerned with some of their people leaving the church to go to Bhengu's meetings although he encouraged them to go back to their churches. His preaching was not about the church or people joining a church but about having a born-again experience and a relationship with Christ (Mbhele pers. comm., 05 March 2005):

> Dressed in a blue overall that was shorter than he was, he rode around the township on a bicycle with some pamphlets, which he distributed in the street, especially among children. Mbhele was one of the children he gave handbills to assist with the distribution. He pasted them on walls; he took others into shops. Bhengu encouraged those who had been saved and cripples that could now walk to give their testimonies in the streets on Sunday afternoons and display their crutches to demonstrate the power of God. (n.p.)

Zungu was one of Bhengu's first workers. According to an interview with him and Dlodlo, campaign meetings started on 22 January 1945. Dlodlo went to the meetings, and the next evening, on 23 January 1945, he was saved. He was also healed from a stomach ailment he had had for many years. Many miracles happened during the campaigns: the blind could see, the deaf could hear and the crippled walked. Many other miracles took place (Dlodlo & Zungu pers. comm., 13 September 1986).

East London

The *Probe Publication* (1985), South Africa's only independently owned black voice, in November 1985 reported about the happenings in East London:

> There was a stage when East London Xhosa Bibles went out of stock. Everyday. Afternoon and evening, scores of people carrying big red and black Bibles appeared from all corners of Duncan Village to go and gather at the dumps where you now find Ikwezi and Xabanisa Junior Secondary Schools. The reverend Alfred Camngca observes 'If you walked down the Cemetery Road those years as early as 6 am, you heard as if it were bees buzzing, prayers right through. In almost every street there were more than one family saved'. The climate was also conclusive for Bhengu's revival. The African National Congress opened their meetings with prayers and Bhengu's revival supplied the religious impetus for the politico-socio re-awakening of masses. (p. 7)

The move by Bhengu to go to East London could be compared with that of Paul to go to Macedonia. When Paul and his companions came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bethynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to, so they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'. After Paul had seen the vision, they were ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the Gospel to them (Ac 16:7–10).

In an interview, Kunene explains how it happened (Kunene pers. comm., 18 September 2005):

> In 1945 Mr Camngca saw a vision of a man dressed in a black suit wearing a bow tie. Camngca did not know the man. God told him to go to Port Elizabeth and ask the man he had seen in a vision to bring revival to East London. He later went to Port Elizabeth (German Hall) to try and find the man he had seen in the vision. He met Bhengu at the entrance of the City White Hall (German Hall) where Bhengu had his meetings. Camngca shouted, 'Here is the man I saw in a vision'. Bhengu shouted back, 'Here is the man I saw in a vision'. Bhengu had also seen a vision of a man of Camngca's description. Camngca told Bhengu that God sent him to come and ask him to bring revival to East London – a Macedonian call (Ac 16:9–10). Bhengu went to East London but had no place to stay. He stayed in Mr Camngca's home. Mr Camngca lived in a two-roomed house with his wife and children. He offered his bed to Bhengu but Bhengu chose to sleep on the floor not wanting to cause discomfort to the family. Bhengu conducted his campaigns at a Tipini (Dumping Ground). There was no other place for his meetings. Many people came from all over the Eastern Cape to hear Bhengu. His meetings were highly successful. The mayor of East London and the police published in newspapers the effects of the meeting. (n.p.)

It was in East London that he launched his most powerful evangelistic campaign that effectively catapulted him on to national and international scenes as one of the greatest evangelists of the like of Billy Graham. He was known as the 'Billy Graham of Africa'.

Healings and Miracles Ministry

All Bhengu's campaigns were accompanied by some spectacular miracles and healings of the sick and maimed. 'I will prove that there is a God and that he is stronger than the devil!' Bhengu said, and did this by means of faith healings, 'for without them my church would be as empty as the other Protestant missions'. He added, 'If I was not convinced that the missionary command had to be carried out in all its parts, both teaching *and* healing, I would not have begun to preach'.

Bhengu regarded hostility to medicine as a regrettable mistake on the part of many Pentecostal churches. 'I have never heard any testimonies about healings of organic diseases', he said. On 08 April and 02 November 1953, Bhengu affirmed that in East London he cooperated with two doctors, to whom he sent everyone suffering from an organic disease (Hollenweger 1972:129). This however did not stop Bhengu from proclaiming the healing of the organically sick. In the vernacular, his church was known as the *icawe kamphilisi* [the healer's church].

God desired a healthy mind in a healthy body. 'The body is the temple of God', Bhengu said. He further states (Hollenweger 1972):

> It is our duty to keep this temple pure and avoid everything that can harm it. And therefore, I do not need to forbid my followers to smoke and drink. I only draw their attention to the ruin of their health – and their finances! And the result? None of my people smokes or drinks. (p. 129)

The beginning

Bond (2000) tells the story of how Bhengu's healing ministry began:

> Bhengu told me of the dream he had (also in Lesotho) from which he dated his healing ministry. Up to that time he had prayed for the sick but with small results. In his dream, Bhengu, who was very fastidious about hygiene, found himself in a Basotho hut surrounded and pressed by people afflicted with loathsome diseases. He shrank from contact with them as they reached out toward him. Then in his dream he saw Jesus descend through the thatched roof of the hut. Jesus moved among the sufferers touching them and healing them. Then He ascended through the roof again. As He went, He turned to Bhengu and spoke. 'You do the same' He said. From that time, great miracles began to attend Bhengu's ministry. (p. 77)

The healing of a woman

A woman who was born with a hunchback would walk by bending forward and lifting up her knees. Because her back was badly

deformed, she could not sleep on her back. She sought help from many quarters, from doctors and traditional healers, but to no avail. She was 13 years old when her aunt took her to Bhengu's East London crusade, where Bhengu prayed for her. She went home and during that night she woke to find that she was sleeping on her back. There was a cracking sound coming from her spine as the bones loosened and straightened. From that day she walked upright. I confirmed this when I visited her at her house in Mdantsane, East London (Noma pers. comm., 16 December 2006).

The healing of a man brought in a wheelbarrow

Lund and Mangum, who were American missionaries engaged in literature production at the Emmanuel Press in Nelspruit, reported as follows on Bhengu's January 1956 Nelspruit revival:

> It began at a watch night service when a group sensed that something was going to happen. They prayed through every night until January 22nd at which time two weeks of special evangelistic meetings were to begin. The church was much too small so was quickly enlarged to more than twice the original size. The first service saw the building filled and with people hanging in the open windows. Loudspeakers and floodlights had to be installed and the open field surrounding the church soon became 'holy ground' as thousands heard and responded to the invitation to get right with God. Gangsters, known in South Africa as 'tsotsis' returned stolen goods after conversion and one of their so-called leaders one night gave a wonderful testimony of his salvation and challenged his followers in crime to now become followers in the way of the Lord. Eight responded that night and surrendered to the evangelist all their tools of vice and crime, bringing them in a large Hessian sack. Huge bonfires of fetishes and medicines took place on several occasions. The revival continued long after the African evangelist left town and the whole community was stirred. Revival fires spread to distant cities and towns. (*Fellowship News* January–February 1956: vol. 30–40).

In a cassette-taped message, Bhengu mentions this miracle that occurred at one of his conventions and called on Dan Lephoko and Rev. Mjaji who witnessed the miracle to confirm it. A man had broken his back while working for the South African Railways in Barberton. In January 1956, he was brought, in a wheelbarrow, to Bhengu's revival meeting at Nelspruit. Bhengu laid hands on the man. He stood up out of the wheelbarrow, staggered and walked around.

This miracle happened at the football ground during a Sunday service, attended by 3000 to 4000 people. In the audience were Muslims, members of the South African Police Force (white and black) and a sizeable number of white people.

Dan Lephoko was present when Bhengu challenged the audience and said: 'I want no philosopher but give me Christ, I want no Mohammed but give me Christ'. The atmosphere was electrical, charged with the presence of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit on Bhengu.

The crippled man of Nigeria

In a taped message, Bhengu tells his audience how, on one of his evangelistic trips to Nigeria, God healed a cripple who sat on the side of the road begging (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> While I was walking in the street I saw a crippled man sitting on the pavement begging for money. I gave him sixpence and walked on. As I walked on a voice spoke to me and asked, 'Why did you give that man money, are you not my servant?' I then went back to the man and demanded that he give me back my sixpence. I took the money back. 'I am the man of Jesus Christ. Rise and walk!' and I grabbed the man and stood him up. He stood up. He staggered and started walking. (n.p.)

This incident could be said to be similar to the story of Peter and John and the crippled man who was carried and placed at the gate of the temple every day to beg from those who went to the temple (Ac 3:5–10).

The demon-possessed girl

According to Bond (2000), this dramatic miracle happened in an African township on the East Rand. The press was in attendance with their cameras:

> When Bhengu rose to speak, he found that immediately below the speaker's rostrum a peasant couple from the country were seated on the floor almost up against the platform. With them they had their insane daughter of about 17, lying on a grass sleeping mat. The girl was neglected and unwashed. She stank. Bhengu with his fastidious habits was repelled. The girl kept flailing her arms about feebly, uttering an inane cry [...] at regular intervals. The rather elderly parents did nothing to quieten her. A blackness came upon Bhengu's spirit. Revulsion took hold of him, mounting more to an anger. He felt no anointing in the preaching but went through the motions until his sermon was ended. Then he was scheduled to pray for the sick. The people were expectant. The press photographers were poised with their cameras ready. Nicholas Bhengu felt not a spark of faith. How was he to arrange the healing line? As it was, the first in line was this repulsive family, stinking and insane. He just felt he could not pray for the girl before the assembled paparazzi-like crowd of photographers for them to see nothing take place. He decided he would slip out of the door behind the platform and lay hands on the people as they filed out of the front door, emptying the hall of its crowd. Thus the girl would not be first in line, but last. No one would know whether she was healed or not. Bhengu felt certain she would not be healed. But when he tried the back entrance, the door was locked! Where was the caretaker with the key? Nowhere to be found! He had no right to lock the door anyway with a crowd like that in the hall! It was illegal! Find the caretaker! They looked. They waited. They sang. Bhengu sat immobile, face thunderous. At length there was nothing to be done. He had to pray for the girl. Whether she got healed or not, he just had to face it. As he went down from the platform, there was an expectant hush. The photographers were at the ready. Then the miracle happened. A paroxysm of godly wrath came upon the man of God. At the top of his voice he shouted out. He cursed the demon in the girl. There was a wail and in the next instant she was on her feet normal, being clutched by her parents. The next morning the newspapers were full of photographs of her being carried shoulder-high from the meeting by members of the crowd. Pandemonium filled the hall. Of course, Bhengu's black mood was nothing but the

> effect of Satanic power emanating from the girl. As he prayed for her, the Spirit of God came upon him with that special kind of faith to destroy the work of the devil. (pp. 78–79)

Like in the case of Jesus, Bhengu performed many miracles in the course of his campaigns and in ordinary settings. Many people can witness to the thousands of conversions and miracles performed by Bhengu. Many of the witnesses are still alive although some have since passed on to be with the Lord as promised in the Word and by Bhengu who, in his preaching, gave people the assurance of salvation. About Jesus, the Apostle John wrote (Jn 20):

> Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (v. 31)

Bhengu's impact was felt not only in South Africa but also in other countries in Africa. Also as an evangelist, teacher and prophet, Bhengu had a tremendous influence in overseas countries.

Changed lives

Bhengu preached for results and did bring change to the lives of thousands of people and communities. Wherever he went with his tent, crowds came to hear him. They gave their lives to Christ, went back to God.

It did not matter where he preached, whether in cities or rural areas, crime came down; people surrendered stolen goods and their tools of trade to Bhengu. Stolen goods and weapons were then taken to the police in truck loads. The *Johannesburg Star's* staff reporter (in the *Mission News* October 1958), reporting under the title *A Black Billy Graham,* wrote (*Johannesburg Star* October 1958):

> The fire died out of the tall, bespectacled Zulu's eyes and voice and he began moving slowly around the congregation, intoning: '*Ubugebengu*

> *abukhokheli lutho. Nikelani izikhali zenu nani kuNkulunkulu*' [*Crime does not pay. Surrender your arms and yourselves to God*]. There was a slight stir and then knives, pangas, hatchets, coshes, knuckledusters and other dangerous weapons were silently passed from hand to hand to the Rev. Nicholas Bhengu, South Africa's 'black Billy Graham'. Since he began his religious campaigns around South Africa in 1945, this preacher has been responsible for thousands of pounds worth of stolen property, guns and other arms being handed over to the police, as well as the wholesale conversion of native gangsters. He is now campaigning in Orlando where his fireproof tent is packed each night with up to 4000 people. So phenomenal is his power over his own people that tributes have been paid to him by Dr Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs, and by police chiefs throughout the country. His power, as I witnessed, is almost hypnotic. In the style of the old-time crusading evangelists, he gives his congregations a verbal lashing for their sins. He tells them: 'Not one of you is clean. The thing you know how to do best is to hate'. He somehow gets across to even the worst elements. A native from Randfontein handed over a small, razor-sharp, needle-pointed knife with the words: 'I don't know how many people this has stabbed. I've lost count'. 'If you repent and work for God always, you will one day be forgiven', he was told. In Orlando Bhengu invited Phillip Molefe to assist him in the crusade. (n.p.)

The report goes on to say that Bhengu reached out to the criminal population (*Johannesburg Star* October 1958):

> Special provision had to be made for these converts. Some of them brought three lorry-loads of stolen goods, a complete suite of furniture, arms and ammunition, to a police station. Mr Bhengu said the crusade had swept the city for more than five years. Its success had 'softened the authorities so we have freedom and favour throughout South Africa'. Mr Bhengu said in South Africa something was needed that could break the power of the 'juju man' who holds sway in literate Africa. Western conquest and colonisation caused the Africans to blame Christianity for the loss and destruction of their tradition and culture. (n.p.)

One of his converts testified (Dubb 1976):

> Before I joined Bhengu's church I spent my money on cigarettes, brandy, k....r-(indigenous African brewed) beer, tea-parties (drinking clubs) and buying presents for my boyfriends. I consulted diviners

and herbalists on whom I wasted too much money. I now spend my money buying good clothes for my family, good things to decorate my house and on church affairs. I give some to my husband who makes a small saving at the Post Office. I spend more money at Bhengu's church than what I did at my former church. At the same time I do not feel it, for I have more money since I do not spend it as extravagantly as I did before. (p. 66)

Chapter 6

Missional churches

Churches for Africa

It is estimated that Bhengu planted more than 2000 churches in South Africa and neighbouring countries. Kirk (2000:33) mentions 'the extraordinary missionary thrust of the last time centuries, with its emphasis on the planting of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches'. Furthermore, it is estimated that lay people went out to establish about 500 churches.

Missio Dei and *Missio Ecclesiae*

Missio Dei [the mission of God] is an initiative of the triune God in his desire to reach out to man. The triune God calls and sends the church, through the Spirit, into the world to participate fully in God's mission (Burger, Marais & Danie 2017:203). According to Kirk, when Christian communities speak about God, by definition they have to speak about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as there simply is no other God. Therefore, to speak about the *Missio Dei*

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is to indicate, without any qualification, the mission Trinitatis (Kirk 2000:27). In other words, as far as Kirk is concerned, it is the God of the Bible who initiates the *mission Dei* and not any other god. We also see God's mission (*Missio Dei*) in the Old Testament, in that God sent Moses and the prophets to the nation of Israel and to the Gentile nations (Larkin & Williams ed. 1998:15). In the New Testament, we see God sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus refers to himself to the fact that he was sent by his Father '[...] and whoever receives me does not receive me but Him who sent me' (Mk 9:37). In John, Jesus says to his disciples, '[...] as the Father has sent me I also send you' (Jn 20:21).

Just as the Father had sent Jesus, so he sent his disciples. 'As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world' (Jn 17:18). In Mark, the Lord said, 'Go into the entire world and preach the good news to all creation' (Mk 16:15).

Bosch asserts that Karl Barth was the first to give a clear theological explanation of *Missio Dei* (cf. Bosch 1991):

> Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *Missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement', the *mission ecclesiae*: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. (p. 390)

This was how Bhengu, too, sent out his people as God's ambassadors to evangelise those who had not been converted to Christ.

Biblical missionary task

Peters (1972:159–163) defines four tasks of mission:

- Spiritual. The Holy Spirit being the agent of salvation originating from the eternal counsel of God.
- Biblical. A biblical theology is a missionary theology. Peters postulates that a Bible teacher will also be a mission teacher and

any attempt to bring revival for mission has to be based on Bible.

- Faith. God has ordained that Christianity should be a religion of faith. From an objective point of view, Christianity is a religion of supernatural revelation. From a subjective point of view, it is a religion of faith. Faith is the spiritual eye that beholds God, that perceives Christ the Saviour and Lord, that understands the Bible to be the Word of God, that accepts the missionary task as the purpose and will of God, that discovers missions as the natural result of the work of Christ and that missions are an inherent element of the call unto salvation and the obedient compliance to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Without faith it is impossible to please God; faith is fundamental to all Christian life and endeavours. There is no truly spiritual work which is not also faith work.
- Human. 'God has chosen human instruments to accomplish His task in human hearts within a human society surrounded by human environment'. Peters decries the fact that many a missionary has not fully identified with the environment of the people he has been sent to minister to, the evangelical missionary has not been willing to make the social integration, psychological and spiritual identification. He never 'sat where they sat' which has created cultural problems. These missionaries have failed to incarnate themselves in the manner that Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul did (Phlp 2:5–11; 1 Cor 9:16–23; Jn 1:14, Mk 10:45). Peters makes the significant observation that many missionaries were unwilling to integrate socially with the people they were ministering to. Their lack of interaction with the fabric of society they were called to serve was one of the reasons that there was a call for missionaries to go home.

World Council of Churches

In the WCC fourth Assembly held at Uppsala in 1968, everything was brought under the umbrella of 'mission' (Bosch 1980):

> Health and welfare services, youth projects, activities of political interest groups, projects for economic and social development,

> constructive application of violence, combating racism, the introduction of the inhabitants of the Third World to the possibilities of the twentieth century; and the defence of human rights. Small wonder that Donald McGavran, in an open letter, criticised the Uppsala assembly for allowing mission to develop into 'any good activity at home or abroad which anyone declares to be the will of God'. (p. 11)

Mission and Evangelism

In an annual report to donors dated 23 November 1969, delivered at Assembly Hall, Belgravia Crescent, East London, Bhengu exhibited a full understanding of the *Missio Dei*.

He based his message on John 20:21: 'Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: As my father hath sent me, even so send I you'. He said:

1. It is striking to realise that we have a mission not less than the one which the first missionary who travelled the longest distance came to this earth. It frightens us to know the immensity of the task before us.
2. It behoves us to intensify our efforts. He was sent by God to do the greatest Mission on earth. We, in turn, have been sent by Jesus Christ himself, the Son of the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth whom we have accepted as our Saviour, King and Master.
3. We are made aware of our position first in him as members of his body, and his bride, as his church and as bones of his bones. We belong wholly to him but there is a task set before us. If we have been accepted into sonship with him, we have also been commissioned by him to this ministry on earth – to fulfil that which was begun and left incomplete by him.
4. The work of salvation was his Mission to this world and this was accomplished – 'It is finished' – when he bore our sins on the tree and died the death of a malefactor 'having done nothing amiss'. His mission was accomplished. 'I must work the works of Him that sent me' (Jn 9:4).

5. The Mission of gathering the lost souls, building his body and extending his kingdom by proclaiming to the world the glad tidings of what has been accomplished in their behalf is left with [*sic*] us and for us. We are fully aware now of our task and mission from the risen Saviour – 'even so send I you!'.
6. We all want to fit into his programme and play our role respectively as grateful and obedient children of the Great King. We are constrained by his love to do his will.
7. The indwelling Christ compels us to love as he loved, sacrifice as he did and suffer with him in all things. What is his will?
8. His will is that no one should perish but they should all come to the knowledge of the truth and repent, believe and be saved (2 Pt 3:9). How shall they hear without a preacher? (Rm 10:14). How shall they preach except they be sent? (Rm 10:15).

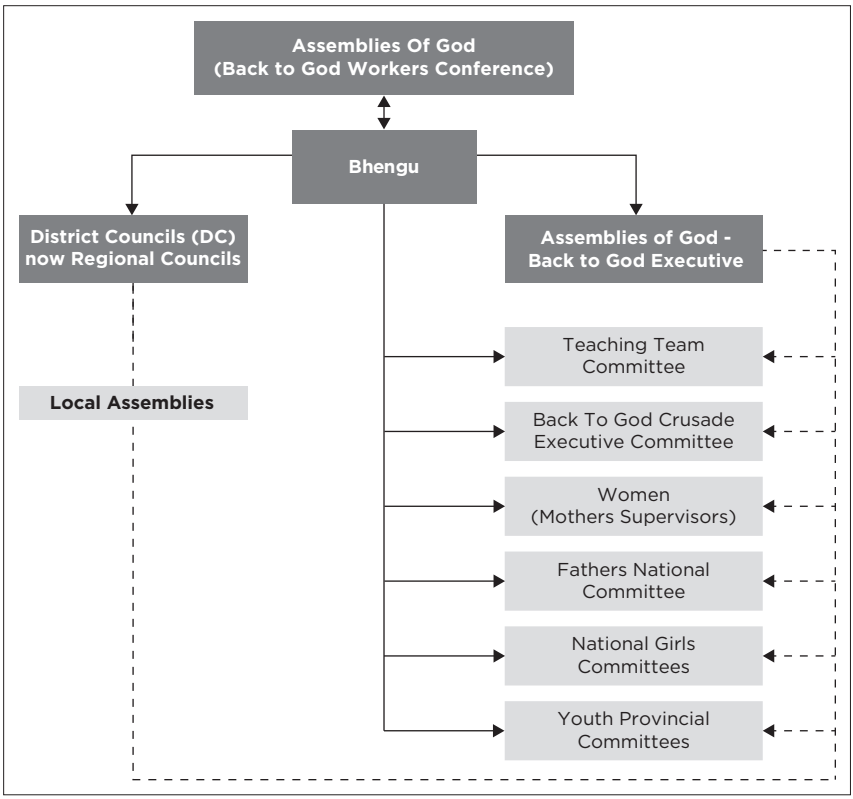
According to John Stott (1975:35), the word 'mission' is a comprehensive word, embracing everything which God sends his people into the world to do. It therefore includes evangelism and social responsibility, because both are authentic expressions of the love which longs to serve man in his need.

According to this definition, the church has an obligation to involve itself in the broad aspects of God's general mission work: world affairs including poverty alleviation, unemployment, disease and the liberation of people who are denied civil liberties. Nonetheless, Stott maintains that Paul's cry for his people to be saved is God's key mission (Rm 10:1).

A letter Bhengu wrote to me from Selly Oaks Colleges in 1974 exhibited his distress; without making any specific reference to the WCC, he expressed his disconcert at the approach of ecumenism towards mission and evangelism where everything goes for mission and evangelism.

Vision and structure

Bhengu structured, organised and managed his work (Figure 6.1). Bhengu imparted his vision to his followers, challenged them to



Source: Lephoko 2006.

FIGURE 6.1: Bhengu's work organisation structure.

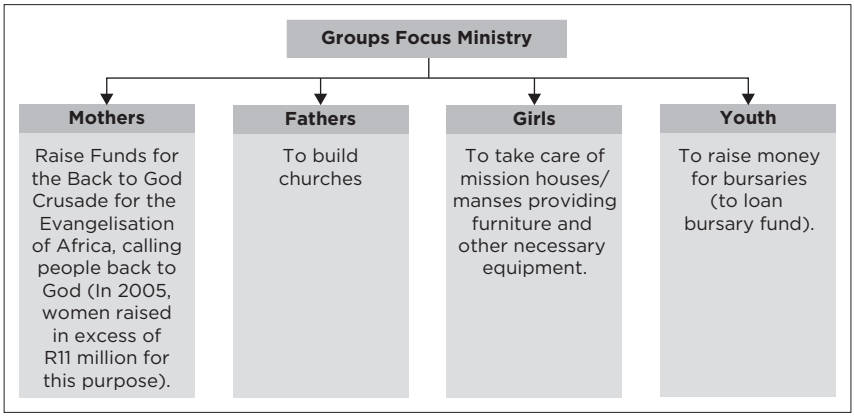
go out and win people for Christ and to build their own churches. To achieve this, he organised mothers, fathers, youth and girls to raise money for specific purposes.

Church planting

Bhengu devised a strategy to build churches by mobilising his people to build their own. The circular below is Bhengu's strategy for the men to build churches.

How are we going to build the church buildings on various building sites on offer by the governments of the Republic, Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, KwaZulu, Gazankulu, Leboa, Qwa-Qwa, Swaziland, Lesotho and Botswana? We can easily achieve this without any bulldozing effect (Figure 6.2):

> Let us comprehensively read the passage that follows – Let all men collaborate – Let us all direct our ball to the goal opposite us. Read this prayerfully and thoughtfully, calculatively and yielded and then act. The need for building big churches is aggravated by factors of our large numbers and multiplication in all places: It is imperative therefore that we should decorate the independent homelands with valuable and attractive buildings so as to promote the nation in the faith we have detected and in the truth and evidence of which we are convinced setting aside all fables and dreams of the nations. What are we going to do then? R1.00 a man a month from all the assemblies can never be burdensome on us as we can build them all, can't we? So then, read this directive carefully and in this you will be honouring your leader, if at all you have one. James 3:1. MY LAST SOLEMN REQUEST: WE MUST RAISE A FUND FOR THE BUILDING OF CHURCHES, Hebrews 13:16–22.
>
> 1. All mothers have set us a big example in this church. Although it has been an effort on their part to organise others, today they have reaped their fruits and are challenging us.



Source: Lephoko 2006.

FIGURE 6.2: Bhengu's groups focus ministry.

2. I request you then MEN to pay attention carefully and be determined and rise and act without question nor defiance or controversy but each and every one do according to this request.
3. I have tried to no avail to raise a church building fund, for if a particular assembly builds a church alone, this becomes so burdensome to it that it eventually faints. We have also tried all means of cooperation but failed.
4. I suggest, declare and request therefore that: (a) All MEN from each and every assembly contribute R1.00 monthly. (b) You will notice then that should we all with determination do this, I will be leaving you with a fund which will cater for all buildings of this ever growing church. My soul will rest in peace. Remember it is R1.00 only a month. It will help the building fund of your own church. Do you think that R1.00 a month is impossible? Just think of all the men saved who love God and also like the salvation of souls and the increase in the work of Jesus, let alone having enough room for themselves and their children, how much they can accumulate in just 1 year!

Be aware – rise saints and act while I am still alive.

The Back to God Crusade

In the minds of many, one of the greatest achievements of Nicholas Bhengu was the establishment of the Back to God Crusade. By doing this, he joined the ranks of church planters in Africa.

Bhengu had been calling people back to God long before establishing the Back to God Crusade, but in 1949 an important event took place (*Mothers' Convention Reports Accounts* 1982–1983):

> The Back to God Crusade came into being because of a vision Rev. N.B.H. Bhengu saw in 1949 at [*sic*] Port Elizabeth shortly after his return from the United States of America where he had gone to study but had to cut short his stay because of the illness of his entire family. On the day of the death of Gen. J.C. Smuts that night Bro. Bhengu saw the vision and a heavenly choir was also singing in the sky. The message from above was loud and clear that he should preach the Gospel from Cape to Cairo and bring people 'back to God'. He got up and paced the room, uttering 'Back to God, Back to God' and 'Back to God'. That was the beginning of the Back to God Crusade. (n.p.)

Bhengu was determined to build a movement that would be a vehicle to reach out to the continent of Africa by building momentum and multiplication processes through his churches and managing the results. Bhengu clarified the Back to God Crusade as follows (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> The Back to God Crusade is similar to what is known as Guilds in other churches. It is non-denominational in nature and seeks to spread the Gospel without pressurising converts to discard their churches to join any. That many denominations have derived or gained some kind of changes can be ascribed to the Back to God Crusade. That many homelands in South Africa have great respect and admiration for the Crusade, [*sic*] needs no evidence. Back to God Crusade brings the Gospel to the people and brings people Back to God. It further teaches holiness, brotherly love and responsibility irrespective of church affiliation, race, ethnicity, tribe or colour. We aim at building the people so that they become honest, respectable and dependable citizens who build good and responsible communities capable of building the nations. We abhor divisions and tribalism in the Christian Church. The Back to God Crusade does not recruit people either from denominations or from the splinter groups of the Assemblies of God. We sincerely believe in the Unity of the Body of Christ and we do not believe that we are the only body of Christ but that we are catalysts for the Unity of the Body of Christ. When I am persecuted, ill-treated, misconstrued and evil spoken of, should I divide the Body of Christ? When I am disappointed, disgruntled and annoyed must I allow my temperament to mutilate, amputate and lacerate the Lord's Church? Must I allow my feelings, proclivities or inclinations to have an upper hand and destroy what Jesus died for? God forbid. God's people are not sheep or cattle. God wants his church intact. (n.p.)

Ingredients of the movement

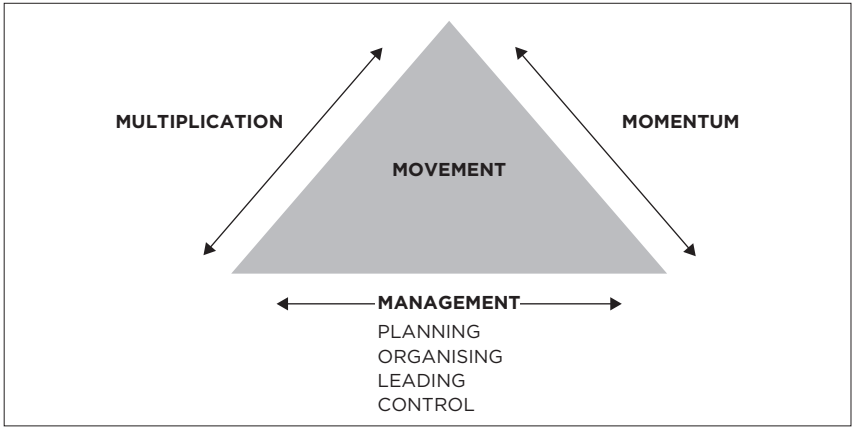
Nicholas Bhengu was an evangelist routed in tradition, as expressed by Dr Roger S. Greenway (Lephoko pers. comm., 2010 n.d.):

> [*W*]ith all due respect to Billy Graham whom God used greatly to spread the Gospel in his time, I would place Nicholas Bhengu ahead of Graham as an evangelist in tradition of St Paul. Paul's strategy always included three things – evangelism, instruction and training of leaders, and planting of churches. (n.p.)

Bhengu used the Back to God Crusade to plant missional churches. The Back to God campaigns created momentum which attracted thousands of people. People were converted and trained into disciples, and this created a multiplication effect. Preserving the results was done through an appointment of a pastor including aspects of planning, organisation, leading and control. Figure 6.3 depicts how Bhengu organised and ran his work.

Bhengu's crusades built momentum; he moved into areas with a big bang, with trucks marked 'Back to God – Africa for Jesus – Jesus for Africa', a choir and a team of evangelists. This drew crowds who came to see and hear the message he preached.

Multiplication was achieved when churches were planted. These churches became the source of support for future mission and evangelistic outreach. He conserved the results of his crusades. The Back to God Crusade became known among the people as *Nozala* – the one who gave birth to hundreds of churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique (Mshengu pers. comm., 12 October 2003). Crusades were mainly held in tents although community halls were also used, especially at the beginning of his outreach.



Source: Lephoko 2006.

FIGURE 6.3: Bhengu's approach to his work.

Objectives of the movement

At the July 1971 Workers Conference, Bhengu presented the objectives of his Back to God Crusade. He wanted results. In the minutes dated 12 July 1971, the following information was noted:

1. Name of the crusade: Back to God Crusade.
2. Sphere of Operation: The whole of South Africa.
3. Programme: Outreach by way of the crusades and implementation of the programme. Soliciting funds, from interested persons and people of all races embracing all goodwill people [*sic*].
4. Affiliation: Affiliated with the Assemblies of God Church in South Africa – not a platform for criticism.
5. A committee of three men for Back to God Crusade will be appointed to look after the funds of the Back to God Crusade.
6. Back to God Crusade is not an end to [*sic*] itself but is for the establishment of Assemblies.

Constitution

A Back to God Crusade Constitution with its name, objectives and principles was drawn up for the registration of the organisation. The registration of Back to God Crusade as a Section 21 Company on 21 July 1976 helped facilitate the raising of funds for Bhengu's evangelistic crusades:

1. Name: The Name of the Institution shall be the 'Back to God Crusade', hereafter referred to as an institution.
2. Head Office: Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa.
3. Objects and principles:
    a. To spread the Gospel throughout the country.
    b. To provide premises and equipment such as tents, motor vehicles, etc.
    c. To maintain such premises and equipment and to engage such officers and staff as may be necessary for the establishment, maintenance and promotion of the crusade.
    d. To purchase, take on lease or acquire any other interest in any land, buildings and property, real and personal, which

TABLE 6.1: Founding members of the Back to God Crusade.

Full name	Occupation	Residential address
Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu	Preacher	Jabavu, Standerton
Pritchard Johannes Maboa	Preacher	Jabavu, Standerton
Fred Shabalala	Preacher	Jabavu, Standerton
Josiah Donda	Preacher	Jabavu Standerton
Abel Matroshe	Preacher	Jabavu, Standerton
Harrison Majiya	Preacher	Jabavu, Standerton
Sipho Bhengu	Preacher	Jabavu, Standerton

Source: Bhengu (n.d.).

may be acquired for the purpose of or can be used in connection with the objects of the institution.

e. To borrow and raise money in such a manner and subject to such conditions as the crusade may deem fit, for the purpose of binding the whole or any part of the properties, assets and revenue of the crusade both present and future.
f. To do all such things and carry out all such undertakings as may be necessary or desirable for an incidental [*sic*] to the objects of the institution.

Personal details of the founding subscribers to the Back to God Crusade are presented in Table 6.1.

Regional teams and leaders

For strategy, effectiveness, efficiency and best results, regional teams were established for the crusades (Table 6.2). In a circular titled *For Best Results in the Crusade Work,* Bhengu (pers. comm., 01 November 1967) stated:

> The division of the Crusade into eight regions is far better and profitable than a big solid team moving from area to area. This has a tendency to 'HIT & RUN', leaving rural areas and small places untouched while racing for the big cities. The campaign stops, the tents are rolled and carried away to the next town. The tide of revival subsides and many relapse into their old life. But when a team is continually, constantly and permanently in the area the results will be permanent in most cases. We can thus see crime reduced and children's activities established to curb the rising irresponsibility and idleness. This is our

TABLE 6.2: An overview of the leaders working in a designated area.

Item	Geographical area	Currently known as	Leaders
1.	Transkei	Eastern Cape	Hartley Qina, assisted by three workers
2.	East Pondoland	Eastern Cape	Gideon Colombile, assisted by three workers
3.	Ciskei	Eastern Cape	Atwell Ngcangisa, assisted by three workers
4.	Cape Peninsula	Western Cape	Don F. Siko, assisted by two workers
5.	Witwatersrand Southern	Gauteng	Led by a team of five evangelists yet to be appointed
6.	Natal and Zululand	KwaZulu-Natal	Dan Masondo, assisted by two workers
7.	Eastern Transvaal	Mpumalanga Lowveld	Leader to be appointed
8.	Northern Transvaal	Limpopo	Leader and assistants to be appointed

Source: Bhengu (n.d.).

> task. Each team will be semi-permanent in an area with daily crusade meetings, follow-up work and prayer meetings. In this way I feel I can do more by directing, planning and initiating these campaigns for the teams, the first few nights as a DRAW-CARD perhaps. I can do more by prayer, writing, arousing interest, making reports, praying for the sick and visiting these regions by rotation. (n.p.)

In a circular sent on 11 November 1967, leaders and workers were required to be (Bhengu pers. comm., 01 November 1967):

> [*E*]experienced, matured [*sic*] and tested workers who will create no problem or anxiety in the crusade [...] select men and women with a vision and a call from God (and not hirelings). (n.p.)

For results in the crusade work, Bhengu lays down his strategic focus and the need to conserve campaign results by establishing churches and deploying pastors to shepherd the flock (1 Pt 5:2). Bhengu did not conduct crusades for crusades' sake but to build up the work.

Bhengu's focus was not only on towns and cities but also on rural areas: He was interested in effectiveness and efficiency in the work. He wanted to see fruit, '[...] that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples' (Jn 15:8) ' fruit that will last' (Jn 15:16). The way to achieve and conserve results was by having a 'semi-permanent' team in the area with daily

crusade meetings. He himself had to play the role of a director – directing the operations through planning, prayer, writing and stimulating interest, generating reports, praying for the people and visiting the regions.

Bhengu's regional evangelists: Almost all of these men have gone home to be with their master. This strategy worked very well. With several tents in different places, his major task was to initiate the campaign, withdraw and leave the tent with a team leader. He would then move to another area where this would be repeated. Once a church had been planted, a pastor was sent to look after the new converts. Some of these churches were founded by women but only men were appointed as pastors.

Bhengu set high standards for his evangelists. These included understanding the role and calling of the evangelist.

An evangelist had to be clear about his message that salvation could only be achieved through Jesus Christ. Regarding his personal life, the evangelist had to be mature and lead a pure life, be a member of a local assembly and not a loose cannon. The anointing of the Holy Spirit on the evangelist's life was indispensable. The evangelist had to practise a spirit of forgiveness. An evangelist was the one who announced good news (Is 52:7).

The qualifications were set out in an undated circular, as summarised in Table 6.3.

The Mothers' Ministry

The story of how Bhengu started organising women is told by the women (*Back to God Mothers' Organisation Report* n.d.) themselves:

> It was during one of his fundraising episodes in Brooklyn, New York, USA, that while he was praying to God, God spoke to him and told him to go back to South Africa to raise money for the work there. That night in a vision he saw an African woman wearing a typical '*doek*' [*headgear*]. He then heard the voice of God asking, 'Do you see

TABLE 6.3: The qualifications set for evangelists.

Category	Qualification
As an ambassador	1. Sound warnings 2. Make judgements clear 3. Call sinners to repentance 4. Point to the Cross and God Man on the Cross 5. Point to the empty tomb 6. Shout the good news on housetops 7. Point the way of peace
Message of evangelist must be clear to be effective (1 Cor 14:8)	1. Salvation through Jesus only (Ac 4:12) 2. Paul's summary of the Gospel (1 Cor 15:3, 4)
Clear motive	1. Paul's motive (2 Cor 5:14) 2. The approaching judgement (2 Cor 5:11; Ac 17, 30, 31) 3. To fulfil the command of our captain. Ambassadors under authority
Personal life	1. Be matured [*sic*] 2. Distinguished by life of holiness (1 Pt 1:16) 3. Highly exposed – Idolised 4. That is why he should say with Paul, 'Imitate me for I imitate Christ' (I Cor:1) I. We serve a Holy God (Revelation 4:8, 2 Corinthians 5:9). II. We preach a Holy Gospel (2 Peter 2:21; Jude 1:20). III. We are called to be Holy (2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:14–16). a) Holiness is to conform to the character of God. b) Holiness should touch every area of our life: • Childish immaturity • Lovelessness • Competitiveness • Holiness in vessel (2 Timothy 2:20,21) • Body holiness (Proverbs 4:23)
Local assembly, Good standing	1. Accountable to it 2. Faithful, true, fruitful, active, servant in local body, subject to local leadership 3. Proverbs 11:14 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety'
Holy Spirit in life of an evangelist, Luke 4:18, 19 Anointed – indispensable	1. Prayer life 2. Man of faith

Table 6.3 continues on the next page →

TABLE 6.3 (Continues...): The qualifications set for evangelists.

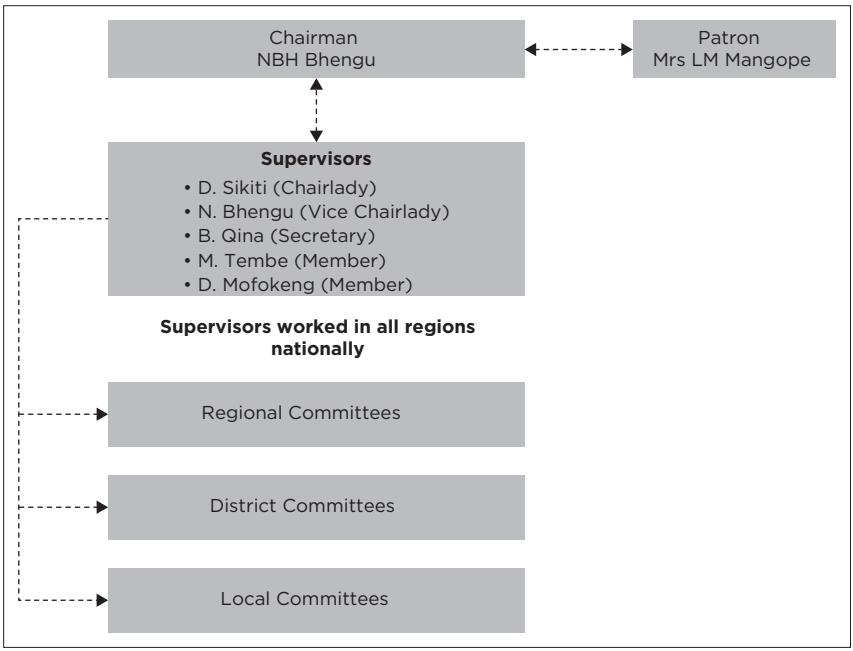
Category	Qualification
Are we evangelists acceptable to God? Are you sure you are in the right ministry? (Jr 20:9; Ac 4:20; 1 Cor 9:16)	1. Are our lives acceptable to God? 2. Our relationships with other workers – Is it acceptable to God? I. Love one another II. Serve (Mk 10:43) III. Patience (2 Tm 2:24) IV. Courteous (1 Pt 3:8) *Example:* • Forgiving (Eph 4:32; Mt 6:15) • About judging others (Rm 14:4; 1 Pt 4:8) • Subject to one another (Rm 12:10) • 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of Peace, and bring glad tidings of Good things'? (Rm 10:15)

this African woman? Go back to your country; you will get the money that you need to do my work from people like this woman'. After his striking vision in Brooklyn, New York, USA, Bhengu returned to South Africa. After much prayer he called together a group of women: Mrs Mylet Bhengu (his first wife), Mrs Doreen Sikiti, Mrs Virginia Buthelezi (wife of Gideon Buthelezi, one of his early associates) and Mrs Emily Mngoma. Mylet became chairlady. Doreen Sikiti became Secretary. He trained the women and commissioned them to train others. In 1961 he enlarged the team to include Mrs Ruth Moduka and Mrs Beatrice Qina. (n.p.)

The following structure of the Mothers' Ministry was developed after the death of the chairperson Mylet Bhengu (Figure 6.4).

Neither the supervisors nor the organisers had the power or authority over the women in the Assemblies. According to Mofokeng, local committees were under the leadership of the local church.

Bhengu disapproved of the election of Convention Committee members by secret ballot; he feared that people who did not share his vision and commitment to the Great Commission might end up in leadership positions. After the death of Mylet, Doreen Sikiti became the chairlady and Beatrice Qina the secretary. Ruth Moduka, Dina Mofokeng and Monica Tembe became additional members.



