

CHAPTER 3

THE MAN NICHOLAS BHENGU

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Nicholas B Hepworth Bhengu was one of the most prominent church leaders in Africa: an evangelist, prophet, teacher and church planter. *Time Magazine* described Bhengu as the Black Billy Graham of Africa. In an interview I conducted with Dr Sam Hynd, a missionary medical practitioner with the Church of the Nazarene in Swaziland, Dr Hynd had this to say about Bhengu:

So naturally I got to know him and I was impressed, not by his preaching, but the manner and the way he spoke. This man was a powerful black with a real message and one that was powerful; so I was impressed many times by that.

Dr Hynd also said that he missed Bhengu when he was not invited to their youth camps.

“Bhengu was powerful, spiritually and in every other way as a person, his personality, his voice; he was commanding and was sensible in what he said, so he could not help but make an impression in widening his ministry”

Lawrence Tutu, a former journalist with *Daily Dispatch* in East London, in his book *Twilight of the Struggle* [1986:112] writes:

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 for himself a neat saintly niche 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 the stature of a homespun Billy Graham: the son of an authoritarian Lutheran Pastor whose pronounced limp was 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. “I don’t like to see people wasting food and money. If they don’t know what to do with it they must give it to the needy and hungry,” he once said with his mind on his boyhood days when he did not have sugar to sprinkle over his porridge and used the juice squeezed from sugar cane stalks.

3.2. BHENGU’S ROOTS AND PLACE OF BIRTH – THE ENTUMENI LUTHERAN MISSION STATION

Bhengu was born of Christian parents on 5 September 1909 at Entumeni, a Norwegian Lutheran Mission Station near Eshowe, former Capital of Zululand (now KwaZulu – Natal), founded in 1852 by Rev Hans Schreuder of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission. On 7 January 2009 I visited the Schreuder homestead. My notes of the day read as follows:

The Mission is situated some 21 kilometres 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 – Nkandala Road - to the church it’s about two kilometres as the crow flies, otherwise the road meanders alongside a huge forest that stretches for a few kilometres down the slope. We were led by Rev Simeon Zulu, a retired Pastor of the Lutheran Church living in the area whose sister was married to Jeconiah, Bhengu’s elder brother. Rev Zulu also took us to Bhengu’s homestead which no longer exists in its 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. (Personal observation on visit to the area (2009-01-07)).

3.2.1. Bhengu's Family Tree

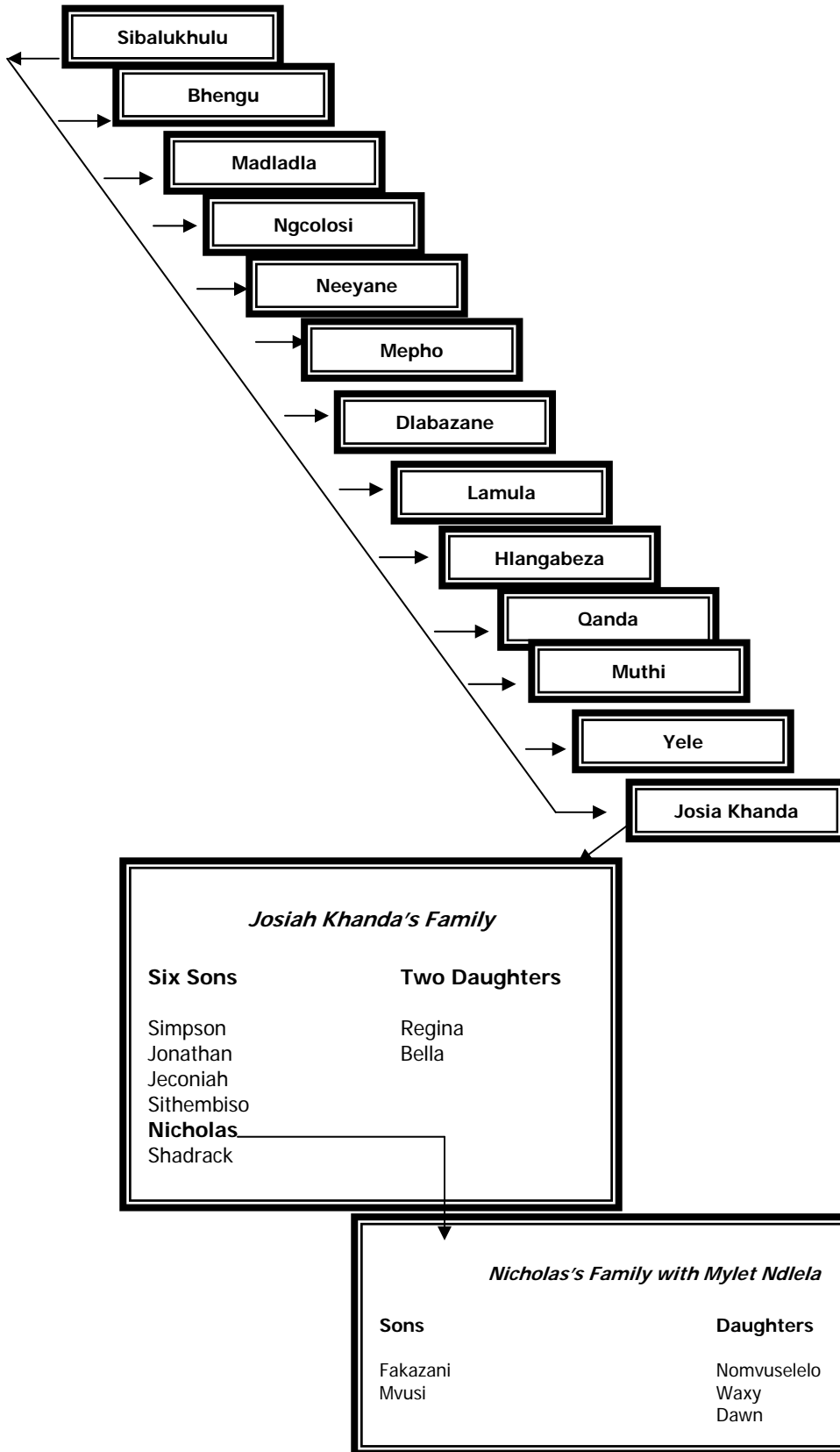
The genealogy of Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu was submitted in writing to me by Geoff Bhengu, Bhengu's nephew, son of Jeconiah as follows: Nicholas ka Josia Khanda, kaYele, kaMuthi, kaQanda, kaHlangabeza, half brother to kaNkungu, kaLamula, kaDlabazane kaMepho, kaNgcolosi, kaNceyane, kaMadladla 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:

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, 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 s.a.)



BHENGU'S FAMILY TREE



3.2.2. Christian Family Background

Bhengu's father, Josiah Khanda, was an evangelist of the Lutheran Church. The children were brought up as Christians. Jeconia and Shadrack were ministers of the Lutheran Church (now the Evangelical Lutheran Church). Jonathan was a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, whilst Nicholas ministered with the Assemblies of God. One of his two sisters, Bella Zungu, ministered alongside him as an evangelist in the Back to God Crusade. She was trained at the African Bible Institute, an Assemblies of God Bible College in Witbank (Interview: Vilakazi & Bhengu, 2003.07.02).

At the Assemblies of God General Conference on 10 October 1955, Bhengu addressed the Conference on The National Church. He said the following about his Christian upbringing:

Now in the formation of the birth of the National Church I shall be the last to oust or disfavour the fellow-yokemanship (sic) or inclusion of the foreign and local white missionaries. The Church of Christ is definitely not composed of people of one colour. We visualise the birth of a Holy Ghost propelled Church in the entire continent where the scope for European participation will never end.

Bhengu was always proud of his missionary upbringing – and the work done by the Lutheran missionaries was indeed something to be proud of. More than a century before Bhengu's calling, the first Lutheran Missionary, Hans Schreuder, arrived in Zululand.

3.2.3. The Missionary Founder of Entumeni (Gleaned from my visit to the Lutheran Museum on 07 January 2009)

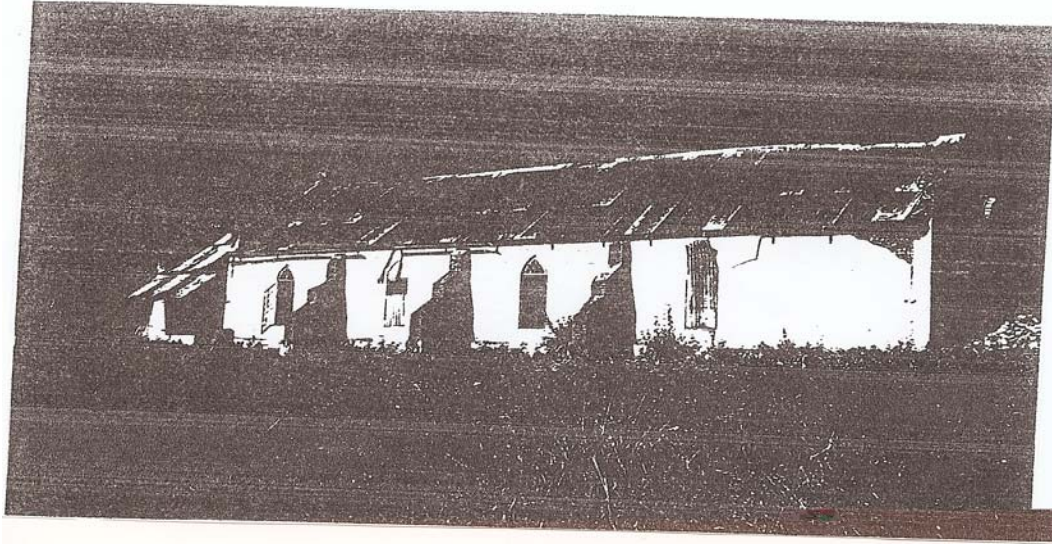


Hans P S Schreuder

Hans Paludan Smith Schreuder, born in 1817, was an early Lutheran missionary in Zululand. He initially failed to get permission to start work at first. 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 so 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.

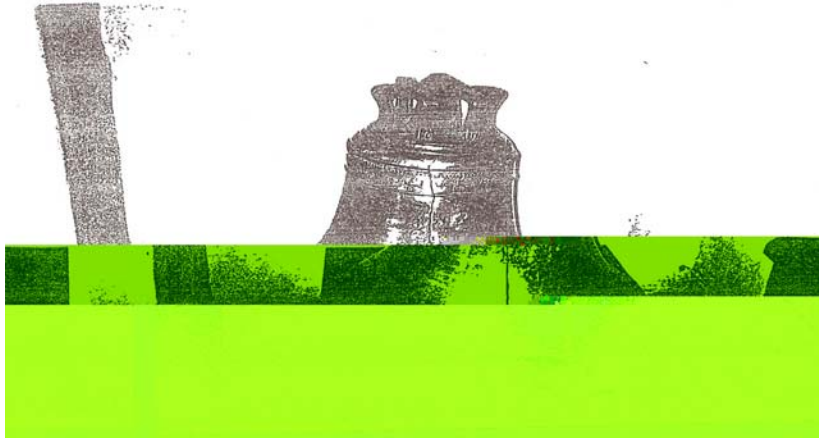
Schreuder was appointed Norwegian bishop of the country in 1866. Schreuder became a Zulu scholar and writer and was one of the few missionaries for whom Cetshwayo had any respect. Nevertheless Bishop Schreuder left Zululand for Natal at the outbreak of the Zulu War. Cetshwayo appreciated Schreuder's role as Gods 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.

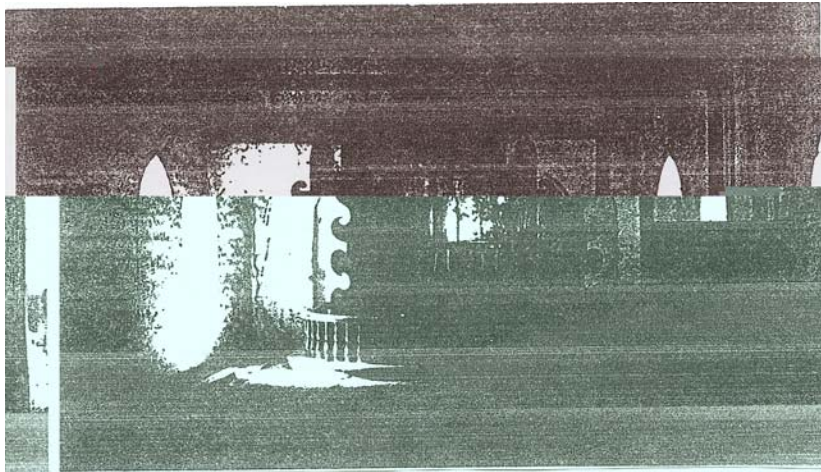


The old Entumeni Lutheran Church

In 1906, during the Bambata 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.



The Entumeni Bell



The original altar and pulpit

3.3. BHENGU'S EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Addressing an Assemblies of God Conference, Bhengu mentioned the fact that he was educated and disciplined by the Norwegians:

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". From the above it is clear, therefore that Bhengu did receive this 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.

Hollenweger states that Bhengu attended the Lutheran missionary school in Entumeni and from 1925 the Roman Catholic missionary school in Inkamana and Mariahill (Hollenweger 1972:126). This information is however disputed by Professor Sibusiso Bhengu, Bhengu's nephew and the first Democratic Minister of Education in Nelson Mandela's Cabinet. Professor Sibusiso Bhengu says:

My uncle never had a formal education, neither did he attend Inkamana or Marianhill Catholic schools. He studied privately attending night school classes in Durban, in that way earned his Matric Certificate" (Telephonic interview, Bhengu: 2004.01.06).

Professor Sibusiso Bhengu's remarks are corroborated by Samuelson Fihlela, Bhengu's sister Regina's son. Samuelson Fihlela states:

My uncle never went to a formal school. He taught himself by reading newspapers and then attending night school in Durban and Kimberley. In this way he obtained his Senior Certificate" (Telephonic interview, Fihlela, through his daughter Ntombi: 2004.01.07) (in Lephoko 2004:8). This is also confirmed by his two daughters Vilakazi and Bhengu (Interviews 2003.07.02)

3.3.1. Bhengu's theological 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 Reverend Fred Suter served as principal. According to Bond, Suter was the man Bhengu "loved better than his own father". Mr 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". 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.