Source: Lephoko 2006.
FIGURE 6.4: Mothers' Ministry structure.

Local and regional committees received strict instructions on how to collect money, bank and withdraw it. Money was to be banked in the name of the local mothers who work at both regional and national levels, with supervisors acting as co-signatories for the regions.

The Mothers' Easter Conventions

Women were organised at local, district, regional and national levels as a strategy to raise crusade funds. Regions brought their bags (monies) raised during the year to national conventions in Thaba Nchu. There were also displays of handiwork (sewing, knitting, etc.) from regions and countries such as Swaziland and Lesotho and Namibia. A spirit of competition was engendered

during the convention among regions vying to beat others with their donations and their handicrafts. Before the presentation of bags, financial audits were presented to the convention attended by 20 000 to 30 000 people annually. Winning regions were presented with trophies to encourage groups to perform even better the following year.

Bhengu directed that monies brought by Lesotho and Swaziland should be returned to those countries and not used in South Africa. He recognised that Lesotho and Swaziland were poorer, independent countries and were not in a position to build churches to accommodate converts from the crusades, support pastors and conduct their own revival campaigns without the Mothers Fund.

Women's Fund

Women were the backbone and engine of the Back to God Crusade. They raised literally millions of rands for the campaigns. As early as 1950, Bhengu realised that in order to fulfil his mandate to preach the Gospel from Cape to Cairo, he would need money. He often went to the USA to seek financial assistance for the crusades. He either came back with insufficient funds or no money at all.

The first Mothers' convention was held in Bloemfontein in 1969, at which a total of R2000 was collected, a substantial sum in those days. He never asked his African audiences to make financial contributions to his campaigns until they were formed into a church (*Back to God Mothers' Organisation Report* n.d.). In 2017, the women collected R21 000 000 for the Back to God Crusade.

White assemblies partnership

Under the leadership of James Mullan and later John Bond, white assemblies became involved in supporting the Back to God Crusade financially. Pastor Noel Scheepers in East London coordinated all contributions from assemblies countrywide.

Regional offices were set up in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Lesotho with responsible leaders:

1. Transvaal (now Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo), Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and overseas: J.S.W. Bond
2. Orange Free State, Kimberley, Lesotho: Ted Rawlings
3. Natal and Zululand (now KwaZulu-Natal): John Howe
4. Eastern Cape: Hustler
5. Western Province (now Western Cape): N. Cromhout.

Funds were channelled into the Back to God Crusade account through Noel Scheepers' Office in East London. A large number of workers were supported by this fund. Scheepers organised fundraising meetings for Bhengu in East London. There was also financial support from overseas, notably the USA.

Bhengu was very sensitive to interference in his work by white donors or friends. They were welcomed to give but he detested it when they sought to exercise control over his workers. The letter below to John Bond expresses his anger at white people meddling in his work (Bhengu pers. comm., 07 May 1975):

> 7 May 1975. Selly Oak Colleges, B29 6 LE, Birmingham. England. Dear Brother Bond, Greetings in His Precious Name! Thank you for your letter dated April 17th received here on our arrival from South Africa. I quit [*sic*] or appreciate your position but I want to give you a little light: (1) Almost all the African workers came to the Lord through my ministry. We spend time and money in holding special sessions for [*sic*] discussions questioning, counselling and conclusions on all matters concerning procedure and manner of working. It has been known that we have unique unity in our work for a long time and therein lies our strength. (2) After the workers, during my absence overseas, unilaterally decided to accept vehicles and gifts from the white brethren without indicating to me that they wished to depart from our way of administration, I knew they were challenging my authority, which up to this hour I have never been used to. When Bro. Scheepers apologised they have not done so up to this hour. (3) In order to prevent workers from getting a share from the central fund made out of Assemblies tithes and at the same time accepting monies and gifts individually from the white brethren, I decided to revert to the old system that

each and every assembly keeps its funds and supports its pastor direct *sic*]. This is more scriptural and constitutional. I had told them that this centralisation does not seem to have any New Testament backing but seeing that we are faced with the problem of smaller assemblies and starving pastors we should try the Old Testament pattern (the Levites). I had also said that if it does not work we will revert to the New Testament and constitutional pattern. So, in November and December last year I went to all central fellowships e.g. the Reef, Durban, the Transkei and the Ciskei. In each area I discussed with the committees first, then the workers in the general meeting. I answered all questions and gave all reasons for doing this in my life. After this I took it up with the people at the convention. At first, I had thought I would have to leave the ministers to administer the Assemblies (the Fellowship for every area) and I withdraw completely to concentrate on evangelism fully. This possibly pleased some of them, but I found out that the majority of loyal workers were greatly displeased, and the assemblies were all, to the man, opposed to my doing so. I prayed and read and searched the Bible more. A father cannot throw away his children just like that without a reason. I would be betraying the trust. I then freed the workers to accept cars, money or gifts from the white brethren and fellowship with them on ministerial level as much as they wish to. They will still pastor assemblies as before and be supported by the assemblies but there are certain things they cannot do: (1) The assemblies remain in my charge as their founder and apostle until each assembly wishes to be free from me. (2) These workers will not be under me but independent, they will remain members of the AOG Conference and fellowships, I also remain there with them – not over them but with them. The assemblies which I have founded are Assemblies of God and remain tightly in the Fellowship. But according to the AOG Constitution and our manner of working, their administration falls into my hands and I will administer them as a group since we are the Back to God group and those workers who remain loyal to this manner of working will pastor and also be selected to serve on committees until things return to normal. Those who felt their time to rule assemblies had come took exception of this and Brother Dan Masondo actually carried on a strong propaganda in the Durban area and this was spreading all over. There was a serious division among workers although fortunately it had not affected the Assemblies. The members of the African Executive were also affected without knowing the harm already perpetrated in [*sic*] Durban area. We went to Bloemfontein, the Executive did not meet

> me and so the matter was not touched in spite of the fact that many people came there for the explanation of this matter according to my circular letter. I then requested all workers to go to Durban on April 5th. There, full evidence of his invidious propaganda was revealed. He did not apologise in spite of admonition from all workers and Executive members. He made a statement that he does not agree with my way of working as it is bad and is subject to changes. This was a public statement. I thought perhaps the two assemblies in which he is pastor are also affected and may stand with him: (1) uMlazi [*and*] (2) KwaMashu. I found a great amount of dissatisfaction in both assemblies. I asked them to make a choice either to retain him and be free from me or retain me and free themselves from him. They unanimously decided to stay with me and I therefore relieved him from his duties as pastor of KwaMashu. This is the whole position [...]. (n.p.)

Bond replied to Bhengu's letter as follows (Bond & Bhengu pers. comm., 26 May 1975):

> 26 May 1975. Dear Bro. Bhengu, Thank you for your letter of 7 May with the confidential information it contains. In reply let me state as follows: (1) I unequivocally accept your judgements in these matters because I recognise without questioning your authority and ministry and because I have always found that in such matters you act with reason and insight which I cannot question. (2) I have found Masondo amiable and was so quite unaware of the sentiments and activities which you describe. I accepted him without question as a member of the executive and as one of your trusted lieutenants. I had no idea that there were tensions within your work or that he was responsible for any difficulties whatsoever. Had I known this I would have been very much more alert in my relationships with him. I feel now as though I have been exposed to a grave situation in which I could very easily have become involved. As it happens I have not become involved in any way whatsoever, but I realise that this is more by good fortune than good management. Nevertheless, I am relieved since the last thing that I want to do is become involved in the internal workings of the African work. (3) To a certain extent it seems that Bro. Attlee has become involved, in that it was through his work in Natal when certain vehicles and or monies (I do not know precisely what) were handed over. Bro. Attlee has taken immediate steps to recover him from any invidious position he might have been betrayed into. I can assure you most emphatically that Bro. Attlee

> takes the same attitude as I do in recognising unequivocally your authority and leadership in the African work. (4) Whatever happens Bro. Bhengu, please believe me that none of us wants to become involved in any wrong way in the African work. I note your comment in the final paragraph of your letter about the white brethren not accommodating certain recalcitrant elements in your work. Might I say my dear Brother that I feel you owe it to me and the other white brethren to please tell us specifically if there is any way in which you think this might be happening. I get alarmed when I hear things like this about Masondo and realise how easily I could be led into an invidious situation simply by having an open heart toward an African brother without realising the inner workings and tensions in any particular situation. I thank you for your complete honesty and frankness in making the situation clear to me [...]. (n.p.)

Donors

To spread the message, Bhengu gave regular reports of his crusades to overseas and local donors. It is not possible to refer to all of them here; only four are presented. There were a number of overseas donors who gave money to the Back to God Crusade. In one of his reports to faith partners, Bhengu singles out two donors – Rev. J. Meares of The Evangel Temple of Washington D.C. who supported three evangelists with US$3000 a month and Len Jones of Christian and Mission Enterprise in Australia who made a pledge, which Bhengu calls 'WONDERFUL NEWS IS TO HAND' (Bhengu pers. comm., 1966 n.d.).

Bhengu Report, 1948

With the exception of financial support Bhengu received from his friend Gideon Buthelezi and the Carmichaels when he went to Port Elizabeth in 1945, the report of February 1948 is very likely the first report that Bhengu (Bhengu pers. comm., 10 February 1948) sent to supporters:

> P.O Box 33, New Brighton Village, Port Elizabeth. Dear Brother/ Sister, Greetings in the name so sweet –JESUS, The year 1947 has gone past and now we are all faced or facing another

momentous year in which we hope the Lord is going to come. We were, however, not disappointed last year when we saw its closing without the advent of our expected King of Kings; He has graciously given another period to us to proclaim the Gospel and a chance to sinners to be saved. The past year was not full of interesting happenings in the field but was, nevertheless, full of activities and blessing from the Lord. We closed the year jubilantly with a baptismal service at Zwartkops where 28 stood up to testify of their salvation before going into the waters. Quite a number have been saved after that so that before winter-fall we hope to baptise more than the last number including those who have been saved already. (We bury the dead). We were very busy last year; I had to do more going out to visit the believers in the whole of the Cape, Transvaal, Natal and Swaziland. Our dear Brother Gumede took charge of the work here, teaching different classes and building up the work. Unfortunately, he fell ill and had to undergo an operation for appendicitis. The Lord helped him through and he got over it. He worked very hard during the latter part of the year and we were afraid his wound might be disturbed. Running and standing in queues for buses every day and coming home late at night were his portion. Early this year he decided to go to Durban to get a bit more of a SECULAR EDUCATION, which we all need very much. He is taking up a teaching post to maintain himself and his family and will attend lectures at Sastri College in the afternoons. His space is greatly felt by all here and the gap shall remain for a long time as there are no workers at all. We do trust he will come back after graduating. Brother Jafta Dlamini has gone to the Transkei to consolidate the work which the Lord is starting at different centres through the believers returning to their respective homes. God bless and prosper him. Brother Ngcobo is still at Queenstown with his family and we hope to help him soon to get to Piet Retief, God willing. May God bless them. Sister Violet Hillary has been to Stegi to help the brethren there and came back to P.E. The people missed her much. She is a great help in the whole work. She does office work as well. I do not know if we could accomplish much without her. She is a blessing in the work. May the Lord bless and keep her. Sister Marie Daniels is devoted and zealous to work for her Lord but her health is failing. Let us pray for her healing. Brother Burman (Coloured Brother) from Obed-Edom, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, will be arriving here in March this year to see possibilities of a solid coloured work in the Coloured Township. Please pray for this man for there is a great need among this section of the people. It seems as if all

> the trips shall be retarded this year because they will be done by train instead of by CAR. The car is absolutely out of question this year. Two very important parts which must be replaced cannot be obtained anywhere in the Union; therefore, it appears as though the car shall have to be sold cheap otherwise it is wasting money for nothing. But many will say 'This is better'. We have (1) New Brighton, (2) Korsten, (3) Walmer, (4) Uitenhage, (5) Jeffreysbay, (6) Grahamstown, (7) Lovedale, (8) Peddie, (9) Middledrift, (10) East London, (11) Queenstown, (12) Engcobo, (13) Idutywa, (14) Willowvale, (15) Umtata, (16) Mt Frere, (17) many places in Natal and Zululand, (18) Many places in the Transvaal including Piet Retief and (19) Stegi, Swaziland. There are many other small places for our attention plus hundreds of invitations from different Churches and Missions which have been waiting for us over the years. Although we do establish assemblies where it is absolutely necessary, we, however, work interdenominationally where there is cooperation. GOD BLESS YOU. PRAY FOR US. PRAY FOR WORKERS. PRAY FOR THEIR SUPPORT. (n.p.)

In the report, he expresses his appreciation for his colleagues: Gumede, Dlamini, Ngcobo, Violet Hillary, as well as Burman who was to start a new work among people of mixed race. This is in the spirit of Paul who when writing to churches mentioned his co-workers by name (Rm 16).

Eshowe Report, 1969

The Eshowe Crusade was probably the most important crusade for Bhengu. It was held in his home town. Although he could not pitch his tent at the mission station at eNtumeni, residents from the mission were bused to the meeting as indicated in the report. Bhengu (pers. comm., 23 November 1969) reports:

> Here we pitched our large tent in winter in spite of very cold nights at Empapala 18 miles West of Eshowe and 14 miles from my home eNtumeni where I was born, and my people are. Every night we had to use all the available transport conveying Mission station people to and from the meetings. eNtumeni is a Lutheran Mission Station, all the inhabitants of the entire reserve are members of the heathen [*sic*] Mission and no one is allowed to preach the Gospel there unless he is a Lutheran despite the fact that the lives of the people there is [*sic*] not different from the lives of the Lutheran and sometimes is worse.

> This, in essence, is a curse of blind bigotry of denominationalism. This was very expensive, but we managed to get the message to the inhabitants that way. Many were saved and healed from the Mission as well as those in area where the tent was. (n.p.)

Msinga Report, 1970

Bhengu also reported on a campaign that was held in Msinga in KwaZulu-Natal upon the invitation of the chief of the Bomvu (Ngubane clan) tribe. The Msinga area was riddled with faction wars between the Bomvu and Mchunu tribes. I was privileged to have attended the opening day of the campaign up on the hills of Msinga valley and witnessed hundreds of people surrender their lives to Christ. In August 1970, he reported (Bhengu pers. comm., August 1970):

> August 1970. It is not easy to render a clear report of what has taken place, as we were overwhelmed by the Tugela (Umsinga) success. As I reported last year, we received an urgent call from one of the very important Zulu chiefs of the Bomvu Tribe on the Umsinga Hills between Dundee and Greytown. This chief, Muntu Ngubane, is a primitive Zulu, as is his tribe, which is one of the largest in the country. For over ten years there had been faction fights and tribal skirmishes resulting in deaths and bloodshed. These people use guns and sometimes manufactures [*sic*] their own arms and ammunition. The government has established a special station as a firearm squad, but the guns are still there, and people are still shot in spite of these efforts. We pitched our tent in February, with fear and trepidation, but faith rose up as we saw crowds filling our largest tent to capacity on the very first day. Chief Muntu – never been to school or church before – was the first to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour. The joy of the Lord and the power of God filled the whole tent, and everybody clapped hands as if they said 'Hurrah'. Now you may guess what followed: We felt that for the first time the Gospel message had penetrated this backward tribe. Chief Muntu was baptised on April 5th, together with the wife of the late Paramount Chief of Zululand. Hundreds will be baptised after winter. Eight people were shot dead a month ago, less than a mile from the tent; but our people's morale was not shaken. This is a very notorious area, but we have a feeling that VICTORY IS ON THE WAY. The Crusade has been very costly. There is starvation in the land, and feeding the workers and others from the shops and markets which

> are 50 miles away, [*sic*] drained a lot of money. We could not look on the sick and hungry people from long distances; we have to give them something to eat. (n.p.)

Lesotho Report, 1983

Reporting on a crusade in the neighbouring country Lesotho, Bhengu (pers. comm., 08 January 1983) wrote:

> Something unusual, the Crusade was launched on January 8th 1983 at the Pitso ground in the centre of Maseru the capital of Lesotho. The Lesotho crusade has seen hundreds accepting the Lord as their personal Saviour, and there are many significant cases of healings from deafness, blindness, paralyses. Crutches and wheelchairs decorate the tent as we draw close to the end of our campaigns because winter is catching up with us and yet we have invitations from all over Lesotho to bring the tent. Our brother Elliot Mashicila Dlamini has been used of God more than ever before. We praise God for His wonderful presence and witness in troubled Lesotho. *Prayers*: We pray and ask you to pray for the Crusade, our next target is Swaziland where the King died with a plea for a Crusade. Pray with us. *Our Faith*: (1) We believe God will do greater things for us in Africa. (2) We believe God for a big truck for conveying tents and equipment. Our old Ford truck has had its days, we need a new and larger truck about 7 to 10. Please pray with us. (n.p.)

Mylet Report, 1967

On 06 February 1967, Mylet reported in her own capacity on a visit to the 1966 Annual Convention by Meares and his wife, Rev. and Mrs Forseth and Petrucelli (Mylet Bhengu pers. comm., 06 February 1967):

> Brother Meares brought sister Meares with him this time. We also had Rev. and Mrs Marvin Forseth from Vancouver, Canada. We had heard that brother Petrucelli was unable to come this time, so his arrival was a pleasant surprise. We really appreciate what our brethren at the Evangel Temple have done by sending their Pastors, and paying all the expenses involved, to say nothing about missing their inspired messages during Christmas. Brother Petrucelli was our first speaker on Christmas day. He spoke about the victory of the little boy David over the giant Goliath. He stressed that David had confidence in the

> power of God, he remembered what the Lord had done for him in the past and said, 'The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out the hand of this Philistine' (1 Samuel. 17:37). The blessing of the Lord was upon the whole convention, and everything felt that if we can have that faith the Lord will use us. It was the first time that brother and sister Forseth came to our beautiful country. We will never forget the love they extended to my husband and me while we were in Canada in 1964, together with his congregation they made our stay in Westminster a memorable one. It was a great pleasure to welcome him and Mrs Forseth in South Africa. (n.p.)

From Mylet's report, it is clear that she valued the sponsorship these people brought to their work.

What is the church?

Before dealing with Bhengu as an apostle and church planter, it is important to address the meaning, membership and role of the *church*. There are different schools of thought on the subject; these influence how an exegete interprets and applies Scripture or responds to situations.

A brief overview of some of the key teachings of Roman Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical and Pentecostal thought is set out here.

In Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant circles, divergent views on the meaning of the *church* exist. Different aspects of the church are usually emphasised.

Roman Catholic view

In *Models of the Church,* Dulles (1974:34–38) mentions, among other roles of the Church, the following:

- The church as an institution. This is the church as deputed by its visible structures with rights and powers. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Institutional Church is represented in three ways: teaching, sanctifying and governing; with a further distinction being the church taught, the church sanctified and

the church governed. Dulles continues: 'But the Church is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same rights. It is a society of unequals, not only because among the faithful some are clerics, and some are laymen, but particularly because there is in the Church the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach and govern, and to others not'. The phrase 'some it is given to sanctify' does not find favour with Evangelicals and Pentecostals who teach that sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. Torrey (1957:343) says, 'The Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer'.

- The church as mystical communion. The image of the Body of Christ is organic, rather than sociological. The Church is seen on the analogy of a human body equipped with various organs. It has an inbuilt vital principle thanks to which it can grow, repair itself [...] The Body of Christ as distinct from any natural organism has a divine life-principle. This is said to be the Holy Spirit. Dulles emphasises the image of the Body of Christ with particular stress on the mystical and invisible communion that binds together all those who are enlivened by the grace of Christ, including not only the earthly but also the heavenly. The angels and the blessed are members of the heavenly Church. He believes the Body is not essentially visible, since it includes all men who are animated by the Spirit of God. 'All the just from Abel on are in the Body of Christ in the Ecclesia' (pp. 50–51).

Reformed view

To highlight the traditional Reformed thinking on the church, the views of Louis Berkhoff (1933) and Johan Heyns (1980) are quoted:

> Louis Berkhoff emphasised the difference between the visible and the invisible church: 'In defining the church it will be necessary to bear in mind the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church. (1) The former may be defined as the company of the elect who are called by the Spirit of God, or briefer still, as the communion of believers. (2) The latter is a broader concept and may be defined as the community of those who profess the true religion together with their children. It is important to bear in mind that these two are not entirely parallel. Some who are members of the invisible Church

> may be unbelievers and hypocrites and as such form no part of the body of Christ'. (pp. 282–283)

Note the phrase 'with their children'. The church as an assembly of believers can be a domestic church or the church in the house (Rm 16:5, 23; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlp 2).

For Johan Heyns (1980), the existence of the church revolves around God's election:

> God's acts concerning the Church are elective acts. From among all nations and people he has chosen *these* people for himself. Consequently, his acts have a doubly exclusive significance: these people belong to him. His unique acts have created a unique relationship and as his own, his people have been set apart delineated from all who are not his people. (p. 49)

Evangelical view

This leads us to the further consideration that the Church is not primarily a human structure like a political, social or economic organism. It is basically the church of Jesus Christ ('my church' Mt 16:18) or of the living God (2 Tm 3:15). The various biblical descriptions all emphasise this. It is a building of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone or foundation, 'a holy temple in the Lord' and 'a habitation of God through the Spirit' (Eph 2:20f.). It is the fellowship of saints or people of God (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). It is the bride of Jesus Christ, saved and sanctified by him for union with himself (Eph 5:25f.). Indeed, it is the body of Jesus Christ, he being the head or whole body, and Christians the members (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12f.; Eph 4:4, 12, 16f.). As the body, it is the fullness of Christ, who himself fills all in all (Eph 1:23) (Tenny 1967:170–171).

Pentecostal and Charismatic view

The Church is the Body of Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit, with divine appointments for the fulfilment of her Great Commission. Each believer, born of the Spirit, is an integral part

of the General Assembly and the Church of the First-born which are written in heaven (Eph 1:22, 23; 2:22; Heb 12:23) (Hollenweger 1972:515).

Who belongs to the church?

Baptism and faith are interlinked as 'baptism comes from faith and faith leads to baptism' (Küng 1968):

> Faith alone is not the basis of baptism; baptism is more than a sign of the faith and confession, designed merely to confirm faith; conversely, baptism alone is not the basis of faith; faith is not the natural consequence or the automatic front of baptism. (p. 207)

Both of them have their basis in the saving act of God in Christ. According to Küng (1968), 'By being baptised, he becomes a member of the community, by having his sins forgiven, he is included into the communion of saints'. This doctrine of baptism is key to admission into membership of the church.

The ecumenical theologian Ryle (in Feinberg [ed.] 1958) raises some questions with regard to the nature of the church: Where is the one true church? What is this true church like? What are the marks by which this one true church may be known?

> The one true church is composed of all believers in the Lord Jesus. It is made up of all God's elect, all converted men and women, all the Christians. in whomsoever we can discern the election of God the Father, the sprinkling of the blood of God the Son, the sanctifying work of God the Spirit, in that person we see a member of Christ's true church. It is a church of which all the members have the same marks. They are all born of the Spirit; they all possess 'repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ', and holiness of life and conversation. They all hate sin, and they all love Christ. They worship differently and after various fashions. Some worship with a form of prayer, and some with none; some worship kneeling, and some standing. But they all worship with one heart. They are all led by one Spirit; they all build upon one foundation; they are all joined to one great centre, Jesus Christ. They all even now can say with one heart, 'Hallelujah'; and they can all respond with one heart and voice, 'Amen and Amen'. (pp. 505–506)

It is a church which is not dependent on ministers upon earth; however, it values those much who preach the Gospel to its members. The life of its members does not depend on church membership, baptism and the Lord's Supper, although they highly value these things, when they are to be had. But it has only one great head, one shepherd, one chief bishop: the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone by his Spirit admits the members of this church, although ministers may show the door.

All theological traditions are in agreement with the central belief that Christ is the Head of the church.

The Church is an organism, not an organisation. There is a vital relationship between Christ and the church, both partaking of the same life, just as there is between the physical head and the body. We cannot join the church as we would a lodge or any mere human organisation. We must be partakers by faith of Christ's life before we can become members of Christ's church in the true sense. As the Head of the church, Christ is its guardian and director (Eph 5:23, 24); the source of its life, filling it with his fullness (Eph 1:22, 23); the centre of its unity and the cause of its growth (Eph 1:22, 23; 4:15; Col 1:18; 2:19) (Evans 1974:186).

It is clear from the above discussion that the New Testament Church is God's own creation through the death and the resurrection of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The church is the community of those who are saved; it is a group of people who are individually empowered by the Holy Spirit for service within the community and in external witness; and it is a commissioned community (Hattingh 1986:2–8; Hollenweger 1972:424).

The church planter

Bhengu often spoke about why he started planting churches. It was during some of his itinerant evangelistic episodes with the Church of the Nazarene at a boarding school at eNdzingeni,

Swaziland. Many students had come forward during Bhengu's preaching. Dr David Hynd Senior asked Bhengu why when he preached many students came to Christ, but when they (the missionaries) preached not many gave themselves to Christ.

Bhengu decried the fact that missionaries did not believe that black people can be genuinely saved, that at the school the missionaries do not allow a young man to speak to his sister without the matron being present to listen to their conversation.

According to Bhengu, Dr Hynd Senior responded by saying, 'You go and start your own work, so we too can criticise you'.

In 1956, Dr Hynd Senior was on furlough and his ship had docked in Durban. It was during this time that Bhengu was conducting his Lamontville campaign in Durban. He fetched Dr Hynd Senior from the ship and took him to Lamontville to show him his work, telling him, 'Here is my work, now you can criticise me' (Bhengu pers. comm., 1956 n.d.).

Swaziland (now eSwatini)

Swaziland and Zimbabwe are two of the countries where Bhengu planted strong and viable self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches (Transforming missions).

In Swaziland, Bhengu as an itinerant evangelist in the early 40s used to be invited by Dr David Hynd Senior, the founder of the Church of the Nazarene, the hospital and training college in Manzini (Swaziland). Dr Hynd was a medical missionary doctor from Scotland. Apart from Dr Hynd, there was a lady missionary of the same church, Fairy Chism, who became involved in organising events for Bhengu around eNdzingeni near Pigs Peak.

In the Nazarene Church, they used to and still have camp meetings which originated in the USA. All the Nazarene churches would meet at eNdzingeni where the Church of the Nazarene in Swaziland was first established.

Dr Samuel Hynd Junior in his own words describes how he met Christ at one of the camp meetings (Dr Hynd Junior pers. comm., 18 October 2003):

> I was this child and they used to go to the camp meetings and, so I went along as well. Incidentally I was converted through an African evangelist myself so naturally I was interested in hearing an evangelist anyway because that was where I first became a Christian even though I was a son of a missionary, that does not mean to say you do understand the Scripture. The devil works in many ways. Anyway, that was my first hearing of him. I was right from the beginning impressed by this man, he had tremendous messages. People listened in a way I have not seen. In this way he became quite influential and he was being invited to these camp meetings. Gradually as the work increased in the Nazarene Church, the camp meetings became district, Siteki and Manzini had their own camp meetings. My father had also met him early up in eNdzingeni camp and, so he invited him to a camp meeting there. So, through this contact my father had a very good relationship with Miss Chism and having heard him himself he said 'no, this man is grown up spiritually, with his messages he seems full of the Spirit and very powerful messages'. I do not remember the messages myself, but they were powerful. I was still a young man and that's where I got to know him more, here in Manzini because he was invited for several years to preach in the camp meetings in this area. So naturally I got to know him and I was impressed by not only his preaching but the manner and the way he spoke to people. You did not feel, I almost hate to say this, but because of the next door neighbor [*sic*], there was this sort of attitude about black and white that sort of thing. This man was a powerful black with the real message and the one that was powerful as I have said several times. So I was impressed many times by that. When I became a Christian and came back as a miracle missionary as well because I could see the importance of a healing ministry together with the spiritual ministry. I then was instrumental in the inviting and again in camp meetings. He himself began to be known more so then he began to be an evangelistic tool to the camp meetings. His ministry widened from the Nazarene. At that time the Assemblies of God did not have much work here, but he was linked to the Assemblies of God as far as I know in South Africa, this is how I would say that he had a big influence. His influence widened and others were inviting him and then somehow rather I don't quite remember how but I see here there's a mention of his relationship to the king. The king was always very open to the evangelists who came and invited them to come. He then developed

a pretty close relationship with his Majesty King Sobhuza II who would invite him here. He used to call us all together, Christians for special times for prayers and national events. For example, there was a [...] or something like that then he would invite someone to speak to us, then you would miss Bhengu, he was that powerful, spiritual and in every other was as a person, his personality, his voice, he was commanding, he knew what he was saying and he was sensible in what he said so he could not help it but make an impression, widening his ministry. Gradually then he would come to these meetings. In the camp meetings when the Assemblies of God came in with his background being from South Africa then he would be coming and mostly we looked on. Some people thought he made his home here because he was here so frequently. He gathered around himself some of the Pentecostal people. The Nazarenes were not Pentecostal, but they are strongly evangelists. I would say he began widening his ministry here until some of the men wanted to have connections with Assemblies of God, Assemblies of God for Swaziland, I don't know whether they were from Swaziland or outside. The different groups established gradually became wider and more nationally accepted because of his relationship to the King. Several of the preachers set up church meetings, evangelistic meetings. I remember the last time was when he put a tent at the [...] to the Craig fare at the agricultural show, he had an annual show down there by the river. He had a tent there. There was another Swazi preacher who was part of his group around, I think they began to group around here looking at him as a leader. This man. John Nxumalo, he sort of became his representative. The last show I can remember, Bhengu came and started it for a week or so, and Nxumalo carried on for another or two. We even invited him and Nxumalo to stay at the Nazarene mission because it was an evangelistic one. We thought we could go and that was the last one, it was a very powerful mission. It did a lot there. We began to hear that his ministry in South Africa was beginning to establish. I did not know what was happening across there but somehow we then learned that he was sort of beginning to move away to establish the Assemblies of God and to his Back to God ministries. But anyway, some of the pastors here evicted themselves to that, for example we heard that Isaac Hleta sort of became a leader here and we began learning that there was a bit of division in the Assemblies of God in South Africa. I think that's when you had the International Assembly we used to call it Bhengu's Assembly although there was the separation it seemed for various reasons. In fact, we heard that he elected Isaac as the chairman and the president of the Swaziland Conference of Churches which is the evangelical grouping. With the following of

> Isaac Hleta and John Nxumalo, the work went on. Unfortunately, there was beginning to be a division here, I do not know exactly why. Bhengu was becoming more of an international man; shall we say the authority he had so much was not so evident. We were bit saddened by that, but we always thought of him as being the top man as always, very acceptable. I would say that the opinion about God never left Reverend Bhengu. He was accepted for all he was, that is the case then going the little outside but the last also I remember him. I had to go to Scotland, that was my route and I went there to finish up my medical training. Bhengu came on one of his trips to United Kingdom and captured to be one of the leaders there and actually I used to fetch him. I remember this church in Scotland where my mother and the people actually accepted him very, very well. I was sorry that there was no figure group that saw him, but he was very good and I knew him to be as on fire for God as ever. So, the Scottish people knew him as a hero, they said he was very lot accepted there and my very last contact with him was then. After that I never did see him again. (n.p.)

Wilson tells how Bhengu came to establish his first church:

> The three Carmichael brothers and their sister Jessie Creamer and a married couple met Bhengu in Carmichael's home in Pigs Peak, Swaziland during his evangelistic meeting with the Church of the Nazarene, where Bhengu in an informal manner shared the Gospel with them. They all accepted Christ in that meeting. Jessie says that he shared the Gospel in a simple but profound manner. It was here that he was requested to establish his first church ever in 1943. In this church I was shown benches that were made in 1943 and are still in use. (Wilson pers. comm., 19 October 2003)

Dr Hynd Senior often invited Bhengu to minister at the schools, camps and conferences. The ministry was highly received by the church. It was during one of these meetings that three Carmichael brothers and their sister Jessie who later married the late Winkie Creamer heard Bhengu speak and invited him to their home in Siteki so that he could clearly explain the Gospel to them as a family. Bhengu went to visit the family and after sharing with them the Gospel of Christ, all members of the family accepted Christ as their personal Saviour. The Carmichaels asked Bhengu to pastor them. However, Bhengu was unwilling to accept their request because their mother was one of the staunch members

of the Church of the Nazarene which had invited him. He did not want to break the trust and fall into the trap of sheep stealing. He encouraged them to ask the Church of the Nazarene to shepherd them.

In 1943, an Assembly of God was planted by Bhengu in Siteki at the time the church was predominantly mixed race at the behest of the Carmichaels. This church became one of the very first churches to support Bhengu's evangelistic mission. They provided financial and material support and also appointed Ms Hillary from the assembly to serve as his secretary. Ms. Hillary became the most trusted administrator for Bhengu in his early ministry in Port Elizabeth and East London. She served Bhengu and the church with dignity and great sacrifice to herself in a country that was obsessed with racial divisions, including the fact that she was a foreigner from Swaziland.

During my first visit to Siteki in 2003, I was shown the church that was built in 1943 with its benches still intact. A vibrant day school had been added on the premises to provide education to the children. The work in Swaziland was united until the school was added on the premises which led to misunderstanding and tensions between the church leadership and the school administrators.

As a result of misunderstanding between the work at Siteki and the brethren who sought to work directly under Bhengu, an appeal was made by these brethren to Bhengu to establish a Back to God movement in the country. Ms. Nxumalo, originally from Pietermaritzburg, made several contacts with Bhengu to bring the crusade to Swaziland. She tells how Bhengu ignored her appeal for more than five years.

In November 1974, Bhengu sent an evangelistic team to Swaziland led by Dr Elijah Maswanganyi; members of the team included pastors Nathaniel Donda, Abednego Mlambo, A. Camngca, Rev. Rathutshwane and Douglas Simelane. The campaign was successful, with a number of churches established thereafter. However, starting Back to God work was not without

hurdles. An attempt by some of the men who were supposed to be on Bhengu's side spread rumours that Bhengu was anti-Swazi culture, notably polygamy. This was a serious allegation that was not taken lightly by King Sobhuza II, the reigning King at the time. By tradition and culture, the King had many wives. The accusation against Bhengu in this respect was seen by the King as a direct attack on him. Bhengu was also accused of being communist and bent on seeking to upset the peace, stability and the political system in the kingdom.

The structure of Bhengu's work in Swaziland is identical with that of South Africa. However, in Swaziland, Bhengu appointed Mrs Makama as a trustee on the first District Council Committee (now Regional Council Committee). This marked a huge difference from South Africa where no woman ever served on the leadership structure, such as being on the District Council Committee where only men are members. There is no explanation why Bhengu made this move in Swaziland and not in South Africa. Mrs Makama was also the first woman to head a prison institution in that country. One can only speculate that because of her leadership stature in the country, he probably felt that she qualified to take a leadership position in the council.

☐ King Sobhuza II and Bhengu

The information below was provided by one of Bhengu's senior pastors in Swaziland, Pastor Mamba, who was responsible for driving Bhengu around in Swaziland including to the meeting Bhengu had with the King.

The relationship between His Majesty King Sobhuza II and Bhengu over the years became intimate. The King provided land and instructed Bhengu's church in Swaziland to build a house for Bhengu. He gave Bhengu citizenship of Swaziland, which allowed him to travel to other African countries when his South African Passport was banned, owing to countries opposed to apartheid.

In 1981, during the war between two Zimbabwean political parties – Zanu of Nkomo and the Patriotic Front of Mugabe – the King invited Bhengu to his Palace and sent him as his emissary to Zambia with a message to the then President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda. He asked Bhengu to request President Kaunda to mediate between Nkomo and Mugabe in an attempt to establish peace in that country.

During the King's Jubilee celebration of his rule, the King invited Bhengu to sit next to him on the podium together with all the international guests and presidents including Mr Pik Botha, Minister of External Affairs (now International Relations and Cooperation) in South Africa.

The relationship between His Majesty King Sobhuza II and Bhengu is confirmed by Dr Hlongwa (Hlongwa pers. comm., 10 January 2005) as follows:

> There were certain times when his Majesty King Sobhuza invited Bhengu to minister to him personally. Bhengu was also given a piece of land (house) by the King and the King had high regard for him. Bhengu prayed for the king on several occasions. (n.p.)

When the King died in 1981, Bhengu was the official preacher at the King's funeral.

Zimbabwe

As it was the case in South Africa, Zimbabwe was waging a war of liberation against the oppressive white colonial imperial regime. It was waged mainly by Zanu of Nkomo and Robert Mugabe's Patriotic Front, culminating in the liberation of the then Southern Rhodesia to become Zimbabwe in 1980. It was during this time that Bhengu was ministering in Zimbabwe.

Bhengu did not involve himself in the politics of the country; instead, he worked with all the groups that were involved in the war including white people, liberation movements and others. He maintained a neutral position. He could preach and minister to all the people of Zimbabwe which was helpful to the work.

The work in Zimbabwe started in 1958 after Jim Mullan transferred John Bond to look after an assembly in Salisbury (now Harare).

The following year, 1959, Bond invited Bhengu to start work among black people in that country. Bhengu brought a team of workers and pitched a tent seating 1000 people in Highfield. The crusade lasted for 6 weeks, ending in November 1959. Bhengu's entry into the country was vehemently opposed by missionary Bush of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada who had been operating in Zimbabwe under the banner of the Assemblies of God (Bond 2000:217–218).

Unlike in South Africa where Bhengu inherited some of the churches that had been founded by various missionary groups, in Zimbabwe Bhengu started the work from scratch (Rm 15:20). He did not experience the same problems as he did in South Africa, albeit the work had its own problems especially after Bhengu's departure.

☐ Geoffrey Bizeni Mkwanazi

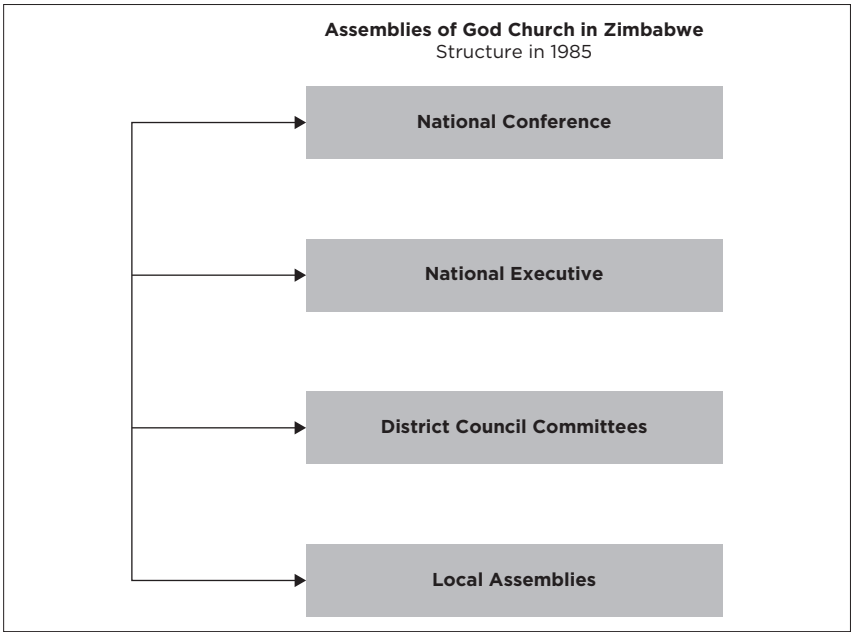
Mkwanazi was to play a significant role in the affairs of the church in Zimbabwe.

Geoffrey Bizeni Mkwanazi was born of Bizeni Mkwanazi and Selina Hlabangana on 30 August 1929. Mkwanazi was their first child (Nyathi 2013:36). In the mid-1960s, Mkwanazi moved to South Africa under a false identity document as Misheck Ntabeni and settled in Alexandra Township, north of Johannesburg. While in Alexandra, he acquired South African identity documents in the name of Geoffrey Mkwanazi, as a Zulu born in South Africa. He worked for the South African Railways at Braamfontein as an Office Clerk. It was while he was living in Alexandra that he was led to Christ by Pastor Abel Ndzishe of the Assemblies of God. This was the beginning of his relationship with the Assemblies of God which later led to him meeting Rev. Nicholas Bhengu. Mkwanazi went to African Bible Training Institute in Spring Valley, Witbank (now eMalahleni), for his

theological training to prepare himself for ministry. The school had been established by Fred Burke, an American missionary to South Africa, on his farm. Burke was also the principal of the school. It was while at the school that he met his wife Eleanor Linky Masombuka who was also a student at the school from 1957 to 1959 (Nyathi 2013:65, 71, 85).

He went back to Zimbabwe in 1968 to bury his father after which he returned to South Africa. In 1974, the authorities discovered that Mkwanazi had been in South Africa unlawfully with false documents. This led to his deportation by the South African government to his country of origin.

Bhengu structured the Zimbabwe work the same way he structured his work in South Africa: with national conference, national executive, district or regional councils – Midland, Manikaland, Matabeleland and Harare (see Figure 6.5).



Source: Pastor Mathamsanqa Dube (n.d.).

FIGURE 6.5: Bhengu's Zimbabwe work structure.

Membership of the Zimbabwe structure is discussed below:

- National Conference. This includes all accredited pastors, probationary pastors and delegates from accredited local Assemblies.
- National Executive. Nine members elected from fully accredited pastors by popular vote of members of the national conference. They elect their own office bearers: national chairman, general secretary and treasurer after having been elected at the national conference.
- District Council Committees. Seven members elected from fully accredited pastors by popular vote from assemblies in a particular district council. They elect their own office bearers: chairman and vice-chairman, secretary and vice-secretary, two trustees and an additional member. A district council comprised all accredited pastors, probationary pastors and delegates from accredited local Assemblies.
- Local Assemblies. Twenty-five or more scripturally baptised members constitute an accredited assembly. They elect their local assembly committees from among mature men to run the affairs of the assembly. They also elect a delegate(s) to attend the national conference or the district council in their region. Local assemblies in a region form a district council. Other operational group committees include mothers, men, youth, girls and Sunday school. They have their operational structures of organisers, quarterly committees, monthly committees and local committees. Organisers attended the district councils and the national conference as observers.

In Zimbabwe, Mothers' Funds are brought to the national convention in Gweru; this includes Youth, Girls' and Fathers' funds. Bhengu helped build the structure with the money that was given to him for his birthday while on a preaching tour in Norway.

In Zimbabwe, the money goes back to the regions that allocate 10% to the national office, 10% to the regional Back to God Crusade campaigns, 10% to their regional offices and 10% for the support of pastors. The remaining 60% is used for different

causes as each region sees it fit. In Swaziland, the disbursement of Mothers Funds in particular is done in a meeting where all the structures are represented: Mothers Committee, Youth Committee, Girls Committee, Fathers Committee, Sunday School Committee and the District Council Committee.

However, in South Africa, the modus operandi is undemocratic in that allocation of funds is done by national leaders without the participation of provinces and regions responsible for raising the funds concerned.

East London

In East London, in the late 1950s Bhengu built the largest church in Southern Africa at the time. It was called '*Gwinyazonke*' [swallow them all], which means that it could swallow or accommodate thousands of people. It was also used as a convention centre for Bhengu's work for many years. People came from all over Southern Africa to attend December and Easter conventions where they received inspirational messages and made financial contributions towards the spread of the Gospel.