3.4. BHENGU SEEKS EMPLOYMENT

Bhengu came from a poor family in rural KwaZulu-Natal. He realized early in life that he needed to find work. He had grown up eating *izinkobe* (samp meal) which he later hated and never allowed his children to eat. Because of poverty, he was driven to find employment from a white man in the area in order to survive. The white man always sent him to buy meat for his dogs but never gave Bhengu any of the meat. As a result he never wanted to keep dogs. He later got a job as health inspector at Makhathini Flats, a malaria-infected area. From Makhathini Flats he went to Durban where he was employed as court interpreter clerk at the magistrates court in Warwick Avenue. Despite the fact that they were looking for someone who could type (which he could not do), he was offered the job as interpreter (Interview: Vilakazi & Bhengu, 2003.07.02).

From Durban Bhengu proceeded to Kimberley seeking better employment opportunities. It is not known what kind of employment he had in Kimberley. In 1929, whilst he was in Kimberley, he was converted under the ministry of two young white American evangelists from the Full Gospel Church of God and became a born-again Christian.

3.5. BHENGU'S CONVERSION

The story of his conversion is related by Hollenweger (1972:127) in the following words, as told to him by Bhengu. 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".

3.6. THE LUTHERAN CHURCH REJECTS BHENGU'S NEW-FOUND FAITH

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 for 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 ejected 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.

One of the people who opposed Bhengu was a Lutheran pastor on the Station, called Astrup. He was opposed to Bhengu visiting houses of congregants, conducting prayers and preaching of his new gospel Astrup accused Bhengu of bringing bad spirits (Imimoya emibi) 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" (Interview Zulu. 2009.01.09).

Professor S Bhengu explained that the land from which Bhengu had been ejected had been given to the Lutheran Church by the Government of the day. Prof Sibusiso Bhengu 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 since 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 Bhengu himself was saved at Bhengu's Clermont campaign in Durban in 1956 (Interview Bhengu 2006.01.05).

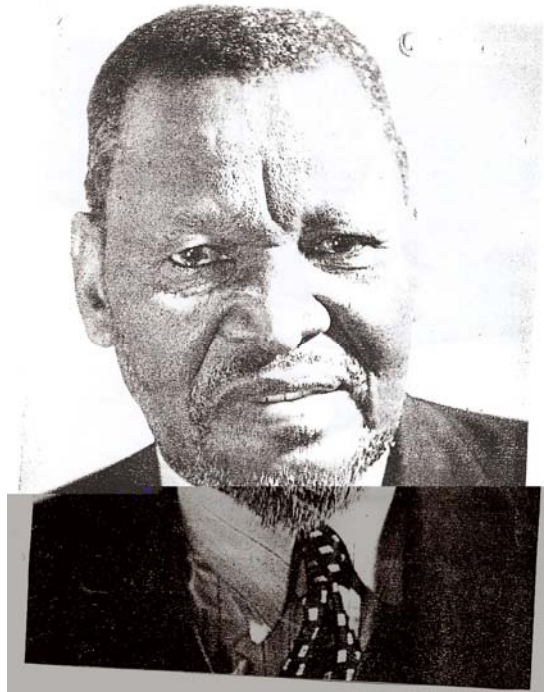
3.7. BHENGUS FIRST ASSOCIATES

Early in his Christian journey Nicholas Bhengu came into contact with many people – among them Job Chiliza, Alfred Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi - who became some of his

first partners in ministry.

3.7.1. Job Y Chiliza – The Man who disciple Bhengu

After Bhengu got saved in Kimberley in 1929, he had an urge to go back to Durban. In Kimberley he joined the Full Gospel Church of God at Kimberley Primary because this was where he had come to Christ. This church commended him to the care and



Job Y Chiliza

discipleship of Job Chiliza who was at the time a minister 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.

In 1942 Chiliza left the Full Gospel Church of God and joined the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Before this, in 1920, Chiliza had already established his own church, the African Gospel Church. In the Holiness Church, Chiliza and his people were allowed to retain their

property under their own name. Because they, as a church, were joining another church, they were given a new name – the African Gospel League (Telephonic interview Mzolo 2004.09.25).

In 1946 the Pentecostal Holiness Church informed Chiliza that they were going to dissolve the African Gospel Church. Chiliza rejected this decision. Instead he restructured his African Gospel Church. Pastor Lucas assisted Chiliza to have the church, the African Gospel Church, registered with the government in Pretoria. (Mzolo and Nondaba – s.a). Chiliza was a visionary and a powerful preacher. (Sundkler 1976:85)

3.7.2. Alfred Lawrence Gumede

Alfred Gumede was born at Illovo in the district of Umzinto on the South coast on 3 May 1910. Gumede trained as a teacher at Mariannahill College outside Durban. He was at that time a nominal member of the South African General Mission (Personal communication with Gumede 1959). In 1931, whilst teaching at a Lutheran School at Mpaphala in KwaZulu, he first heard about Bhengu. He left Mpaphala at the end of 1931 to take up a teaching position at the South African General Mission School at KwaDumisa, where he stayed until 1933. Subsequently he taught at an Anglican School in Malizayo, where he met his wife Dorothy Dladla. She was born on 06 May 1910, she will celebrate her 100th birthday on 6 May 2010.



Alfred L Gumede

During school holidays Gumede 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 the ministry. At this time Bhengu heard of this teacher who had recently come to the Lord and started corresponding with Gumede. They had not met yet (Interview Gumede 2009:01.7).

In 1934 Gumede heard of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit and became thirsty for the experience. 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 join Bhengu at the convention. He met Bhengu and another man; and 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 didn't.

He relates the events of that meeting:

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 I 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. (Gumede interview by: Watt 1986.10.28)

In 1941 Bhengu planted a church in Benoni. He left Gumede to pastor the work when he went to Port Elizabeth in 1945. In the same year 1945, Gumede left Benoni to go to Union Bible School in Pietermaritzburg. He later joined Bhengu in Port Elizabeth where he taught at Pilgrims Bible School, founded by Bhengu. Gumede died in 1991 (Interview. Gumede 2009:01:08).

3.7.3. Gideon Buthelezi

Gideon Buthelezi was one of the first people Bhengu met after his conversion in Durban. He met Buthelezi in a restaurant in Durban when he overheard him sharing Christ with someone in the restaurant.



Gideon Buthelezi

Bhengu went over to Buthelezi and together they shared how they each had met Christ. From that day onward they became friends. Mkhize and her husband were Buthelezi and Bhengu's first converts in Hill Crest, Durban. Buthelezi started work in Durban and Northern KwaZulu. (Interview: Mkhize, 2005.01.04). Buthelezi and Gumede were the two people closest to Bhengu. They joined Bhengu at the Emmanuel Mission in 1937 and the Assemblies of God in 1938.

On 4 July 1957 Buthelezi died at the age of 49 in Vereeniging where he had been ministering with Evangelist Phillip Molefe, who was at the time a minister of the Assemblies of God. Molefe had on occasion ministered alongside Bhengu in some of Bhengu's major crusades including his Soweto Crusade of 1958. Buthelezi was the first to get married, followed by Gumede and then by Bhengu.

It was to Buthelezi that Bhengu turned for financial support early in his ministry: In 1938 he wrote to Buthelezi for assistance shortly after his marriage to Mylet Ndlela. He also wrote to him from Ladysmith, on 22/3/1941, Pietermarizburg 4/1/1942, Ladysmith 22/9/1942, Ladysmith 12/7/1942, Kingsley 15/11/1944, Port Elizabeth 6/1/1945, Port Elizabeth 13/3/1945 and Port Elizabeth 15/12/1945. All correspondence between Bhengu and Buthelezi was in Zulu. The letters indicate a strong spirit of brotherhood (calling each other *mfowethu* – brother) as well as a shared concern for the Lord's work.

Gumede also asked Buthelezi to help take care of the church in Benoni while Gumede was in Port Elizabeth. His major concern was with the white missionaries who were bent on causing trouble on the East Rand.

3.8. BHENGU MARRIES MYLET NDLLELA

It was while Bhengu was conducting a revival in Pietermarizburg that he met Mylet's mother, Mrs Ndlela (Nee Mkhize). Sensing her commitment to the Lord, in typical African tradition he asked if she had a daughter that he could marry. Mylet was at the time a student nurse at King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban. After the wedding she did not return to King Edward VIII to complete her training.



Mylet Bhengu Mylet was a beautiful and serene person, full of love and compassion.

Bond describes her beauty and personality:

Nicholas Bhengu's first wife, Mylet, was one of the most beautiful women I have ever known. Her beauty was both outward and inward, for her character was as lovely as her face. My wife Enid first saw her at one of our general Conferences. She still recalls how spell-binding Mylet was. Enid simply could not take her gaze off her.

Throughout her life, Mylet struggled with poor health and she died comparatively young in 1971. About 5000 mourners attended her funeral in Pietermaritzburg. I was among those privileged to speak at the service, and then I laid her to rest in the nearby cemetery. For all the rough and ready layout of a typical township graveyard, it was a tranquil spot set among surrounding hills and fringed with tall trees.

As I pronounced the words of the final committal, "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead", my heart was alive with the thought of Christ's second coming attended by crowds of angels filling the vale, calling the dead from the dust [200:89].

Mylet had contracted TB and was in hospital for two years from 1950-1952. Her children Waxy, Mvusi and Dawn were placed in a Children's Home in Queenstown. They were later removed by their aunt Mabel Dombo Ndelela, Mylet's younger sister, and taken back to Port Elizabeth where she and Violet Hillary, Bhengu's co-worker, looked after them. Bhengu, who had enrolled at Taylor State University in the United States of America to study Theology, was forced to come back to be with the children and Mylet. He never returned to pursue his studies in America (Interview: Vilakazi & Bhengu 2003.07.02).