It was at this church that Bhengu held his annual conventions and conferences in the 1960s. He planned and directed from this church. It was the hub of his work. It was from here that the work spread to Transkei and rural areas (Ezilaleni). People gave liberally to get the Gospel to those who had not heard.

On Friday, 08 June 2001, the *Dispatch Online* carried a photo with the caption, 'The Reverend Nicholas Bhengu preaches to a large congregation in East Bank in 1957'. The accompanying report says that Bhengu had brought a new brand of Christianity to East London that attracted wide support because it tolerated customary practices such as lobolo and circumcision with commitment to discipline.

The *Probe* magazine (November 1985) reported about how the church in Duncan Village was taken by the South African government because it was in a white area:

> Looking and sounding defeated he told me that he had reached the end of the road. He could not do better. 'The South African government have [*sic*] been ungrateful for the work I have done, bringing criminals back to God. They first banned me in 1953 and now they are taking the house I built without giving us anything in return. They do not appreciate my contributions to society. All I want to do now is retire, go overseas and write about my experiences and then die'. (p. 9)

After the authorities removed the Duncan Village church, Bhengu built a big church in Mdantsane. It was reported in the press that the Assemblies of God was to build a R517 000 church in Mdantsane to replace the old church in Duncan Village.

The head of the church, Rev. Bhengu, said the church would be the biggest in Mdantsane and would accommodate 1200 people. Mr Bhengu said his church had another building in Mdantsane, but it was too small to accommodate all the congregants – over 5000 in Mdantsane alone. He said the old building in Duncan Village could accommodate over 3000 people and had been the centre of the church in South Africa. The centre has since been moved to Thaba Nchu.

Mr Mike Freeman, the architect, said the church was designed to place full emphasis on the pulpit. With this area as the focal point, the walls were designed to radiate out in a series of angled modules to complement the focal point and avoid any disruption of worship, he said (*Daily Dispatch* 17 November 1984):

> In order to accommodate the concept of a church and the associated importance of its function in modern-day society, it is vital that a fine balance between economic restraints, functionalism and design impact is achieved. (n.p.)

Church government

In Ephesians 4, Paul writes:

> It was He who gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (pp. 11–12)

Apostles establish churches and give leadership to those churches and send out others in an organised manner. Prophets preach or proclaim the Word of God, some of it with special divine inspiration. Evangelists announce the good news – the Gospel – to those who need to be saved and united with God. Teachers teach Christians doctrines, while pastors (shepherds) have the responsibility to lead and protect the sheep from wolves and from those who may want to destroy the work from within (Ac 20:28–31). The main work of the pastor is to look after the sheep and protect them from the wolves. Bhengu set up systems to govern the churches and to manage relationships.

Pastor

A pastor was key to Bhengu's assemblies. In addition to chairing meetings of elders and deacons, he was an ex-officio member of all church committees. Any correspondence to any of the five departments (Mothers' work, Girls, Fathers, Youth and Sunday School) in the church was addressed to the chairlady or pastor, secretary or pastor and so on. Before any notices were issued in the church, the pastor had to read them to familiarise himself with the content before they were announced in the church.

A pastor was also expected to help members resolve problems. Bhengu wrote (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> A pastor who does these things will never get into problems with his assembly. A Pastor should avoid arguments, strife and autocracy. He should be a father to all kinds, sorts and characters of his sheep. He should be tender-hearted but stern. Never pick up [*sic*] a quarrel with any of his sheep – avoid showy and haughty spirit, cheap talk, idle or foolish jokes; never listen to stories or tales by people about

> others. Be neutral and take no sides. A pastor should never judge, decide and condemn any member by himself autocratically. A good pastor discourages people from bringing cases before the Scripture has been fully followed: (1) When you have something against your brother (Matthew 5:23–24), (2) When you have been wronged (Matthew 18:15–17), (3) When you see a brother going astray (James 5:16, 19, 20), (4) When your brother sins (1 James 5:16–17). (n.p.)

If people were taught clearly about this, many quarrels and cases could be reduced to the minimum (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> A good pastor is a man of prayer and Bible reading and waiting upon God; a pastor should be a man of faith. A pastor who is greedy for wealth, positionalism [*sic*], fame and high standard of living will not make it: we should think of the sheep more than we think of ourselves. (n.p.)

Bhengu subsequently elaborated on the role of the pastor (Lephoko 2001:10–11):

1. A pastor should think of the lambs of the sheep. It was not a lamb that was lost. It was a sheep (Lk 15:4–7). The lambs of course need special care. The church needs to produce Sunday school teachers and allow them to work among the children.
2. A successful pastor is interested in all departments of the church – fathers' meetings, girls' meetings, Sunday school meetings and all the activities of the assembly. Once a week, Sunday school teachers should meet together with the pastor and discuss the Sunday school lesson. Sunday school teachers are not allowed to miss Sunday school at any cost. It does not matter where they go, even to quarterly meetings, they must come back to take care of Sunday school children on Sunday.
3. A pastor should produce Sunday school teachers and work with them among children.
4. A pastor should consider Sunday school as his chief work. He is the Sunday school superintendent.
5. A pastor should teach and produce men fit for the offices of elders and deacons, offering himself as an example. The hope of every assembly is the production of men who reach our standards, or even a standard above ours.

Finances and administration in local assembly

Money collected in the church was counted by three people in front of the congregation and then entered on an A1 Form under specific categories (e.g. tithes, free will offerings and campaign fund) for which the offering had been given (Figure 6.6). The monies would be banked on the first business day following the service. The following Sunday, deacons would bring a copy

A1 FORM: TAKINGS	
Assembly:	
Date:	
Income	**Amounts taken (R-value)**
1. Building fund	
2. Tithes	
3. Freewill	
4. Assembly business	
5. Campaign fund	
6. Women's meeting	
7. Women's homework	
8. Girls' meeting	
9. Girls' homework	
10. Assembly bazaar	
11. Sunday school	
12. Miscellaneous	
13. Special fund	
14. Gift	
15. Youth meeting	
16. Easter convention	
17. Annual convention	
18. Men's meeting	
19. Target	
20. Talents	
21. Relief fund	
22. Widows' fund	
Total	
Chairperson:	
Secretary:	

Source: Church Circulars (n.d.).

FIGURE 6.6: An example of an A1 Form.

of the deposit slip and have the amount read out to the congregation. A member of the congregation would be invited to go forward to examine the deposit slip and the A1 Form to validate that the amount on the form agreed with the amount on the bank deposit slip and announce to the congregation that the money collected had indeed been banked.

Funds could only be withdrawn once a month. An A2 Form (a requisition form) would be completed by the deacons; the amount for each item would be read out to the church before withdrawal. The church would approve or disapprove of some items of expenditure (Figure 6.7). The withdrawal

A2 FORM: EXPENDITURE

Assembly:

In the Deacon's Meeting that was held on the ..... day of ..... 20 ..... at the .....

No.	Item	R-value	Income	R-value
1.			Building fund	
2.			Tithes	
3.			Freewill	
4.			Assembly business	
5.			Campaign fund	
6.			Special fund	
7.			Holy communion	
8.			Miscellaneous	
9.			Relief fund	
10.			Pastor's bonus	
11.			Choir	
12.			Transport	
13.			Sunday school	
14.			Widows' fund	
	Total		**Total**	

Chairman:

Secretary:

Approved by:
On the behalf of the assembly:

Utilise space for remarks:

.....

.....

.....

Source: Church Circulars (n.d.).

FIGURE 6.7: An example of an A2 Form.

form would be signed by a trustee in the assembly. The A2 Form would then be sent to the district council office where the particulars of the request would be checked against specific items relevant to the requested amount on the financial books of the congregation making the request. Bhengu would then approve the expenditure if money was available. The books of the provincial and national departments and of the women's, men's, girls' and youth conventions would be audited and reported on at relevant convention meetings where members would have the opportunity to debate the audited accounts.

Writing about finances, Bhengu said, 'All finances were completely in the hands of the assembly on behalf of God'. The local oversight was not supposed to dispose of any funds without the approval of the assembly. Tithes were to be centralised for pastors to share equally and to assist with the support of small and poor assemblies. He warned: 'In all money affairs there will be endless troubles'.

Bhengu did not use money for himself or for his family. For Bhengu all monies had to go towards evangelism. 'He led a very poor life, it was not a life deserved by a man who built so many churches in each and every city' (Mshengu pers. comm., 12 October 2003). Bond (2000) sums it up:

> I found Nicholas Bhengu meticulous in money matters. I came to realise that his word was his bond, precisely and literally. In dealing with him my one concern was always to ensure that when we made an agreement we both understood precisely the facts, terms and conditions we had agreed on. Once we were in agreement, I knew we had a binding agreement whether it was in writing or not. Never once was I disappointed. There will be those who use money for their own aggrandisement. Some will overspend and place the church into endless debts. Some will see an opportunity to get rich. The church leaders and the church itself are both capitalistic and scorn at all social concern for the people. That is why people hate churches and their creed. (p. 66)

District council offices

District councils were set up to assist assemblies in their work for the Lord and never to control them (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> The offices are there to keep records, see that the money in the assemblies is recorded, that all expenditures are legitimate before money goes out, see that no unauthorised expenditure or debts are made out. Use the offices, obey the offices, and respect the offices. They are not dictators over you but they are your safeguards and security. (n.p.)

The majority of Bhengu's assemblies were mature, able to build their own churches, support their pastor and conduct their own affairs including financial matters. Some assemblies had financial investments that ran into hundreds of thousands of rands. He taught his people not to get into debt with anyone, not even banks. All movable and immovable church property belonged to the particular church. Church buildings, however, were registered in the name of the Assemblies of God.

Self-supporting churches

Bhengu emphasised the need for his churches to be self-supporting rather than depend on foreign financial support. In a circular dated 01 November 1967, he wrote (Bhengu pers. comm., 01 November 1967):

> 1st November 1967. Dear Co-workers, Greetings in Him! To all workers who are being supported by Missionaries, our Officers, by my personal help, by district councils or by other assemblies and not the assemblies where they minister: (1) The goal is self-supporting assembly in Africa. (2) While you are getting your temporary support from any of the above sources it is your duty and your opportunity to teach people to give without reservations. Teach them without fear or apology. (3) Supervise the books and the banking carefully. (4) Remember your present help support is temporary; so teach the assembly so that they can take over your support when the present help dries up. (5) It has come to our notice that some workers do not

> stress giving for fear they will offend or drive away people. (6) They sometime stress that they want no money as God looks after them. Brother, you must watch out! Your assembly must get out of a cradle and work like other Assemblies. (7) Teach with love and grace. Pray as you teach giving, demonstrate it. (8) When your present income stops you will starve if the people don't learn giving as part of their worshipping God. (9) They must tithe faithfully and you must tithe faithfully also. (10) They must support God's work by all means. Self-supporting assemblies in Africa is our goal! God Bless You, Yours in Christ Jesus. (n.p.)

In a written response to the research questionnaire, Wiseman (pers. comm., 28 October 2003) wrote:

> A major component was his decision not to depend on whites or overseas finances for the resources to move the work forward. He was committed to being an indigenous self-supporting church. I once preached at the huge Duncan Village church at an evening meeting. From a pool of light in the front, people stretched way back into the darkness in three directions. When the offering was taken I was amazed to see THREE separate offerings taken (I forgot the causes each supported), and one of them was a ONE RAND OFFERING – this at a time when R1 was 'imali yecawe'! I was amazed at the sacrificial generosity of the congregation as they filed past placing their one rand coins into the receptable [*sic*]. R1 in the early 1970s would be equivalent of about R60 today. (n.p.)

Self-governing churches

In Ephesians 4, Paul writes:

> It was He who gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (vv. 11–12)

Apostles establish churches and give leadership to those churches and send out others in an organised manner. Prophets preach or proclaim the Word of God, some of it with special divine inspiration. Evangelists announce the good news – the Gospel – to those who need to be saved and united with God. Teachers teach Christians doctrines, while pastors

(shepherds) have the responsibility to lead and protect the sheep from wolves and from those who may want to destroy the work from within (Ac 20:28–31). The chief work of the pastor is to look after the sheep and protect them from the wolves.

Bhengu set up systems to govern the churches and to manage relationships.

- The role of the pastor in Bhengu's churches
- Finances and administration in local assembly

Self-propagating churches

A press report from Germany (Lephoko 2010:182) reads:

> WEST BERLIN – Protestant evangelist revival work has spread through South Africa in the past 15 years like wild-fire, an East London minister, the Rev. Nicholas Bhengu, of the Back to God Crusade, said here. He told the World Congress on Evangelism (1966) more than 500 churches have been founded by unappointed and unpaid new converts alone during that period. In East London, attendance at evangelistic meetings reached 42 000. Many converts were channelled back to existing churches but 'we soon became aware these churches were not prepared to minister to converts from the underworld and heathendom', he said. In spite of his concerns, he still saw an important role for missionaries. 'The field for missionaries is tremendous. They can work all the way with us and not under us. The need is for Bible teachers, Sunday school promoters, Bible camp leaders and many other activities', he continued, 'where there will be scope for white South African Students to minister but not to lead'. (n.p.)

From time to time, tension arose in the Assemblies of God for various reasons. Bhengu and his colleagues had to learn to deal with this. Perry (1977:119–123) proposes how to manage conflict creatively.

Conflict, he postulates, is an inevitable part of growth and life, and conflict need not be destructive. He identifies four types of conflict: (1) Intra-personal – conflict within the individual,

(2) Inter-personal – conflict between and among individuals, (3) Intra-group – conflict within a group and (4) Inter-group – the conflict which perceives another group with antagonism.

Tensions in the Assemblies of God revolved mainly around constitutional arrangements and leadership, especially with regard to African work, in particular Bhengu's assemblies.

In a letter dated 04 June 1977 to the General Executive, Bhengu (pers. comm., 04 June 1977) wrote:

> 4 June 1977. The Africans are allocated Free Church sites by the Department of Bantu Affairs and Development: (1) All workers have to be registered and are controlled by the influx control. (2) We can register only one worker for the area as Assemblies of God, and an additional one if the township expands and the church expands. (3) The workers are subject to levy which is paid by the employer with statistics. (4) The workers are subjected to PAYE which go with statistics from the employer. (5) The Location authorities give one house for the minister and his family. (6) The Department grants one church site to one denomination in one township and a second site can be considered only where the township has expansion [*sic*] as well as the work. (7) Groups will never work in the African work. The Department expects well-organised churches with centralised administration which makes discipline and statistics easy – so characteristic of the Assemblies of God and so entrenched in the constitution and life of the white people section – to (also) work successfully in the African work, since the Political and Social system places it in aforesaid categories. Do you think the groups can, at this time, be dissolved and one social body formed in the white section? IMPOSSIBLE! We will only go to conference to chase a white elephant. (n.p.)

Opportunities for leaders

For Bhengu to create opportunities for some of the church leaders was a critical element to successful ministry. He sent some of the ministers to overseas institutions for training, such as Rev. Fred Shabalala to Christ for All Nations Theological College in Houston, Texas, USA. Bhengu also requested Rev. G.B. Mkwanazi to lead work in former Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

Bhengu gave his blessing to white churches to support Elijah Maswanganyi. In this regard, Bhengu wrote to Bond saying that he had no objections to white churches giving support to Maswanganyi (Bhengu pers. comm., 14 January 1980):

> 14 January 1980. Mr J.W.S. Bond, Assemblies of God, P.O. Box 10555, Johannesburg, 2000. Dear Brother Bond, Greetings in His Name! (1) I am writing to confirm that I have absolutely no objections if you open the Assemblies doors for Brother Maswanganyi to come in and present his Mission and Vision to the people of God. I accept what the Lord leads the people to give for or to the Back to God Crusade and would not like to monopolise or restrict them to my Missions or Visions only. People are led by God to give to that which they feel is a worthy cause. (2) I also have similar convictions about Sipho Bhengu. Those workers or individual Christians or Assemblies wishing to invite, help and maintain him are absolutely free to do so. I should not feel I am the only person to be helped. 'The Lord leads His people all the day long'. (3) I leave for Rhodesia on 17/01/1980 and shall be there till the middle of February. God bless you, Jesus in Him. (n.p.)

Bhengu also encouraged and supported Dr Hlongwa to study both locally and overseas, notably in the USA. He arranged with John Bond for financial support.

On 17 September 1979, Bond wrote to the Commissioner for the Department of Cooperation and Development requesting that Dr Hlongwa be granted a passport to travel to the USA to study at Drew University.

On numerous occasions, Bhengu encouraged and supported young men and women to study and improve their academic qualifications, as evident in a letter to Moses (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> Rev. Nicholas Bhengu, P.O. Box 1055, Johannesburg, TEL. 23-0449. Dear Moses, Greeting in His Name! Thanks for your letters I received this morning on my arrival from Rhodesia. I am in agreement with your ambition and plans for your knowledge. You have my wholehearted approval. I am unable to write anything more because I have a big pile of letters on my desk. The heart desires to say much more in volumes but I have no time. Correspondence has accumulated much while I was away. God bless you and greet all the students for us. (n.p.)

Another of Bhengu's protégés was Richard Sihlobo Ngidi, who was saved and blessed by Bhengu for the ministry. In his book *What a Giant of Faith: The Story of Richard Ngidi's Ministry of Miracles* (2010), Khathide writes on how Ngidi, the man he calls a 'giant of faith', was saved during one of Bhengu's campaigns in Lamontville township on the outskirts of Durban:

> Ngidi, having seen God work miracles through the ministry of Bhengu, asked for an appointment to see Bhengu. It was in one of these tent revival meetings of Nicholas Bhengu that Ngidi found rest for his soul. The miracles that Jesus did through the hands of Nicholas Bhengu captivated the attention of Richard Ngidi. Within days of his new birth experience, Ngidi knew that he had not been saved to be a pew-warming Christian. He knew that God was choosing him for high destinies. Before the revival meeting came to an end Richard requested an audience with the preacher, Rev. Bhengu. The preacher agreed and an appointment was made. Rev. Bhengu asked, 'What do you want, young man?' 'Mfundisi, (Pastor) I am here to ask a very serious question'. 'Go ahead'. 'How did you receive the power of God to heal the sick?' Before the old man could answer the question, he took a deep breath and asked: 'Have you received Christ as your Lord and Saviour?' 'Yes, I have'. 'When?' the old man probed. 'During this revival'. Rev. Bhengu directed another question at Richard Ngidi, 'Do You know anything about the power of the Holy Spirit?' 'Not quite'. Rev. Bhengu then began to give Richard Ngidi a lecture on the power and the workings of the Holy Spirit. He told the young man that anybody who was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit was capable of doing works of power. This was the challenge Richard was looking for. He then asked the preacher to lay hands on him in order that he might experience the power of God's Holy Spirit in his life. As soon as Richard left the preacher, he knew that a change of identity had occurred in his life. He was to trust God for a great move of the Holy Spirit. For him there would be no going back. Like his spiritual father and mentor, Ngidi was greatly used of God. He saw thousands of people come to Christ, lives charged and remarkable developments taking place. (pp. 10–11)

Chapter 7

Tensions in the Assemblies of God

It is said that tensions and misunderstandings occur as a result of people working together. The Little Oxford English Dictionary defines tension as 'a situation that is strained because of differing views' (1999:723), while misunderstanding is failure to understand correctly (1999:441). It was expected that there would be at one stage or another tensions that would occur when taking into account the diversity of missionary groupings and African leaders in the Assemblies of God. Missionary groups still owed allegiance to their sending countries, Canada, England, Ireland and the USA among others, and reported about their work to supervisory bodies in their countries of origin.

At one stage, missionaries were allowed to organise themselves into a grouping as missionaries, and they were afforded the opportunity to elect among themselves people to represent them at the General Executive of the Assemblies of God.

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There was also a strong African block led by Bhengu, Gumede, Buthelezi, Mjaji and others who felt there was a need for full representation on the General Executive as far back as 1943.

Later in the development of the Assemblies of God, white work was established under the leadership of James Mullan and his brother Fredrick. Work by Indians and people of mixed race also came into existence. Add to that, independent assemblies' congregations of ideas, visions and strategies to achieve God's mandate to evangelise the masses and win them to Christ.

These different groupings conducted their own conferences (interim conferences) between the general conferences that took place biennially during which all groupings came together under the umbrella of the Assemblies of God.

Critics of the Assemblies of God in South Africa did not understand that the Assemblies of God was not a creation of apartheid as history testifies to the fact that it was founded by missionaries who came to South Africa and worked among African people. It is a fellowship of diverse groups and ministers BOUND IN FELLOWSHIP BY SPIRIT.

It is not my intention to traverse all causes of tensions in the Assemblies of God and Bhengu's work. Lack of space would not allow me to do so. There is also no attempt to go into detail regarding those areas of tension or misunderstandings that I will refer to.

Leadership

Leadership is a complex concept on which numerous volumes have been written by experts in the field: academics and those who occupy leadership positions in business, politics, the church and so on. Leadership is displayed at different levels – macro-level and micro-level situations. Bhengu led both at macro and micro levels. He served on the General Executive of the Assemblies of God almost from the time he joined the Assemblies of God, which is before he established the Back to God Crusade.

It is not easy to pin Bhengu down to any particular leadership style. Bhengu was a Zulu born at eNtumeni outside Eshowe, the colonial capital of KwaZulu (now KwaZulu-Natal) which is in the heart of Zulu culture. His upbringing by Christian parents under the stern discipline of Norwegian missionaries also had some influence on how he as a Christian minister led, motivated and directed his people and influenced those outside his work and the Assemblies of God.

Vision, mission and leadership style

'A vision is a mental picture of a future event taking place' (Lephoko 2001:98). That's why it is of paramount importance to work with and among children and young people. The future belongs to them. It is what we do today with and for them that will determine their future. Someone said, 'eyes that look are common but eyes that see are rare'.

A mission embodies the business philosophy of the firm's strategic decision-makers, implies the image the firm seeks to project, reflects the firm's self-concept and indicates the firm's principal product or service area and the primary customer needs the firm will attempt to satisfy. In short, it describes the firm's product, market and technological areas of emphasis, and it does so in a way that reflects the values and priorities of the firm's strategic decision-makers (Pearce & Robinson 1994:31).

A mission differentiates an entity from other organisations operating in the same or similar space. It deals with what we are doing, why we are doing it, who we are doing for, where we are doing it and how we are doing it and the expected results.

Bhengu's Mission was to:

1. Do God's work in relation to his calling.
2. Evangelise Africa with Africans leading the charge and others like missionaries assisting with the process, for example, establishment of Bible colleges and training of pastors.

3. Plant self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches.
4. Educate the youth through a bursary fund to prepare them for leadership roles in church, business, politics, education and so on.
5. Mobilise women to develop funds for Back to God Crusade campaigns.
6. Mobilise men to build churches.
7. Mobilise girls to furnish mission houses.
8. Cooperate and work with other denominations and para-church organisations.
9. Establish teaching teams to safeguard his doctrine and the principles of church governance after he was gone.
10. Strive for the unity of the Assemblies of God.
11. Unite the black work instead of having splinter groups created by missionary efforts.
12. Organise men, woman and youth to become employers rather than being employees.
13. Cooperate with other denominations (ecumenism).

It is clear that Bhengu was very much aware of the huge responsibility to spread the message of salvation to all people throughout the world, calling them to go back to God. In a handbill for Bhengu's Mission to Salisbury, his missionary career was highlighted (Handbill 1976):

> Nicholas Bhengu has preached to thousands of people throughout Scandinavia, the USA, Britain, Canada and South Africa. In the late 1940's he baptised 1300 converts after his Back to God Crusade in East London, South Africa. One of the biggest churches in South Africa, seating 5 000 people was built in East London as a result of that Crusade. At Christmas time each year some 10 000 people gather there for a huge convention. When Nicholas Bhengu visited Salisbury in 1959 the Time magazine gave a full page report of his work. Outstanding miracles of healing and remarkable conversions have taken place under his ministry and thousands of lives have been changed by God. (n.p.)

In an annual report to donors dated 23 November 1969, delivered at Assembly Hall, Belgravia Crescent, East London, Bhengu

exhibits a full understanding of the *Missio Dei*. He based his message on John 20:21, 'Then said Jesus to them again, peace be unto you: As my father hath sent me, even so send I you'. He said:

1. It is striking to realise that we have a mission not less than the one which the first missionary who travelled the longest distance came to this earth. It frightens us to know the immensity of the task before us.
2. It behoves us to intensify our efforts. He was sent by God to do the greatest Mission on earth. We, in turn, have been sent by Jesus Christ himself, the Son of the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth whom we have accepted as our Saviour, King and Master.
3. We are made aware of our position first in him as members of his body, and his bride, as his church and as bones of his bones. We belong wholly to him but there is a task set before us. If we have been accepted into sonship with him we have also been commissioned by him to this ministry on earth – to fulfil that which was begun and left incomplete by him.
4. The work of salvation was his Mission to this world and this was accomplished – 'It is finished' – when he bore our sins on the tree and died the death of a malefactor 'having done nothing amiss'. His mission was accomplished. 'I must work the works of Him that sent me' (Jn 9:4).
5. The Mission of gathering the lost souls, building his body and extending His kingdom by proclaiming to the world the glad tidings of what has been accomplished in their behalf is left with [*sic*] us and for us. We are fully aware now of our task and mission from the risen Saviour – 'even so send I you!'
6. We all want to fit into His programme and play our role respectively as grateful and obedient children of the Great King. We are constrained by his love to do his will.
7. The indwelling Christ compels us to love as he loved, sacrifice as he did and suffer with him in all things. What is his will?
8. His will is that no one should perish but they should all come to the knowledge of the truth and repent, believe and be saved (2 Pt 3:9). How shall they hear without a preacher? (Rm 10:14). How shall they preach except they be sent? (Rm 10:15).

The first missionary who travelled the longest distance to earth is none but the one who is mentioned in John: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning' (Jn 1:1, 2). And:

> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (v. 14)

Jesus finished the work of salvation which He had been sent to do by the Father by bearing our sins on the tree. He shouted 'It is finished!' Jesus' mission on earth was to die and redeem mankind from sin and impending judgement.

Bhengu felt compelled to obey God and intensify his efforts to accomplish the mission that was started and left incomplete by his Master, the Son of the living God.

Bhengu was keenly aware of the task that he had to fulfil by preaching the good news and building up the church, the Body of Christ. The words 'Even so send I you' seem to have consumed Bhengu. His desire was to fit into his Master's programme and play a role as a grateful and obedient child of the Great King. He was impelled by God's love to do his will. Like Paul, he could say (1 Cor 9):

> (16)Yet when I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! (17)If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. (18)What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the Gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. (19)Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. (20)To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. (21)To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so as to win those not having the law. (22)To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (23)I do all this for the sake of the Gospel that I may share in its blessing. (vv. 16–23)

In line with Paul's great missionary verses, Bhengu concluded with the following words to his audience (Rm 10):

> (13)[...] [*E*]veryone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (14) How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? (15)And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' (vv. 13–15)

This was a passionate plea to his audience, many of whom were not able to go but could send Bhengu and his team of evangelists as their ambassadors.

After his extraordinary calling, Bhengu believed that God sent the Son and that God the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. The sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son meant that the Church was in the world to do Mission work. He also understood that 'Mission is no longer thought of as the Church's activity overseas, run on cultural lines' (Kirk 2000:24). He knew that the mission frontier was not primarily a geographical one, but one of belief, conviction, of a commitment. From the beginning of his ministry, Bhengu sought to reach out to people of all cultures: Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Pedi, Swazi, Tsonga, Venda, white people, Indians, people of mixed race and Shonas in Zimbabwe and the rest of Africa.

Bhengu believed that just as the Father had sent the Son, the Son through the Holy Spirit had now sent him to take the Gospel from Cape to Cairo. His vision was to reach all of Africa with the good news. In an endeavour to reach all the people, he learnt to speak most of South Africa's languages, including English and Afrikaans. He also became a student of their cultures. He never interfered with the Xhosa culture of circumcision. A remark by Bhengu at the 1957 Convention confirms this (Dubb 1976):

> The Xhosa people have a saying that a boy is a dog. With them every uncircumcised person [*which would include Bhengu, a Zulu*] is a 'boy' and therefore a dog. They say that neither a boy nor a dog can lead men, i.e. circumcised people. They say a dog cannot be a leader of its own master. But there are dogs which after they have

> made a kill of a wild beast come to their masters, wagging their tails, jumping about, panting and growling uneasily. The master notices something unusual about his dog, he stands up and notices the kill. The dog has led its master! What have they to say today? I as a 'boy' [i.*e., an uncircumcised Zulu*] have led the 'men' [*circumcised Xhosa who predominate in the Cape Province*] to such a stage without complaint. (Cries of 'Glory to God! Amen!'). (pp. 79–80)

An extract from an address by Mhlambiso, Chief of the Amahlubi tribe in the Amatola basin at the 1957 Convention, illustrates the way people held Bhengu in high regard (Dubb 1976):

> Rev. Bhengu, white ministers and black ones, together with all the officials, I am grateful for this honour. I thank the Convention [...] for giving you this church site. I am very pleased to have this pleasure of seeing with my own eyes what this is like. When a finger of God points at someone to be a leader of anything nobody can ever turn or bend it. God pointed at Rev. Bhengu for his gift of being capable of leading the people convincingly. I am given people to lead and rule. They are very stubborn. They do not listen to me as people listen to Rev. Bhengu. (Applause from the congregation, and cries of 'Hallelujah! Amen! Glory to Jesus!') I think he possesses what I lack. He has a gift I do not have. He has God in him – I do not. (p. 80)

Most of Bhengu's work was among his African people; however, he did not restrict himself to this group. He also preached to people of other races in this country and overseas in countries such as Canada, the USA, Norway, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Japan.

Leadership theories

A brief overview of some leadership theories is essential. The following concepts will assist in assessing or determining Bhengu's leadership style.

Blanchard

Blanchard (2007:99) in his book *Leading at a Higher Level* (2007) deals with situational leadership. He proposes three skills that are essential for a situational leader: diagnosis, flexibility and

partnering for performance. Diagnosis relates to competence – the sum of knowledge and skills an individual brings to a goal or task. The second aspect of diagnosis is commitment; this refers to the person's motivation and confidence in a goal or task.

Bhengu met all three requirements. He was able to diagnose a situation, identifying what was needed for evangelism and church planting. He was flexible to some extent although he could sometimes be quite rigid. He would never bend or be moved from what he perceived to be his God-given mission, no matter what. He partnered with church donors and other churches, political and traditional leaders to accomplish his goal for the sake of the Gospel but would not partner with anyone just for the sake of partnership.

Avery

Avery (2004) focuses on what he calls leadership paradigms. He names four such paradigms: classical, transactional, visionary and organic. Avery distinguishes each of the paradigms as follows:

1. Classical leadership refers to dominance by a pre-eminent person or an 'elite' group of people. This individual or group commands or manoeuvres others to act toward a goal, which may or may not be explicitly stated.
2. Transactional leadership refers to leaders who view followers as individuals, with more focus on their skills, needs and motives.
3. Visionary leaders provide vision and leadership. They capture the hearts and minds of their followers with their images of some desired future state.
4. Organic leadership is different: For many people, the organic paradigm represents a radical change of thinking, about leadership, followership and the traditional nature of organisations. It involves letting go of conventional notions of control, order and hierarchy, replacing them with trust and an acceptance of continual change and even chaos and respect for diverse members of the organisation. In organic organisations, the members are expected to be self-managing and self-leading. (pp. 17–26)

Bhengu

Leadership style

Bhengu's characteristic leadership style is evaluated below against Avery's paradigms of leadership.

- Classical leadership. Bhengu exercised a dominating leadership style when he was determined to achieve certain goals, especially during the early years of his ministry. He had full command and control of others to act towards set goals. He would move his ministers or evangelists from one place to another at very short notice by telegram. This was done when a tent had to be brought down and someone was needed to come and take charge of the work and help plant a church while he himself moved on.
- Transactional leadership. Bhengu used this kind of leadership style quite often. He transferred a minister from one place to another based on his skills, needs, spiritual giftedness and the needs of an assembly. A minister was also transferred when his gift(s) seemed to have served the current local church, or the minister was experiencing some problems at his station.
- Visionary leadership. Bhengu was a visionary. He had received a mandate from God to preach the Gospel to all peoples. The vision that commanded him to go from Cape to Cairo, literally consumed him. He provided vision for the Back to God Crusade team, the women and the churches to give to God's mission to win Africa back to God. He captured the hearts and minds of the people by his single-minded goal to evangelise the continent of Africa and beyond. The war cry, 'Africa Back to God, Africa for Jesus – Jesus for Africa' was written on his Back to God Crusade trucks and tents.
- Organic leadership. Bhengu did not totally relinquish control of his churches; he did however allow churches to conduct their own affairs as best they could under the oversight of the local leadership: elders and deacons – or church committees where there were no elders or deacons. Local leadership worked under the supervision of district councils.

District councils did not lord it over the assemblies as strict policies and procedures were to be followed to safeguard the integrity of churches and the good name of the Assemblies of God.

Leadership qualities

Bhengu was a great spiritual leader. Spirituality was his focus as an evangelist, church planter, apostle, prophet and pastor. Sanders in his book *Spiritual Leadership* ([1967] 1994) sets out a range of qualifications needed for Christian service. Only a few are selected to assist in considering Bhengu's leadership qualifications.

- Mental qualifications. A leader must be prudent, a person with sound judgement. With regard to behaviour, he must be respectable. A well-ordered life is the fruit of a well-ordered mind. Bhengu was certainly self-disciplined and well-ordered. Although he did not have a university degree (which he had set out to achieve by going to Taylor University in the USA), he was self-taught. He developed himself intellectually and was able to interact with all men at all levels of social, business, political and academic life. He had a sound mind. 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline' (2 Tm 1:7). He ended up being appointed visiting professor at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England.
- Domestic qualifications. Paul admonishes a married leader to 'manage his own family well and to see that his children obey him with proper respect' (2 Tm 3:4). Bhengu's two daughters, Waxy and Dawn, described a cordial homely relationship with both their parents. There were family rules: 'Mylet was a wonderful woman. She loved reading magazines and she taught us to work and pray together. We wrote to our Dad to encourage him. We all ate together. We would go into his bedroom to share with him. He instilled values in us not to owe anyone. While he was away on ministry Mylet would maintain the rule'.

- Vision. Sanders ([1967] 1994:56) writes: 'Vision involves foresight as well as insight. President McKinley's reputation for greatness rested in part on his ability to put an ear on the ground and listen for things coming. He turned his listening to vision. He saw what lay ahead'. Bhengu saw much further than his contemporaries. For example, although he did not participate in political activism, he prepared his people for change. He set up bursaries for the youth, so that when democracy arrived they would be ready to take up positions of leadership.
- Humility. According to Sanders, 'humility is the hallmark of the spiritual leader' (Sanders [1967] 1994:61). Christ told his disciples to turn away from the pompous attitudes of the oriental despots and instead take on the lowly bearing of the servant (Mt 20:25–27). As in ancient days, even today humility is least admired in political and business circles. But no bother! The spiritual leader will choose the hidden path of sacrificial service and approval of the Lord over the flamboyant, self-advertising of the world. Dr Gamedze states categorically in an interview (18 October 2003), 'Bhengu was not a show-off person'. Bhengu was quick to apologise and ask for forgiveness if he had wronged anyone. He was also willing to forgive those who had wronged him (Bhengu & Gamedze pers. comm., 1974 n.d.).
- Self-sacrifice. 'Scars are the authenticating marks of faithful discipleship and true spiritual leadership', says Sanders ([1967] 1994:116). Bhengu bore scars of hard work, traversing the country in all kinds of weather. He bore scars of poverty and hunger, of being misunderstood, misconstrued and misinterpreted.
- Loneliness. 'Because the leader must always be ahead of his followers, he lives with loneliness. Though he may be friendly, there are areas of life where he must walk alone'. Bhengu was often lonely. At times he would rise in the middle of the night to drive alone from one city to another. He did this in 1961 when he left Nelspruit in the middle of the night and drove to East London.
- Rejection. Bhengu suffered rejection at the hands of his original church. The Lutheran Church expelled him from their mission station when he was saved and again expelled him in

> later years when he returned to the mission to build a home (funeral arrangements, 27 January 1984). This kind of rejection was probably most hurtful: I have lived being misunderstood, misinterpreted, misconstrued and abused by reckless men from all sections and sides. These were all very good for my moulding up as well as humiliation. They were practical lessons to prove theories. They helped to keep me low, selfless and self-effaced. I could not ride a high horse after all my success for they were all his. I was glad when no street, road or avenue in all the townships was named after me. My life was buried with Christ and although I received great honours from the leaders of various countries yet I was never elated to feel that I was above my fellowmen in the street. I am going to lay myself down in death in real equality with all men of low estate. Men who never went to school, never preached to thousands in Africa and overseas. I feel I am worthless. I feel I am nothing. I feel I am nobody but God took my life and used it for his own pleasure as useless as I was. It was all for his honour and glory.

The philosophy of ministry that allowed certain gifted individuals such as Bhengu and missionaries to establish their own works overtime led to a situation where a man like Bhengu with great anointing, effective organisation ability and a growing ministry or church planting through the Back to God Crusade was susceptible to tensions.

Missionaries

American missionaries

American missionaries held the view that the work in South Africa had to be run along the same lines as the Assemblies of God USA.

Bond (2000), who had been on the General Executive of the Assemblies of God since 1959 and later served as chairman of that Executive for 27 years, in his book *For the Record – Reflections on the Assemblies of God* writes regarding the attitude of the American missionaries:

> They wanted to have South Africa split up into regions, each with a regional superintendent. Every ministry would be confined to a particular region, would work under the direction of his regional superintendent, and could only minister outside the confines of his region if he had the specific consent of the regional superintendent concerned. In effect, they wanted Nicholas Bhengu to be confined to East London and to work under the direction of some missionary regional superintendent. The Executive responded to this by telling the Americans that far from confining Nicholas Bhengu to a region in the Eastern Cape, we were convinced he had a ministry for all of Southern Africa. We said, 'If Bhengu feels led to go and preach in Timbuktu, we'll take up a collection and send him there!' The audacity of these American demands astounded me. Even Morris Williams who spoke for the Springfield missionaries confessed that the American work represented less than five percent of our membership and that the African work numbered more than 90 percent. Yet they were pressing on us these outrageous demands. Of course, their plan was to bring Nicholas Bhengu under their thumb. The same fate was intended for James Mullan and his white assemblies. (pp. 192–193)

Bhengu was an apostle, prophet, evangelist, church planter and a visionary leader who believed in African leadership by Africans. He believed that only Africans understood the cultural dynamics of the continent. This belief brought him in sharp contrast with missionaries who felt excluded by Bhengu's strategic approach, especially those from the USA as articulated by McGee in his book – *This Gospel Shall be Preached* (1989). 'Nationalistic sympathies could not be easily ignored'. Even the words 'International Headquarters' on the front of the new Assemblies of God headquarters in Springfield, Missouri (dedicated 02 March 1962), generated negative reactions from visiting church officials of sister churches organisations abroad.

According to McGee (1989), the reason why the American missionaries broke away from the Assemblies of God is as follows:

> [*S*]eparation resulted partly because of divergent politics. The South African Assemblies of God eventually came to be close[*ly*] governed by 'Apostles' who also spearheaded evangelism and church planting [...]. Having major reservations about this kind of ecclesiastical structure and aware of Bhengu's fundraising activities in the United States and other countries to support it. The Assemblies of God

> (USA) severed its federal fraternal relationship in 1964 and launched the International Assemblies of God in South Africa (designed to be linked to the proposed International Assemblies of God Fellowship). (pp. 109-110)

Motshetshane (2015) writes on the International Assemblies of God as a new experiment of the AGUSA (Assemblies of God United States of America) missionaries:

> For the first time in the history of missionaries and their converts in South Africa, it was the missionaries who seceded from a work they had been part of as they stood challenged by resolute African leadership. In a traumatic display of financial power and rejection of African leadership, the American missionaries withdrew from the AGSA [*Assemblies of God in South Africa*] and formed the International Assemblies of God in 1964. In justifying the move to start a new church, Morris Williams, the new AGUSA field director of Africa, reported the following to his principals '[…] in recent years it became evident that African churches needed and wanted a better basis on which to build their work. Consequently, the International Assemblies of God was born'. This was only four years after Williams had taken over from Everett Phillips as the AGUSA Field Director for Africa in 1960. (pp. 275–276)

Bhengu did not want missionaries to play a leadership role in the black Assemblies, certainly not those that had been established by him and others that were under his oversight. They could only come by invitation. He wanted black work to be led by black people. He did not accept white people's money to build churches because he wanted black people to receive God's blessing for building their churches themselves. He would only use white money to preach the Gospel. He also warned Rev. Mogapi against working with some missionaries who were exploiting black workers (Mogapi & Ndlovu pers. comm., 16 February 2009).

☐ Elim Pentecostal Church Missionaries

Ron Gull, one of the missionaries of the Elim Pentecostal Churches of England who worked with Phillips, wrote a document to explain the problems that led them to leave the Assemblies

of God. The written submission was in response to my request. Gull's thesis gives a comprehensive historical background of the structure and operations of the Assemblies of God that created a fertile ground for divisions and splits in the movement.

Gull lists six factors that were paramount for their decision to leave. These might also have prompted others to leave the Assemblies of God:

- The general diversity factor. Black people came from diverse African groups, while the missionaries came from the Assemblies of God in the USA, Great Britain and Ireland; the Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance in the United Kingdom; and the Scandinavian Pentecostal Churches, each one of them with the mandate to plant churches.
- The expatriate leadership factor in the 'Mission Churches'. As the 'mission' churches matured, indigenous men and women leaders, some of stature, did emerge. Such was the pattern and vision of those days that they were given only limited authority with the overall power remaining in expatriate hands, perhaps for too long.
- The Assemblies of God Constitution Factor. The amalgamation with the Assemblies of God had not been accepted without due consideration and early dissemination among the missionaries of Emmanuel Mission. In fact, the Constitution of the Assemblies of God that was passed by the General Conference held at Shingwedzi and its subsequent amendment by the General Conference at Witbank in 1955 and 1965 resulted in a rather rigid structure, quite different from that described in 1968.
- The Back to God factor. The immense success, under God, of the Back to God Crusade across the nation led by Nicholas Bhengu and others brought hundreds of newly formed assemblies into membership with the Assemblies of God. It was inevitable, given the charismatic character and the anointed ministries of such men, that these new assemblies should look to them for ongoing leadership. It was also perfectly natural that these assemblies should be identified

with the crusade that brought them into being even to bearing the name 'Back to God' rather than 'Assemblies of God'. It was obvious that the Back to God group would dominate the Africa section of the work and eventually gain recognition as the main evangelistic arm of that section of the Assemblies of God. It was inevitable too that it would later gain recognition as an official 'group' as allowed in the general constitution, with its own individual constitution, its own annual conference and regular regional and national conventions. The 'mission' churches had no such coherent structure to warrant even an unofficial recognition as a 'group' and were consequently merely regarded as Assemblies of Churches.