3.8.1. Bhengu and Mylet's Children

Bhengu and Mylet had five children: Nomvuselelo Adelaide, Fakazani, Waxy Ruth, Mvusi and Dawn. Both Nomvuselelo and Fakazani died young. Nomvuselelo (Revival) was their first-born. She fell ill during one of the many evangelistic outreaches Bhengu and Mylet undertook. They were preaching with Rev Kenneth Spooner an African American missionary of the Apostolic Pentecostal Holiness Church in Rustenburg and on surrounding farms in the area.

Nomvuselelo had been sickly and died during one of their evangelistic outreaches. With no money to buy a coffin they emptied their tin trunk of their clothes, placed the tiny body in it and were going to bury her on the side of the road when the owner of the farm on which they had been preaching intervened. He offered them some tomato boxes to make a coffin. Bhengu declined and buried Nomvuselelo in the tin trunk on the farmer's property in Hunters' Rest where the Hunters' Rest Hotel is now situated. The farmer made a rockery on the grave. According to Phinda in an interview, Bhengu would visit the grave to say a prayer whenever he was in the area, possibly to reminisce over the cost of discipleship to his life and the resulting death of two of his children. After their death he never allowed his remaining children to be out in the cold, fearing for their health. He would not even allow them to attend evening prayer meetings (Telephonic interview Vilakazi 2004.01.09).

3.8.2. Bhengu's second marriage, to Nokwethemba Mthethwa

Three years after the death of Mylet on 26 January 1974, Bhengu married Nokwethemba, 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. 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, he was intrigued by Islam, and attended Islamic classes to broaden his knowledge of that religion (Telephonic interview, Nokwethemba Bhengu 2003.10.27). This was confirmed by Bhengu himself in a letter to me (quoted above):

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.

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, B 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 toward 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 (Telephonic interview: Nokwethemba Bhengu 2003.10.27). Bhengu did not have children with Nokwethemba.

3.8.3. Relationships in the family

Both Waxy and Dawn, Bhengu's daughters, describe the relationship between them, their brother Mvusi and their parents as having been very good. Their parents were like friends to them. Mylet was always at home with the children, unless she joined her husband on ministry trips. She loved women's magazines, gardening and roses.

She taught her children to work by allocating each of them certain household chores and giving each a plot to cultivate vegetables. After supper or prayer she would play games with the children and read Bible stories to them. Prayer was the lifestyle of the Bhengu family. There were occasions when Bhengu would rush out of the house without praying, in a hurry to get to work, and the children would call him back to come and pray with them. He always humbly obliged.

3.8.4. Money management in the home and church

Bhengu was very strict about what money was used, both in the home and the church, and how it was spent. He taught his children not to ask for money. He never asked anybody for money for himself. His children were taught to live by faith. The children were rebuked for asking for Christmas gifts or money from other people. If anyone gave the children money, Mylet would take it away from them. He did not live above his people; he lived like them in a four-roomed house in a township although he could afford a better house. In Mthatha, where he had a big house, he brought some of his ministers to live

with them. He taught them to share whatever they had with others.

He was against wastage and getting the church into debt by spending too much on church buildings or furniture. He urged regions to work together to build churches. In order to assist congregations who were building churches, he would send circulars to organisers and extend invitations to become involved, adding financial targets. This method created a spirit of unity and oneness of purpose.

3.9. MYLET'S FUNERAL

When Mylet died on 26 May 1971, she was buried in Pietermaritzburg, her home town. Bhengu was later buried there himself. At the time I was living in Pietermaritzburg and was the official interpreter at Mylet's funeral. Rev Louis Botha Potgieter, general secretary of the Assemblies of God, preached on the text "Let me die the death of a saint" (Num 23: 10). Bhengu had written a valediction in honour of his wife, which was read at the funeral service by Prof Sibusiso Bhengu. The valediction is quoted below in full [Bond 2003: 90 – 91].

3.9.1. A Valediction to a departed friend - Mylet 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. Towards 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 26th 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"

3.9.2. Interpreting the Statements in the Valediction

Some of the key phrases in the poem are highlighted below to 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.

1. *The desert, hunger and want were your food.*

There were times that they had no food to eat, Bhengu would recount their suffering to his people and yet they would survive.

2. *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)

- 3. 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.

- 4. Your portion was humiliation, opposition and poverty.*

Jessie Creamer 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." Jessie and her family would once in a while send him some money for the work of God in Port Elizabeth (Interview: Creamer, 2003.11.19). This statement is confirmed by Gamedze. "He would wash a shirt and wait for it to dry and wear it, and would do the same again and again"

- 5. Towards sunset you saw unprecedented success in Africa where the sons and daughters rose from Christ 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.

6. *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 TB but due to 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.

7. *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.

8. *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"

9. *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 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 Christ Jesus.

10. 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.

3.10 BHENGU'S HOME GOING GROOTE SCHUUR

3.10.1. A Sad Good-bye

In October 1985 the spiritual giant, and great leader and apostle, Nicholas Bhengu went to be with the Lord. He died in the Grootte Schuur Hospital, Cape Town. This man had won the hearts of whites and blacks alike throughout South Africa and abroad, with his simple but profound preaching, spiritual insight and wisdom. Had he remained in his early vocation as 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.

<http://www.caog.org.za/hist.asp>

3.10.2. Bhengu's Funeral Arrangement

In an undated sermon he preached before his death, which he called "home going", he prepared his people for his departure. He warned them to guard against those 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; 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 directions on how his funeral was to be conducted:

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 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 so-and-so on so-and-so at the age of so-and-so." 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 three 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 [Bond 2000: 53 –54].

It is clear from the above that Bhengu was a wounded man after a series of rejections - first 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 Back to God Crusade there were people who injured him with their venomous criticism. For strength he often quoted a text from Isaiah 54:17

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.

He 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.

3.10.3 An analysis of Bhengu's funeral instructions

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 actually cried 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.

I do not intend to analyze all the statements but rather to highlight a few points in the document. In doing so, I believe that some light could be shed on his attitude to speeches and the slaughtering of beasts.

My analysis of selected statements 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.*

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 but chose to deliver a speech and asked Pastor Messinah Donda to deliver the sermon. I attended Masondo's funeral and was the interpreter.

- *... 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 (sic) 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.*

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 he 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. 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. It is done to remove the curse of death from those who attended the burial.

The slaughtering of a beast or chicken – a spilling of blood at funerals is an African tradition done to appease the departed ancestors (amadlozi), those who have gone before, and to cleanse those who remain behind from the curse of death.

Mbiti (1969:151) 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 neutralizes 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!

CHAPTER 4

BHENGU'S MESSAGE - HIS PREACHING AND THE THEOLOGY BEHIND HIS PREACHING

4.1. INTRODUCTION

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, notably 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 Ntshangase, the liturgy introduced by Bhengu in his churches was the result of his Lutheran background (Ntshangase interview 2005). Ntshangase'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 seen from the thesis he presented at the Assemblies of God Conference in Witbank on Wednesday October 10 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." He received his Bible training at KwaDumisa, an Evangelical Bible School under the leadership of Rev Fred Suter, one of the highly respected Evangelical theologians of the time.

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.

4.2. BHENGU'S VISION AND CALL TO MINISTRY

From Bhengu's own testimony, it can be construed that the vision outlined below had a tremendous impact on his life and work.

4.2.1. Bhengu's call to Ministry

Bhengu often spoke about his being called by God. I remember talking to him and a Mr Mkansi at whose home he was staying during his evangelistic crusade in Nelspruit in 1956. 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:

The Lord explained to me that I was authorized 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." (Dubb 1976:10, translated from Schlosser 1958:24)

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).

4.2.2. An analysis of Bhengu's vision and call to ministry

In order to understand Bhengu's preaching and the theology behind it; it is essential to analyse the vision God gave him.

4.2.2.1. Authorisation by the Lord to serve him

"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 talking to him and Mr Mkansi at whose home he was staying during his evangelistic crusade in Nelspruit in 1956. He told us that God had spoken to him specifically in a vision and commanded him to go and preach Jesus Christ to the masses who were enslaved by sin and living in poverty and oppression.

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 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.

4.2.2.2. Nationalities of people in the 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 war cry “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, UK, Sweden, Norway, Canada, Japan and other countries.

4.2.2.3. The cry of their hearts

The people Bhengu saw 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 (blacks) as people needing help. They were drowning under the yoke of sin, poverty and political oppression by successive white regimes, from colonialism to apartheid.

4.2.2.4. The Lord showed me “an open Bible”

The Lord showed him 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 chains of sin, in which they have been bound for centuries.”

In one of the articles in his Declaration of Faith, Bhengu declares that the Bible is “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” (Hollenweger 1972:518). 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).

4.2.2.5. The Lord’s command “I wish you to do this”

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 (Jer 1:4-10), Isaiah (Is 6:8-13) and Paul (Gal 1:1-2, 15-24). Luther says, "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..." [Ebling 1970: 17].

Spurgeon (1954: 26-31) 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 for telling to 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 further to 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...."

4.2.3. Biblical motifs: Bhengu's call compared to the call of Moses and that of the Apostle Paul

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 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.

- Moses met God in a burning but unconsumed bush whilst 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.

4.2.3.1. Moses' call to deliver the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt

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 "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. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out that land into a good and spacious land, one flowing with milk and honey... So now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." (Ex 3:7-10)

4.2.3.2. The call of Paul

Paul's call was also specific. He had been persecuting the church, authorized 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:

'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 what I will show you I am sending you to them 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 sin and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me' (Ac 26:12 - 20)

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." (Gal 1:1,15).

He added, “But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus.” (Gal 1:15 - 17)

Bhengu’s followers called him an apostle, prophet and evangelist. They sensed the special calling in his life and ministry.