- The Elim factor. The financial policy of the Back to God movement became progressively more centralised, with local assembly funds being increasingly administered by the staff at the central office in Johannesburg, often with Nicholas Bhengu as a controlling signatory of their bank account. As this method of control expanded, doubtlessly in a worthy effort to combat financial irregularities, some 'mission' assemblies resisted it seeing it as a means of limiting their sovereignty, and a further erosion of the original administrative structure of the Assemblies of God. Some of the resentment was also because of the fact that this method was only instigated within the so-called 'black' section of the work. Illustrative of the problem introduced by this control factor was that experienced by the Waterval Boven assembly. The assembly had been established by an Emmanuel Mission worker, Pastor Luke Mjaji, in 1945, and had been nurtured by him from that time with regular visitation and 'revival' meetings. Then, in 1975, a 'Back to God' worker holding Assembly of God credentials, Pastor Ngubeni, was directed, supposedly by the African Executive, to take the leadership at nearby Belfast, possibly with a mandate to include Waterval Boven.
- The 'Mission' worker factor. In the northern region, there were problems of a very different nature. At Lenyenye, 'mission' worker Pastor Mabitsela shared the pastoral duties with another older worker named Malatje. In 1972, when tension

> was beginning to build up between the local Back to God workers and the mission sector, the African Executive visited Lenyenye and appointed Malatje as the official pastor. This was done following a so-called election at which even non-members were allegedly allowed to vote in order to marginalise the 'mission' assemblies. Mabitsela had been instrumental up to that time in organising the assembly membership in the erection of the new church building, which at that stage was at roof level. Consequently, when Malatje asked for the church plans, Mabitsela refused to part with them.

Gull assisted Mjaji's group when they decided to leave the Assemblies of God in 1977 to form the Emmanuel Assemblies. Gull reports:

> Following a successful meeting of the Steering Committee, consisting of pastors Mjaji, Mabitsela, Seale, Mdaka, Mahisa and Mahlaule, work began on a suitable constitution. Elim missionaries Frieda Grossen with Ron and Betty Gull, met the Steering Committee in the then Elim Mission house in Hospital Street, Tzaneen, to help with the wording and drafts that finally culminated in what was felt to be a satisfactory document. By August the final draft was complete and in the hands of an attorney in white River for legal consideration. (n.p.)

The Emmanuel Assemblies was officially constituted at a conference that took place on 15 and 16 October 1977 in Ka-Nyamazane, Nelspruit.

☐ Canadian

The departure of the Canadian missionaries, as well as some white and black churches, was mainly precipitated by the amendment of Section 5.2 of the property clause in the constitution. Bhengu, who had earlier lost one of his church buildings to a dissident group in Soweto, was eager to protect African church buildings on government-leased land. In his determination to have the constitutional amendment approved by the conference, Bhengu had asked Bond to provide him with his list of nominees for the Executive. He then lobbied his African delegates to vote for Bond's nominees (Bond 2000:267–269).

The Coastal Assemblies

The Coastal Assemblies were a group of churches led by Mike Attlee, one of the leaders appointed by James Mullan as an apostle to lead a section of his work when he retired. In a document *History of the Coastal Assemblies of God*,[5] the leadership of the Coastal Assemblies of God presents their reasons for leaving the Assemblies of God.

The final crunch however came in 1981 at a General Conference of the Assemblies of God when it was discovered that the black delegates had been lobbied for Bond's candidates and that the outcome of the election for the executive would consequently be in their favour. This left people like Mike Attlee, Noel Scheepers and other important leaders of the Executive of the Assemblies of God without support. Their main concern was the change in property rights amendment in the constitution which read (Bond 2000):

> If a property movable or immovable, such as a church building, minister's house or anything else is registered in the name of the Assemblies of God and held under the General Constitution of the Assemblies of God and not under a local assembly Constitution, such property, movable or immovable, is deemed to be held by the Assemblies of God and must continue to be until the General Executive might decide otherwise, [...]. (pp. 267–268)

Bhengu's lobbying for his people to vote for Bond's nominees led to unhappiness among Ennis' group of Assemblies. Sam Ennis then led the exit from the Assemblies of God. He was joined by Attlee's Coastal Assemblies of God to present their reason for leaving the Assemblies of God.

Quest for unity

Bhengu's vision for Africa was most probably the result of the vision he saw of people drowning in an ocean. All the victims were black and spoke to him in African languages.

5. http://www.caog.org.za/hist.asp.

It is this vision of his calling to ministry that set him on a collision course with missionaries, liberation movements, South African government, homeland leaders and white people in the Assemblies of God, including his own African people.

Bhengu was convinced that black Africa could only be won to Christ and transformed by the Gospel of love and forgiveness by Africans: 'Jesus for Africa – Africa for Jesus!' He had tried Communism before his conversion; it did not give his people what they needed the most. They needed to be reconciled to God through the preaching of the Word of God which would help them come to faith.

Bhengu authored the paper entitled 'A storm in a tea cup – Are whites planning for an exodus in the Assemblies of God to start a new movement?' In this document, he gives a short historical background of the Assemblies of God and how he joined H.C. Phillips of the Emmanuel Mission and that together with Phillips joined the Assemblies of God on Federal Bases.

Bhengu explains how he joined the Emmanuel Mission (A storm in a tea cup n.d.):

> I joined the Emmanuel Mission in 1936 and in 1938 I left the government service to do evangelistic work in Eastern Transvaal. I soon found out from Pastor Phillips of the Emmanuel Mission (Elim in England) that they were not recognised by the Government in South Africa as the latter was not recognising any new church. He informed me they were negotiating with the Assemblies of God which accepted churches into federal structure so I agreed to join the Assemblies of God on Federal lines. (n.p.)

The white work in the Eastern Cape was making amazing progress. The black work was making fantastic progress taking cities and towns into its fold. Bhengu says they were working very closely with Pastor James E. Mullan and the entire white work; they were a family together, devouring East London, Transkei, Durban, Kimberley, Bloemfontein and Johannesburg like wild fire. This brought joy to all the white assemblies. There also developed spontaneously assemblies of the people of mixed race and Indians in the Cape, Natal and Transvaal.

Signs of trouble

In 1955, there were signs of constitutional trouble in the Assemblies of God but were not crises until the beginning of 1961. In 1964, the American missionaries produced a constitution which was subjecting the whole movement to Springfield, that is, their missionary headquarters. Bhengu reacted to this and said (A storm in a tea cup n.d.):

> To this we objected and voted against – 441 against 66. It was the preponderous African vote that saved the movement. We saved our white counterparts! [*sic*] Assemblies of God on account of constitutional crises but they blamed it on me. I was dubbed a communist in South Africa and in USA I was dubbed an Apartheid Agent of the South African Government. What a paradox! (n.p.)

Why did I become restless?

Bhengu explains (A storm in a tea cup n.d.) the events during the turbulent times which threatened the cordial relationship which existed between Bhengu and the primarily white group:

> The white people's work is divided into many autonomous camps known as groups and there's unpleasantness between them. The black work is one solid block with hundreds of assemblies and thousands of members. The white people buy sites in local names and build for the local assembly and that church becomes and remains the property of the local assembly. Should the assembly leave Assemblies of God, there's no trouble, they leave with their property because it belongs to them. But we have no right to buy land. We have land granted or leased by the Government and this is invariably leased to the Assemblies of God as a denomination; we build and dedicate it to God and to the Assemblies of God. If we leave the Assemblies of God, the property remains in the Assemblies of God and this is the policy of the Government of South Africa and not ours. We, therefore, cannot be divided in the same location and have groups like our white brethren. We feel we have respected them in spite of the fact that we do not feel that these fragmentations are scriptural. We expect them to respect and admire our unity and leave us at peace. The outside world respects us because of our growth, unity and similarity in every respect but our own white Brethren desire to divide us. Why? It is difficult for

me to say. We are not a threat to them; we do not interfere or cause any problem in the white work. There is ignorance in our white Churches concerning the Government policy as far as church sites are concerned. When we proposed the clause which has caused a lot of misunderstanding in the white work, we were not a threat to the white assemblies at all. The clause is meant for our own protection so that we do not have disputes which might result in confiscation of our buildings or drag us into prolonged court litigations. Do the white assemblies get church sites leased or freely granted to them in their areas? Why then should they feel unrest on account of this clause? We can only assume that it is because they have intentions of starting black people's work in opposition to what we have, because the Assemblies of God flourishes on groups, divisions and sections. Only the black people's work is solid, well organised, united and one in every direction. What kind of Christians hate unity? This has been a long process. They went about asking one and only one question from the black workers i.e. what will happen to you and the work when Bhengu dies? This comes from the old colonial and paternal background of thinking that a black person is incapable. All we are doing today is for keeping that unity in the black section of the Assemblies of God. I have gone as far as suggesting that we go back to separate development constitution so that the black people vote only for the black member of the Executive and the whites for the white members only. This would eliminate all the confusion, suspicions and misgivings, but this was turned down by both black and white members of the Executive Committee. I prophesy that when I am dead the blacks will fill the Executive with only black members and the whites will work under a black Executive which will be unpleasant and unacceptable. I cannot understand this situation at all. The man who spoke to one worker in Alice said 95 percent of the whites in the Assemblies of God is leaving because Bhengu has changed the constitution! I must be a lawyer and a genius at that! I have never touched the constitution. I only read it when it is drafted. I have no time to sit down and make constitutions as I am awfully busy and I do not believe in constitutions, I never quote the constitution. Constitutions are made to be shelved until some naughty person or persons stir up trouble – we are governed by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Whatever we do or say is for the protection of the Black Work from divisions and disintegrations. I challenge the White Assemblies, and not the Executive, to call a general meeting before they embark on an Exodus and have an open discussion and tell us what hurts them and we tell them what hurts us. If they are God fearing and peaceful people they should do this and I am sure they will all understand and remain in the Assemblies

> of God. The group leaders are leading the white section astray by not telling them facts as they are. I am being grossly misrepresented purposely. Some of the white leaders of groups were going to leave anyway but they are making me a scape goat. There is great misunderstanding among them and we hate to see this evil seed sown to the black section. I think the problem is clear and we must have a clear solution. I forsee the danger. I can diagnose it with ease. One day the whole Executive will become one way or another and this is a very dangerous situation. I shudder to think of what might happen when I am gone. It is not so much the colour of the skin or race which matters in God's work. It is God who directs a capable man of God who can lead the conference. I am far from such qualifications. I wouldn't even dream of it and I really mean this before God. Strife and suspicion will come to an end between different racial groups in the church. But, brethren, remember how it all started and who started it and then blame it on me when I protected the black section which is my life and blood. For over 50 years I have been struggling under most trying circumstances to do what we all see today. I have a debt to the black masses. I am sorry I ever joined the Assemblies of God but it is too late now for tears. The blacks have more at stake than all other races put together. We cannot leave the Movement nor do we wish to see our white brethren on the exodus. Let there be the spirit of reconciliation. (n.p.)

Tensions in the Swaziland work

There was a query regarding church registration, which was an obstacle to the brethren at Siteki. The Siteki Assembly was registered with the authorities as the Assemblies of God (Companies Act). Then there was another church registered in the name of 'Swaziland Assemblies of God'. This appeared to be most unacceptable to the brethren at Siteki.

Tensions began when the Assembly in Siteki registered the school as a company under the Department of Education, while the church as a denomination was registered as the Assemblies of God. This created tension between the denomination and the local Siteki Assembly of God which was running the school on its premises. This led to a situation where you had the Assemblies of God Church and the Assemblies of God Company. The situation is clearly expressed in a letter (Kotwana & Daniel pers. comm., 17 January 1977), which sets out the operational agreement

between the Assemblies of God as the company in Siteki and the Assemblies of God as a church:

> Dear Brethren, At a meeting in Lomahasha on the 15th January 1977 where representatives of Siteki, Big Bend and Lomahasha Assemblies gathered the following was resolved. We, recognise that there are two Assemblies of God Churches registered and functioning in the Kingdom of Swaziland. One registered as a Church, the other as a Church-Company. We agree in principle to accept this. Being registered as a Church-Company, affords us the rights of holding property in our name, and at the same time preach the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as being led. We, therefore request, that, in all things where we share common fellowship in the Gospel, we continue as usual – except in matters of Administration. Having been registered in Swaziland for the past twenty years we find it difficult to disband on our Administration. We have decided to continue as we have always functioned. Yours in the Fellowship of the Gospel. (n.p.)

Bhengu had complained to the General Executive of the Assemblies of God regarding the situation in Swaziland. In a letter titled 'To All Members of the General Executive', he wrote (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> Our people of the Assemblies of God in Swaziland have been subjected to indignity and outrageous and unchristian action by the trustees of an Assemblies of God Coloured Church which we have held in high esteem and respect for years; in fact this Coloured Church is the first and the oldest in the country. For this reason, I request for and [*sic*] an urgent commission of inquiry before the General Executive meets since one of the men concerned is a member of the General Executive. If this is not dealt with, I do not recommend that that any African member of the General Executive should attend any Executive meeting if I am still their leader. This is in sympathy with our Swaziland brethren. (n.p.)

After receiving full facts about the situation in Swaziland, Bhengu wrote a reconciliatory letter in which he apologised and asked for forgiveness (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.):

> I am asking you brethren to kindly forgive me if I have hurt your feeling in the matter of Stegi [*sic*] dispute. I did not know anything

> or the back ground of the whole thing. I am sorry. Please forgive me and forget the whole matter. I will not talk anymore about this matter. I also apologise to the Creamer [*sic*] for the letters I wrote to them. I withdraw them all and beg for forgiveness. You should [*sic*] if I wrote a letter of this nature that the Lord has dealt with me severely. Whatever the General Executive does should not be based on my refusal to sit with Brother Creamer in the Executive. I withdraw that decision of mine completely and will sit with him as a brother having forgotten the matter completely. I am and was never really interested in the Siteki properties but in the souls and spiritual welfare of the people. My files have now permanently been closed. Please forgive for pains and inconvenience I may have caused. May God bless you all. Accept my apologies and follow [*sic*] peace together at all times. Yours sincerely. (n.p.)

Northern Transvaal dissenters

The Assemblies of God believes in local church government, that is, every local congregation governs itself; can an immature congregation just govern itself without having been first taught, instructed, proved and set in order?

The Back to God Crusade taught, organised and ran campaign on a large scale all over southern Africa. This taught assemblies to give and support themselves. A year was enough time in a town or city to establish a self-supporting assembly.

The Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo) was established by missionaries and governed by them. They never had any knowledge of administration and the results were chaotic. The Christians and workers looked to the missionaries for direction and financial support. The work under our care was producing capable leaders and self-supporting assemblies by hundreds all over the country. This progress became a threat to those who build around themselves and act as rulers. There was not a single black assembly with a banking account nor did they know how to operate one.

Splits in the Church

Despite all that happened during Bhengu's ministry, he tried to prevent church splits. He travelled to different parts of the country to discuss issues and try to bring reconciliation. His passion to bring reconciliation can be attributed to the dream he had, as narrated by John Bond (2000):

> God seems to have used dreams to speak to Bhengu. When he was a young Christian before he entered the ministry, he attended a church pastored by a lady missionary. He did not like her and he knew that many in the congregation did not like her either. He came to the point where he determined that on the next Sunday he could stand up, confront the lady missionary and invite those who would come out with him to form their own congregation. He was determined on this course. Saturday night came. The next day would be the confrontation. Bhengu had a dream that night. He saw a gigantic pair of legs surmounted by the torso which stretched up into the clouds. The head was hidden by the clouds. He saw himself attacking the legs with a machete and a chopper. He hacked at them that the blood sprouted, and the bone was exposed. Then all at once the clouds above him parted. He saw the face. It was the face of Jesus Christ he was hacking at the body of Christ. Next morning he rose from sleep, packed his few belongings into his little suitcase, and crept out of town saying farewell to nobody. By a dream God had prevented him from committing the grievous sin of destroying the body of Christ, the church. (p. 82)

Tensions in Bhengu's work

There is a misconception among his people that Bhengu established the AOG. This cannot be true as Bhengu himself explains how he came into the Assemblies of God in 1937 after joining H.C. Phillips. He explains that he came to the Assemblies of God on the basis of its accommodative constitution that allowed different groupings to have the freedom of establishing their own ministries under the umbrella of the Assemblies of God. This philosophical ministry not only allowed Bhengu to start his own work but also allowed missionaries from different countries to plant churches in the country.

It is therefore wrong to say that the Assemblies of God was or is patterned after the apartheid model of racial and ethnic divisions. However, it cannot be denied that the apartheid system had some influence on the movement; for example, at general conferences, there was a kitchen where meals for blacks were prepared and another for white, mixed race and Indian constituencies. All groups were free to use any of the kitchens without fear of discrimination. Because of numbers and economic status of the blacks, it was not easy for them to use the white, mixed race and Indian kitchen, neither did the other groups join themselves with the African majority by using the African kitchen.

In July 1986, the first conference after Bhengu's death was held in Edendale in Pietermaritzburg. At this conference, members of the Back to God Crusade Committee took over the running of the conference asserting themselves. They claimed that Bhengu had said that they would take over the running of the church after his death and not the Executive.

In December 1986, a storm was raging whether it was the Executive or the Back to God Crusade committee that had earned the mantle to run the church; I approached the Executive during the December Convention in Thaba Nchu and suggested to them that a Commission of Enquiry look into what Bhengu had actually (said) regarding future leadership of the church. The Executive agreed to the proposal and appointed me to chair the commission with the following members:

1. Dan Lephoko (chairman)
2. Jacob Moumakwe (secretary of the commission)
3. Abel Matroshe (secretary of the executive and a member of the Back to God Crusade and the teaching team)
4. Pritchard J. Maboa
5. Josiah Donda.

As a result of the tension between the Back to God Crusade Committee and the Executive, Mr P.J. Maboa who was Secretary

of Back to God Crusade, in a letter dated 10 February 1987 to all members of the Black Caucus of the Executive, tendered his resignation from the Executive:

> TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE BLACK CAUCUS OF THE EXECUTIVE. Dear Brethren, Greetings in His Name'. There comes a time when a man has to make a decision in his life, now that time has arrived to me. Everything has been done since the dearth [*sic*] of our beloved father, a power struggle has been developing and is gaining momentum by day. Now brethren I am left with no alternative but to file in my resignation to conference, seeing that conference will only be held in July I can continue labouring under these conditions until, that time so I will be filling my resignation at the Mother's [*sic*] Convention. God bless you all. Yours in Him. P.J. MABOA [*Signed*]. SECRETARY BACK TO GOD CRUSADE.

The Commission found that the Back to God Crusade Committee was responsible for the Back to God Crusades and not the running of the church.

☐ Teaching team and the executive

Tension between the teaching team and the executive stems from the powers Bhengu bestowed on the teaching team. With all the powers and responsibilities given to the teaching team, there is none left for the executive. This creates a power struggle between the two structures, with the Executive feeling that as an elected body they found that their constitutional privileges were being thwarted by the powers Bhengu conferred on the teaching team. The executive feels that they have to always consult with the teaching team when they have to make decisions affecting the church. On the contrary, the teaching team is frustrated by the fact that financial control is in the hands of the Executive. It is not clear why Bhengu said nothing about the Executive.

The teaching team has the responsibility to ordain pastors but does not have the power to appoint and transfer pastors; this power is in the hands of the executive.

The tension between the two structures is regarding who has the final authority in governing the church.

Bophuthatswana

Bophuthatswana was one of South Africa's homelands situated in the west of the then Transvaal under the South African government. Bophuthatswana became independent in 1977 and was led by Chief Lucas Mangope who later became President of Bophuthatswana. After independence, there were only six assemblies in Bophuthatswana (Mabopane, Tlhabane, Mafikeng, Itsoseng, Lehurutse and Madibogo). Five of these sought to consolidate themselves to form the Bophuthatswana Assemblies of God, except the Mabopane assembly which was part of the Pretoria district. Leaders of these assemblies were part time and self-supporting. These leaders felt marginalised by Nicholas Bhengu. They felt that their contributions, especially to the Mothers' work, an evangelistic endeavour, were not benefitting them at all. The Back to God Crusade never went to their territory and also Bhengu never visited them.

These two matters together with the independence of Bophuthatswana prompted the leaders to try to establish a national Bophuthatswana Assemblies of God. As can be expected, discussion ensued. Reconciliatory discussions reached President Mangope who sided with Bhengu, and four of them withdrew from the idea of independence and two pursued the idea of independence.

To defuse the tension, Bhengu sent a crusade team to Mmabatho, led by evangelist Mashicila and Rev. Ben Mookapilo. The latter was later transferred from Kimberly to Mmabatho. Mookapilo was relevant culturally and also because of his leadership strength. Bhengu diffused the tension by reorganising the women's work under the patronage of Mrs Leah Mangope, wife of the Bophuthatswana President. Under the leadership of Rev. Mookapilo, the Mmabatho Assembly later became the orbit for the Assemblies of God in Bophuthatswana, which has

now become North West Province (Siyabonga pers. comm., 22 January 2018).

Tensions in Zimbabwe

When Nicholas Bhengu passed away in 1985, the friction that had plagued the black Zimbabwean Assemblies in his lifetime continued with no one with sufficient stature to control it. The power struggle that ensued spilled over into the white work in Zimbabwe.

Before Nicholas Bhengu died, the Rhodesian Assemblies had, with the blessing of the South African Executive, formed their own conference independent of South Africa. They had ratified a Rhodesian (later Zimbabwean) constitution that closely paralleled our South African Assemblies of God constitution. It stipulated that there should be a conference every two years at which an executive had to be elected to function for the following two years until the next conference.

Only one such conference was ever held in the following 12 years. It took place in 1987. Bond (2000) reflects on the events:

> An executive was elected with [*sic*] a certain Dr Cuthbert Chidoori as chairman. Cuthbert was one of the young men Bhengu had installed to lead the work as organisers. Geoffrey Mkhwanazi [*sic*], the previous chairman, refused to accept the results of the 1987 election. He insisted on recognising the 1985 executive of which he was chairman and not the 1987 executive. (pp. 224–225)

Zimbabwe was not spared from tensions that were seen in other areas of Bhengu's work such as South Africa and Swaziland.

The situation was exacerbated by the intrusion of Isaac Hleta and Fred Shabalala who after Bhengu's death went to Zimbabwe to change trusteeship in Mashonaland and Matabeleland without the authority of the South African Executive. Their actions prompted Abel B. Matroshe (Secretary General of Bhengu's work) to write to all executive members the following on 10 December 1985:

> TO ALL AOG. EXECUTIVE MEMBERS (blacks). Dear Brethren! Greetings in His blessed name. To me it sounds strange to hear the report tabled and read before us today about the change of TRUSTEESHIP in Mashonaland and Matabeleland. Our dear Brethren, F. Shabalala and I. Hleta have taken upon themselves to organise meetings and to change TRUSTEESHIP in a National Church without a mandate from this Executive thereby introducing a foreign policy in a foreign land in the name of this Executive without its mandate. To me this is immoral and I take exception to their action. This being out of step with the normal procedure, may bring ill feeling, breed suspicions and provoke confrontation against the whole Executive leadership [...]. Yours in Christ the Lord, A.B. Matroshe. [*signed*]

Bhengu's concerns with the tensions

Despite the fact that in some quarters, especially among missionaries, Bhengu was believed to be the source of tension both in the Assemblies of God and in his work, in reality it was Bhengu who travelled the length and breadth of South Africa and neighbouring countries to try and effect reconciliation among the parties.

Bhengu somehow came to know about tensions and some rumours in the white work and he wrote the following letter to Noel Scheepers (Bhengu & Scheepers pers. comm., 11 May 1982):

> Dear Brother Scheepers, Greetings in the Precious Name! I am writing this letter to correct some rumours coming to my ears that are not true at all. (1) To me you have been one of the few Christians who have the spirit of humility, love and forgiveness. In all our petty misunderstandings there was never anything of a grave nature. It was mostly caused by reports from people who misunderstand what you really said and you were prepared to talk it over with me and we forgave one another [*sic*] in the Spirit of Christ. I have never found any hard, haughty or racial pride in our dealings. (2) In handling enormous sums of the Back to God Crusade Fund, I have never at any point suspected, detected or found any vestige of impropriety or dishonesty. I was always haunted by the fear of disharmony, disintegration and instability in the European work and I felt the fund should be regionalised which fear has now been proved. (3) I have had confidence in you as a Christian gentleman and dear brother who has been thoroughly emancipated by the Gospel of Christ from

> the traces of superiority complex or racism. You, your dear wife and children are and shall always be held very precious by both my wife and me. It grieves me to hear of these rumours which seek to hurt you and break our sweet relationship. (4) Someone reported to me that some question your credibility. Please know that I personally dismiss this as from the devil himself, and never from the African quarters. (5) For the Back to God Crusade, I have yet to meet a hard worker like you who did everything freely and wholly for the salvation of black Africa. (6) You have never defended yourself even from me, a black man. You have always retreated without justifying yourself on any of the few issues we had in the past. (7) The only time when you and I had some major differences was when the statements were made at the Executive Meeting in Johannesburg that the white Apostles should have black work too. I reacted very sharply because of my known aversions of the groups. The black work was one solid block and I felt that fragmentation was coming to divide our people into groups. You humbly stood up at the Witbank Conference, and with your two fingers made a scissors sign, and said: 'If the brethren had a thought I had any strings attached, I cut them off with this scissors'. That was to me a sign or mark of Christian humility, and true brotherhood as well as leadership. (8) All the black brethren, including myself, have not lost confidence in you. We would, as Christians, very much like to work with you on a regional concept as I visualise. I must say it is only between white and white leader [*sic*] and not between white and black Leadership that you find disagreements, hate and disunity, and this has now been passed on to the black [*sic*]. We have no axe to grind with all our white brethren or workers. Please keep us out of all the present trouble. Our only fault as you kindly explained to me, is how we use our preponderous vote to throttle the minority and we confess this before God and men. I beg of you not to get despondent remember if God called you, you are no more your own. You will never be happy away or outside this call on your life. There are many proofs of God's call. Do not be a second Jonah – you will be in trouble! It is not the AOG's call, it is God's call. Can people, trials or persecutions extricate you from the will of God? Why do you not wait till God finishes this work in the AOG [*Assemblies of God – Southern Africa*] and see the outcome? (n.p.)

In a letter to the Eastern Cape Assemblies of God, Noel Scheepers mentions the above letter written by Bhengu and further says (Bhengu & Scheepers pers. comm., 20 May 1982):

Bro. Bhengu has done all in his power to effect reconciliation in the movement. God will reward him. Quite unexpectedly the enclosed letter came to me this week. I wish to thank him for his love and unity. The past misunderstandings have gone and failures, errors etc. on my part have been forgiven. (n.p.)

Chapter 8

The Teaching Team and the Executive Committee

As an apostle who planted churches and gave leadership to them, including setting up strategies and policies for the continued effectiveness of the church and those who minister in it, it was expected that he would not leave the work to chance. Like Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, Bhengu felt the need to gather a number of his faithful ministers to be with him to train and equip them for the work that lay ahead of them. On his way to Rome, where he suffered martyrdom, Paul summoned Ephesian elders to the island of Miletus to instruct them on what they should do after he had passed on (Ac 20):

> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know

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> this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. (vv. 28–30)

The Back to God Teaching Team

To safeguard his work, Bhengu established the Back to God Teaching Team. He summoned 24 of his trusted ministers and trained them from 21–31 March 1977 in East London. Among others, their duties were to ordain elders and deacons and supervise assemblies, district council offices and Back to God property. In addition to appointing elders and deacons, the team had to deal with conflicts in churches.

The teaching team was not an elected body but was appointed by Bhengu himself. The teaching team was charged with the teaching of Bhengu's doctrine. He did not want to leave this most important aspect of the work in the hands of an elected body such as the executive that might include people who were not sympathetic to his vision. After his death, the team would identify other ministers to fill vacant positions when they occurred.

This strategy was based on 2 Timothy 2:2, a multiplication strategy according to Paul's teaching. Bhengu called his team 'Bhengu's Timothys'. This team was ordained at the workers' conference in uMlazi township, Durban, in July 1977, which he commissioned to go to the assemblies to teach and ordain elders and deacons. At that same conference, he ordained certain workers who were seconded to other organisations such as CCC (Dan Lephoko and Sipho Bhengu) and Africa Cooperation Action Trust (Themba Dambuza).

Reasons for establishing the Back to God Teaching Team

The Assemblies of God is a fellowship and not a monolithic denomination. It consists of different groups in the church. Each group had its own philosophy of ministry, policies, rules and procedures.

Members of the different constituencies (group, association and Back to God) are elected to the General Executive at a General Conference comprising all races. Bhengu's fear was that at any of these elections people who did not share his philosophy of ministry or doctrine could get elected at the conferences and by virtue of them being elected have sway over his work. He warned that these people would then lead his work.

Bhengu's fears of the possibility of people elected to the executive who did not share his vision and mission for the church that he laboured for with tears and sweat over five decades nearly became a reality. In 2012 an attempt was made by the executive to change the Constitution of the Assemblies of God to entrench certain leaders of different constituencies.

The proposed change is encapsulated in the proposed constitutional amendment as given below:

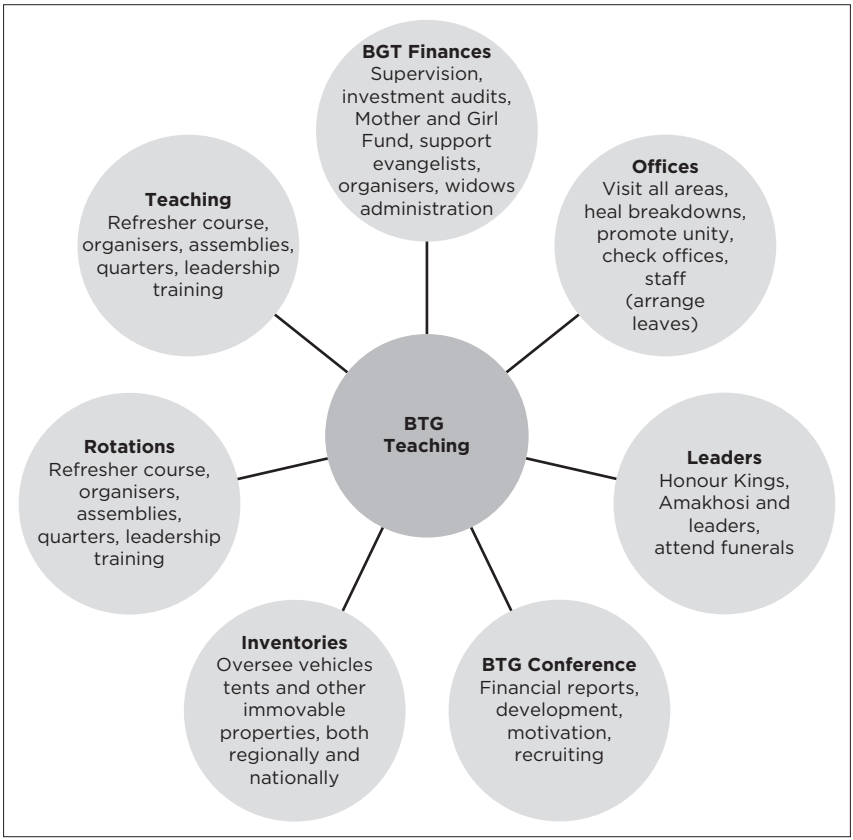
> Section 7. General Executive
>
> Section 7.4. Composition
>
> Section 7.4.1. The General Executive shall be composed of elected and non-elected members
>
> Section 7.4.2. The non-elected members are the national leaders of the three networks, that is, the chairpersons of the movement, the association and the group
>
> Section 7.4.3. Seventeen members shall be elected by the General Conference not including the chairman and vice-chairman
>
> Section 7.4.4. The General Executive shall appoint a general secretary/treasurer (n.p.)

With his view on what could happen after he had passed on, he decided to establish the teaching team, whose purpose would

be to preserve and protect the work from those who would desire to destabilise his work.

Bhengu established the Back to God Teaching Team in 1977, in East London (Figure 8.1). He hand-picked the following men who he could trust to carry on with his vision, mission and values. They were officially introduced and inaugurated at the Workers Conference in Umlazi, Durban, 1977:

> Participants: E. Mkhize, C. Mcanyana, D. Mnyanda, C. Majombozi, H.T. Qina, A.B. Matroshe, B. Mookapilo, D. Manzana, M.F. Donda, A. Vena, A. Hlongwane, A. Camngca, R. Sondishe, F. Dhlomo, B. Barnett, W.



Source: Lephoko 2006.

FIGURE 8.1: Back to God Teaching Team responsibilities.

Makinana, W. Didi, V.M. Nkomonde, K. Mateke, F. Shabalala, M. Biyela, S. Mosehla, B. Mofokeng, Josiah Donda.

Later in 1985 Bhengu selected seven from the original group of 1977 and gave them training in Lamontville, Durban from 11–15 February 1985.

Figure 8.1 presents the Back to God Teaching Team organogram and their accompanying responsibilities.

Powers of the teaching team

Bhengu gave the teaching team wide and varied powers. The following are some of the powers and responsibilities that Bhengu assigned for the teaching team in the movement. The teaching team was instructed to develop a teaching manual that would include the following:

1. Key doctrines espoused by N.B.H. Bhengu so that all members and new entrants into his work are made familiar with its core teachings and beliefs as enunciated in his statement of faith (Hollenweger 1972:517) as well as the Assemblies of God statement of fundamental truths or things commonly believed among us (Assemblies of God Constitution, Part 6:24–26). This is of great importance in view of multiplicity of diverse religious organisations. Bhengu was sensitive about what doctrines are taught in the churches. In the early days of the Faith Movement in South Africa, any minister who attended a Faith Movement Bible College was given an exit ticket never to come back to the church. He was alive to strange doctrines and questionable practices being introduced into the church after he was gone.
2. Lead, teach and ordain pastors, elders and deacons represent the work in places where he could no longer go after death. Where I am called I shall respond, but you should respond like me. You are to look after all organisations just like I did. Encourage people to attend conventions.
3. Care for widows, orphans, the sick and those who are vulnerable among them and those who are not on government grants in line with the teachings of the Apostles (1 Tm 5:3, 9; Ja 1:27).

4. Emphasise the role of prayer in the assemblies (2 Th 3:1–2).
5. Love for the Body of Christ and seek to prevent splits which hurt the church.

☐ Elders or Presbyteros

According to Vine (1961:195), the divine arrangement seen throughout the New Testament was for the plurality of these to be appointed in each church (Ac 14:23, 20:17; 1 Tm 5:17; Tt 1:5).

The scriptural qualifications and duties are explained below (1 Tm 3:1–7; Tt 1:5–9) (Tables 8.1 and 8.2).

TABLE 8.1: The qualifications and duties of elders.

Category	Sub-category
Qualifications	1. Above reproach 2. Husband of one wife 3. Vigilant 4. Sober-minded 5. Of good behaviour 6. Hospitable 7. Art to teach 8. Not given to much wine 9. Not a violent man 10. Gentle 11. Peaceful man 12. Not a lover of money 13. A good manager of his own family 14. One who has obedient children who give him due respect 15. Mature in the faith 16. A good report from people outside the church
Duties (Ac 20:17–28)	1. Overseer of the church 2. The shepherd of the flock 3. Take care of the Church of God 4. Watch over people's souls 5. Pray for the sick 6. Member of the church council 7. Settle disputes 8. Search for the lost 9. Visit the backsliders 10. Teach the church 11. Administer the affairs of the church

TABLE 8.2: The qualifications and duties of deacons.

Category	Sub-category
Qualifications	1. Have good character and be sincere (1 Tm 3:8) 2. Not double-tongued 3. Not given to much wine 4. Not greedy for money 5. Hold to the revealed truth of faith with a clear conscience 6. Flawless in conduct 7. One wife
Duties (Ac 20:17–28)	1. Responsible for church finances 2. Responsible for church's physical assets 3. Responsible for financial record-keeping 4. Draw up expenditure and report to the assembly 5. Keep members registers of the assembly 6. Deal with correspondence 7. Look at social aspects, for example, look after the poor families and orphans 8. Look after the church buildings, furniture, teaspoons, chairs and so on 9. Check if there is enough food for the mission

☐ Deacons or *Diakonia*

According to King (1968:390), *Diakonia* means an activity which every Greek would recognise at once as being one of self-abasement: waiting at the table, serving food and pouring wine.

In Acts 6, we find the first appointment of deacons to serve the tables. The Lord Jesus himself came to serve and to give life for a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). [...] the leader as a servant (Lk 23:26).

Chapter 9

A South African Jeremiah

Jeremiah 29 states:

> (4)Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; (5)Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; (6)Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. (7)And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. (vv. 4–7)

Just like the prophet Jeremiah who was called to minister to Jews in Babylon who were in captivity, Bhengu was called to minister to people who were under the oppression of apartheid. Jeremiah prophesied a promise for restoration (Jr 29:11) and that

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one day people will be emancipated from their oppression. However, while they are under the oppressive regime, they need to live full lives as active citizens of the current place where they are held captive. In Jeremiah 18:1–4, the vessel of clay that was marred was put back to the wheel and another vessel was made. Bhengu called people Back to God (BTG) so that their lives can be reshaped. Also, Bhengu encouraged his followers to be economically active during the years of apartheid because he anticipated a South Africa that will be free from apartheid.

Economic development strategies

With the founding of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912 and the NP in 1914, respectively, a stage was set; both organisations came into being in Bloemfontein. The ANC's objective was to seek equality for blacks, in particular African people, while the NP sought to establish an Afrikaner identity – language, culture, religion and racial purity – for its people.

The socio-political landscape in South Africa changed dramatically when the NP came to power in 1948. The NP enacted laws that would cause pain and suffering to other races, notably blacks. These included pass laws that restricted the movement of black people; the *Bantu Education Act, No. 47 of 1953,* designed to keep black people subservient to white people as suppliers of labour on mines and on farms; and the creation of the Bantu Homelands. The latter epitomises grand apartheid as Dr Verwoerd, then Minister of Bantu Affairs in J.G. Strydom's government, orchestrated the division of the country into African ethnic groups: Zulu, Swazi, Venda, Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Tswana, Tsonga and Xhosa (Transkei and Ciskei both Xhosa homelands which was a misnomer in that both Transkei and Ciskei were isiXhosa-speaking), giving self-rule and independence to those who were gullible to ask for it. The NP government also established residential and business areas for people of mixed race and of Indian origin. The abnormality of segregating black people

through ethnicity was that black people intermarried across ethnicity which in many respects went against the grain of the grand apartheid philosophy and strategy of divide and rule.

During this period, life in South Africa was based on race. The colour of a person's skin determined what he could or could not do: where he could live, send children to school or university and die or be buried. This state of affairs led to racial polarisation. Attempts by liberation movements to find a negotiated settlement failed, leaving organisations such as the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress and others with no option but to take up arms and fight for liberation. South Africa was inevitably plunged into a prolonged war for liberation led by liberation movements with counter attacks by the state. This period lasted for about 50 years and resulted in the deaths of thousands of black people and some mixed race, Indian and white people. There were also cross-border raids into neighbouring countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola by the apartheid regime – the South African Defence Force in pursuit of liberation fighters. Their camps and safe houses were bombed, resulting in deaths.

The church was inevitably drawn into the fray. Many churches made pleas to government in an attempt to bring a socio-economic and political solution to apartheid. Several conferences were organised to address the problem. These efforts by the broader church to find a solution to the scourge of apartheid ended up dividing the Evangelical, Pentecostal, English and Afrikaans churches on grounds of race and the diverse strategies to defeat apartheid.

Clearly, Bhengu, as one of prominent church leaders of his time, would have been expected by both the government and liberation movements to take a stand for or against apartheid. It was not an easy road that he had to travel in pursuit of his calling and mandate to preach the Gospel to all creation (Mt 28:18–20). He endured criticism from liberation movements for not joining

the struggle. He was monitored by government agents who feared that he might turn the people against them.

The colonisation of South Africa began with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in the Cape on 06 April 1652. Jan van Riebeeck had been sent by the Dutch East Indian Company to set up a halfway station between Europe and India to supply fresh produce to passing ships. Jan van Riebeeck introduced the Protestant Reformed faith to the country.

For many years, the Dutch Reformed Church was the dominant faith among the majority of white Afrikaners. However, the occupation of the colony by the British in 1806 opened space for other church denominations to do mission work: Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican and societies such as the London Missionary Society and others.

Cochrane (1987) says:

> The end of the nineteenth century brought the diamond and gold discoveries, transformed the economic geography of the region, introduced the first major phase of industrialisation, and set up labour supply and control systems matched to the unique conditions of a tight monopoly in the diamond market and a usually strict monopoly on the low-grade, highly capitalised, but immensely rich gold reefs. From this point on the economy of South Africa was locked into structures that would produce a marked degree of exploitation of colonised labour, a white labour aristocracy, and underdevelopment of the rural reserves. That the gold reefs lay in a Trekker Republic generated at first an imperial war and then a peculiar and momentous competition between national and foreign capital, a competition for hegemony in the face of various recurrent threats from labour. (pp. 182–183)

Mojake (in Saayman 1991) has this to say:

> It is against this background of vast economic forces that the influx of missionaries to the colonies acquires meaning. The missionaries came from a capitalist Christian civilisation that unblushingly formed religious sanctions for inequality, as it does to this day, and whose ministers solemnly blessed its wars of aggression. Churches became captives of the ruling elite whose focus was bent on making profit from cheap black labour. (p. 25)

Cochrane (1987) castigates them for colluding with colonial masters of the day:

> White governments created labour reservoirs for cheap black labour in the native reserves with the cooperation of chiefs. The captivity of the churches to the ruling powers and their functional dependency on the industrial economy, itself connected in important ways to the imperial metropolis, can be understood at a number of levels. The Victorian tradition, a colonial mentality, the structures of the church itself, the material interests of its white members, and the impact of European immigrants – all played a part in determining the theory and the practice of the Church along lines prejudicial to the colonised indigenous people and the working class in particular. Regularly the Church stumbled through confusion, ambiguity, inactivity, and occasional protest from its black members among whom it desired no loss of influence. Its undoubted contribution to their welfare and to their ability to cope in a new environment imposed upon them, does not undermine or reduce the force of this assessment of the Church in relation to blacks and to the working class in particular. (p. 183)

Spiritual versus social Gospel

The debate around spiritual versus social Gospel has been raging on for many decades to the point of causing divisions between Evangelical–Pentecostal groups and the various denominations of the WCC.

The controversy was about what the Gospel entailed – spiritual matters, saving of souls or changing societal structures to make life somewhat more bearable for the poor and oppressed.

The Evangelical theologian, Michael Green addresses the inseparable need of both spiritual and social Gospel. He believes that it is wrong to separate them. In essence, the one should not exist without the other. Jesus did both, he preached, and he fed and healed the people (Green 1992):

> What is more, evangelism is neither Christian proclamation alone nor Christian presence alone. It is both. There has been a disastrous tendency for some Christians to concentrate on proclaiming the Gospel without showing it; so to emphasise that the feeding, the healing, the educating and the liberating fall in the background. In reaction those who have concentrated on a 'social Gospel' have been

> content to get among people and embrace them with the arms of Christ's love without bearing any overt witness to the one in whose name they do it. The very idea of separating the spiritual from the social Gospel does despite to the New Testament. Jesus went about doing good and preaching the good news of the kingdom. His followers must aim for the same balance. There is only one Gospel – of a God who reaches people in their need, rescues them, builds them into a new society, and is concerned with every aspect of their lives in this world and the next. This message must be both proclaimed and lived out. Presence alone and proclamation alone are equally useless. The early Christians employed both. So must we. (pp. 15–16)

Lloyd-Jones (in Stott 1975) writes:

> The hospital does not, cannot and never will be able to take over the functions of the Church! It is quite impossible for it to do so [...] The authentic task of the Church is not primarily to make people healthy... her essential task is to restore men to the right relationship with God [...] Man's real problem is not simply that he is sick, but that he is a rebel. Lloyd-Jones believes that the ministry of the church is primarily to restore people to God. (p. 87)

It is common knowledge that the majority of Evangelicals lay high priority on the salvation of man's soul and the need of an individual to be connected to God through the new birth or regeneration. The Gospel of John 3 with its emphasis on being born again is seen as key to a change from death to life:

> (5)[...] I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (6)You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. [...] (8)The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (vv. 5–8)

The apostle Paul (2 Cor 5) maintains that being saved means becoming a new creation:

> (17)Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; (18)The old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (20)Therefore we are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (21)God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (vv. 17–21)

This newness in Christ should be the guiding light in changing the lifestyle of an individual, and it should also impel the new person in Christ to become an ambassador for a change model, structural or societal renewal, including sociopolitical transformation (Phlp 2):

> (15)[*S*]o that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe (16)as you hold out the Word of Life in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing. (17)But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. (vv. 15–18)

According to John Stott, in the eyes of the most prominent Evangelical thinker at the end of the 20th century, the priority of the Gospel, the heart of our calling, is service evangelism. Referring to the Lausanne Covenant (par. 6), he wrote (Stott 1975):

> Christians should feel an acute pain of conscience and compassion when human beings are oppressed or neglected in any way, whether what is being denied them is civil liberty, racial respect, education, medication, employment, or adequate, clothing and shelter. Anything which undermines human dignity should be an offence to us. But is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the Gospel? And how can we seriously maintain that political and economic liberation is just as important as eternal salvation? Both are certainly challenges to Christian love. But listen to the apostle Paul when he writes with solemn emphasis about this concern for his fellow Jews: 'I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race' (Rm 9:1–3). What was the cause of his anguish? That they had lost their national Jewish independence and were under the colonial heel of Rome? That they were often despised and hated by Gentiles, socially boycotted and deprived of equal opportunities? No. 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved' (Rm 10:1), and the context makes it plain beyond doubt that the 'salvation' Paul wanted for them was their acceptance with God (Rm 10:2–4). (p. 35f.)

In South Africa, the debate was of equal importance. Willem Nicol saw David Bosch and Albert Nolan as representatives of the two sides. Bosch, in Nicol's view, overemphasised the role of the church as minister of reconciliation by creating an alternative community in the world, not taking God's providential activity in the world seriously enough. Nicol (1990) compares Bosch, the Dutch Reformed Church theologian, with Nolan, the Roman Catholic priest:

> For Bosch, Christian reconciliation precedes social justice, while the reverse is true for Nolan. Bosch pleads that the church should keep a critical distance from any specific historical movement like the present struggle, Nolan sees it as the main task of the church to give its full support rating to the struggle. For Bosch the liberating role of the church is indirect in that it should in its uniqueness and weakness be a catalyst of change, while Nolan calls the church to directly empower the masses. Bosch stresses powerlessness, and Nolan power, but neither emphasises the unconventional combination of the two that leads to non-violent action. Social analysis and planning of liberation strategy are for Bosch not really the task of the church and theology, while for Nolan they are. (p. 93)

Nicol believes that Nolan's way is the correct one (Kritzinger & Saayman 1990):

> If the church reads the signs of the times like the suffering and hope of the poor, and the actions of the trade unions and the political organisations working for liberation, she can have no doubt as to what God is doing in South Africa today. The church should proclaim this as the Gospel and thereby give very powerful support to the struggle. This proclamation is not abstract. The church should 'encourage people' to participate in the struggle, 'support the organisation' in the struggle, 'protest', 'propose new ways of acting' and 'even give a helping hand' (1988:217). She does not spread a spirit of violence, but if some violence should occur within the struggle, it should not frighten the church from supporting it. All this should be done by the church as institution which is distinguished from the church as the people who belong to it. The meaning of the distinction is to show that the latter, and not the former, can move into practical politics, formulate policies and thereby make compromises. The church as institution should shun this as a third way. So, from the uniqueness of the church, Nolan makes the opposite deduction to what Bosch makes: Nolan deduces that the church should uncompromisingly

> side with the struggle, while Bosch deduces that the church should keep a distance. (p. 93)

In his widely acclaimed book *Transforming Mission* (1991), David Bosch provided a historical note to the controversy:

> By the end of the nineteenth century the rift between conservative (or fundamentalist) mission advocates on the one hand and liberals (or social gospellers) on the other was becoming ever wider. Still, representatives of both groups could argue that evangelism preceded civilisation, while other spokespersons again of both persuasions could plead equally convincingly for introducing civilisation as a precondition for evangelism. They therefore did not necessarily differ about strategy in this respect, for the simple reason that all of them, whether liberal or conservative, postmillennialist or premillennialist, were committed to the culture of the West, which they propagated equally vigorously. Where they did, however, increasingly differ was about the overall aim of mission. Whereas some insisted that the grand object of mission was not to bring pagans into an ordered and cultured society but to bring them to Christ and eternal salvation, others were more concerned about the creation of a Gospel-centred civilisation and the benefits this could bring to all nations than about doctrine and people's eternal destiny. (p. 297)

My personal view is that a balance should be struck between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the Gospel – bringing the people to Christ and also teaching them to be salt and light (Mt 5:13):

> You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

In my book, *A Guide to Dynamic Youth Leadership – A Challenge to the Church* (2001), I write:

> In South Africa the question of racism has become a bone of contention. Blacks accusing whites of racism and vice versa. Racism is the attitude that says one race is superior to another. It is the product of the sinful nature inherent in all men. It must be seen as sin and that

> racial attitudes displease God. Christians are not immune to this sin. Although in public most Christians will pretend all is well, while in private the venom is spewed out against others, thereby poisoning them as well. We should help our youth to deal with it and try to root it out at an early stage of their development. We should care enough to confront a brother or sister when they express a racial attitude. But we also need to deal with it in our own lives before we attempt to look at the speck of sawdust in our brother's eyes while paying no attention to the plank in our own eyes. (p. 22)

Cassidy (1990) emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit as the enabling power for involvement in dealing with issues confronting the church and society:

> Deep Christian spirituality, where the Holy Spirit is empowering and in charge, has got to the matrix from which all human endeavours flow, especially those which relate to the four categories of this Scripture – the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. And if Jesus had to move in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14) and had to have the Spirit of the Lord upon him (Luke 4:18) in order to fulfil his liberating mission, then certainly we cannot manage with less. Whether, therefore, we see ourselves preaching good news to the poor, releasing the captives, restoring sight to the blind or setting at liberty the oppressed, we need the Holy Spirit in control to ensure that each activity is done in his time and way. Any method of working for either spiritual or any other kind of freedom which does not go the Spirit's way is therefore to be held in suspicion. (p. 323)

Politics

Bhengu

Among all the forces at play in the country between the theological differences of his time, Nicholas Bhengu had to find his own position, to define his message.

Bhengu did not participate in party political activities; however, he was very much alive to the happenings in the country. He had committed himself to preaching the Gospel by which he hoped to bring peace and stability among different racial groups which would result in eliminating racial and political

tensions with the ultimate goal of introducing democracy in South Africa. He could not reconcile his message of peace with violence, be it by the state or by liberation movements as we will see below.

Bond says the following about Bhengu and the political situation in South Africa (Bond pers. comm., n.d.):

> In a very true sense, Bhengu would not allow himself to become captive to any political faction. Thus, he kept in a position where he could minister to everybody. Perhaps it was due to his wisdom. Perhaps it was due to the sovereign working of God. Bhengu seemed to find favour with all political leaders in apartheid South Africa, both black and white. He even found a high degree of tolerance from the South African government, although it fell short of outright favour. There was a time toward the beginning of his ministry when the Department of Native Affairs placed some strictures on him, accusing him of being a Communist. On the advice of Jim Mullan, Bhengu wasted no time but sought an audience with the Secretary for Native Affairs. At that time, it was a certain Dr Louis Eiselen. Bhengu completely won the day. With a gentlemanly grace that none of his successors ever sought to emulate, Dr Eiselen personally apologised to Bhengu, first verbally and then followed it up with an official written apology. A decade later such courtesy would have been unthinkable from any native administrator. By then the Department had become a virtual kingdom within a kingdom. Many of the officials were dictatorial, masterful and arrogant. In the 1960s some black radicals regarded Bhengu as a 'sell-out'. He received threatening letters in the post. 'Bhengu, look what you're doing to us!' 'When we get you, we will boil you in oil'. Yet in the same period, radical activists sent Nicholas Bhengu messengers to promise that in times of trouble, none of his churches would be burnt down. Later from Robben Island, verbal messages were conveyed. 'Greet our father for us'. 'Tell him that I was the one who came to him in East London about not burning churches'. A few years ago at a diplomatic function which I attended, I made myself known to the head of the Foreign Affairs Department, an ANC government official. He said, 'Oh, the Assemblies of God! I know you! You're for us! Well, to some extent at any rate!' The statement was equivocal but friendly. When the African church dedicated the conference centre which it had purchased for some four million rand at Henley-on-Klip, President Mandela consented to be the guest of honour. I had the privilege with others of sharing the platform with him and with Mrs Mary

> Metcalfe, the Member of the Executive Council for Education who spoke glowingly of the Assemblies of God's efforts at educating black children and women. Yet in the apartheid era, homeland leaders courted Bhengu's friendship. George Matanzima, then Prime Minister of the Transkei, visited the BTG East London Convention and spoke there. Bhengu had no choice but to open the platform to him. His speech somewhat embarrassed Bhengu with its racialism. Matanzima expatiated on heaven. He said, 'If I get to heaven and there's white man there, I'll walk out!' Bhengu had to wait until the following day to repudiate the statement in Matanzima's absence. He did so with characteristics wit. 'If you get to heaven', he asked, 'and there's a white man there and you walk out, where will you walk to? There are plenty of white men in the other place'. This has to be powerfully stressed, because much so-called Christian action, be it supposedly spiritual or in the sociopolitical arena, so lacks the style and fruit of Christian grace and spirituality that it becomes a travesty of the Gospel and a source of utter confusion to a watching world. The non-Jesus spirit makes those who might otherwise be willing to change stubbornly resistant to doing so. (pp. 100–101)

The struggle against apartheid was fought on many fronts: churches, liberation movements, labour unions, student bodies, international organisations and others participated.

It was to be expected that a man of Bhengu's stature would publicly oppose the apartheid government and support the struggle for political freedom. Instead, Bhengu continued to minister to homeland leaders. He also invited them to his church conventions. For this, Bhengu was strongly criticised, *inter alia,* by Chief Albert Luthuli, the highly respected president of the ANC. His family, too, was perplexed. Black journalists, above all Lawrence Tutu, openly raised their voices against Bhengu's stance.

Chief Albert Luthuli

Schlosser (Hollenweger 1972) speaks of Bhengu being in the crossfire of politics and of Luthuli's criticism:

> Bhengu pleads for peace with the whites – a phenomenon among 'educated natives' in the Union of South Africa – and is consequently

> branded and threatened as a 'traitor' by the nationalist natives who belong to the ANC. In fact in South Africa it is no longer so easy even for a Pentecostal pastor to remain outside politics, something which is incomprehensible to most of his colleagues in other countries. Albert Luthuli, who died in 1967 while under house arrest, was a lay preacher of the American Congregational Church and President of the ANC, and in his youth was a teacher in a village near Bhengu's home. Ketesa Schlosser reports: He told me that he respected Bhengu as a sincere and honest man. Bhengu, who is conscious of the danger that threatens him from the extremists of the ANC, has in his turn a great human respect of Luthuli; 'He is one of the best Christians we have. But I do not understand why he has declared his support for the passive resistance movement'. (p. 136)

Schlosser decries the fact that Bhengu was left to fight the attacks alone without the support of South African and World Pentecostal Movements. 'He was left to deal with these difficult problems completely on his own'. Schlosser concludes 'Bhengu is far from a blind admirer of whites, but he is too reasonable to be a fanatical black nationalist'.

Lawrence Tutu

Bhengu's arch critic, however, was Lawrence Tutu, a member of his East London Assembly. Tutu, whose parents were staunch and trusted members of Bhengu's East London church, wrote a number of articles in the *Daily Dispatch* in which he criticised Bhengu. Tutu's grievance was that while Bhengu invited homeland leaders to his church conferences and conventions to address gatherings, he did not do the same for liberation movements.

Bhengu responds

Bond, concerned about Lawrence Tutu's articles in the press, prompted Bhengu to respond. The open letter quoted below was written by Bhengu to the General Executive at the request of John Bond who was the General Chairman of the Assemblies of God at that time. This letter (*Letter to the General Executive of*

the Assemblies of God) is of such importance that I quoted some of the key points (Bhengu pers. comm., 1980 n.d.):

> Dear Brethren, Greetings in His Name! Quite a number of articles have been appearing in the Daily Dispatch about Assemblies of God and me. These articles have disturbed those who do not know Mr Lawrence Tutu personally plus those who rejoice at seeing mud thrown at the Assemblies of God and at me personally. But I have never worried myself concerning the small men who try to pull me into political controversies so that I attend to them instead of concentrating on God's work which is so important to me at this time. They are too small to attend to and if I do attend to them I would be making him great. I am surprised if these articles have disturbed the brethren in our fellowship. These brethren have known me for years and know that I do not change. Lawrence Tutu has been writing many things in the past with his friend, the late Hargrieves Mpetukana, who tried a smear on me, but the brethren finally found that it was all a concoction of lies. The following are some of the points to be considered: (1) Lawrence Tutu earns his livelihood as a journalist and needs material for the press and so he finds his target or victim in me. (2) Lawrence Tutu is not really shooting at me; he is shooting at Homeland Governments and the South African Government indirectly. (3) All the statements in the press are a distortion of facts from a disgruntled, frustrated and venomous person who cares for neither the Church he claims to belong to nor any person in any station. (4) Tutu has no scruples for the Church and his theological ideas are questionable and border on modernism. I have all the clippings here with me from the newspaper. It was not my intention to write this letter of explanation but Brother Bond felt I should say something to the Executive and so I am doing so. (5) Tutu's mother was one of the most faithful and saintly followers of Christ and member of the East London Assembly. Tutu's mother died in the faith. His father is an ardent Christian brother and deacon in our East London Church. I had decided to keep silent as an honour to Lawrence Tutu's late mother and to his father who has never been found at fault since he was saved in 1950 in the East London Revival. (6) Chief Justice Mabandla was at the convention in 1978 and was invited again in 1979 but apologised because he was held up somehow. Did the press interview Chief Justice Mabandla? Chief Mabandla was only left out 1 year and the fault was made by the staff which sends out invitations. (7) We invite anybody who is a leader, we make no preference for parties. We maintain our neutral position in party politics but honour chiefs and all leaders. This is why

> I attended Chief Botha Sigcau's funeral in Transkei, Mr Biko's funeral in King William's Town. I am a Christian and I adhere to the Bible and to I Timothy 2:1–4 which Tutu has doubts about. (8) I am a Christian first of all and I am a brother to all men of good will irrespective of tribe, ethnicity, colour, political or denominational affiliation. Tutu and the venom in the press will not change me an iota. (9) Everyone knows that we began to invite chiefs and leaders since 1957 at the dedication of the East London Church and they have been invited yearly ever since. We operate in the homelands and almost 75% of the blacks come from and return to the homelands. We, therefore, have no choice but honour chiefs and leaders in those homelands. (10) We have people from all parts of the world in our churches and we cannot afford the luxury of favouring certain parties and disfavouring others. We are a church catering for the spiritual and social welfare of the people and so we do not bark. (11) Finally, we believe and teach what the New Testament teaches. We love God, we love the brethren, we love fellowship. If Lawrence Tutu had anything he thought will be harmful to the body of Christ, he should have discussed it with us if he did not intend to damage our good name to the simple folk who read the newspaper. His motives are questionable, and his Christian spirit is also questionable. I will not write and disgrace him to the public through the press, but I am writing to those who are worried and depressed by these articles. (n.p.)

In view of Bhengu's use of strong language, I invited Lawrence Tutu to provide copies of his articles on Bhengu's inability to give liberation struggle leaders an opportunity to address his meetings, as well as an opportunity to provide commentary. Tutu promised to check with his former newspaper, *Daily Dispatch*, but never came back to me despite several attempts for him to do so.

Sociopolitical activities

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the criticism levelled at Bhengu by one of its reporters (Lawrence Tutu), the East London *Daily Dispatch* reported very positively on Bhengu's role in bringing sociopolitical changes to South Africa.

In December 2006, I visited the archives of the *Daily Dispatch* in East London in search of articles written on Bhengu in newspapers. I was assisted by one of the archivists in locating

the reports on Bhengu. I was accompanied by Lawrence Tutu, who introduced me to the head archivist at the *Daily Dispatch*.

Four examples, all taken from *Daily Dispatch*, are provided below on Bhengu:

- *Daily Dispatch* 25 February 1978, Not Enough Changes. East London – South Africa's policies had caused hostile and rebellious attitudes abroad and the country's domestic strife had estranged her from the West as well as the Third World countries. This was the warning sounded by Rev. N. Bhengu, widely travelled evangelist and social reformer who was reporting on his impressions and experiences about the attitude of overseas countries toward South Africa at a lunch forum of the Institute of Race Relations. He said the West was ready to lend a helping hand to anyone who promised to destroy South Africa's racial society. He said the task of every South African was to extend a hand of friendship: 'We are all component parts of South Africa. We must behave, talk and treat men like people – we must do to others like we would like others to do to us. Rev. Bhengu said. Fears especially among Christian circles were that changes in South Africa were too few. There is a great concern to assert and affirm the Christian stand without dabbling in politics, just the simple teaching of the Gospel. But the Gospel message itself is becoming meaningless'. He said although South Africa was militarily strong it could not withstand a long-drawn-out war. There had to be changes in the relation of man to man. Rev. Bhengu said there were two alternatives – violence and peaceful negotiation – and he urged for the latter with patience: 'It will be a slow process it, [*sic*] will need a good education and patience when people's hearts are changed and their minds are purged of poison which has been there for years'.
- *Daily Dispatch* (n.d.), On Race. East London – The race problem was troublesome but not a hindrance to the work of evangelism in any country, the Rev. N.B.H. Bhengu, head and founder of the Assemblies of God and BTG Crusade, said in an interview yesterday. He returned yesterday from Berlin, West Germany, where he attended the first World Convention

on Evangelism, and from Canada and the United States. There were allegations that evangelism did not progress in a country faced with race problems like South Africa. This was not correct, Mr Bhengu said: 'Even the countries without race problems cannot claim to have advanced the work on evangelism better than we have done in South Africa', he said. 'Nothing can stop the work of God. No laws can stop the spread of the Gospel'.

- *Daily Dispatch* (n.d.), On Separate Development. Bhengu was not an admirer of separate development as an ideology or solution to South Africa's race and sociopolitical problems. Because many of his people came to the cities from rural South Africa, however, he was compelled to work with homeland leaders in order to reach their people with the Gospel. The *Daily Dispatch* reported that Bhengu said that separate development had its own difficulties as the developed Africans had to be at the beck and call of the undeveloped, who manned institutions like tribal authorities. He also said that members of his congregations were sometimes victimised in certain rural areas because of their faith: 'It has been difficult for us to obtain church sites in some rural areas', he said: 'We have been opposed by chiefs and their tribal authorities. Some bigoted Christian churches have even opposed our establishing congregations in their midst. It is our intention to establish a Bible School in the Transkei. We are meeting with strong opposition in some areas and we may be forced to establish it in the Free State'. Some of these areas – Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei – opted for so-called independence from South Africa. Other homelands which did not opt for independence but accepted legislative functions in their areas were Kwa-Zulu, Ka-Ngwane, Kwa-Ndebele and QwaQwa. Bhengu had to work within these structures as well as some white areas of South Africa. The fact that some homelands leaders did not grant Bhengu church sites indicates he was not the darling of homelands authorities.
- *Daily Dispatch* 27 November 1967, On whites Responsibility. Mr Bhengu founder of the non-white sections of the Assemblies of God was addressing a white audience at the City Hall on Sunday night. The world was seething and boiling [...] 'The

> Europeans in the country have great responsibility of these. Of those to whom much has been given much will be expected' he said. 'The European Christians have done much to help us in our tasks and much has been accomplished'. Mr Bhengu said he committed himself to communism when he was a young man. This he did through vague promises but now he had dedicated himself to God.

Political leaders

As a prophet and evangelist, Bhengu preached the Word of God to all people including politicians, traditional leaders, business people, students and youth – the rich and poor without distinction. They all needed to hear the message of salvation, the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of a future in heaven with their Creator.

Preaching to the African National Congress

In 1951, the late Dr Gamedze, a prominent evangelical leader in Swaziland, was on a ship bound for England. He told me the following in an interview (Gamedze, pers. comm., 18 October 2003):

> While the ship docked in Port Elizabeth, I requested to disembark to go and see Bhengu in Port Elizabeth, with a plan to drive with him from Port Elizabeth to East London. During this time I got to know more about Bhengu and all the suffering he went through. He related of times when he had only one shirt. He would wash the shirt and wait for it to dry, wear it again until it was torn. He always wore a jacket so as not to show the tear in his shirt. Bhengu also told me about how he had lost his child and since he did not have money to bury the child he used his suitcase, to bury the child on the roadside. For a man to go through all that because of the Gospel! He is an example of what an apostle should be – that's why I had so much respect for Bhengu. When we got to East London there was a big commemoration of the ANC Youth League and there was a great presence of police. I expressed concern at the risk of being arrested especially because of the special permission I had obtained to leave the ship. I decided to remain in the car while Bhengu went ahead to address the meeting. Bhengu had a way of capturing crowds. He would start with jokes and stories. He would just deliver the powerful message during the

> last five minutes. This meeting ended well. I remained in East London for some days. Bhengu told me that he was going to meet the people who were saved on that day. I did not believe that any one got saved on that day. This taught me that 'anointing has nothing to do with what you say – it has something to do with the power that propels what you say'. (n.p.)

Gamedze is corroborated by Nene, who told me (Nene pers. comm., 02 July 2003):

> In Port Elizabeth, Bhengu lived in an ordinary four-roomed municipal house. As children we used to sing for the ANC. Bhengu was often invited to pray at ANC meetings where crowds were singing liberation songs. We would go and sing in the mountain, sometimes in the rain. Mandela was also there. The police wanted to lock us up as Communists. Rev. Molefe took Bhengu to Pretoria where he explained his mission for preaching the Gospel. (n.p.)

☐ Preaching to his Majesty King Sobhuza II of Swaziland

Dr Gamedze talks about how King Sobhuza used to invite Bhengu to preach at the King's Imbizos (gatherings of the nation).

Gamedze says this about Bhengu (Gamedze pers. comm., 18 October 2003):

> His ministry widened from the Nazarene [...] He had links to the Assemblies of God [...] I would say that he had a big influence. His influence widened and others were invited and then somehow [...] I don't quite remember how but I see here there's a mention of his relationship to the king. The king was always very open to the evangelists who came and invited them to come. Bhengu then developed a close relationship with King Sobhuza II who would invite him here. He used to call us all together, Christians, for special times, for prayers and national events [...] He would invite someone to speak to us [...] Bhengu was that powerful, spiritual and in every other way as a person, his personality, his voice, he was commanding, he knew what he was saying and he was sensible in what he said so he could not help but make an impression, widening his ministry. (n.p.)

In an interview, one of the members of the Royalty in Swaziland told me how Bhengu had pitched up his BTG Crusade tent in the

Kingdom of Swaziland. A number of his Majesty King Sobhuza's wives attended the meeting and were struck by Bhengu's humility while delivering powerful messages. When they went back to the Palace, they reported to the king about what was happening at Bhengu's meetings and tried to persuade the other wives who had not been to the crusades to attend the crusades. Some of the men who were supposed to be on Bhengu's side spread rumours that Bhengu was anti-Swazi culture, notably polygamy. This was a serious allegation that was not taken lightly by his Majesty King Sobhuza II, the reigning king at the time. By tradition and culture, the king had many wives. The accusation against Bhengu in this respect was seen by the king as a direct attack on him. Bhengu was also accused of being a communist and bent on seeking to upset the peace, stability and the political system in the kingdom.

However, the king was persuaded to invite Bhengu so that he would explain his preaching and teachings to the king. After meeting Bhengu, the king was satisfied that all the bad reports attributed to Bhengu were false. Bhengu was able to share the Gospel with the king. The king knelt before Bhengu and Bhengu was able to lead the king to Christ. My team and I broke down and wept when we learnt how the king knelt before a mere servant of God to be introduced to Christ.

Threat to the State

As mentioned before, Bhengu refused to bow to the state or to black radicals. Dr Hlongwa, one of Bhengu's highly educated ministers, had this to say about Bhengu and politics (Hlongwa pers. comm., 24 September 2003):

> Bhengu was born into a certain social environment. He was involved with the Communist Party's concern for the poor, and with the people who were as opposed to the elite who were enriching themselves. Communism proper is Biblical. The liberation motif came through very strongly in Bhengu's preaching. He said that people can have political freedom but still not be liberated if their spirit is still in bondage. He was saying, people can have political freedom but if

> they are not liberated in their spirit they would still be oppressed. He hammered in the fact that we needed to be liberated spiritually in order to participate in the political arena as liberated people. Bhengu used to be followed by the Special Branch in South Africa. The police were not totally convinced that he was preaching the Gospel only. Because he had a large following of people coming to hear him and gangsters getting converted and turning their weapons in to him, they felt that he was too powerful and could easily turn the people against the State. But Bhengu was faithful to his calling. (n.p.)

Socio-economic reconstruction and development

Bhengu's vision and strategy was to develop young black men and women to participate at all levels of entrepreneurial activities. His aim was to prepare them for leadership when freedom from apartheid eventually arrived. Bhengu was convinced that South Africa would one day become a free country where one's standing would no longer be based on the colour of one's skin. He established development programmes for young people and for women.

African socialism

Bhengu viewed capitalism as a philosophy that takes away from the poor without giving back what it takes from them. He pits capitalism against African socialism.

According to McGowan (2016:158), capitalism uses means for the sake of expanding its productive ends, but it never permits subjects to invest themselves in means while remaining in the capitalist universe. Capitalist subjects can think about the goals they want to fulfil without recognising that they can never really leave the terrain of means, which inheres in subjectivity itself. The new god is the market, and unlike the omnipotent and omniscient God of the monotheistic traditions, the market does not make its tyranny clear (McGowan 2016:114).

African socialism on the other hand is a philosophy of sharing – giving and receiving to foster a kind of parity in the standard of living in the community (Onuoha 1965):

> It underlines the key-idea of African Socialism, which is, communitarianism: the idea that all men form a community with their fellowmen and that their actions must always be conditioned by this fact; that they should contribute to the well-being of the community and, in turn, are entitled to share in all the benefits accruing to it. (p. 19)

According to Kotzé (1983:73), in *Development policies and approaches in Southern Africa,* along with colonialism, capitalism is also rejected because to the Africans it is the capitalist system which had made colonialism an important feature of European foreign policy.

I own a copy of one of Bhengu's sermons on socialism, based on Matthew 5:32 (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.). For lack of space, I will not transcribe the message in full. Parts of the message are in isiZulu, isiXhosa and English. It may be said without any doubt that Bhengu's early association with communism influenced his socio-economic outlook. Some parts of message are a free translation from isiZulu and isiXhosa to English:

> Jews are capitalists. When Jesus came he found that there were poor and rich people. You only need to read your Bible, without asking me; you will see what Jesus did. Among Xhosa-speaking [*sic*] people, there are those who have livestock and those who have none. Black people are not capitalists in the Western way of life. When people have no food because there was no rain in their area, they would go to those who have, to ask for food. In African culture, he who has, gives to him who has nothing. If I have cattle and you have none but want to get married, I lend you cattle to go and pay lobolo (dowry) for your wife. You are allowed to pay back when you can with no interest charged. In African culture there is no capitalism as experienced in the West. When someone has no cows, he is loaned a cow so as to have milk to feed his children, so that his children may not die from hunger. In Western culture a ten times millionaire will ignore you. African people look after one another, they would not watch other people suffer when can help. Soviet Russia's socialism is premised on Karl Marx's scientific socialism. This socialism is like religion, it does not address the question of racism, tribalism and ethnicity. We Christians are socialists. He who is in us (Jesus) although he was rich, he became a socialist and he had compassion. The difference between Marx's dialectics and us Christians is based on two things, (1) The Communist says, what is yours is mine (2) Christianity says,

> what is mine is yours. Christian Socialism is nothing more than compassion.
>
> Capitalism. The rich have plenty to eat and what is left is given to the dogs when there are hungry people around them. Compassion is not forced on people; it is not forced on people at gun point. I went on tour to Israel. Our bus stopped at a place near the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus had sat and taught thousands of people. I visualised him sitting and teaching the people for 3 days. He had compassion because the people were hungry.
>
> Jesus had compassion. He did not send the people away hungry; he feared they may collapse on the way. He fed the multitudes. Capitalists would have sent the people away while they remained behind to feed themselves. They don't care about the hungry as long as they themselves are full. This attitude is the cause of wars and industrial strikes among the workers and on mines. There is a lack of compassion, Christ's compassion. Christ's heart of compassion can eliminate the strikes. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. It is not right that you should eat pudding but give me only pap (maize porridge) to eat. Why do you do that to me when our needs are the same, only compassion can address that [...]. (n.p.)

Bonk in his book *Missions and Money – Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (1991:49) says 'As long as there is an economic chasm between missionaries and their converts, social fraternity will be hampered'. This chasm between the rich missionaries working among the poor creates a psychological and social syndrome among both the rich missionary and the poor community. Bonk (1991) quotes:

> A wealthy mother's six word explanation in response to the troubled inquiry of her nine-year-old daughter somehow says everything the rich have ever been able to say concerning their relationships with the poor: 'they are they and we are we'. Nor have honest observers of Western missionary social behaviour been blind to their apparent inability to establish close friendships with the poor. (p. 48)

Bhengu lived his life as an African Christian Socialist. He lived among his people in four-roomed houses (called match boxes), ate what they ate and was buried among his people; this was despite the fact that he had planted hundreds of churches from which he could have amassed huge wealth for himself and his family. He practised

the African principle of ubuntu – *umuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu* [a person is a person because of other people], which means interdependence among the people of a community of society. His lifestyle was in the spirit of Paul's teaching (2 Cor 8):

> (13)It is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality – (14)at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; (15)as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack'. (vv. 13–15)

Leadership through education

Bhengu believed that education was the key that would unlock talents embedded in the youth and women. According to Hlongwa, Bhengu was well ahead of his generation in introducing reconstruction and development programmes in the church long before the ANC thought of it.

As early as in the 1960s, Bhengu established a bursary fund for the youth to enter tertiary institutions. Provincial education boards were formed throughout the country. Led by special committees, funds were raised at local, district and regional levels for this purpose. Provincial boards would receive bursary applications and select deserving candidates for funding. The strategy was replicated in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. After successfully completing the studies, the bursar would refund the money so that others could also benefit. In a circular (Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.), Bhengu set up structures and procedures to facilitate raising and distribution of funds.

Thousands of young people were assisted in this manner. Some of them hold high positions in government, business, church and institutions of higher learning.

Women in self-reliance

The relationships and roles of women and positions of leadership have always been a thorny matter to deal with in a satisfactory manner – as Bhengu also found.

Kretzschmar and Van Schalkwyk (2000:18–19) address the lack of common transformations among churches regarding women in leadership positions. Whereas many Protestant churches do ordain women in priestly positions, others such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church still resist the ordination of women.

This point can be illustrated by using the issue of leadership in the church as an example. For twenty centuries, the vast majority of men and women have argued that it was acceptable for men to be priests, ministers and pastors but not for women. During this time, individual men and woman have rebelled against this common understanding, but they were the exception to the rule. During the 20th century, however, an increasing number of men and women from certain sectors of society have adopted a different view and agreed to the ordination of women. The vast majority of Protestant churches do now ordain women to the ministry. However, certain Protestant churches, together with other churches such as the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches, do not accept the notion of women's ordination. Therefore, these churches do not have women in senior leadership roles within the church. There are no female bishops and cardinals. This leads to the question: Why have certain Christians accepted the validity of the ordination of women whereas other Christians have not? Is it not true that these two groups understand the identities and roles of women differently?

Bhengu empowered women by creating entrepreneurial opportunities for them to earn money for themselves, feed their families and send their children to school. He organised women at local, regional and national levels. These women were taught to use their hands to create wealth, by sewing, knitting, baking and cooking.

Women were also taught how to look after their families, and how to keep their homes clean and presentable as befitting Christian women. He integrated the reds (unschooled) from rural areas and the schooled (educated) people, creating a bond

between the two groups. He made it clear to them (Hollenweger 1972):

> In heaven the streets are shining gold and the dresses shining white. Let us, as good Christians, be as clean and shining in our appearance as we can, even here [...] It is difficult for people to break away from their old customs. Africans in the country like to relieve themselves in the bush, but here we have lavatories. Use them. I shall not be pleased to hear that dirty paper is lying about in them. I see that you are even too lazy to flush the lavatories. That is being very dirty. This church, too, is cleaned every day, but look at it just now, with all these papers lying around. It is this kind of thing that makes the location streets unnecessarily dirty too. (p. 134)

Women in Bhengu's church acquired skills that made them stand out in home management and business. They became shining examples of what African women could do for themselves. Even though many of them, especially those from rural areas, had not had much education they were able to compete with educated people for social and economic challenges with success.

Dormant Capital – The Pentecostal Movement in South Africa and its potential social and economic role says the following about Bhengu (2008):

> In 1914 missionaries of the Assemblies of God strengthened the movement. The early leadership included the famous Pastor Nicholas B.H. Bhengu, a former Lutheran who joined the Assemblies of God. He was the first great African-born Pentecostal evangelist. Membership of the Pentecostal churches has grown steadily in South Africa. Pentecostalism also exercised a profound influence on the development of the African Independent church movement after World War II and hence forms of Pentecostalism have become mass movements across sub-Saharan Africa. (p. 14)

This is in line with Bhengu's strategy on human development and entrepreneurship to create financial and economic independence among black people.

Haddad (2003), speaking on poverty, women's networks and faith among the Nxamalala in Vulindlela, KwaZulu-Natal, says:

> My experience in working with the women of Nxamalala in Vulindlela, is that they literally attribute their survival to God. In times of dire

> need they are unable to 'explain' how they manage to provide meals for their children or pay their school fees. For them, God provides these material needs. The following excerpts from Bible study group discussions illustrate this point: Umyeni wami washona ngo 1988 ngasebenza waphela umsebenzi kodwa uNkulunkulu uyangipha nje ukudla ngidle [...] Ngihleli ekhaya angisebenzi [...] Nazi izingane ziyafunda kodwa uNkulunkulu uyangisiza ukuthi ngikwazi ukuthola ukudla ngidle .[*My husband passed on in 1988, I worked and I lost a job but God always gives me food to eat ... I am at home. I am not working. Here are the children; they go to school, but God always helps me to get food to eat*] (Janet Nzimande, 27 May 1999, Nxamalala). Sifundile ke manje ukuthi, 'Nkosi yami' uma uthi nje hayi ake ngiyekele kuJesu, gempela imali ebengiyithola ibiyisimangaliso nje ukuthi bengiyithola kanjani angazi, kodwa ngangibona nje hawu, nonesikweleti sami esidala nje ngibone nje hawu ngibone ukuthi hayi ngamandla kaNkulunkulu. [*We have now learned that if you just say, 'My Lord, let me leave everything with Jesus', ... in fact, the money that I was getting was mysterious because I don't understand how did I get it, but I found anybody that owed me, paying my money back, and I realised that it was the power of God*] (Thembani Khoza, 27 May 1999, Nxamalala). (pp. 441–442)

Bhengu created networks for the women in the church. These networks proved to be highly effective: women prayed together and shared their knowledge and skills with one another such as sawing, knitting, cooking and baking. Youth was empowered through bursary fund. Some of them took positions of leadership and ended up establishing churches and others were working in the public and private sector. This was Bhengu's anticipation that one day South Africa will be freed from the shackles of apartheid and become a democratic South Africa.

Lephoko in Watt (1992) says:

> In the black section of the movement there has always been a strong emphasis on social issues. This has its roots in Bhengu's understanding of redemption. Dan Lephoko, a member of Executive of the Assemblies of God and ex-chairman of the EFSA, said that he knows no other person who had such a clear grasp of the totality of the meaning of the Gospel than Nicholas Bhengu. (p. 112)

Chapter 10

Caring for the Body of Christ

Right from the beginning of his ministry, Bhengu became involved in inter-denominational work, reaching out to and preaching for other denominations. He was not in favour of 'sheep stealing'. In his crusades in East London and other places, he encouraged his converts to return to their own churches. He was, however, forced to accept into his church those who were not churched or who felt that their new-found faith would not be welcomed in their original churches. He attended and spoke at various ecumenical conferences in South Africa, the rest of Africa and overseas: the United Kingdom, the USA, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Scotland, Singapore and so on. He also seconded his men to para-church organisations and sent his ministers to non-Pentecostal Theological Colleges.

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Ecumenism

In reaching out to Christians from other denominations, Bhengu proved himself to be a man of his time – for the 20th century may indeed be called the ecumenical century, in the history of the Christian Church.

What do we mean when we speak about ecumenism and the ecumenical calling of the church? According to Tenny (1967), the word *ecumenism* derives from the Greek term *oikoumene,* meaning the whole inhabited world:

> An older adjectival derivative is *ecumenical.* Thus the first worldwide councils from Nicea (A.D. 325) were described as ecumenical, and the patriarch of Constantinople claimed to be the ecumenical bishop in virtue of his assumed primacy. More recently, the term ecumenical has come into Protestant usage through missionary conferences aimed to bring the Gospel to the whole inhabited globe (New York, A.D. 1900). It was adopted by Archbishop Söderblom of Sweden when, after the First World War, he convened a conference to study the role of the church in reconstruction (Stockholm, A.D. 1925). Since then, the efforts of the churches to work together and to try to achieve closer unity have been commonly styled the Ecumenical Movement, and ecumenism has been coined to express concern for, participation in, or the fulfilment of this or similar movements. (pp. 232–233)

The goal of ecumenism was to build fellowship and unity among churches. The WCC is by far the largest ecumenical body in the world and includes the majority of Protestant and Orthodox churches – with the Roman Catholic Church as a participant observer. The WCC was established on 23 August 1948, when four ecumenical streams merged: Life and Work, Faith and Order, the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council for Christian Education (Raiser 1991:23–24). Today, 340 churches from 115 countries belong to the WCC.

In South Africa, the ecumenical ideal was first fostered by the mainline churches which founded the Christian Council of South Africa, which in later years was to become the

SACC. According to Thomas (2002:xviii–xxvi), many churches, or 'blocks' of churches, took part in the process. The first block of churches comprised the English-speaking churches and the Methodist, the Presbyterian and the Anglican churches. The second block of churches included the Lutheran Church, the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, the Moravian Church and the Rhenish Mission, as well as the Hermannsburg Mission. The third block of churches included the Afrikaans churches, especially the Dutch Reformed Church which identified with the apartheid policy of the NP government, and which has over the years divided itself into a family of churches, with different 'sister churches' for white people, Africans, people of mixed race and Indians. The fourth block was occupied by the African-initiated churches, churches in search of black selfhood. This group emerged as early as the 1880s. The largest denomination of this group is the Zion Christian Church. The last block of churches mentioned by Thomas includes the Pentecostal churches, with churches like the AFM where, according to Thomas, white people retained power and control – although, in recent times, a number of black members of the Pentecostal churches stepped out of this control, one of them being Dr Frank Chikane.

In Bhengu's time, the churches mentioned in Table 10.1 belonged to the SACC.

Theological differences

Despite the unity among the different churches, there are also many theological differences. One of these differences concerns the role of the church in society. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, was over many years quite critical of the WCC brand of liberation theology. The approach by the WCC to equate salvation and liberation with structural political liberation and social change, to the point of supporting strategies that sought to overthrow unjust governments

TABLE 10.1: Membership of the South African Council of Churches, 1975.

Membership	South African Council of Churches
Black churches founded by mission societies	• Bantu Presbyterian Church • Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cape/Orange • Evangelical Lutheran Church, South Eastern Region • Evangelical Lutheran Church, Transvaal • Evangelical Lutheran Church, Tswana Region • Moravian Church, Eastern Cape • Moravian Church, Western Cape • Nederduiste Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika
African independent churches	• National Baptist Church • African Baptist Church • African Methodist Episcopal Church
Multiracial with a black majority	• Church of the Province of South Africa • Methodist Church of South Africa • United Congregational Church of South Africa • Roman Catholic[a]
Multiracial with a white majority	• Presbyterian Church of South Africa • Salvation Army • Society of Friends (Quakers)[a]
White churches	• Baptist Union[a] • Evangelical Lutheran (Transvaal)[a]
Mission societies	• Paris Evangelical Mission

Source: Thomas 2002.
[a] These were observer member churches which while having full rights of participation and speech in the organisation did not have voting rights on its committees or national conference.

through violent means, was also of great concern for Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

In his book *Barriers to Ecumenism: The Holy See and the World Council of Churches on Social Questions* (1983), Derr presents the ideological difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC on salvation and liberation: In its insistence on a strict separation between Christian faith and any aspect of a historical ideology, we meet that dimension of Catholic thought often called, whether in praise or blame, 'other-worldly' and contrasted with the 'this-worldly' activism of the World Council. This distinction is such an old cliché that one advances it with some hesitation, and yet there is something to it after all. Roman Catholicism has been traditionally reluctant to identify salvation with any intermundane liberation. Salvation is not historically innate and does not deal with the material situation,

but is beyond all temporal hopes. The Kingdom of God is reached by faith and membership in the Church, not 'by the mere changing of structures and social and political involvement'. It should not be interpreted 'as being present wherever there is a certain type of involvement and activity for justice'. The Church's commitment to the needs of the disinherited notwithstanding (Derr 1983):

> It is wrong to state that political, economic, and social liberation coincides with salvation in Jesus Christ. This idea of Christ as a political figure does not tally with the Church's catecheses. [*Christ's*] mission was not in the social, economic, or political order. Likewise, Christ did not give the Church a mission which is social, economic, or political, but rather a religious one. (p. 15)

Despite all the differences within the ecumenical family, McLeod (in Murphy & Asprey 2008:108) defends and calls for unity among all Christians. In essence, the church has no choice but to be ecumenical. It is a given from God. This underlying family unity exists regardless of whatever may divide us: denominational allegiance, church order, doctrinal differences, cultural divergence or liturgical oddity. Even in our sectarian hatred we are one, and we are one especially in Jesus Christ. Every single believer is united to Christ. He lives in us (Gl 2:20). And because Christ and the Spirit, the second persons of the Trinity, are inseparable (2 Cor 3:17), we are equally united to the Spirit. We are baptised in him, led by him and filled with him. By him, by means of this baptism in the Spirit, we are incorporated into the body of Christ, sharing in its life, and related to every other single member. This body is one. Christ cannot have two bodies. And this is the only place where we can enjoy salvation. Every saved person is a member of this body. This is the essential meaning of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* [outside the church there is no salvation]. If someone is not a member of this body, he or she has no share in salvation.

This body is the church, consisting of all believers spread geographically throughout the world and distributed historically through every age from Pentecostal to the end of time.

The clergy, and even the Magisterium, cannot distinguish themselves from it. They are part of it. Every minister, priest and bishop is first and foremost a member of the laity, the people of God. No further grace puts us outside or above this people. Even Christ himself is a member of it: the Chief Shepherd is also a lamb (Rv 7:17). Only in this body of Christ, dependent on its every other member, have we any spiritual life; and only in living, organic contact with this body are we of any use. And it is just this body, in its entirety, which is holy, catholic and indefectible.

In recent years, these sentiments were shared by Catholic theologians and church leaders. Pope John Paul II's strong statement in this regard reverberated in ecumenical circles: the Ecumenical Movement must not be allowed to flounder. The reunion of Christians is divinely willed. This is based also on the fact that Christ prayed that the church should be united (Derr 1983:3–7).

Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal divide

Bhengu was both Evangelical and Pentecostal in his theology and ministry, with heavy leanings towards Pentecostalism, because this is where he spent most of his life and work. According to Bebbington (quoted by Ranger 2008:5), evangelicalism revolves around the following: *conversion* (emphasis on the need for change of life), *activism* (emphasis on evangelistic and missionary efforts), *biblicism* (a special importance attached to the Bible) and *crucicentrism* (emphasis on the centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross). Bhengu seems to have fitted this mould perfectly.

When, after the merger of the IMC with the WCC, IMC members withdrew from the WCC, an evangelical ecumenical body was formed in 1966, operating from Wheaton (Ohio). The subsequent

conferences of this movement at Wheaton (1966) and Lausanne (1974) were both attended by Bhengu as well. He identified wholeheartedly with the Lausanne movement's emphasis on the priority of evangelism – but acknowledging, in the words of David Bosch, that 'evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witnesses, just as our disunity undermines our Gospel of reconciliation' (Bosch 1991:461).

Ecumenical initiatives

Bhengu was a man of influence in ecumenical circles. He attended, spoke and lent support to national and international initiatives: the Pentecostal World Conference in Toronto, Canada, in 1952, the Lausanne conference in 1974, the Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism in 1973, the PACLA, Nairobi, Kenya in 1974, as well as the World Charismatic Renewal Conference in Singapore, 1978, to mention just a few.

In 1979, the SACLA, one of the most influential events in the recent history of the churches in South Africa, was held in Pretoria. David Bosch, who served on the SACLA committee with Bhengu, wrote in his foreword to Watt's book *From Africa's Soil – The Story of the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa* (1992) the following:

> I have been privileged to know two of the leaders I referred to above: Nicholas Bhengu and John Bond. From first to last, their integrity and the quality of their leadership impressed me. I first heard about Bhengu and his remarkable ministry when I was a missionary in Transkei in the late fifties and the sixties, but I only came to know him intimately during the 1973 Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism. Since then we were together many times until he passed away. I particularly remember his participation in the committee that organised the SACLA, which was held in Pretoria in July 1979. For 2 years before this we had met monthly to discuss all possible aspects relating to the planning of that mammoth convention. Bhengu attended virtually all the committee meetings. At many critical moments he gave quality to our deliberations, always in his modest and quiet way. For me, Bhengu epitomised the Assemblies of God. (p. 12)

Bhengu supported credible evangelical Christian para-church organisations: CCC, Africa Enterprise (AE) and so on. Although he had some reservations about their position on Pentecostal experiences, he nonetheless seconded some of his men to work with them.

Africa Enterprise

Africa Enterprise was founded by Michael Cassidy in 1964 with a vision to evangelise the cities of Africa. These citywide missions are usually inter-denominational and serve to unify the church in local cities. Over the years, AE has developed considerable credibility among the churches throughout South Africa because of its ability to mount such missions and unite the church. AE also holds major congresses of church leaders on particular topics. Three have been particularly significant: the Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism (1973), the SACLA (1979) and the National Initiative for Reconciliation (1985). Two other foci in Cassidy's ministry are important: his keen interest in influencing leaders, both political and ecclesiastical, and his untiring efforts to bring leaders together. His efforts to reconcile warring political parties in the province of KwaZulu-Natal during the 1980s were significant. In the National Initiative for Reconciliation, convened at the height of that period's political unrest, AE under Cassidy's leadership proved itself as the one Christian group with the credibility to organise a meeting of racially, politically and denominationally diverse church leaders, even though the conference and subsequent follow-up meetings served mainly to highlight the vast differences between black and white people on the issue of reconciliation. To AE, he seconded Abiel Thiphanyane. Bhengu also served on AE Board of Reference (Ranger ed. 2008:204–205).

Campus Crusade for Christ

Rossouw (1989) describes the establishment and vision of the founders of AE and CCC International:

> In a vision that he received in 1951 Bright got the idea to start preaching the Gospel on university campuses. The programme was launched in Los Angeles and in the course of time extended to the rest of the USA and South America. The headquarters of the enterprise was moved to Mound, Minnesota in 1956. By 1960 there were already 109 full-time workers. In 1963 the current headquarters, the Arrowhead Springs Hotel, was bought for two million dollars. (p. 22)

Bright, according to Rossouw (1989), offered three reasons for the success of the CCC ministry:

- dedication to the Saviour and his cause in all circumstances
- strong emphasis on the work and ministry of the Holy Ghost in the life of every believer
- special, exact and thorough training and equipping of every co-worker.

Bright calls their evangelisation, used in a wider sense than we are accustomed to, 'aggressive evangelisation'. In his own words, he describes it as follows (Rossouw 1989):

> By aggressive evangelism I mean going to men with the good news of our living Christ and his love and forgiveness, not in an argumentative tone nor with the high-pressure techniques but taking the initiative to tell (as the apostle Paul wrote), all men everywhere about Christ. [*He continues*] We realise that this can best be accomplished by multiplication rather than through addition. (p. 22)

Bhengu seconded Sipho Bhengu, John Ndlovu, Charles Maphosa and Dan Lephoko to the CCC International. He held the CCC in very high esteem, despite the fact that CCC International was opposed to speaking in tongues, prophecy and so on. Approving my secondment to CCC in 1973, he said 'CCC had some of the best methods of reaching out to people with the Gospel and training them to become disciples'. Bhengu confided to me that if he were young he would have joined it himself. He opened his churches to the CCC to train his ministers and hundreds of his

church members in lay evangelism and in discipleship. He also organised training for his pastors in Johannesburg and in Durban. He sent Ben Matsebula, one of his pastors, as a delegate to attend the 1974 Explo organised by Campus Crusade International in Seoul, South Korea.

Africa Co-operative Action Trust

One of Bhengu's pastors, Joseph Dambuza, was seconded to Africa Co-operative Action Trust, a Christian organisation that worked in rural development among the poor. Dambuza was its regional director in Ciskei. He also worked for the Student Christian Movement.

Federal Theological Seminary of South Africa

Theological education was dear to Bhengu's heart. He therefore sent Moses Ntshangane, one of his very able co-workers, to the Federal Theological Seminary of South Africa, where students of a number of mainline churches were trained. Ntshangane received his theological education from the same institution at which he later became the dean of students. He also worked for the Pietermaritzburg Urban Mission Project, a SACC initiative, with Bhengu's blessings – while still pastoring the Assemblies of God Churches.

According to Wiseman, Bhengu had an ecumenical heart while loyal to the Assemblies of God (Wiseman pers. comm., 28 October 2003):

> He encouraged me in starting the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa (which grew to embrace 22 denominations among them AOG), and was willing to be on our Board of Reference and also on the Board of Reference of the Evangelical Bible Seminary of South Africa, which was being formed in 1974–1979 and opened its doors in 1980. While teaching on the UBI staff in 1964–1983, he regularly sent

> hand-picked men (and some women) to be trained for the ministry in AOG. I recall they were men of top calibre, who stretched me to and beyond my limits! Sipho Bhengu, Wilson Hlobo, Gilbert Mxhego, W. Makinana [...] their names still stand out in my memory some 40 years later. He certainly kept the Gospel flame profile very visible at a time when theologically liberal preaching was popular, and he helped restore/entrench the credibility of evangelical theology and preaching. (n.p.)

A call for prayer for Africa and its leaders

Bhengu encouraged his followers to pray for all leaders in Africa. 'Support leaders of your nation and present Christ to them, by all means', Bhengu used to say. Praying for those in leadership was paramount in Bhengu's life and ministry. His liturgy includes praying for all leaders regardless of who they were. This is based on Paul's teaching in which he urges the church to pray and intercede for 'everyone, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in godliness and holiness' (1 Tm 2:1–7). Based in this scripture, praying for those in leadership forms part of the liturgy at every worship service.

An ecumenist with an evangelical heart

From the discussion in previous paragraphs, it is clear that Bhengu was an ecumenist. He nevertheless kept to his evangelical credo and used every opportunity at conferences and assemblies, as well as in dialogue with ecumenical partners, to warn against the inroads that liberal theology – in his opinion – was making in the Christian community in his time.

In a personal letter he wrote to me from Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, on 12 November 1974, Bhengu expressed his dismay with liberal theology which sanctioned and blessed everything including killings. Liberal Theology, Bhengu says, puts Jesus

Christ on par with Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius by saying all religions are alright. He further said (Bhengu & Lephoko pers. comm., 12 November 1974):

> Theology is one of the things that killed the early Church and has destroyed the faith of many in the Western world; a matured [*sic*] man only can survive. It is a battle of champions and survival of the fittest. There is more theology but all Churches are dreamy and dead! This is a lesson to Africa, Africa Awake! They find enough theology to sanction bloody revolution and everything. They find theology to place Jesus Christ at [*sic*] par with Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius, all religions are alright! Africa must reject the Western philosophies! Jesus is God, Jesus is King and Jesus is the only Saviour! He is the only one who rose from the dead! Others, all of them came from below but Jesus came from above and is above all (John 3:31.). With Love to all in your family and in the family of God. (n.p.)

In a letter to John Bond, also written from Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, Bhengu expressed his disquiet with Liberal Theology, Black Power and Black Theology (Bhengu & Bond pers. comm., 20 November 1974):

> There are serious developments in Africa today. (1) There is Black Power [*sic*] (2) There is Black Theology which seeks (both) to throw away old accepted Theology and resuscitate Africa's primitive beliefs. These are supported and funded by the universities and Theological Colleges of the West. Theology explains away the Bible word by word, statement by statement and sentence by sentence, it's giving pagan origin of what influenced the writers of the Bible until the Bible, [*sic*] ceases to be the Word of God. This is where Black Theologies step in. Do you realise the implication? The truth must be broadcast in Africa as never before [...]. I feel we ought to send a few young men to Bible Schools and then to Theological Colleges in order to equip them with weapons to counteract liberal theologies. So, I am already here, I am a member of the central staff as a lecturer and attending many other lectures. I do research work at the same time. Each lecturer opens my eyes more as to the situation; the church in the West is completely off the line! Bless God for the Evangelical groups which I met in Lausanne in July. (n.p.)

At PACLA, Bhengu used the opportunity to address church leaders from across the African continent (Cassidy & Verlinden 1978: 633–634). He never missed an opportunity to present

Christ the Saviour even among these eminent church leaders. After relating stories about Admiral Byrd, the explorer of the North Pole, and the propensity of sheep to go astray, Bhengu (1978) went straight into the finished work of Christ on the Cross, ending his message with an appeal to his audience to accept Christ:

> In the Word of God I find one thing. Jesus said in John 10: 'I am the door; if any man enters by me, he will be saved'. That is definite. In John 14:6 He says, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me'. In 1 Corinthians 1:8 is found the preaching of the Cross. What is this Cross all about? It must be the starting point. When you want to be saved, you can't be saved any other way. There must be a starting point. What happened on the Cross? Was this just two sticks which someone put together? No. Something must have happened on the Cross. Romans 5:10 says when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Now we get somewhere. Our reconciliation with God is by Jesus Christ who died on the Cross. In 2 Corinthians 5:20: 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you [...].' Verily I say unto you, he that heareth my Word and believeth on him that sent me has everlasting life. And whoever believes in me shall never die [...]. For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life [...] I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live'. What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ [...] He that has the Son has life. He that has not the son has not life [...] that is the story of the Cross. This is the only way. If you want to be at peace with God, if you want to get right with God, the whole job has been done. Jesus Christ on the Cross accomplished everything so that we could start from the Cross and walk straight to God. Without the Cross there is no salvation. What is it? It is the payment that Jesus accomplished on the Cross. He poured out His soul on the Cross. He paid with His very life on the Cross. He died on behalf of sinners. He died in our stead. He died our death. Where I should have died, Jesus died so that I might believe in Him. I should die no more. What is left for me to do? 'To accept Jesus Christ because he came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him. He gave them the authority to become the sons of God'. If you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you are taken from the place of sinners and placed among the sons and daughters of God. This comes by faith in Jesus Christ. Not only to believe that He

> is the Son of God, not only to believe in His incarnation. It is all very good to believe in those things, but the greatest thing is the death of the Son of God on the Cross. So, we have got free salvation. We don't work for it. We don't have to toil for it. All we have to do is to accept the work done by Jesus Christ on the Cross. That is how we are accepted by God in his beloved Son. That is how salvation comes to us. We are all lost like sheep. We don't know how to get home. We don't know how to get back to God. But there is the Cross. It is planted there. Remember how the man rejoiced when he found his tent. He could have drifted further and further away but he provided himself with a starting point and that made it possible for him to find his tent. Then he went into the tent, he lit his stove, he warmed himself, he made soup, he made some coffee, and then he was warmed again. The joy he had. The assurance he had. He was inside his tent. He was saved from being frozen to death. How he thanked God to be in the tent. How he rejoiced for he knew he was safe. When you accept the Lord Jesus Christ, you know you are safe; you know you are at peace with God because Jesus satisfied God. The wrath of God fell upon him and the punishment fell upon him that we should get no more punishment. There is therefore no condemnation waiting for us. We have passed from death unto life. It is not because you are better than others. Jesus has done it for us. And the only way to please God is to accept his love. God loves you. (pp. 633–634)

Nicholas Bhengu, an ecumenist and an evangelical, to the very end!

Bhengu developed the following integrated networks for his work, the BTG Crusade, Women's Ministry, Girls' Ministry, Men's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Teaching Team and Sunday School. Although all of these had their own committees, they nonetheless worked together and supported each other.

Bhengu was a great evangelist and church planter, committed to bring people the simple, undiluted good news of salvation through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross; establishing them in a community of the saints; building them up in a relationship with God and others; and challenging them to become part of God's missionary plan by involving them in giving and by commissioning them as missionaries in their own right.

Bhengu's leadership style may be regarded as dictatorial when the need of the hour demanded it, consultative when

seeking the opinion of others or pioneering when charting a way forward. But he never strayed from what he saw as God's demand on him (Mt 28):

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. (vv. 18–20)

Every man and woman, boy and girl had a place in Bhengu's ministry. His approach to minster was well received to his fellow Africans, as Bradshaw (1993) says:

> People from Non-Western cultures, such as Africans [*sic*] perceive a constant interaction between physical and spiritual aspects of creation. They believe Christian theology splits 'humans into body and soul, and to preach the salvation of the souls. Africa could never accept the mutilation of the human being'. (p. 21)

Figure 10.1 describes his approach to address different human aspects, namely, spiritual, intellectual, developmental, missional and evangelical, and political (liberation).

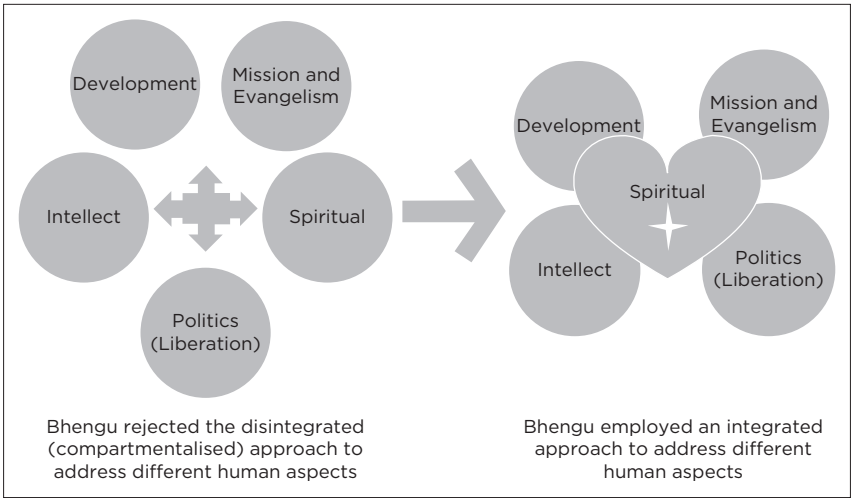


FIGURE 10.1: Bhengu's approach to addressing human aspects.

Chapter 11

Homegoing

One day you will pass into a better life, more alive than you are today. An excerpt of D.L. Moody (1900) makes the statement:

> Some day you will read in the papers, that 'D.L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead.' Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, gone out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal, a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1855. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever. (p. 5)

A few years before his death, Bhengu started to preach about his imminent departure. A song he used to sing is *Siyohlangana eZulwinin Khona* [We are going to meet in heaven]. The song has a dual meaning; it shows that he was certain that he was going to heaven and that his followers would meet him there.

Just like the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7 who said, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith', an extract from a message he preached at the National

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Conversion in Thaba Nchu in December 1984 (Bhengu pers. comm., December 1984) is as follows:

> These are my closing words before I close my ministry for my home going. My whole life has been spent in bringing the 'VOICE' of God to you although there are prophetic messages I withheld because the Nation was not ready and still divided and struggling for independence and power. (n.p.)

The above extract was two-pronged in that he was conveying that he dedicated his life to being the voice of God. On the contrary, he withheld conveying prophetic messages because South Africa was not ready yet for such a message.

Final farewell message

Bhengu gave instructions on what the church should do when he had departed. He also warned against those who would see his departure as an opportunity to create division in the church work he started and replace the Holy Spirit by elevating academic achievement in the work at the expense of the role of the Holy Spirit. He also called for unity in the broader church.

In his farewell message to the church, Bhengu (pers. comm., n.d.) wrote, *inter alia*:

> Build the Church of God. The names of our Churches are our own inventions and not God's! Let the Christians come together as God's children. Build the Nation when you are remembering that you are part of that Nation and you are in for a specific purpose for God. Pray for all leaders in Africa, support leaders of your Nation and present Christ to them by all means. The Church is the light of the world. The Church is the salt of the earth and the Church should lead the Nation to Peace, Unity and Prosperity. (n.p.)

In the message, Bhengu strongly emphasised the role of the church as God's agent for nation-building. He used phrases like: 'Build the Church of God', church members have the responsibility to build the church. 'The church belongs to God'. The church is 'God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Tm 3:15). In this respect,

he emulated Paul (Ac 20) in his address to the Ephesian church leaders:

> I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent to the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'. (vv. 23–35)

Death of Bhengu – A sad goodbye

On 07 October 1985, the spiritual giant, great leader and apostle, Nicholas Bhengu went to be with the Lord. He died in the Groote Schuur Hospital, Cape Town. This man had won the hearts of white people and black people alike throughout South Africa and abroad, with his simple but profound preaching, spiritual insight and wisdom. Had he remained in his early vocation as a trade union member and member of the Communist Party, there is no doubt that he would have risen to great political heights. God took a hold of his life and he is now seated before the King of Kings and because of this ministry many others will be seated there too.

Tributes

- *Africa Enterprise.* 'We pay tribute to evangelist, prophet and teacher Rev. Nicholas Bhengu who died recently. Rev. Bhengu was a member of the AE Board of Reference and so will be sorely missed by our team and those of us who knew him personally. Converted through missionaries in Natal he felt called into the ministry and studied at Dumisa Bible School and in the United States of America. As a minister of the Assemblies of God, he launched the "BTG" crusade in Duncan Village, East London, in the 1950s. It was to prove to be one of the most effective ministries to reach people in South Africa for Jesus Christ. Rev. Bhengu died in October at the age of 76 having established one of the largest churches on the African continent and having been awarded the title of "The World's Greatest Black Soul-Winner" by an American church group' (*Africa Enterprise Update magazine*, December 1985).
- *Natal Witness newspaper.* The 'Black Billy Graham' Rev. Nicholas Bhengu (76) who died last Thursday in Cape Town [...]. In 1945, he founded his own church. In 1958, he was a member of the Advisory Committee for the Fifth World Pentecostal Conference in Toronto. His great revival campaigns in South Africa, and especially his fight against crime, gained him the favour and support of the South African Government (*The Witness*, 24 October 1985).
- *Iphepha Lesizwe Indaba (The People's Paper).* Tribute caption on Bhengu was 'Farewell great winner of souls': 'A great black souls winner is gone. He is the Rev. Nicholas B.H. Bhengu, 76, often described as the "black South African Billy Graham". Mr Bhengu had travelled worldwide. He had preached to all racial groups and started BTG Crusade in the early 1950s in Duncan Village [...]. He told a white audience that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was the only salvation for the world. In January 1978, Mr Bhengu was given international recognition when he was awarded a special plaque for "the world's greatest black soul winner" [...]. Mr Bhengu was invited by the members of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives to attend the 42nd annual National Prayer Breakfast in Washington on January 29, 1976, where he met the then

President Gerald Ford, and his wife' (*Iphepha Lesizwe Indaba*, 24 October 1985).

- *The Probe magazine.* History has a way of endowing societies with men who are a notch above the ordinary folk. The history of religion is no exception. And so it came to pass that the South African world of black theology was blessed with one Nicholas Bhenkinkosi [*sic*] Hepworth Bhengu – a towering religious revolutionary who carved a neat saintly niche for himself within the parameters of human failings. When the old pide [*sic*] piper of the pulpit was laid to rest at his Pietermaritzbug [*sic*] home a few weeks ago at the ripe age of 76, it brought to a close the fading reign of an evangelical enigma. Nicholas Bhengu had all the material and psychological rearing that was to catapult him into his role as an international evangelist with some of the stature of a homespun Billy Graham (*The Probe,* November 1985).

Funeral instructions

In an undated sermon, he preached before his death, which Bhengu called 'Home Going', he prepared his people for his departure. He warned them to guard against people who were seeking positions and fame in the church; people who were not led by the Spirit of God; people who would seek to undo all that he had built over so many years; and people who were after money to enrich themselves. He also said that true leaders should depend on the Holy Spirit to lead the people of God.

Before he died, he gave instructions on 27 January 1984 concerning his funeral:

1. The coffin shall be supplied by the undertakers without consultation with either relatives or church people.
2. The hearse shall take the corpse from the mortuary direct to the grave and neither to my home nor to the church.
3. There shall be no funeral service either at home or at the church.
4. Hymns shall be selected by me which shall be sung while the coffin is being lowered.

5. No speeches, no preaching, no ceremony and no wreaths. Absolutely none.
6. Announcements on the air and in the press should be as follows: Nicholas Bheka, son of Josiah Khanda, son of Yele Bhengu. Born on September 5th 1909 at eNtumeni Mission Station, expelled twice for his faith by the mission as a heretic, first as a young man, 21 years old. Came back to settle down in his father's land, built a home and was forced to leave in 1973 and settled at Mtunzini. Died at ..... on ..... at the age of ..... Nothing else should be said, absolutely nothing! No watch night services anywhere and no substitutes.
7. Absolutely no slaughtering of any beast of any sort, not even a chicken and no food provision of any kind.
8. The burial or funeral shall take place 3 days after my certified death and no more.
9. The funeral should take place any day of the week and should not wait for friends, relatives or church people.
10. All expenses shall have been paid for and there shall be no money collected or given for my funeral.
11. Curse be upon those who shall deviate from these instructions. (n.p.)

The instructions were read by his younger brother, Shadrack, at his funeral service at Harry Gwala Stadium in Pietermaritzburg.

It is clear from the above that Bhengu was a wounded man after a series of rejections. Firstly, when he tried to witness to his own people at eNtumeni after his conversion and again when he tried to settle there. It was not only the Lutheran Church that rejected him. Within the Assemblies of God and in the BTG Crusade, there were people who injured him with their venomous criticism. For strength, he often quoted a text from Isaiah 54:

> No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me declares the Lord. (v. 17)

Bhengu was hurt by people who misunderstood him, misinterpreted him and told lies about him. The divisions and splits in the Assemblies of God also hurt him, after he had tried so hard to preserve unity in the church.

Many people were shocked when Bhengu's funeral instructions became known. I was one of those who were devastated by this move. Like many in the movement who had known and worked with Bhengu for many years, I could not understand how a man of his stature could have given such instructions. They raised a number of questions, such as 'What could have led him to such a decision?' I was saddened when the instructions were read to me on the phone by Rev. Josiah Donda. I could not believe that a man of Bhengu's calibre could have taken such a position, depriving people of the opportunity to share testimonies of his work for God. God had used him to transform their lives and we were all aware of the impact of his ministry worldwide.

Analysis of selected statements from the funeral instructions could be judged as being highly subjective. However, every effort is made to be as objective as possible:

> The hearse shall take the corpse from the mortuary direct to the grave and neither to my home nor to church. There shall be no funeral service either at home or at the church. (n.p.)

This statement sounds strange considering that members of Bhengu's church had always been brought to the church for funerals. Speeches and preaching were allowed. He himself preached on many of these occasions. When Dan Masondo, one of Bhengu's key pastors, died in 1983, Bhengu ordered his body to be brought to the church in KwaMashu, Durban, before it was taken to KwaMashu Community Hall for the funeral service. Bhengu was scheduled to preach but chose to deliver a speech and asked Pastor Messiniah Donda to deliver the sermon. I attended Masondo's funeral and was the interpreter (Bhengu n.d.):

> Expelled twice for his faith by the Mission as a heretic, first as a young man, 21 years old. Came back to settle down in his father's land, built a house and was forced to leave in 1973 and settled at Mtunzini. Died [...] nothing else should be said, absolutely nothing. No watch night services anywhere and no substitutes. (n.p.)

The issue of Bhengu having been forced to leave his place of birth, his father's land, must have been very traumatic for him. It was as if he had been uprooted from his homeland, from kith and kin – 'expelled at age 21 and again in 1973 and settled at Mthunzini'. It would seem that Bhengu wanted the world to know that he had been rejected and thrown out for his faith. He saw himself as a martyr for his faith, 'No slaughtering, no chicken no food.'

One can only speculate why he did not want food served at his funeral. It is an African custom to invite mourners to return to the home of the deceased after burial to have a meal which includes meat of a beast slaughtered for the occasion. To some, a basin of water treated with some herbs is placed at the entrance of the kraal for mourners to wash their hands before food is served. Those who believe in this practice say it is done to remove the curse of death from those who attended the burial.

Furthermore, it is a general African belief that the slaughtering of a beast or chicken – a spilling of blood at funerals is an African tradition performed to appease the departed *amadlozi* [ancestors], those who have gone before, and to cleanse those who remain behind from the curse of death.

Mbiti (1969) writes about this practice among the Ndebele tribe:

> We see a number of meanings in these funeral procedures. The spear with which the eldest son strikes the grave is a weapon of defence and protection and when used for this occasion it neutralises all danger on the way to and in the new country where the dead man is going. Personal belongings are buried with the body to accompany the deceased man, so that he does not find himself poor in the hereafter: these things are part of him and he must not be robbed by the surviving relatives (or else he will visit them and demand what is his own). The animal killed afterwards serves, as it is called, to 'accompany' the deceased, to provide him with food on the way and livestock in the next world. Drinking 'medicine' made from the ashes of the burnt bones is a rite whereby the departed is mystically united

with the members of his family and community who are still alive. Washing in the river is a ritual act of cleansing from the pollution caused by death; and the same applies to the rite performed a month or two later, when the implements are washed with beer. At that ceremony, children are given protective medicine to drink, as a counter measure against death. Bhengu was acutely aware of this custom. It would appear that he did not want to participate in it in death. He banned it! (p. 151)

Chapter 12

A lasting legacy

In southern Africa, Bhengu played a significant role, particularly in South Africa, by pioneering the development of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches, at a time when most black churches were heavily dependent on support from missionary-sending countries and institutions. His theology, his evangelistic campaigns, his leadership style, his prophetic voice at the time of political and social upheaval in South Africa as well as his ecumenical sensitivity left a lasting imprint on the ecclesiastical, socio-economic scene in South Africa and the rest of Africa and the wider world.

A witness in a turbulent time

The Bible as well as church history tells us that God endows his servants with special talents for their ministry, suited to the specific needs of their time. This was the case with Nicholas Bhengu. The times in which the evangelist from Zululand was born and was called were full of challenges: socially, politically and economically. In 1910, the Cape, Natal and the two Boer

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Republics, Transvaal and Free State, formed the Union of South Africa. For white people, a new political future beckoned. Black people were left in the wilderness.

The coming to power of the NP in 1948 introduced a system that governed the lives of all people in the country: education, homelands' governments and employment opportunities were regulated by law. Apartheid laws were challenged by liberation movements such as the ANC and the PAC who, after a protracted attempt to persuade the government to negotiate an acceptable political settlement, which is acceptable to all the people, resorted to an armed struggle after negotiations were rejected.

The church in South Africa was challenged to help find solutions for the country's problems, to help to bring a very unjust dispensation to an end. A number of initiatives were launched, *inter alia,* the Cottesloe Consultation, the Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism, the SACLA and the National Initiative for Reconciliation.

These initiatives did help to conscientise their members and to work towards reconciliation. But, they also divided the churches, especially the Afrikaans-speaking churches, which supported government policies, and the English-speaking churches, which aligned with the SACC, that were vocal in their opposition to apartheid.

President P.W. Botha introduced the so-called Tri-Cameral System of Government, in an attempt to create a new dispensation for the country. This move was rejected by the majority of South Africans. A large number of political, civil and religious groups came together to form the UDF, which developed into a powerful instrument in the fight against apartheid. In reaction to the strong opposition that was mounting in the country, the government declared a state of emergency. Troops were sent into the townships, across South Africa, to quell the violence that was erupting. Rent boycotts and attacks on township councillors and other people perceived to be supporting the status quo became the order of the day.

In Soweto, students rose up against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools.

Bhengu's legacy as a leader, family man, preacher, evangelist, prophet, ecumenist and strategist must be measured in relation to all of this. He was truly a man of his time.

The preacher

Bhengu's theology had different roots. He was born and raised at eNtumeni, a Lutheran Mission Station, where he received his early education. He was also a convinced evangelist, having attended the KwaDumisa Bible College, where he trained for the ministry. But his longest association was with the Assemblies of God, one of the largest Pentecostal Churches in South Africa, which had the greatest impact on his life and work, especially on his preaching and healing ministry. The many healings and miracles that took place at Pentecostal crusades made a huge impression on him.

Bhengu preached Christ. He spoke of the Cross of Jesus Christ being the starting point of his sermons, as well as the core of his messages. He preached the Cross to all people regardless of their status in life: to politicians, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, church members and church leaders alike. He emphasised Jesus as the only redeemer. He declared war on crime, ancestor worship and superstition. The healing ministry he exercised was to authenticate the power and existence of God.

Bhengu was an accomplished Storyteller. He prepared his sermons with anecdotes that helped him get his message across to the people. He understood the psycho-social and cultural needs of his audiences. He called people to go back to God. He was not judgemental in his preaching. He invited drunks, boyfriends or girlfriends, the sick and criminals to come to his meetings as they were. He trusted the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to change their lives once they were there. That is how he himself was converted. He had gone with his girlfriend to a meeting in Kimberly, where God transformed him.

Above all, Bhengu depended on prayer and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in his preaching ministry. He was an anointed man of God.

The evangelist

As an evangelist, Bhengu pioneered tent evangelism in South Africa. He travelled around the country preaching from his huge marquee tent in cities, towns and rural communities. His crusades were highly successful. Hundreds of thousands of people gave their lives to Christ. Starting from Port Elizabeth, in 1945, he moved to East London from where he launched the BTG Crusade organisation. The East London crusades were so effective that on one occasion, in one day, he baptised 1300 converts. In his crusades, Bhengu addressed crime. Many people returned stolen goods which were taken to the police in truck loads. In many cases, Bhengu would be accompanied by the perpetrators of crime, who were willing to face prosecution at the hands of the law.

The BTG Crusade was used by Bhengu to plant churches, hundreds of which were planted throughout South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia. Bhengu was serious about his reports to his donors. He wrote quarterly reports on what was happening at each tent campaign. Reports to white churches were organised by Noel Scheepers. Scheepers also organised a special meeting in East London for Bhengu to address his donors about the status of the work. Bhengu's first official report was probably written in Port Elizabeth, on 10 February 1948. In true Pauline style, Bhengu mentions his companions Gumede, Dlamini, Ngcobo and Burman (1 Cor 16:20; Phlp 4:21–23).

Bhengu had a passion for souls and empathy for his audience. In one of his letters to his BTG Crusade friends, dated 01 November 1967, Bhengu makes a deep plea citing urgency for assistance to help spread the Gospel saying:

> I am writing this letter, therefore to reach those whose hearts have been touched by God, 1 Samuel 10:26–27; that God may set them

> aflame as He had done with me. The zeal for revival in Africa and the whole world has consumed my soul. (n.p.)

Bhengu explained the Gospel in simple language so that people could understand. He wanted to see people throwing away the burden of sin. He was critical of missionaries who made it difficult for converts to do so. He once told Schlosser (in Hollenweger 1972):

> The white Protestant missionaries definitely give a false interpretation of the Bible 'when they always drag the burden of sin around with them'. This is a doctrine of which as Africans they can make nothing. For the white Missionaries easily conclude that the Blacks have to bend their backs to carry the burden of sin laid upon them. (p. 129)

The idea is also expressed in the testimonies made at conversion (Hollenweger 1972):

> Today I believe in the existence of God Almighty and I fear him, for I have learnt that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I am no longer what I used to be, *udlalani*, an aimless lover of women. (p. 129)

Because of the impact of his BTG Crusade, Bhengu was often called 'the Billy Graham of Africa'. This is how a journalist, writing for the American newsmagazine *Time*, put it (*Time magazine,* 23 November 1959):

> One of the strongest Christian influences in Africa is a 50-year-old Zulu with a pencil-line moustache and horn-rimmed spectacles who has a knack of persuading criminals to turn in their weapons and often themselves. Wearing a dark business suit, the Rev. Nicholas Bhengu stands on a packing case platform and says quietly in Zulu: 'Ubugebengu abukhokheli lutho' (crime does not pay). There is movement in the crowd, especially among the young toughs in ducktail haircuts, dungarees and safari jackets. 'Nikelani izikhali zenu nani kuNkulunkulu' (surrender your arms and yourself to God). He continues, and a pile begins to grow at his feet, knives, blackjacks, brass knuckles (blacks were forbidden to own fire carted arms), and quantities of stolen goods. At one meeting police carted away three van loads, and it is not usual for Evangelist Bhengu to end up by walking down to the police station hand in hand with someone on the wanted list. (p. 56)

It was inevitable that Bhengu became known throughout Africa as the Black Billy Graham – although his manner and technique

were quite unlike Graham's. He used no publicity or promotion to advertise his campaigns, and his only assistance was a ten-member choir of amateurs supplied by the churches of his mission. His platform presence was almost subdued. But whether he was talking to black audiences or white audiences, Bhengu wove a spell no less effective than Billy's. *Time's* reporter continued (*Time magazine,* 23 November 1959):

> Last week Bhengu was busy in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. Whites jam packed Salisbury's Methodist Hall to hear him tell them, in precise English, what was wrong with white Christianity: 'The greatest dangers in Africa today are Communism and Islam'. Both offer the African equality. The churches are divided. There are too many and their different dogmas and doctrines are too confusing for Africans. Christianity has failed in India and China because Christians have failed to live up to Christ's teaching, and in Africa it's proving an empty shell for the same reason [...]. (p. 56)

Although Bhengu did not enjoy the luxury of the American evangelists' organisational capabilities such as television, worldwide networks, financial muscle and the equipment available to Billy Graham at his headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee, I visited in November 1986, Bhengu was able to do a lot for his Lord with whatever little resources he had at his disposal. Another significant difference between Bhengu and Billy Graham is that Graham was an itinerant evangelist. He worked with and valued partner churches to take care of his converts, to accept them in their congregations and to build them up in their faith. Although Bhengu also started as an itinerant evangelist, he started planting new churches as early as 1943. He used the churches that he established to conserve the results of his crusades. These churches were to be the launching pads for further missionary outreaches in the area.

The strategist

Bhengu registered the BTG Crusade as a Section 21 company (*Companies Act* No. 61, of 1973: Registration No 21/76/22) in order to be able to raise funds from individuals, groups of people

or organisations. Most of his financial support came from the women in the church, followed by the White Assemblies of God Churches. Occasionally, he would go overseas, especially to the USA to raise funds for his evangelistic campaigns. It was while he was in the USA on one of his fundraising trips that he saw a vision about organising women back home to raise money for the BTG Crusade.

Bhengu developed strategies to empower different groups in the church: women, men, youth and girls to be self-sufficient. He also established policies and procedures for good governance in his churches. He assigned responsibilities for each group or department in the church. The project was initiated by Bhengu and his first wife Mylet. In 1961, they were assisted by other women, Sikiti, Buthelezi and Mngoma. Later the team was enlarged to include Moduka and Qina. A total of R2000 was collected at the first Mother's Convention in 1969, in Bloemfontein. The amount of money raised is used to buy equipment such as tents, tracks, chairs and generators and to support crusade workers. Women continued to raise more money. In 2010, they collected R11 million, and a further R22 million in 2018. He divided the country into regions, and each region brought their bags to Thaba Nchu over the Easter Holidays.

Women were assigned the responsibility of raising funds for BTG Crusade. Women caught Bhengu's vision of the evangelisation of Africa from Cape to Cairo. Each local assembly had a women's committee responsible for organising the spiritual well-being of women and raising of funds for the BTG Crusade and skills development. Organisers were trained to visit local churches and regions to teach and encourage women to stay focused on Bhengu's original vision. Supervisors operated at the national level. In local churches, the women were supported by the whole church.

A similar strategy for *men* was devised. They were also organised at local, regional and national level. Their mandate was to raise money to build churches. They also took money to Thaba Nchu during the Christmas season. The projects assisted churches

to buy land and to build their own churches without having to go to the bank to borrow money, something that Bhengu was adverse to. He wanted the church to be debt-free. Men also had special services, once a week, where they met for fellowship. They taught one another about how to be good spouses and parents, and how to help manage church affairs. Young men joined the senior men to learn how they should look after their families when they get married.

Bhengu's people built their churches themselves, without any money from overseas or borrowings from banks. Bhengu wanted his people to be proud for doing things for themselves. This motivated congregations to work together by encouraging and assisting each other, and by lending a helping hand to sister churches.

Bhengu believed in the *youth*. They were the future leaders of this country. For Bhengu, it was important that the youth be developed spiritually, physically, emotionally and intellectually, if they were to become well-rounded individuals and builders of the nation.

The youth were also organised in the same pattern as women and men. Their responsibility was to raise funds and to assist young people who went to tertiary institutions with bursaries. Education boards received and evaluated applications and disbursed money to deserving students. Bhengu's vision with the bursaries was to provide quality education to young people who eventually would take up leadership positions in society, once democracy arrived. Some of the young people who benefited from the fund include Vusi Mona, who serves as the spokesperson of South African National Roads Agency, previously was at Government Communications Information Services, The Presidency of Republic of South Africa; Prof. Honey Mabuza, Professor of Family Medicine at Sefako Makgatho Medical University, Pretoria; Apostle Mxolisi Lephoko, who established a thriving church called Church On The Hill in Nelspruit; and Dr Cuthbert Chidoori of Zimbabwe. There are many others around

the country working in government, in business, and some of them are in politics, who also have benefited from Bhengu's bursary scheme.

Girls had the responsibility to furnish mission houses. They had special services on Wednesday evenings in which they received spiritual teaching and collected money for their project. The funds were also collected at Thaba Nchu over the Christmas weekend.

The churches that were planted were governed by pastors, elders and deacons. They gave oversight to all matters relating to the church. Church governance was paramount in Bhengu's mind. Church money was to be protected and used according to policy and procedure agreed to and as directed by Bhengu. Money was to be collected and counted by at least three people (deacons) before the congregation and banked on the first business day of the week. A bank slip was produced to the church on Sunday for examination by members of the church, to satisfy them that the money was safely banked. Three signatories were required for cheque payments. Bhengu's signature was the control signature, the other two representing the local church. To set an example to others, those who collected money had first to put their own money on the table. If they declined, they were prohibited to receive the collection from the people.

The prophet

Bhengu was a prophet called by God to proclaim the message of salvation to all people. He testified before great and small, to kings, to political leaders, to scholars at Cambridge and Oxford and to hundreds of thousands across the globe. He had one message to all of them: 'Christ is the only Saviour'. His approach was in the Pauline style of presenting Christ (Ac 26):

> (19)So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. (20)First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. (21)That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried

> to kill me. (22)But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen (23)that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles. (v. 19–23)

He stood for what he believed God had sent him to do. He did not flow with the tide. He actually swam against it, despite all criticism levelled against him by those who felt he should join the struggle and fight apartheid from the pulpit and support the armed struggle. For a self-confessed Evangelical and Pentecostal, he did not shy away from speaking about sociopolitical matters – something many of his colleagues never dared to do. Bhengu criticised the Nationalist government openly as seen from the *Daily Dispatch* newspapers. He preached the Word as per Paul's instruction (2 Tm 4):

> (1)[/]n season and out of season In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: (2)Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. (3)For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (4)They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (5)But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (vv. 1–5)

According to Hugh Wetmore, retired missionary and lecturer at the Union Bible College in Pietermaritzburg, 'Bhengu did not compromise on sin, he called sin, sin. He held up high the flag of evangelism in South Africa when it was not popular to do so' (Wetmore pers. comm., 09 January 2009).

Balcomb (in Ranger ed. 2008) says:

> Although Bhengu did not enter the struggle against apartheid on a political level, it is clear that his ministry had profound effects on apartheid. That he bequeathed a moral and social legacy affecting the future of democracy indeed, one that helped prepare the way for democracy is clear. Individuals converted to evangelical Christianity

> through the BTG movement populate every sector of black society: teachers, lawyers, traders, clerks, businessmen, gardeners, and even politicians. Bhengu's teaching emphasises the pre-eminent existence of a transcendent reality that relativises the material realm, centralises spiritual values, exalts the dignity of the individual, and compels political reflection to imagine radical alternatives. (p. 212)

From the above, it is clear that Bhengu's legacy as a prophet will last for a long time. He was a man who was willing to stand alone. In response to Lawrence Tutu's criticism, he charged Tutu as a man with 'no scruples for the church' and that his theological ideas 'were questionable and boarded on modernism'. He committed himself to continue with what he was doing by saying:

> I am a Christian first of all, I am a brother to all men of goodwill, irrespective of tribe, ethnicity, colour, political or denominational affiliation. Tutu and the venom in the press will not change me one iota. (n.p.)

Bhengu was a man of conviction. He was not ashamed of the Gospel he preached. He was under an obligation to preach it to all people:

> That is why I am so eager to preach the Gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith' (Rm 1:14–18).
>
> When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Cor 2:1–5).

The ecumenist

Bhengu was an ecumenist at heart – although he did have a theological difference with the WCC for their support in the

armed struggle. He also had problems with liberal theology which, in his opinion, placed Jesus on par with other founders of religions such as Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius. As a true evangelist, he rejected any notion that there could be salvation without Christ. He further called upon African Christians to reject Western secular philosophies. He emphasised 'Jesus is God, Jesus is King and Jesus is the only Saviour!'

Despite all his concerns, he still supported ecumenism and reached out and related to Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches alike. In a 1968 BTG Report, Bhengu was delighted with his contact with other denominations and reported:

> After the great crusade in Johannesburg, I left at the end of April 1968 for Canada and the United States, where I was a convention guest speaker at the People's Church in Toronto Canada. Space will not allow me to give a full report of what I saw in that great church, with no branches, just one church supporting over 300 missionaries in many countries. For the first time in the history of that church, its magazine will feature names of three African workers. They will support these workers for one full year and the $1200.00 has been sent to our office already for monthly allotments. In Los Angeles at the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International World Convention I saw what I had never expected to see in this life. I saw Anglican bishops, Roman Catholic priests, nuns and university professors of theology, Doctors of Divinity, judges, attorneys and celebrities from all walks of life. These all have had a touch of Charismatic revival with real experience of glossolalia (speaking in tongues), no sophist or sceptic could easily dismiss this from such learned men and women of our modern times. There is definitely a new move by laymen. This is real ecumenism brought about by similar deep experience of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. (n.p.)

Bhengu was involved in a large number of ecumenical initiatives, in South Africa, African continent and the wider world. His presence at PACLA (Nairobi 1976) and SACLA (Pretoria 1979) was deeply appreciated by representatives of many denominations. His support of para-church organisations, such as AE and CCC, was an encouragement to many of his colleagues.

The leader

Bhengu was not an easy man to understand. He was a man who depended on the Spirit most of the time. He would say that when God told him to change direction, he would do so without any hesitation and would apologise to his people for having taken a certain course.

- Bhengu was a powerful leader. When convinced of the leading of the Spirit, he would let no one convince him otherwise. A typical example is that no politician, including liberation leaders or government officials, would get him to toe the line. He was very assertive and did not gladly accommodate adversaries. He did not try to carry favour with anybody. Like Paul, Bhengu could say, 'Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ' (Gl 1:10).
- Bhengu was an African leader to the core. He tried to blend his culture with the Bible in his preaching and teaching. In 1955, Bhengu had demanded that Africans should lead the Church's work in Africa. This was two years before the independence of Ghana, the first African country to receive independence from Britain, its former colonial power. He said that Africans had no desire to lead the whole church, but 'we want to accomplish what no other man will accomplish in Africa, but the Africans' (Bhengu 10 October 1955). Bhengu was an Africanist. But as a Christian, he promoted an Africanism that accommodated other people in the country, which reached out to all human beings around the world. He was in agreement with Steve Biko (1972) who spoke of black consciousness as the process that makes a man see himself as being complete in himself. 'It makes him less dependent and more free to express his manhood' (Biko 1972:92). In his quest to promote African leadership, he instituted a bursary fund for young men and women to study at tertiary institutions to prepare them for leadership, to rediscover their African identity. As far as Western missionaries were concerned, he did not call for a moratorium, for missionaries to go home, but assigned to them the responsibility to teach and empower

African workers, to be able to take the lead. His dream for Africans to take leadership in Africa has since come true in the church, in government and in civil society.

- Bhengu was a visionary leader. A leader was once cautioned: 'Do not walk ahead of me, I may not be following. Do not follow me for I may not be leading. Walk alongside me and be my friend'. Leadership is about building harmonious relations with those you lead. It is also about walking alongside the people that you are leading (Lephoko 2001:98). Do not disappear out of their sight. This was the way Bhengu led his people.

Visionary leader

It has already been stated elsewhere in this book that Bhengu had a vision of reaching all of Africa for Christ. Indeed, he travelled to many parts of Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria, and planted churches in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho and Botswana. Bhengu (*Fellowship magazine*, September–December 1955) said:

> We want to evangelise before these threatening powers of darkness swallow the sub-continent. A powerless church, broken fragmentary kind of movement whose groups are disunited, who hate, fight and devour one another and are split into factions, will neither impress the world nor bring an impact to the dark continent. Fear grips the missionaries and many denominations as they see the inevitable birth of a National Movement. Distrust and suspicion rule in some quarters. Africans pose as friends of the missionaries and carry false news and subvert everything and destroy everything we are trying to build for the church in Africa. We visualise therefore, a united church with autonomous Assemblies throughout the country. Assemblies well taught in the doctrines of the Bible, whose monies are kept in order by the elected officers of the Assemblies and books kept in order so that the African leaders will be debarred from becoming capitalists by taking all the money to themselves. Where the workers are supported by the Assemblies and everything goes through the hands and books of the church. Where there will be scope for white South African Students to minister but not to lead, and permanent scope for foreign missionaries as we shall always need them. Today the missionary must take heed and not impede

> or frustrate this move but rather cooperate with us and assist us toward the goal. (n.p.)

As a visionary leader, Bhengu was able to motivate and build teams, but he led the charge. He motivated women who caught his vision to raise money for the evangelisation of Africa. He constantly kept the vision of reaching Africa driven by the slogan 'Africa BTG: Africa for Jesus and Jesus for Africa'. He organised and built teams to accomplish his goal: evangelists, women, men, girls and youth all rallied behind this goal.

Shawchuck and Heuser (1993) say the following about a vision:

> There are, however, not two but three dimensions of a vision for ministry. The vision gives (1) new insight into the glory and grandeur of God – an 'upward' view of God - and (2) new insight into the severe limitations of oneself - an 'inward' view of the self. The perspective becomes three-dimensional if the vision (3) gives new insight into how things might be - an 'outward' view of circumstances - as our ministries might influence them. A three-dimensional vision is the 'impossible dream', in which God is dreaming God's dream in the heart of those who are called to lead. Such 'vision' requires a particular 'eyesight' that does not match the seeing of those who are not thus 'sighted'. So they tend to label the one with vision as crazy or dangerous or harmless but 'blind' to reality. (pp. 70–71)

This consuming vision that Bhengu had was not always shared by expatriate missionaries and politicians. It was often the cause for their unrelenting criticism of him, labelling him as crazy, dangerous and blind to reality. He complained of being 'misconstrued, misunderstood and misinterpreted'.

However, it is true that Bhengu, once convinced of the way he had to take, would not let anyone stand in his way even though it might cause hurts along the way, notably among missionaries and some white people in the church.

☐ Servant leader

Servant leadership is a big challenge to Christian leaders. When men rise above their equals, the temptation to lord over them

becomes enticing. In recent times, successful Christian leaders are called by names that would have caused Bhengu some concern, such as 'the spiritual eagle' and many others. Some of the great men of God have their Bibles carried for them by assistants, as they escort them to the pulpit.

Jesus warned (Mk 10) his disciples against becoming lords of the people:

> (42)[...]You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them (43)not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, (44)and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. (45)For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many. (vv. 42–45)

Peter echoed his master's words in admonishing church leaders not to lord it over those God has appointed to them to lead. They must not be greedy for money. They must be humble, 'humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time' (1 Pt 5:1–6).

In spite of his very strong personality, Bhengu was a true, humble, servant who tried to serve his people. He was not greedy for money. In May 1985, I flew to East London to see Bhengu. I went to ask him to serve on our Life Ministry Board (CCC of South Africa) of which at the time I was the national director. He agreed to serve on the Board but asked that I arrange a meeting with the board member so that they could reconcile. When that board member turned down my mediation efforts, I told Bhengu that neither would serve on the Board. Bhengu graciously accepted my decision. He exhibited a spirit of humility and servanthood. We talked till about midnight. Bhengu (Lephoko & Bhengu pers. comm., n.d.) said to me:

> Dan, I have suffered a lot in my life. I was poor, so money has no meaning to me except that I use it to do God's work and not for personal gain. (n.p.)

At conferences and conventions, he would walk around to ensure people were well served even to the extent of checking the menu. In his book, *The Master Plan of Teaching* (1990), Matt Friedman speaks of the servant as the wise fool:

> There is perhaps no better way to describe the servant-teacher. First of all, he is 'foolish' enough to take Jesus' advice to heart. He truly desires to emulate the Master: washing his students' feet, laying down his own life for the lives and careers of his disciples, taking up his cross daily and following after the dreams of God. Let's face it, in they, short haul those choices seem rather foolish. Your friends and family, probably just like Jesus', tell you to wake up and be sensible – save your life for something better, go for the gusto, climb the corporate ladder, make some real money, choose a more profitable profession, or set your own agenda. (p. 152)

This is what we will remember Nicholas Bhengu for. He was in all respects a servant leader, the man who was foolish enough, to take Jesus' advice and Jesus' example to heart.

Nicholas Bhengu was indeed the Billy Graham of Africa. He accomplished much for his Lord, for the Church and for the continent of Africa. Through his work, he lifted the lives of ordinary people *and* established links with leaders in high places. He prepared Africans for the dawn of democracy in South Africa. He was a great apostle, a prophet and an evangelist. The call for Africa to go back to God still rings out in the townships and in the mountains.

With all his successes, Bhengu was still human, with faults and frailties like all of us. He was intolerant of people who differed with his vision. The way he organised his work was one of the causes for missionaries and for some white and black churches to leave the Assemblies of God. One such instance was the Cyara Conference (1981) where he canvassed his followers to vote for Bond, in an attempt to change the constitution. The appointment of elders and deacons into life positions in the church is another such instance. Because of old age, some of the men have lost their sharpness of mind and are unable to respond to the changing situation currently in our country.

But in the end, Paul's words to Timothy (2 Tm 4) are appropriate in describing Bhengu's ministry:

> I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, when the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing. (v. 7)

I can hear the Lord saying to the man that he had called, many years ago, who had travelled the world over for his master: 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness' (Mt 25:21).

The church

Money

Bond attests to how strict Bhengu was in handling of church finances, 'I found Nicholas Bhengu meticulous in money matters' (Bond 2000:66). How Bhengu perceived how money should be handled is seen in a circular extract he sent to all assemblies, pastors and district councils (Bond 2000):

> *Finances:* (1) All finances are in the hands of each Assembly fully and completely on behalf of God and Assembly. The Elders and Deacons may not dispose of any funds without consultations with the Assembly. God's money must do God's work and never lent to anybody for any business whatsoever. This must be well understood while I am alive. (2) Money is the cause of all Church splits and fights. Our principles and methods are unique. Those who go against them desire to spend and abuse God's money from the people who are so poor and needy. Raise money and bank it according to procedure and do not spend that money, it is God's money and not yours. Let us not be hasty, let us do things orderly and decently in all honesty and love. I am waiting [*sic*] these to remain as guide-lines for your future after my departure. (p. 66, *emphasis in original*)

In addition, Bhengu created income and expenditure forms (i.e. A1 and A2 Forms) for financial control and accountability in the local assemblies.

Prayer

Dubb (1976) observed:

> Bhengu and his ministers teach that prayer is not simply a formality but rather an essential means of communication with God through which the believer may obtain God's guidance, receive His blessing

> and ensure the fulfilment of his own needs and desires. [...] the evidence offered in support of this confidence in the power of prayer is believed to be irrefutable. (p. 123)

In all Bhengu's assemblies, Mondays were set aside for prayer and fasting. The power with which Bhengu ministered shows that he believed in the power of prayer and communion with the person and operation of the Holy Spirit. After his experience of Baptism in the Holy Spirit, in his sermons he would speak of being filled with the Holy Spirit and reliance in the Holy Spirit.

The Assemblies of God

Historical and structural formation

In 1908, Mr A.E. Turney and his wife started missionary work among Africans and established a mission station in rural Doornkop, Mpumalanga, among the Pedi-speaking people. This work later came to be known as Assemblies of God. Unlike the Apostolic Faith Church, which started as a white church and started daughter churches among black people, people of mixed race and others, the Assemblies of God on the other hand began as an African church. Pentecostal workers and members of Assemblies of God from many parts of the USA came together in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914 to formally establish the Assemblies of God. In 1925, in South Africa, Assemblies of God was formed as the South African District Council, to represent groups of American, British and South African missionaries. It was registered with the South African government in 1917 by Mr Turney.

Later, early missionaries were joined by others such as H.C. Phillips (British) and John. S. Richards (from the USA) who was later appointed the general superintendent in South Africa by the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the USA. C. Austin Chawner from Canada had by this time also joined the Assemblies of God. In 1928, Chawner was elected secretary of the AGSA (Upton 1972).

These were some of the Pentecostal missionary boards that were doing work in South Africa, and with the approval of their

boards, they joined hands to work under the umbrella of the Assemblies of God. This arrangement was ideal for Bhengu as it would later allow him to organise and develop his work the way he thought best. In a letter dated 26 July 1955 to Mrs Larsen, a retired missionary with the Emmanuel Mission at Komatipoort who was then living in England, Phillips explained to her the reasons for joining the Assemblies of God in 1938.

Bhengu's contribution

It is important to evaluate Bhengu's contribution as missionary, evangelist and church planter. It will be attempted by looking through three lenses at Bhengu's work: by comparing Bhengu's methods of church planting to those of Paul, by testing his work against the so-called seven I's programme and by evaluating the results of his church planting in terms of the classical 'Three Selves' ideal of building self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches in the world.

Hesselgrave's 'Pauline Cycle of Church Planting'

Hesselgrave (1980) designed what he called '[t]he Pauline Cycle of Church Planting for the USA and overseas'. He postulates 10 steps, namely, (1) missionaries commissioned, (2) audience contacted, (3) Gospel communicated, (4) hearers converted, (5) believers congregated, (6) faith confirmed, (7) leaders consecrated, (8) believers commended, (9) relationships continued and (10) sending churches convened (Hesselgrave 1980:58–59).

Bhengu complied with all 10 requirements of church planting set out by Hesselgrave. A comparison of the criteria proposed by Hesselgrave and Bhengu's strategy is presented in Table 12.1.

The grid of 'The Seven I's'

Piet Meiring (in Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman 1994:48–53) asks the question: 'How missionary is the church?' He sets forth what he calls *The Seven I's Programme*, a tool that can be used to diagnose the missionary programme for the church.

TABLE 12.1: A comparison of the criteria proposed by Hesselgrave in 'The Pauline Cycle of Church Planting for the USA and overseas' and Bhengu's strategy.

Cycle	Hesselgrave strategy	Bhengu's strategy
1	Missionaries commissioned	He was commissioned by God to preach the Gospel through which he would deliver his people from the bondage of sin. This is how he explained it, according to Dubb (Dubb 1976:10): 'The Lord explained to me that I was authorised to serve Him, but I did not know how to go about it. He showed me a great ocean to which He brought me. There I heard the voices of many people crying in fear of death. They were all under the water and their hands and feet were bound with chains. But they were trying to set themselves free. They all had black faces. When I listened I noticed that one could hear their voices. They were speaking in all African languages and dialects, and yet I was able to understand them all. They were all pointing at me for I was standing on dry land, and said: "We are dying, we are dying. We are perishing. Help us out of here". I felt a great sympathy and wanted to help them all out of there. But they were as many as the sands on the seashore. The more that I tried to help them the more I sank into the water. Bewildered I called on the Lord. Jesus appeared and lifted me out. He showed me an open Bible and said: This is the Word of Life; study this Word, and through the words of this book you will break these fetters and free your people from the chains of sin, in which they have been bound for centuries. I wish you to do this.'
2	Audience contacted	Audiences were contacted by way of notices setting out crusade meetings, venues, dates, time and the nature of messages that were to be preached during the crusade(s).
3	Gospel communicated	He preached and explained the way of salvation in a manner that the educated and unschooled could understand. He had thousands of people converted during his meetings and new converts were organised under a local leadership church structure where they would be looked after and discipled. These churches became sending churches. Mature believers were taught to witness for Christ both in word and deed. They were challenged to talk about Christ in the buses, trains, streets, school and workplaces.
4	Hearers converted	Although it is not possible to estimate how many people came to Christ each evening or at each crusade; hundreds if not thousands came to Christ at each of Bhengu's campaigns. In January 1956 at his Nelspruit campaign, the church had to be extended to accommodate the people. Many hung in windows to hear Bhengu. In East London more than 3000 converts were baptised in one day.
5	Believers congregated	New converts were introduced to existing churches, where none existed new churches were established. A pastor or a spiritual leader would be appointed to care for the young Christians.

Table 12.1 continues on the next page →

TABLE 12.1 (Continues...): A comparison of the criteria proposed by Hesselgrave in 'The Pauline Cycle of Church Planting for the USA and overseas' and Bhengu's strategy.

Cycle	Hesselgrave strategy	Bhengu's strategy
6	Faith confirmed	Teaching and disciplining of converts took place in groups, for example, mothers, girls, youth and men. In these groups and in Bible study groups, young Christians were introduced to the new Life in Christ. They were built up in their new-found faith (Makinana).
7	Leaders consecrated	Leaders were appointed to shepherd the flock, for example, elders and deacons were organised or church committees were elected to guide the church so that there was permanency.
8	Believers commended	Believers who showed leadership capabilities or potential were challenged to take up responsibilities under the leadership of local assemblies. A large number of disciples answered the call to serve the Lord in full-time ministry or in various capacities in the church and community. Some of them became youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, women's group leaders and so on. Many shared their new-found faith on buses, in the streets and on trains.
9	Relationships continued	Relationships were built across the board among the youth, women, men and those in leadership in the churches. Relationships were continually strengthened through teaching, in worship and witnessing. Local, district, regional, provincial and national structures were established for his purpose. Local, regional, provincial and national meetings were arranged for various groups to strengthen or foster relationships.
10	Sending churches convened	Bhengu's churches were all taught to give to mission and evangelism. Churches sent out evangelists, pastors and lady ministers into the world to preach the Gospel. Port Elizabeth and East London became the hub of Bhengu's ministry in the area of sending workers into the field. People donated clothing and other belongings to the church to raise funds for evangelism. The Siteki Church in Swaziland was the first to send money to Bhengu in Port Elizabeth in 1945; it sent money to support him. The churches raised what is known as the campaign fund. These monies were collected every Monday at prayer meetings. Members were encouraged to skip their Monday lunch, save the money they would have bought lunch with and give that to the Monday campaign fund for the spreading of the Gospel.

- Inspiration. Inspiration starts with the pastor in his sermons and home visits by getting the missionary message to his congregation. Bhengu provided his churches with his vision to reach the world for Christ. He inspired them so that they gave money to the BTG Crusade. Mondays were set aside for fasting and intercessory prayer and for taking the campaign offering.

- Information. Information is key to get the local church involved in mission work. Bhengu provided his people with information regarding the need to reach the unreached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of this information was given at conferences, conventions and ministers' fellowships through teaching and mobilisation of the whole church.
- Interpretation. Interpretation is to interpret God's demand on both the vertical and horizontal levels. Bhengu excelled in his interpretation of the vertical message and challenged people to be reconciled to God. His messages were so powerful that people turned to God in large numbers. On the horizontal level, he saw criminals return stolen goods to the police. Wherever he preached crime came down dramatically. He stayed clear of party political involvement, believing that his messages were meant for politicians. Despite lack of focused direct political involvement, he did preach against structural oppression and racial discrimination.
- Involvement. Bhengu taught and encouraged his people to get involved in the day-to-day needs of the people in the community, by helping their neighbours. Unfortunately, not many of the people were involved in the alleviation of poverty within their communities, especially through work done by non-government organisations.
- Instruction. Bhengu was heavily involved in training women and girls in his church. Women and girls were trained in sewing, baking, home management and so on, while men were equipped with business skills. Study bursaries were provided for the youth with the aim of preparing them for leadership roles in the new South Africa for which he laboured in hope; it was also the case in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. He did not live to see the advent of democracy in South Africa, however (Heb 11: 13–16): 'All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them'.

- Investment. Bhengu mobilised women to raise funds for the BTG Crusade. These funds were used to buy tents and trucks and provide stipends for the evangelists and their families. The finances were properly audited and reported at annual Easter conventions in Thaba Nchu.
- Intercession. Every Monday was set aside for intercessory prayer. Members were encouraged to fast for the day and pray together for the salvation of those outside Christ. They also collected campaign money for the BTG Crusade.

The 'Three Selves'

Bhengu modelled his church organisation and church government in line with the Three Selves (Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman 1994:7–8, cf. Venn 1998 and Anderson)

Since the 19th century, the ideal of the Three Selves of planting self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches gained wide acceptance in Protestant mission circles. Bhengu indeed succeeded in planting churches that were self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. In his address to the Assemblies of God Conference at Witbank, 10 October 1955, he said, 'I want to teach our men to raise funds and finance every programme themselves'.

Although not all Bhengu's churches were set up with elders and deacons, the churches that did not have elders and deacons were constituted with church committees who oversaw the work of the church.

This system allowed for churches to elect their own leaders. Elders and deacons were elected for life unless they were found guilty of immoral behaviour or were totally inept in the discharge of their duties.

The elections of elders and deacons were conducted by the BTG Teaching Team, Teaching, a body established by Bhengu in 1977, while the elections of church leaders were conducted by men's organisers.

Develop young church leaders

Both in Swaziland and Zimbabwe, Bhengu set himself to raise young leaders to lead the church in the future.

In Swaziland, his strategy was informed by the political situation in South Africa. He was concerned that the South African government might ban Swaziland nationals from entering South Africa which would affect the development of the work in that country. Swaziland was used by South African liberation struggle activists as a transit to countries that offered them military training for the liberation of South Africa from the apartheid regime. These included among others members of uMkhonto weSizwe (ANC's military wing) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army.

Bhengu spent considerable time in that country training future leaders who would continue with the work if they were barred from entering South Africa. In the words of one of the leaders, 'Bhengu did not come to Swaziland to deal with conflict as was the case in South Africa but to develop us' (Ndimandze pers. comm., 12 January 2017).

The success of the strategy can be attested to by the fact that leaders from Swaziland have occupied the position of Regional Chairmanship of South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, including Swaziland, since the death of Bhengu in 1985:

1986–2006: Isaac Hleta. He died in office.
2007–2011: Ernest Hlophe. Hlophe also served as Hleta's deputy.
2011–2013: Victor Nkomonde (South African) became chairperson but lost to Osborn Hleta in 2013.
2013 – Osborn Hleta, current chairperson.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe was unique in that from the onset of the establishment of the Zimbabwe work, Bhengu groomed young leaders who served as organisers of youth work. He spent a great deal of time

with them sometimes into late hours of the night. They include Dr Cuthbert Chidoori, national chairman; Mathamsanqa Dube; Billy Mpofu; Nathan Setlhako; and others. In South Africa, Bhengu's time was to a degree consumed with trying to fend off attacks from missionaries and African people within the church who did not share his vision for the evangelisation of Africa led by Africans.

In Zimbabwe, Bhengu played a servant leadership role. Although Bhengu was the founder and member of the National Executive, he allowed the Zimbabwean nationals to chair their meetings. He gave them full autonomy as a country.

Dearth of leadership in South Africa

Although South Africa gave birth to Swaziland and Zimbabwe, South Africa has failed to produce national leaders of the calibre of those found in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Victor Nkomonde is the only South African who served one term as chairman.

It is possible to deduce that the effects of apartheid's Bantu education could have stunted the development of black people in the country as a result of which strong church leaders could not be developed.

Apart from the crippling effects of apartheid on African people in South Africa, lack of quality leadership among South Africans in Bhengu's work can also be ascribed to a lack of a desire to give leadership in the work as they feel inadequate for the task. 'It is any trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do' (1 Tm 3:1).

The South African church has acquiesced to the fact that it will perpetually be led from the Kingdom of Swaziland. This has been the case for 33 years. The situation is more dire for countries with small church membership: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia. As a result, the possibility that Regional leaders

who can lead the work will emerge from these countries is unlikely.

In South Africa, future generations of black children were to be relegated to the status of drawers of water and hewers of wood. Verwoerd went on to say (Suzman 1993):

> What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? What is the use of subjecting a Native child to a curriculum which in the first instance is traditionally European? I just want to remind Honourable Members that if the Native inside South Africa today in any kind of school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. (p. 35)

Lephoko in his book *A Guide to Dynamic Youth Leadership – A Challenge to the Church* (2001) says:

> In South Africa the greatest need is the development of leaders especially among black people. It is disappointing to watch white churches plunder township churches by bussing out young black intellectuals and business people to their stained glass windows sanctuaries in Randburg and Pretoria. (p. 96)

Expatriate missionaries

Addressing an Assemblies of God conference from the National Church Thesis, Bhengu read from Matthew 28:19: 'Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost'. Bhengu (pers. comm., n.d.) continued:

> This is a unique privilege for me to present to the Assemblies of God conference my whole vision and commission. I have been greatly misunderstood and grossly misinterpreted, sad to say mostly by my own African people who in turn misinformed the missionaries whose labours of love and self-denial have made me what I am. After hearing what I am going to say, I am sure every fog which has been created by such unscrupulous workers who delight in breaking up all the efforts we are making for the unity of the work God and mutual understanding between white and non-white Christians will be eliminated or reduced to the minimum. I am naturally not an

> ambiguous man and desire to be an open book to all. What I am about to say is my entire soul, the very bowels of my entire being. (Bhengu Assemblies of God 10 October 1955). (1) Missionaries encouraged multiplicity of assemblies in some locations resulting in weakening of our forces. (2) They do not understand the African mind. (3) Missionaries give power or assistance to start conflicting work against the mother Assembly. (4) Africans find pleasure in fighting missionaries. (5) Some missionaries frightened by useless friends (African) spread doctrines of multiplicity of assemblies in one area. (n.p.)

Lloyd-Jones (in Stott 1975) says:

> The hospital does not, cannot and never will be able to take over the functions of the church! It is quite impossible for it to do so [...] The authentic task of the Church is not primarily to make people healthy [...] her essential task is to restore men to the right relationship with God [...] Man's real problem is not simply that he is sick, but that he is a rebel. (p. 87)

Evangelism is to bring about specific changes, to renounce evidences of domination of sin in our lives and to accept responsibilities in terms of God's love for our neighbour. It is the 'total transformation of our attitude' and styles of life (Costas, in Bosch 1991:413).

From the very beginning of his ministry with the Assemblies of God, Bhengu asserted his leadership within the Assemblies of God. He wanted to lead his own work within what he called the federal system of the Assemblies of God without interference from white people and missionaries.

Watt reports that Bhengu's stance towards missionaries made the missionaries unhappy, especially the Americans. The Americans wanted to see the Assemblies of God in South Africa organised along the American Assemblies of God lines. This was rejected by other missionary bodies including white South African church leaders. Watt (1992) says:

> Experiences like these made the missionaries feel that Nicholas Bhengu was becoming dictatorial and that he wanted them to take a back seat. Any leadership they had was being challenged. (pp. 62–63)

Bhengu's strategy was 'only Africans can reach Africans'. According to Bond, the Americans were bent on restricting Bhengu to work in the Eastern Cape by dividing South Africa into regions, each being led by a superintendent who would give permission to evangelists wanting to do work in other regions. This proposal was rejected by the General Executive (Bond 2000:192–193).

Bhengu's problems with the expatriate missionaries started very early in his work in Benoni on the East Rand, Transvaal (now Gauteng). Bhengu wrote two letters to his friend, Gideon Buthelezi. In the first letter, Bhengu urges Buthelezi to come to Benoni and take charge of the work while he went to Port Elizabeth. On 15 November 1944, Bhengu wrote to Buthelezi asking him to meet him at Glencoe so that he could go with him to Benoni. He pleaded with Buthelezi: *Abamhlophe bafike baphambanisa izinhloko zabazalwane baxova* [Please let's meet at Glencoe and go with me to Benoni because white people have caused confusion among the brethren].

The second letter followed on the 06 January 1945, whereby Bhengu again wrote to Buthelezi in isiZulu (Bhengu pers. comm., 06 January 1945):

> *Yenza konke mfowethu ungesabi ngoba abamhlophe bazobakhathaza abazalwane kakhulu, iso lakho lomoya nelenyama malibe kubo kakhulu abase Goli (Johannesburg) abazalwane.* [Do everything in your power my brother, do not be afraid because white people will cause trouble for the brethren. Your spiritual and physical eye must be with the brethren in Johannesburg. Fear nothing]. (n.p., author's own translation)

Dr Roger S. Greenway in respect of Bhengu's church planting work quotes Dr Timothy Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, who recently made this statement (Lephoko pers. comm., 2010 n.d.):

> The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for the numerical growth of the body of Christ, the renewal of existing churches, and the overall impact of the church on the culture of any city [...] Nothing else – not crusades, outreach

> programmes, Para-church ministries, mega-churches, consulting, or church renewal processes – will have the consistent impact of dynamic and extensive church planting. (n.p.)

One of the poems Bhengu enjoyed reciting is Rudyard Kipling's 'If' (The Poetry Foundation n.d.):

> If you can keep your head when all about you
> Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
> If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
> But make allowance for their doubting too;
> If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
> Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
> Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
> And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:
>
> If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
> If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
> If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
> And treat those two impostors just the same;
> If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
> Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
> Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
> And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:
>
> If you can make one heap of all your winnings
> And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
> And lose, and start again at your beginnings
> And never breathe a word about your loss;
> If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
> To serve your turn long after they are gone,
> And so hold on when there is nothing in you
> Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'
>
> If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
> Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
> If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
> If all men count with you, but none too much;
> If you can fill the unforgiving minute
> With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
> Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
> And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son! (n.p.)

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Glossary

Assemblies of God Association	Predominantly mixed race and Indian Assemblies of God work.
Assemblies of God Group	Predominantly White Assemblies of God work.
Assemblies of God/ Back to God	Predominantly African Assemblies of God work.
District Council Committee (now Regional Council Committee)	A committee of elected pastors responsible for overseeing the affairs of Assemblies in the Assemblies of God Movement (BTG) in a particular district.
Education Board	Education Board members are elected by each provincial youth convention and are responsible for allocating education bursaries to college and university students in the provinces or regions.
Fathers	Married men with or without children.
General District Council (now General Regional Council)	A district conference, which is attended by accredited ministers, probational ministers, organisers, elders and delegates from local Assemblies of God (BTG).
General Executive	Members of the General Executive are responsible for the whole of Assemblies of God. It consists of pastors elected at a biannual General Conference, as stipulated in the Constitution of the Assemblies of God section (a) of the Rules of Procedure.
Girls	All unmarried women (excluding widows and divorcees) whether young or old, with or without children.
Mothers Movement (Ministry)	Ladies Movement of married women, with or without children.
Organisers	All those appointed to work among mothers, fathers, youth, girls and Sunday School to help promote the work within their designated groups, motivating them both spiritually and in fundraising.
Supervisors	Women appointed to supervise both Mothers' Ministry and in some instances girls' work as well.
Teaching Team	A group of hand-picked pastors trained and appointed by N.B.H. Bhengu to teach in the Assemblies of the movement (BTG Crusade) and appoint elders, deacons and ordain pastors at conferences.
Youth	All the youth in the movement including young men and young women.

Index

A
abilities, 29
ability, 35, 192–193, 227, 258
abuse, 15, 294
accept, 12, 48, 71, 108–109, 129, 145–147, 151, 161, 179, 195, 204–205, 210, 247, 251, 263–265, 282, 304
acceptance, 85, 108, 189, 229, 300
accountability, 294
accurate, 3
achieve, 11, 20, 27, 132–133, 139, 182, 190–191, 252
achieved, 18, 28, 136, 140, 169
achievement, 64, 134, 268
action, 20, 23, 25, 34, 38–39, 71–72, 82, 88, 92, 204, 210–211, 216, 230, 234, 244, 260
administration, 23, 73, 145–146, 172, 177–178, 204–205, 218
Africa, 1–10, 12, 14–28, 30, 32–36, 38, 42, 48, 53–55, 58–59, 61–65, 67–69, 72–74, 79, 106–108, 111–114, 117–118, 120, 123–124, 127, 133–137, 140, 142, 144–145, 152–153, 159–160, 163–166, 168–169, 175–177, 182–184, 187, 190, 193–195, 197, 199–201, 205, 209–212, 216, 219, 224–226, 230–231, 233–235, 237–239, 243–244, 248–249, 251–252, 254, 257–258, 260–262, 265, 268–270, 277–284, 286, 288–293, 295, 299, 301–305
African, 3–4, 7–8, 10–12, 15–22, 26, 28, 33–38, 44, 49–50, 59–60, 65, 68–72, 78–80, 86, 105–106, 108, 110–111, 113–115, 117, 120–122, 124, 140, 142, 144–148, 159, 163, 165–166, 169, 177–178, 181–183, 188, 194–201, 204, 207, 209–210, 212, 223–226, 228, 230, 232–236, 238–240, 242–246, 248, 253–254, 262, 265, 270–271, 274, 278, 281–282, 284, 288–290, 293, 295, 297, 301–305
African Christians, 288
African context, 19, 38
African traditional religions, 26
age, 6, 12–13, 42, 46–47, 59–60, 88, 111, 255, 265, 270–272, 274, 293
agencies, 4
agency, 284
agreement, 7, 91, 157, 174, 179, 203, 289
alienation, 229
ambiguity, 227
analyse, 9, 36, 78
anthropology, 28
anxiety, 139
apartheid, 5–6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16–20, 22–38, 75–76, 80, 108, 163, 182, 201, 207, 223–225, 233–234, 243, 249, 253, 278, 286, 301–302
application, 14, 75, 130
applications, 246, 284
approach, 131, 136, 194, 244, 253, 265, 285, 308
Archbishop, 24, 32, 35, 39, 252
attitude, 32, 85, 92–93, 148, 159, 193, 231–232, 238, 245, 304
attitudes, 93, 192, 232, 238
attributes, 26, 111
audits, 144, 218
authority, 8, 36, 60, 79–80, 82, 84–85, 102, 113, 124, 141–142, 145, 147–148, 161, 166, 169, 178, 196, 203, 209–210, 239, 261, 263, 265, 292

autobiography, 309
autonomy, 67, 302
awareness, 3

B
baptism, 50, 62–64, 87–91, 94–98, 100, 102–104, 156–157, 255, 288, 295
barriers, 67, 254
behaviour, 191, 220, 245, 300
beliefs, 91, 219, 262
benefits, 28, 231, 244
Bible, 38, 44–45, 48, 50, 53, 55, 62, 68–70, 77–78, 80–81, 84–87, 89, 91–92, 97–98, 104–106, 108, 115–117, 128–129, 146, 165, 171, 177, 183, 219, 237, 239, 244, 249, 256, 260, 262, 270, 277, 279, 281, 286, 289–290, 292, 297–298
binding, 138, 174
birth, 7–8, 18, 27, 60, 90, 100, 102, 136, 180, 228, 274, 290, 302
black consciousness, 289
black theology, 25, 60, 262, 271
blind, 117, 151, 232, 235, 245, 291
bodies, 19, 66, 108, 116, 181, 234, 255, 304
body and soul, 265
brain, 33
breakdown, 218
budget, 14
business, 16, 18–19, 24, 78, 104, 172–173, 182–184, 191–192, 224, 240, 246, 248, 281, 285, 288, 294, 299, 303

C
Calvary, 108
capabilities, 282, 298
capitalism, 243–245
care, 53, 55, 57, 115, 133, 171, 205, 219–220, 232, 236, 245, 282, 297
cash, 57
Catholics, 33
certified, 272
challenge, 36–37, 94, 180, 202, 231, 291, 303
challenges, 19, 34, 36, 229, 248, 277
change, 8, 25, 29, 56, 67, 95, 105, 108, 123, 135, 147, 180, 189, 192, 199, 210–211, 217, 228–230, 234, 236–238, 253, 256, 279, 287, 289, 293, 304
character, 2, 87, 91, 141, 170, 196, 221
characteristics, 234
charisma, 99
charismatic, 17, 26, 29, 59, 88, 100, 155, 196, 257, 288
charity, 28
child, 13–14, 29, 33, 43, 52, 62, 159, 165, 186, 240, 303
children, 2, 18, 21–22, 28, 32, 44, 46–47, 52–53, 55–56, 59, 63, 70, 76, 78, 81–82, 90, 115–116, 118, 131, 134, 138, 146, 154–155, 162, 171, 183, 185, 191, 212, 220, 225, 229, 234, 241, 244, 247, 249, 268, 275, 303
China, 3, 11–12, 282
Christ, 18, 24, 29, 32–33, 46, 48, 51, 56, 62, 65, 67–70, 72, 74, 78, 83, 85–93, 96, 100–102, 104–108, 111, 116, 121, 123, 128–132, 135, 140–141, 151, 154–159, 161, 165, 170, 176, 178, 180, 182, 185–186, 192–193, 200, 204, 206, 211, 220, 228–229, 231, 236–237, 242, 245, 251–252, 254–256, 258–264, 268, 270, 279–280, 282, 285–290, 297–300, 305
Christian, 17, 19, 23, 26–31, 34–35, 37–38, 44, 56–57, 59, 62, 65, 71–72, 76, 78, 83, 87, 91–96, 101, 103, 111, 113, 115, 127, 129, 135, 148, 155–156, 159–160, 170, 176, 179–180, 183, 191, 202, 205–206, 211–212, 226–230, 232, 234–241, 244–245, 247–248, 252–256, 258, 260–261, 265, 268, 281–282, 287–289, 291–292, 297–298, 303
Christian Education, 252
Christian leaders, 291
Christian leadership, 17, 34–35

Christianity, 28, 32, 38, 124, 129, 168, 244, 282, 286
church, 1, 3–4, 6, 12, 14, 17, 19, 23–38, 41–50, 52, 59, 62–64, 71, 73–77, 79, 83–88, 90–104, 106, 110–116, 118–120, 124–125, 127–140, 142, 144, 146, 148, 150–166, 168–179, 182, 184–209, 211, 215–217, 219–221, 225–228, 230–237, 239, 245–249, 251–264, 268–273, 277–280, 282–285, 287–306
church history, 92, 277
church leaders, 33–34, 87, 174, 178, 225, 256, 258, 262–263, 269, 279, 292, 300–302, 304
church order, 255
cities, 120, 123, 138–139, 200, 239, 258, 280
citizen, 15, 37, 53, 55, 135, 224
citizenship, 11, 15, 29, 163
city, 13, 54, 118, 124, 174, 192, 205, 223, 231, 239, 269, 299, 305
claim, 8, 62, 90, 93, 99, 236, 239
cloud, 53, 56, 206
collaborate, 133
collected, 144, 172–173, 272, 283, 285, 298, 300
colonial, 164, 183, 202, 227, 229, 289
colonialism, 80, 244
colonisation, 124, 226
commemoration, 240
commissioner, 19, 179
communication, 21, 284, 294
communism, 11–12, 37, 200, 240, 242, 244, 282
community, 12, 24–25, 27, 29, 34, 44, 91–92, 112, 116, 120, 123, 127, 135–136, 154, 156–157, 230, 243–246, 261, 264, 273, 275, 280, 298–299
competition, 143, 226
complete, 32, 48, 52, 55, 67, 72, 124, 148, 198, 269, 289
complex, 182, 212
compliance, 129
comprehensive, 23, 131, 196
compromise, 230, 286
concept, 30, 93, 154, 169, 182–183, 188, 212
concern, 16, 33, 174, 177, 199, 211, 229, 238, 240, 242, 252–254, 288
confession, 156
conflict, 16, 25, 27, 39, 76, 177–178, 216, 301
congregation, 6, 30–31, 93, 110, 112, 123–124, 153, 168, 172–174, 176, 182, 188, 205–206, 239, 282, 284–285, 298, 305
conscious, 35, 235
consult, 83, 208
contemporary, 104, 192
content, 170, 228
context, 19, 34, 38, 79, 128, 229
contract, 7
contractor, 8
contrast, 85, 194
control, 12–14, 17, 24, 35, 37, 99, 103, 106, 136, 145, 175, 178, 189–190, 197, 208, 210, 226, 232, 253, 285, 294
conversion, 36, 45–48, 51, 63, 69, 81, 86, 88, 91, 94, 115, 120, 123–124, 184, 200, 256, 268, 272, 281
converts, 49, 51, 93, 97, 99, 111, 124, 135, 140, 144, 177, 184, 195, 245, 251, 280–282, 297–298
cooperation, 55, 67, 72, 134, 150, 164, 179, 216, 227
cost, 171
counselling, 2, 145
counterparts, 201
countries, 2–4, 11–12, 17, 80, 94, 123, 127, 143–144, 158, 163, 181, 188, 193–194, 206, 211, 225, 235, 238–239, 252, 277, 288, 301–303
course, 39, 45, 113, 122–123, 171, 194, 200, 206, 218, 259, 267, 289
Covenant, 229
create, 14, 95, 107, 139, 178, 208, 245, 247–248, 268, 278
creating, 230, 247
creation, 14, 28, 92, 128, 157, 182, 224–225, 228, 231, 265

crescent, 130, 184
crime, 15, 105, 120, 123–124, 138, 270, 279–281, 299
crisis, 36, 42, 201
criteria, 296–298
cross, 21, 74, 92, 105–108, 141, 225, 256, 263–264, 279, 293
crusades, 58, 88, 99, 108, 136–139, 144, 148, 208, 242, 251, 279–280, 282, 305
cultural, 14, 74, 116, 129, 187, 194, 255, 279
culture, 9, 16, 124, 163, 183, 187, 224, 231, 242, 244, 265, 289, 305
curriculum, 13–14, 303
custom, 274–275
customs, 115, 248
cycle, 296–298

D
daily, 17, 46, 105, 139, 169, 235–239, 286, 293
damage, 237
data, 88
deal, 23, 25, 36, 39, 76, 106–107, 112, 177, 183, 188, 216, 221, 232, 235, 246, 254, 301, 306
death, 4, 21, 39, 43, 45–47, 55–56, 58–59, 78, 82, 101–102, 105, 130, 134, 142, 151, 157, 185, 193, 207, 210, 216, 219, 225, 228, 263–264, 267, 269, 271–272, 274–275, 297, 301
decision, 16, 19–20, 33, 45, 65–67, 71, 93, 176, 183, 196, 205, 208, 273, 292
defined, 12, 35, 85, 87, 154
degrees, 64
democracy, 192, 233, 284, 286, 293, 299
democratic, 8, 17, 22, 39, 42, 249
deployed, 21, 24
desert, 52, 54
design, 9, 169
determination, 27, 134, 198
developing, 68, 208
development, 2, 10, 14, 18, 27, 61–62, 67, 129, 178–180, 182, 202, 218, 224, 232, 239, 243–244, 246, 248, 260, 262, 265, 277, 283, 301–303
developmental, 265
devoted, 59, 149
diakonia, 221
dialogue, 261, 308
differentiate, 183
dignity, 73, 162, 229, 287
discern, 156
disciple, 90, 94, 103, 107, 128, 136, 139, 192, 216, 259, 265, 269, 292–293, 298, 303
discipleship, 92, 192, 260
discipline, 73, 168, 178, 183, 191
disciplined, 47, 78, 191
discover, 129
discrimination, 10, 18, 27–28, 76, 207, 299
dispute, 7, 43, 202, 204, 220
divergence, 255
diversity, 181, 196
divine sovereignty, 93
division, 10, 21, 32, 43, 67, 135, 138, 146, 160–162, 196, 202, 207, 224, 227, 268, 272
doctrine, 80, 85, 87, 89, 92, 94, 97, 102, 105, 128, 156, 184, 216–217, 231, 281, 286
doctrines, 62, 84, 91–92, 170, 176, 219, 282, 290, 304
dogma, 99, 282
domination, 22, 49, 304
drink, 90, 119, 229, 275
drive, 18, 176, 192, 240
duties, 147, 197, 216, 220–221, 286, 300
dynamic, 231, 303, 306, 309
dynamics, 25, 194

E
ecclesiology, 128, 310
economy, 226–227
ecumenical, 156, 251–252, 255–257, 260–261, 277, 288, 310

ecumenism, 131, 184, 252, 254, 288, 307, 309–311
educate, 18, 115, 184
education, 10–11, 13–15, 18, 24, 29, 42, 47, 57, 115, 149, 162, 184, 203, 224, 229, 234, 238, 246, 248, 252, 260, 278–279, 284, 302, 313
effect, 10, 31, 37, 45, 92, 118, 123, 133, 136, 194, 211, 213, 286, 302
effective, 141, 193, 249, 270, 280, 282
effectively, 118
effects of, 10, 31, 118, 302
efficiency, 138–139
efficient, 101, 103
ego, 113
element, 96, 104–105, 129, 178
elements, 93, 124, 148, 310
embrace, 228, 260
emerge, 196, 303
emotional, 99, 108
emotions, 56
empathy, 280
employed, 4, 46, 228, 265
employees, 184
employers, 6, 184
empowered, 157, 247, 249
empowerment, 280
energy, 11, 27
enterprise, 33, 35, 47, 148, 258–259, 270
environment, 18, 77, 129, 227, 242
eschatology, 93
ethnic, 14–15, 207, 224
ethnicity, 14, 135, 225, 237, 244, 287
Evangelical Christianity, 38, 286, 310
evangelicalism, 38, 84, 86, 256
evangelisation, 48, 133, 259, 283, 291, 302
evangelism, 3, 17–18, 33, 58–59, 62, 93, 113, 130–131, 135, 146, 174, 177, 189, 194, 227, 229, 231, 238–239, 257–260, 265, 278, 280, 286, 298, 304
evidence, 33, 57, 83, 91, 98–100, 103–104, 133, 135, 147, 295, 304
exclusion, 8, 16
exclusive, 28, 155
exhibit, 55, 185
exodus, 200, 202–203
expectations, 14
expenditure, 173–175, 221, 294
experience, 4, 18, 22, 31, 45–46, 50–51, 81, 88–91, 94, 96–98, 100, 110, 116, 165, 169, 180, 238, 248, 258, 288, 295, 304

F

factor, 196–197
factors, 104, 133, 196
failure, 13, 181, 213
faith, 26, 44–47, 53–56, 58, 62, 76, 80, 82–84, 91–92, 102, 118, 122–123, 129, 133, 141, 148, 151–153, 156–157, 171, 180, 200, 219–221, 226, 229, 236, 239, 248, 251–252, 254–255, 262–264, 267, 272–274, 282, 287, 293, 295–296, 298–299
faithful, 43, 141, 154, 192, 215, 236, 243, 294
faithfulness, 70
family, 3, 13, 15, 18, 27, 34, 39, 43–44, 46, 48, 52, 55, 57–58, 60, 63, 70, 77, 115, 117–118, 122, 125, 134, 149, 161, 174, 178, 191, 200, 220–221, 234, 245, 247, 253, 255, 262, 275, 279, 284, 293, 300
father, 20, 29–30, 42–44, 47–48, 51–52, 59, 75, 83–84, 86, 95, 97, 101, 104, 127–128, 130, 132–133, 146, 156, 159, 166–168, 170–171, 180, 185–187, 208, 231, 233, 236, 263, 265, 272–274, 303
fear, 32, 45, 53, 55–56, 78, 151, 175–176, 207, 211, 217, 238, 281, 287, 290, 297, 305
feature, 60, 244, 288
feelings, 31, 45, 135
fellowship, 33, 38, 47, 66–68, 71–72, 75, 120, 146, 155, 182, 195, 204, 217, 236–237, 252, 260, 284, 288, 290, 299

finance, 119, 172, 174, 176–177, 218, 221, 294, 300
firm, 87, 183
flexible, 189
flourish, 202
flourishing, 66
foolishness, 106
foreigner, 38, 162
foreigners, 38
forgiveness, 2, 39, 56, 82–83, 102, 107, 140, 192, 200, 204–205, 211, 240, 259
formation, 7–8, 19, 72, 295
free, 7–9, 15–16, 22, 78–80, 85, 90, 145–147, 172, 178–179, 186, 207, 224, 239, 243–244, 264, 278, 284, 289, 297
free will, 85, 172
freedom, 8–9, 11, 20–22, 24, 124, 206, 232, 234, 242–243
fulfilment, 155, 252, 295
fullness, 99, 155, 157
function, 169, 210, 228, 233, 239, 304
functioning, 204
future, 2, 10, 20, 28, 32, 39, 69, 89, 108, 136, 138, 183, 189, 207, 240, 278, 284, 286, 294, 301, 303

G

generation, 3, 37, 112, 229, 246, 303
gentile, 82–83, 128, 215, 229, 285–287, 292
gift, 36, 62, 100, 103, 112, 172, 188, 190
giftedness, 73–74, 190
gifts, 2, 57, 81, 88–89, 91, 94–95, 100, 145–146
global, 4
glory, 57, 186, 188, 193, 291
goal, 3, 92–93, 133, 175–176, 189–190, 233, 252, 291
goals, 11, 190, 243
God the Father, 83, 97, 128, 156, 187
goods, 105, 120, 123–124, 280–281, 299
gospel, 3, 6, 29–31, 45, 48–49, 53, 55–57, 64, 70, 72, 74, 76, 79–80, 84–86, 102, 104–107, 113–117, 134–135, 137, 141–142, 144, 149–151, 157, 161, 168, 170, 176, 186–187, 189–190, 194–196, 200, 204, 211, 225, 227–232, 234, 238–243, 249, 252, 257, 259, 261, 269–270, 280–281, 287–288, 296–299
governance, 184, 283, 285
government, 4, 7–8, 11–14, 16–20, 22–26, 29, 31, 36–39, 49, 65–66, 74, 85, 114, 133, 151, 166, 169–170, 198, 200–202, 205, 209, 219, 224–227, 233–234, 236, 246, 253, 270, 278, 284–286, 289–290, 295, 299–301
grabbed, 121
grace, 65, 83, 85, 88, 91, 102, 154, 176, 186, 216, 233–234, 256, 269
grand, 4, 19, 224–225, 231
granted, 65, 179, 201–202
great commission, 142, 155
grouping, 38, 160, 181–182, 206
growth, 64, 157, 177, 201, 305

H

happiness, 294
hard, 57, 149, 192, 211–212, 269, 272
harmony, 22, 28, 72, 115
healing, 68, 88, 99, 103, 118–120, 122, 149, 152, 159, 184, 227, 279
health, 2, 46, 56, 68, 115, 119, 129, 149
hearing, 27, 110, 159, 303
held, 19, 27, 32–35, 65–66, 71, 74, 84, 98, 110, 115–116, 129, 136, 144, 150–151, 168, 173, 188, 193, 196, 199, 204, 207–208, 210, 212, 224, 232, 236, 257, 259, 286
help, 27, 54, 57, 78, 80, 107, 117, 120, 134, 149, 160, 170, 175, 179, 190, 198, 200, 232, 240–241, 244, 249, 269, 278, 280, 284, 286, 297
hermeneutic, 100
high, 19, 21, 57, 74, 83, 140, 164, 171, 180, 188, 193, 204, 228, 233, 246, 259, 286, 292–293
Hindu, 26
Holiness, 49, 62, 91, 105, 112, 114, 135, 141, 156, 261

Holy Spirit, 49–50, 53, 55, 62, 64, 74, 86–92, 94–98, 100–103, 105, 110–112, 121, 127–129, 140–141, 154, 157, 180, 187, 202, 229, 232, 265, 268–269, 271, 279–280, 288, 295
honesty, 148, 294
honour, 26, 52, 58, 113, 188, 193, 218, 233, 236–237
hope, 5–6, 17, 22, 28, 97, 109, 149, 171, 230, 255, 299
hospital, 52, 113, 158, 198, 228, 269, 304
household, 13, 90, 111, 268
human, 6, 9, 27–28, 36, 56, 60, 83, 85, 91, 93, 102, 104, 112, 129–130, 154–155, 157, 229, 232, 235, 248, 265, 271, 289, 293
human dignity, 229
human nature, 91, 112
human rights, 9, 27–28, 130
humanity, 53, 56, 101
humans, 85, 265
humility, 57, 192, 211–212, 242, 292
hymns, 77, 84, 103, 271

I
ideas, 182, 236, 287
identification, 129
identity, 9, 165, 180, 224, 247, 289
ideology, 12, 16, 26, 239, 254
immigrants, 227
impact, 1, 4–6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26–28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38–39, 74, 77, 84, 107, 123, 169, 227, 273, 279, 281, 290, 305–306
imperative, 27, 133
implementation, 137
importance, 159, 169, 183, 219, 230, 236, 256
inclusion, 73
individual, 27–28, 34, 36, 91–92, 95, 177–179, 189, 193, 197, 228–229, 247, 282, 284, 286–287
industrialisation, 226
inequality, 8, 226
influence, 6–7, 26, 44, 47, 49, 62, 74, 77–78, 80, 82, 84, 86, 88, 90, 92, 94, 96, 98, 100, 113, 123, 153, 159, 183, 207, 227, 241, 248, 257, 281, 291
information, 12, 137, 147, 163, 284, 299
infrastructure, 24
initiation, 93
injustice, 8, 25, 27
institution, 9, 15, 18, 137–138, 153, 163, 178, 230, 239, 246, 260, 277, 284, 289
institutional, 153
integrate, 129
integration, 7, 26, 129
integrity, 191, 257
intellectual, 94, 265, 303
interaction, 129, 265
interest, 7, 38, 79, 129, 137, 139–140, 244, 258
interests, 37, 227
interfere, 202
interpret, 153, 299
interpretation, 45, 87, 99, 103, 105, 281, 299, 309
interview, 30, 55, 112, 117–118, 192, 236, 238, 240–241
investment, 175, 218, 300

J
Japan, 80, 111, 188
Jerusalem, 83, 88, 223, 285
Jesus, 6, 18, 32–33, 38, 45–46, 56, 65, 70, 72, 74, 78–79, 82–83, 86, 88–93, 96–97, 100–102, 104–111, 117, 119, 121, 123, 128–130, 134–136, 140–141, 148, 151, 155–157, 176, 179–180, 185–186, 188, 190, 200, 204, 206, 221, 227–228, 232, 234, 244–245, 249, 255, 261–264, 269–270, 279, 286–288, 291–293, 297, 299
Jew, 186, 223, 229, 244, 285, 287
Jewish, 26, 83, 229
judgement, 28, 102, 141, 147, 186, 191
justice, 27, 85, 105, 230, 236, 255

K
Kairos, 17, 36–38
Kairos Document, 17, 36–38, 311
kind, 14, 25, 45, 98, 113, 115, 123, 135, 170, 190, 192–194, 202, 232, 243, 248, 269, 272, 290, 303
kindness, 6
Kingdom, 43, 70, 80, 89, 102, 114, 131, 161, 163, 185, 188, 196, 204, 228, 233, 242, 251, 255, 269, 286, 302
Kingdom of God, 70, 89, 102, 228, 255
knowledge, 45, 58, 131, 179, 185, 189, 205, 228, 249

L
labour, 7, 10, 12, 15, 22, 24, 53, 55, 58, 67, 76, 224, 226–227, 229, 234, 303
lack, 55, 129, 182, 188, 234, 244–247, 299, 302
language, 9, 15, 22, 51, 64, 78–79, 94, 104, 109, 187, 199, 224, 237, 281, 297
large, 9, 13, 67–68, 70, 90, 92, 113, 120, 133, 145, 150, 168, 205, 243, 278, 288, 298–299
law, 4, 9–13, 16, 19–20, 25, 37–39, 65, 85, 186, 224, 239, 278, 280
laws, 4, 10–13, 16, 19, 25, 38–39, 224, 239, 278
lead, 4, 53, 55, 140, 170, 177–178, 187–188, 199, 203, 210, 217, 219, 242, 268, 271, 289–292, 301, 303–304
leader, 3–4, 7, 15, 18, 20, 23–24, 31–34, 38, 49, 59, 61, 73, 76, 78, 87–88, 96, 99, 111, 114, 120, 133, 135, 138–140, 145, 160–161, 168, 174, 177–178, 181, 187–189, 191–194, 196, 199–200, 203–205, 209, 212, 217–218, 221, 225, 233–237, 239–240, 256–258, 261–263, 268–269, 271, 279, 284–285, 289–293, 296–298, 300–304
leadership, 1, 10, 17, 24, 34–35, 51, 58, 73, 75, 115, 141–142, 144, 148, 162–163, 170, 176, 178, 182–184, 188–192, 194–197, 199, 207, 209, 211–212, 215, 218, 231, 243, 246–249, 257–258, 261, 264, 277, 284, 289–291, 297–299, 302–304
leading, 54, 58, 70, 83, 87, 94, 111, 136, 183, 188–189, 203, 289–290
leads, 2, 62, 85, 88, 155–156, 179, 230, 247
learner, 24
learning, 9, 31, 160, 246
learnt, 187, 242, 281
legal, 23, 198
legislation, 10, 13, 28
lessons, 193
liberal, 25, 231, 261–262, 288
liberation, 4, 11–12, 15–16, 18, 20, 25, 131, 164, 200, 225, 229–230, 233–235, 237, 241–242, 253–255, 265, 278, 289, 301
liberation movement, 4, 12, 16, 20, 164, 200, 225, 233–235, 278
liberation struggle, 12, 237, 301
liberation theology, 25, 253
liberty, 8–9, 48, 131, 229, 232
listen, 62, 110, 158, 170, 188, 192, 229
listening, 192
liturgy, 77, 92, 261
locations, 14, 304
lose, 45, 55, 231, 306

M
maintenance, 26, 85, 137
management, 136, 147, 248, 299
mandate, 144, 182, 190, 196–197, 211, 225, 283
marriage, 11, 51–52, 55
mass, 12, 19, 78, 117, 182, 203, 230, 248
meaning, 35, 153, 226, 230, 249, 252, 255, 267, 274, 292
media, 307
medium, 279
meeting, 23, 30, 51–52, 63, 65, 68, 98–99, 110, 114–118, 120–122,

139–140, 145–146, 150, 158–161, 163, 165, 168, 170–174, 176–177, 180, 197–198, 202, 204, 211–212, 237, 239–242, 257–258, 279–281, 292, 297–298, 302
member, 10, 13–14, 24–27, 29, 32–34, 48, 50, 64, 66–67, 69, 87, 96, 98, 101, 107, 111, 121–122, 130, 138, 140, 142–143, 146–147, 150, 154–157, 161–163, 167, 170–171, 173–174, 185, 189, 201–202, 204, 207–208, 210–211, 217, 219–221, 227, 234–236, 239, 241, 249, 253–256, 260, 262, 268–270, 273, 275, 278–279, 285, 292, 295, 298, 300–303
memory, 53, 261
mental, 31, 183, 191
mentor, 180
message, 6, 17, 32, 45, 58, 76, 80, 82, 84, 86, 96, 99, 105, 107–108, 112–113, 121, 130, 134, 136, 140–141, 148, 151–152, 159, 164, 168, 184–185, 228, 232–233, 238, 240, 242, 244, 263, 267–268, 279, 285, 287, 297–299
metaphor, 104
method, 11, 23, 27, 31, 37, 72, 100, 197, 232, 259, 294, 296
methodology, v
migrants, 15
ministry, 2, 4, 18, 29, 34, 48–50, 52, 55, 58–59, 63–64, 68–70, 73, 77, 81, 83–84, 86–87, 94, 96, 100, 113, 116, 118–119, 130, 133, 140, 142–143, 145, 147, 159–162, 166, 178, 180, 184–185, 187, 190–191, 193–194, 196, 200, 206, 217, 228, 233, 241, 247, 251, 256–259, 261, 264–265, 268–270, 273, 277, 279–280, 286, 291–293, 298, 304, 306
Missio Dei, 127–128, 130, 185
missiology, 35
mission, 4, 6, 17, 24, 26, 30, 33, 41–42, 45, 47–50, 58–59, 64, 66, 68–74, 76–78, 84, 86–87, 91–92, 101, 114–115, 118, 123, 127–131, 133, 136, 148, 150–151, 158, 160, 162, 179, 183–187, 189–190, 192–193, 196–198, 200, 217–218, 221, 226, 231–232, 241, 245, 253–255, 257–258, 260, 265, 272–273, 278–279, 282, 285, 295–296, 298–300
missional, 127–128, 130, 132, 134, 136, 138, 140, 142, 144, 146, 148, 150, 152, 154, 156, 158, 160, 162, 164, 166, 168, 170, 172, 174, 176, 178, 265
missionaries, 3, 14, 26, 30–31, 42, 47, 61, 65, 70–73, 99, 105–106, 120, 129, 158, 175, 177, 181–183, 193–196, 198, 200–201, 205–206, 211, 226, 245, 248, 264, 270, 281, 288–291, 293, 295–297, 302–305
mistakes, 54, 56–57
mobilise, 184
model, 91, 153, 207, 229
modern, 169, 288
modernism, 236, 287
money, 18, 45, 55, 59, 121, 124–125, 132–133, 138, 140, 142–146, 148, 150, 152, 167, 172–176, 195, 220–221, 240, 245–247, 249, 271–272, 283–285, 290–294, 298, 300
moral, 286
motivation, 189, 218
Muslims, 121
myths, 286

N

nation, 6, 20, 24, 26, 37, 54, 57, 59, 80, 108, 128, 133, 135, 155, 178, 196, 231, 241, 261, 265, 268, 284, 303
nation-building, 268
national party, 4, 9
nationalism, 10
need, 4, 6, 28, 45, 70, 88, 105, 112, 119, 131, 133, 139, 142, 144, 149, 152, 170–171, 175–177, 182, 215, 224, 227–228, 232, 238, 244, 249, 256, 264, 290, 299, 303

needs, 22, 73, 112, 135, 171, 183, 189–190, 236, 245, 249, 255, 269, 277, 279, 295, 299
negative, 194
networks, 217, 248–249, 264, 282
new testament, iv, 88, 128, 146, 157, 220, 228, 237
newness, 229
number, 3, 13, 17, 19–21, 29, 32, 34, 65, 67–68, 81, 111, 121, 133, 145, 148–149, 162, 207, 215, 227, 235–236, 242, 247, 253, 260, 269, 273–274, 278, 286, 288, 298–299, 302

O

obedience, 35–36, 93
objective, 23, 103, 129, 224, 273
objectives, 23, 27, 137
obligation, 131, 287
observe, 117
occupation, 4, 14, 138, 226
offer, 112, 133, 186, 282
office, 19, 21, 56, 66, 81, 125, 137, 145, 149, 165, 167, 171, 174–175, 197, 216, 288, 301–302
Old Testament, 128, 146
open, 2, 14, 21, 78, 80, 82–83, 98, 111, 113, 120, 130, 148, 159, 179, 202, 234–235, 241, 262, 297, 304
operational, 167, 203
operations, 21, 94, 140, 196
opportunities, 8, 10, 22, 178, 229, 247, 278
oppressor, 22
order, 6, 9, 18, 20, 22, 25, 37, 54, 56–57, 62, 72, 77–79, 81, 85, 99, 106, 144–145, 169, 180, 189, 198, 205, 229, 232, 239, 243, 252, 255, 262, 269, 278, 282, 290
organised, 38, 74, 115, 131–132, 136, 143, 145, 170, 176, 178, 202, 205, 225, 247, 257, 260, 280, 283–284, 291, 293, 297–298, 304
oriented, 23
origin, 38, 70, 166, 181, 224, 262
orphans, 53, 55, 219, 221
outcome, 199, 212
overwhelming, 81

P

paid, 57, 73, 107–108, 124, 178, 263, 272
parable, 108
paradigm, 189–190
paradox, 201
parents, 41, 59, 63, 122, 183, 191, 235, 284
participation, 29, 103, 168, 252, 254, 257
parties, 7, 10, 124, 164, 211, 236–237, 258
partners, 148, 261
partnership, 144, 189
passionate, 187
pastoral, 197
patronage, 209
pattern, 91, 93, 105, 146, 196, 284
peace, 8–9, 22, 54, 88, 102, 106, 130, 134, 141–142, 163–164, 185, 201, 205, 223, 232–234, 242, 263–264, 268
Pentecostalism, 62, 77, 84, 86, 91, 96, 102, 248, 256
periods, 53
permanent, 138–139, 290
personality, 101–103, 160, 241, 292
perspective, 291
persuade, 7, 242, 278
phenomenon, 91, 98, 234
philosophy, 9, 11, 49, 183, 193, 217, 225, 243, 262, 288
physical, 51, 91, 93, 103, 112, 157, 221, 265, 305
place, 3, 39, 42, 63, 67–68, 81–83, 88, 99, 106, 110, 117–118, 120, 122, 133–135, 138, 140, 150–151, 169, 174, 178, 180, 182–184, 190, 198, 210, 219, 224, 234, 245, 251, 255, 262–263, 265, 272, 274, 279, 293, 298
plurality, 220
policy, 4, 12, 14, 18, 22, 39, 66–67, 191, 197, 201–202, 211, 215, 217, 230, 238, 244, 253, 278, 283, 285, 303

political, 1, 8, 10, 12, 16–20, 24, 26, 29, 32, 34, 79–80, 109, 111, 129, 155, 163–164, 178, 189, 191–192, 224–225, 229–230, 232–234, 236–237, 240, 242–243, 253, 255, 258, 265, 269, 277–278, 285–287, 299, 301
political leaders, 111, 233, 240, 285
politicians, 39, 240, 279, 287, 291, 299
politics, 18, 20, 78, 164, 182, 184, 194, 230, 232, 234–236, 238, 242, 265, 285
poor, 11, 37, 44, 59, 174, 221, 227, 230, 232, 240, 242–245, 260, 274, 279, 292, 294
population, 11, 17, 21, 33, 35, 124
position, 2, 13, 17, 50, 87, 90, 130, 142, 144–145, 147, 163–164, 182, 185, 192, 216, 232–233, 236, 246–247, 249, 258, 271, 273, 284, 293, 301
possibilities, 130, 149
poverty, 46, 53, 55, 60, 78, 80, 131, 192, 248, 299
power, 7, 10, 18, 20–21, 29, 51, 72, 74, 82–86, 89–92, 95, 99–101, 103, 106, 110–111, 116, 123–124, 142, 151, 153–154, 180, 191, 195–196, 208, 210, 213, 219, 224, 227, 230, 232, 241, 249, 253, 262, 268, 278–279, 287, 289–290, 295, 304–305
powerful, 73–74, 110, 113, 118, 159–160, 230, 240–243, 278, 289, 299
practical, 193, 230
practice, 14, 62, 92, 168, 219, 227, 274, 303
praise, 67, 70, 92, 152, 231, 254
prayer, 26, 44–45, 48, 52–53, 55–58, 63, 105, 111, 113, 115, 117, 139–142, 152, 156, 160, 171, 220, 229, 241, 261, 270, 280, 294–295, 298, 300
preacher, 45, 49, 56, 62, 69, 77, 81, 94, 104, 110, 112, 115, 124, 131, 138, 160, 164, 180, 185, 235, 279
preaching, 1, 6, 45, 48–49, 52, 56, 77–78, 81, 84, 89, 97, 101–102, 104–112, 114, 116, 118, 120, 122–124, 158–159, 167, 186–187, 200, 228, 232, 240–243, 251, 259, 261, 263, 269, 272–273, 279–280, 287, 289
Presbyterian church, 253–254, 305
pressure, 79, 93, 259
prevent, 145, 206, 220
primary, 19, 47, 183
private, 11, 104, 232, 249
problem, 25, 27, 29, 32, 38, 93, 104, 129, 139, 146, 165, 170, 190, 195, 197, 202–203, 225, 228, 235, 238–239, 245, 278, 288, 304–305
process, 35, 39, 109, 135, 183, 202, 238, 253, 289, 306
processes, 109, 135, 306
proclamation, 109, 227–228, 230
produce, 13, 55, 171, 226, 302
profession, 6, 14, 293
profound, 161, 248, 269, 286
programme, 131, 137, 185–186, 243, 246, 259, 296, 300, 306
progress, 200, 205, 239
project, 18, 70, 129, 183, 260, 283, 285
promise, 62, 85, 223, 233, 240
prophecy, 99, 103, 259
prophet, 41–42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 76, 83, 123, 191, 194, 223, 240, 270, 279, 285, 287, 293
prophetic, 27, 36, 38, 268, 277
prophets, 128, 170, 176, 286
prosecution, 21, 280
prosperity, 268
protection, 202, 274
protestant, 96, 105, 118, 153, 177, 226, 247, 252, 256, 281, 288, 300
protestants, 87
proverbs, 141
public, 11, 57, 81, 99, 113, 147, 232, 237, 249
purchase, 137
purpose, 6, 21, 38, 71–72, 129, 132–133, 138, 217, 246, 268, 298

Q
qualities, 81, 191
questionnaire, 176

R
race, 6, 8, 15, 17, 24, 26–29, 31, 33, 45–46, 67, 70, 102, 111, 116, 135, 137, 150, 162, 182, 187–188, 200, 203, 207, 217, 224–225, 229, 231, 238–239, 253, 269, 293, 295
racism, 62, 74, 130, 212, 231, 244
reason, 2, 4, 11–12, 18, 56, 99, 110, 112, 129, 146–147, 160, 177, 194, 199, 204, 217, 231, 259, 282, 296
recognition, 58, 65, 73, 197, 270
reconcile, 233, 258, 292
reconciliation, 17, 34–37, 39, 203, 206, 211, 213, 228, 230, 257–258, 263, 278
reconstruction, 243, 246, 252
recruitment, 93
redeemer, 279, 305
redemption, 45, 85, 92–93, 105, 249
reformed, 4, 6, 26–27, 32, 62, 153–154, 226, 230, 253
relation, 183, 227, 238, 279
relations, 7, 14, 164, 238, 290
relationship, 18, 27–28, 32, 47, 73–74, 86, 113, 116, 142, 147, 155, 157, 159–160, 163–165, 170, 177, 191, 195, 201, 212, 228, 241, 245–246, 264, 296, 298, 304
religion, 1, 5, 12, 28, 58, 60–61, 77, 101, 127, 129, 154, 181, 215, 223–224, 244, 251, 267, 271, 277
religions, 26, 262, 288
remembering, 110, 268–269
renewal, 229, 257, 305–306, 309
repentance, 34, 36, 62, 86, 90, 104, 141, 156, 285
representation, 182
requirements, 189, 296
research, 3, 58, 176, 262
resolution, 28
resolve, 35, 170
resource, 3, 176, 282
resources, 3, 176, 282
respect, 3, 9, 27, 42, 54, 73–75, 102, 135, 163, 175, 189, 191, 201, 204, 220, 225, 229, 231, 235, 240, 242, 268, 293, 305
respond, 153, 156, 219, 235, 293
responsibilities, 28, 33, 208, 218–219, 283, 298, 304
responsibility, 131, 135, 170, 177, 184, 208, 239–240, 268, 283–285, 289
responsible, 29, 35, 98, 124, 135, 145, 147, 163, 168, 208, 221, 283
restoration, 223
restore, 20, 22, 228, 261, 304
result, 4, 14, 43, 45, 77, 113, 119, 129, 162, 181, 184, 199, 202, 207, 232, 302
results, 57, 86, 91, 94, 119, 123, 135–139, 183, 205, 210, 282, 296
resurrection, 102, 157, 263
reticence, 99
reveal, 83, 92, 94, 102
revelation, 129, 141
revolution, 262
reward, 33, 186, 213
righteousness, 84, 228, 287, 293
rights, 8–9, 14, 16, 27–28, 72, 130, 153–154, 186, 199, 204, 254, 303
rigid, 189, 196
risk, 240, 306
ritual, 275
role, 26, 42, 60, 64, 68, 131, 140, 153, 165, 171, 177, 184–186, 195, 220, 230, 232, 237, 246–248, 252–253, 268, 271, 277, 299, 302
root, 84, 112, 232, 249, 279
rules, 13, 98, 191, 217, 313

S
Sacraments, 93
safety, 141
Saints, 93, 134, 155–156, 264
Salvation, 17–18, 32, 45–46, 85, 89, 93, 102, 104, 110, 120, 123, 128–130, 134, 140–141, 149, 184–186, 212, 228–229, 231, 240, 253–255, 263–265, 270, 285, 287–288, 297, 300

sanctuary, 303
Satan, 82–83, 102
save, 21, 89, 108, 110–111, 186, 293, 298
scale, 205
school, 2, 13–14, 16, 19, 22, 42, 48, 50–51, 58, 62, 68–70, 75, 77, 84, 86–87, 91, 97–98, 116–117, 151, 153, 157–158, 161–162, 166–168, 170–173, 177, 193, 203, 225, 239, 247, 249, 262, 264, 270, 279, 297–298, 303
scope, 177, 290
Scripture, 27, 62, 80–81, 84–85, 87–89, 102–104, 153, 159, 171, 232, 261
self, 4, 9, 27, 57, 72, 95, 127, 158, 175–177, 183–184, 189, 191–193, 205, 209, 216, 224, 246, 277, 283, 286, 291, 296, 300, 303
self-supporting, 4, 127, 158, 175–176, 184, 205, 209, 277, 296, 300
sending, 4, 27, 83, 128, 152, 181, 187, 277, 296–298
senior, 113, 158, 161, 163, 247, 284
sense, 34, 54, 73, 86, 112–113, 157, 233, 259
separate, 10, 14, 27, 71, 176, 202, 227, 239
separation, 11, 89, 160, 254
sermon, 6, 54, 104–107, 109, 112, 122, 244, 271, 273, 279, 295, 298
servanthood, 292
service, 4, 13, 23, 26, 49, 52, 68–69, 74, 81, 90–92, 101, 103, 110, 112, 116, 120–121, 149, 157, 170, 172, 176, 183, 191–192, 200, 229, 261, 271–273
services, 3, 16, 47, 92, 112, 129, 272–273, 284–285
shame, 60
shortage, 3
significant, 3, 26, 94, 98, 129, 152, 165, 258, 277, 282
sin, 27, 62, 78–80, 82–83, 85, 91, 102, 105, 107–108, 124, 130, 156, 171, 185–186, 206, 228, 231–232, 240, 267, 281, 286, 297, 304
sinners, 45, 92, 112–113, 141, 149, 263
site, 55, 133, 178, 188, 201–202, 239
skills, 18, 51, 115, 188–190, 248–249, 283, 299
soap, 113
social, 1, 10–11, 16, 18, 23, 27–29, 38–39, 109, 129, 131, 155, 174, 178, 191, 221, 227–228, 230–231, 237–238, 242, 245, 248–249, 253–255, 277, 279, 286
social change, 253
societies, 60, 226, 254, 271
society, 1, 5, 11, 19, 22, 41, 61, 74, 77, 93, 101, 112–113, 127, 129, 154, 169, 181, 215, 223, 226, 228, 231–232, 238, 246–247, 251, 253–254, 267, 277, 284, 287, 290
socio-economic, 10, 18, 79, 243–244, 277
socio-economic conditions, 79
Sola Scriptura, 84
son, 43–45, 47–48, 53, 55, 60, 63, 65, 83, 86, 97, 101, 113, 127–128, 130, 156–157, 159, 185–187, 223, 263–265, 272, 274, 292, 303, 306
songs, 64, 241
soteriology, 128
soul, 1, 4–5, 41, 61, 68, 77, 81, 86, 101, 106, 109, 116, 127, 131, 134, 180–181, 185, 205, 215, 220, 223, 227–228, 251, 263, 265, 267, 270, 277, 280–281, 304
sources, 53, 175
South Africa, 1–10, 12, 14–28, 30, 32–36, 38, 42, 48, 61–65, 67–69, 72–74, 111–114, 117, 120, 123–124, 127, 135–137, 140, 142, 144–145, 153, 159–160, 163–166, 168–169, 177, 182, 184, 187, 193–195, 200–201, 209–211, 219, 224–226, 230–231, 233–235, 237–239, 243, 248–249, 251–252, 254, 257–258, 260, 268–270, 277–280, 284, 286, 288, 292–293, 295, 299, 301–305
sovereignty, 73, 93, 197

Soweto, 15, 22–23, 30, 56, 198, 279
space, 62, 149, 173, 182–183, 216, 226, 244, 288
speaking, 7, 12, 15, 17, 25, 29, 35–36, 74, 78–79, 86, 88, 91, 98–100, 103–104, 216, 224, 229, 244, 248, 253, 259, 278, 286, 288, 295, 297
spirituality, 191, 232, 234
stability, 163, 232, 242
staff, 123, 137, 197, 236, 260, 262
stage, 52, 91, 106, 117, 181, 188, 198, 224, 232
stages, 67
standard, 60, 63, 140, 171, 243
state, 7–9, 11, 14–18, 20–24, 31, 35–37, 43, 62, 90, 103, 119, 134, 145, 147, 189, 192, 194–195, 223, 225, 233, 239, 242–243, 255, 270, 278, 288
statement, 2, 21, 28, 33, 36, 55, 85, 101–103, 147, 212, 219, 233–234, 236, 256, 262, 267, 273, 302, 305
statistics, 178
status, 4, 25, 28, 37, 63, 207, 278–280, 303
stock, 117
stories, 69, 105, 108, 170, 240, 263
story, 3, 30, 45, 68–69, 79, 107–110, 119, 121, 140, 180, 257, 263, 279, 308–309, 311
strangers, 15, 299
strategy, 3–4, 17, 20–21, 23, 132, 135, 138, 140, 143, 182, 215–216, 224–225, 230–231, 243, 246, 248, 253, 283, 296–298, 301, 305
strength, 8, 53, 68, 92, 145, 209, 272
stress, 154, 176, 230
strike, 3, 245, 274
structure, 28–30, 72, 74–75, 131–132, 142–143, 153, 155, 163, 166–168, 194, 196–197, 200, 208–209, 226–227, 239, 246, 255, 297–298
struggle, 12, 16–17, 19–20, 22, 36, 208, 210, 226, 230–231, 234, 237, 278, 286, 288, 301, 307–308, 311
study, 38, 78, 80, 88, 92, 106, 115, 134, 179, 246, 249, 252, 289, 297–299
subjectivity, 243
subsections, 73
success, 53, 55, 66, 112, 124, 151, 193, 196, 248, 259, 293, 301
suffer, 82, 131, 185, 244, 286
suffering, 18, 27, 39, 53–54, 83, 119, 224, 230, 240
supper, 102, 157
synod, 28, 33
system, 16, 18, 24–25, 27, 29, 32, 37, 39, 145, 163, 170, 177–178, 207, 226, 242, 244, 278, 300, 304

T

talent, 172, 246, 277
task, 67, 82, 128–131, 139–140, 185–186, 189, 228, 230, 238, 240, 269, 302, 304
teach, 6, 50, 81, 89, 97, 104–105, 116, 135, 154, 170–171, 175–176, 216, 219–220, 237, 283, 289, 294, 300
teaching, 1–3, 14, 22, 27, 46, 50, 57, 62, 84, 86–88, 91, 101–102, 104, 106, 108, 110, 112, 114, 116, 118, 120, 122, 124, 132, 149, 153, 184, 207–208, 215–220, 231, 238, 242, 245–246, 260–261, 264–265, 282, 285, 287, 289, 292, 298–300, 303
team, 21, 28, 56–57, 132, 136, 138–140, 142, 162, 165, 184, 187, 190, 207–209, 215–220, 242, 264, 270, 283, 291, 300
technique, 281
techniques, 259
temperament, 135
temple, 62, 119, 121, 148, 152, 155, 285
tenacity, 54
terms, 98–99, 107, 113, 174, 296, 304
testifies, 65, 182
theory, 188, 193, 227
think, 60, 74, 79, 93, 110, 134, 148, 160, 171, 178, 188, 203, 243, 306
tolerance, 233

tool, 159, 296
tools, 120, 123, 306
total, 23, 33, 96, 102, 105, 144, 172–173, 283, 304
tough, 281
track, 283
tradition, 3, 9, 38, 60, 62, 91, 100, 124, 135, 157, 163, 227, 242–243, 274
traditionally, 14, 254, 303
traditions, 9, 157, 243
trained, 14, 21, 44, 50, 58, 69, 85, 87, 136, 142, 216, 260–261, 279, 283, 299, 313
training, 3, 12, 14, 22, 48, 52, 77, 84–85, 112–113, 135, 158, 161, 165–166, 178, 183, 218–219, 259–260, 299, 301
transcendent, 287
transfer, 208
transform, 273
transformation, 229, 247, 304
transition, 310
translate, 64
translated, 94, 97
trauma, 46–47
travel, 13, 22, 64, 163, 179, 225
treat, 28, 238, 306
trial, 20, 66, 212
tribalism, 135, 244
trust, 3–4, 55, 66, 99, 146, 149, 162, 180, 186, 189, 216, 218, 260, 306
truth, 2, 28, 36, 39, 74, 107, 131, 133, 185–186, 219, 221, 228–229, 262–263, 268–269, 286, 306
tuberculosis, 49, 56

U

ubuntu, 246
unacceptable, 202–203
unconscious, 35, 93
uncover, 85
understanding, 19, 37, 71, 85, 112, 130, 140, 185, 247, 249, 303
unemployment, 131
unity, 9, 28, 33, 38, 72, 135, 145, 157, 184, 199, 201–202, 213, 218, 252–253, 255, 257, 268, 272, 303
universal, 102, 309
university, 11, 15, 17, 19, 23, 48, 64, 179, 191, 225, 259, 262, 284, 288
unless, 8, 33, 150, 187, 228, 300
unlikely, 303
urban, 4, 13, 260
urgent, 23, 151, 204

V

validate, 173
valuable, 133
value, 107, 157, 172–173
value, 44, 107, 157, 172–173, 183, 191, 218, 287
values, 44, 157, 183, 191, 218, 287
variable, 105
venture, 55
verbal, 124, 233
vernacular, 119
victim, 34, 39, 199, 236
victimised, 239
view, 27, 84, 87, 129, 153–155, 189, 193, 217, 219, 230–231, 237, 247, 286, 291
viewed, 91, 243
views, 89, 96, 103, 153–154, 181
vigorously, 231
village, 117, 148, 169, 176, 235, 270
vine, 220
violence, 12, 16, 20–21, 25, 35, 130, 230, 233, 238, 278
virtually, 85, 257
virtue, 6, 217, 252, 306
vision, 4, 55, 78–80, 82–83, 117–118, 131, 134, 139–140, 142, 179, 183, 187, 189–190, 192, 196, 199–200, 216–218, 243, 258–259, 283–285, 290–291, 293, 298, 302–303
vital, 94, 154, 157, 169
vocal, 17, 29, 278
vulnerability, 18
vulnerable, 219

W

wars, 151, 226, 245
water, 10, 14, 78, 88, 96–97, 149, 228, 274, 297, 303

weak, 60, 186, 269
weakness, 230, 287
welcome, 12, 153
welfare, 70, 129, 205, 227, 237
well-being, 244, 283
Western Civilisation, 28
widow, 172–173, 218–219, 313
win, 24, 70, 106, 132, 182, 186, 190, 289
winter, 149–152
wisdom, 233, 269, 281, 287
wise, 60, 113, 287, 292, 306
witness, 21, 33, 38, 83, 89, 111, 123, 152, 157, 228–229, 257, 270, 272, 277, 297, 307–308, 310
women, 1, 4, 8, 18, 22, 28–29, 44, 54, 57–59, 89, 103, 115, 132–133, 139–140, 142–144, 156, 172, 174, 179, 184, 190, 196, 209, 234, 243, 246–249, 261, 264, 281, 283–284, 288–289, 291, 298–300
Word of God, 45, 49, 87, 97, 104, 110, 113, 116, 129, 170, 176, 200, 202, 240, 262–263, 279
wording, 198
working, 31, 59, 65, 100, 114, 121, 139, 145–148, 180–181, 195, 200, 227, 230, 232–233, 245, 248–249, 285
workplace, 15, 297
world, 1, 3–5, 8, 17–18, 20, 23, 26, 30, 32, 34–35, 41, 53, 56, 60–61, 65, 71, 77–78, 80, 84, 92–94, 96, 101, 106, 113, 123, 127–131, 177, 181, 184–185, 187, 192, 201, 215, 223, 228, 230–231, 234–235, 237–239, 248, 251–252, 254–255, 257, 262–263, 267–268, 270–271, 274, 277, 281, 288–290, 294, 296, 298
worrying, 97
worship, 3, 25, 33, 86, 92, 101, 103, 106, 110, 156, 169, 261, 279, 298
worth, 124, 269, 306
worthy, 58, 179, 197
writings, 80, 102
written, 26, 56, 61, 84, 88, 97, 123, 156, 176, 182, 187, 190, 196, 212, 233, 235, 237, 246, 262, 280, 287

Y

younger, 41, 59, 272
youth, 2, 17, 75, 129, 132–133, 167–168, 170, 172, 174, 184, 192, 231–232, 235, 240, 246, 249, 264, 283–284, 291, 298–299, 301, 303
Youth Ministry, 264
youth work, 301

Dr Dan Lephoko, Associate Research Fellow in the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, is an authority on the life and ministry of Nicholas Bhengu who was greatly influenced by both Evangelical and Pentecostal theologies. The author was a participant observer, having been a member of the General Executive of the Assemblies of God and has worked with Bhengu over many years during his lifetime.

Reverend Dr Roy Musasiwa, Principal of Domboshawa Theological College, Zimbabwe

This Pentecostal history is relevant for times such as these. The manuscript begins at the right space i.e. socio-political history. South African church history cannot be divorced from the secular history as the two are intertwined and in synergy explain the current South African socio-religious landscape. The narrative evolves from this history in order to locate the character, Nicholas Bhengu rightfully without any bias. The manuscript is a positive history that presents the man's biography, environment, character, career, charisma, vision and legacy. Reading through this manuscript, one is confronted with qualities of visionary leadership and above reproach character especially when coming to stewardship of finances and properties, including people.

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Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's life story must be told within Africa's multifaceted religious academic environment, particularly with regard to the past, present and future of the theological challenges of religion and society in South Africa. This scholarly book is a significant contribution to HTS Religion and Society Series. The purpose of the book is to provide academics and researchers reference material of interactions between spirituality, church dynamics, socio-economic development and the political environment. The book contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the religious sector by introducing Bhengu's ability to motivate people from various cultural backgrounds to accomplish a specific mission for God. Bhengu combined evangelism with development which was critical for the black people who were under the repressive regime of white nationalists. The socio-economic and political environment of the time in which he lived and worked was toxic. History has a way of endowing societies with men who are a notch above the ordinary folk. The history of religion is no exception. In South Africa, the world of black theology was blessed with one Nicholas Bhenkinkosi Hepworth Bhengu – a towering religious revolutionary who carved a neat saintly niche for himself within the parameters of human failings. He 'planted' more than 2000 churches in South Africa and neighbouring countries by emphasising non-denominationalism without pressurising converts to discard their churches to join any. He was determined to build a movement that would be a vehicle to reach out to the continent of Africa by building momentum and multiplication processes through his churches and managing the results.

Prof. Andries G. van Aarde, Chief Editor, AOSIS Scholarly Books, South Africa

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