Moses Exodus 3:1-17	Paul Act 9:3-6	Bhengu's Vision
<p>1. The vision of a burning bush Ex 3:2</p> <p>2. God speaks out of the bush. 3 Ex:4</p> <p>3. God tells Moses that he has heard the cries and seen the affliction of his people. Ex 3:7</p> <p>4. God sends Moses to rescue his people from bondage in Egypt. Ex 3:10</p>	<p>1. Vision on the Damascus road. Acts 9:3</p> <p>2. Jesus speaks to Paul from heaven Ac 9:4-6; Ac 26: 14-18</p> <p>3. Jesus sends Paul to preach to the Gentiles and their kings. Ac 9:15-16 “also ... and how much he must suffer for my name”</p> <p>4. Jesus sends Paul to preach a message of deliverance to open their eyes from darkness, to light</p>	<p>1. He saw a great ocean</p> <p>2. Jesus speaks to Bhengu in a vision on the seashore</p> <p>3. Bhengu hears the cries of the people who are drowning.</p> <p>4. Jesus sends Bhengu to deliver his people from the chains of sin and death (Dubb 1976:10)</p>

<p>5. God spells out the task. Moses is to bring his people out of Egypt. Ex 3:10</p> <p>6. God's promise to be with Moses Ex 3:12</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>(Ac 26:14-18)</p>	
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4.3. BHENGU'S THEOLOGICAL ROOTS AND TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY

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

4.3.1. The influence of Lutheran Theology on Bhengu

As a young man he grew up in the Lutheran Church, his father was an evangelist with the Lutheran Church whilst two brothers, Jaconiah 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 Professor Sibusiso Bhengu, 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 Dan, say that their father used to sing Lutheran hymns at home.

Below reference is made to the three theological schools of thought that influenced Bhengu's ministry: the Lutheran, Evangelical and Pentecostal theologies.

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

- **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 Rom 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 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 depends 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 toward 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)

4.3.2. The influence of Evangelical Theology on Bhengu

Bhengu received his theological training from Kwa Dumisa Bible College, which later became the Union Bible Institute, in 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, 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" [Bond 2003: 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).

4.3.3. The influence of Pentecostalism on Bhengu

Bhengu was also influenced by the Emmanuel Mission, founded by HC Phillips, and by the Assemblies of God. 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. "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." (Sundkler 1976: 56).

In 1938 Bhengu joined H C Phillips of the Emmanuel Mission in Nelspruit. Phillips was a missionary of Elim Four Square Church in England, a Pentecostal church. In 1938 Phillips took Bhengu, Gumede and Buthelezi with him into the Assemblies of God. Jean Phillips writes:

H C P 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." (s.a.)

4.4. BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

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.

4.4.1. The Evangelical view on Spirit Baptism

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 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 Scripture 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-nationalized, for the time of the present age of grace [Scroggie:s.a 32].

From the foregoing Evangelical leaders, it is clear that they believe baptism with the Holy Spirit to take place at regeneration, there is no other such baptism as taught by Pentecostals and Charismatics. Miracles gradually disappeared as the Church was firmly established.

4.4.2. Torrey breaks ranks with Evangelicals on the issue of Spirit Baptism

Probably the first evangelical scholar to break ranks with the evangelical stance on baptism in the Holy Spirit was Torrey, in his book *What the Bible Teaches*. Torrey was Principal of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, USA, a highly respected Evangelical Bible college established by the world renowned evangelist, 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: Ac 1:5; 4:8; 10:44-46; 11:15-17; 19:2-6, etc.

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 divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." (Heb 2:4).

Torrey put a number of proposals on the table to substantiate his views, three of which 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.

Compare Ac 8:15, 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 baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Gal.3:2 – “This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

Ac 1:5 – “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

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.

Ac 8:12 - “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized.”

There were certainly in this company of baptized, 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 baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)”

Regenerated but not baptized with the Holy Ghost. We see the same thing in Acts 19:1,2: “And it came to pass, that while Apollo 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 v.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 baptized 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. Rom. 8:9 “But ye are not in the flesh, not in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (see also, 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. (1Cor. 12: 13- “ For by the one Spirit are we all baptized 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 into 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 has to 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 the purpose of 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 cleaning 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.

4.4.3. The Pentecostal view on Spirit Baptism

The Holiness movement of John Wesley had a distinct impact on the rise of Pentecostalism. Wesley taught the second blessing experience, including Christian perfection as distinct from justification. He believed that such experiences would become as numerous as conversions (Synan 1975:59- 61) . In addition to Wesley and his holiness revival, there are two people who are regarded as initiators of Pentecostal revival: Charles Fox Parham (1873 – 1929) and William Joseph Seymour (1870 – 1922). Parham had left the Methodist Church after experiencing healing from rheumatic fever. He started a healing

ministry in Topeka, Kansas in 1898 where he established a healing home. Parham was later associated with Stanford who had come from the Baptist church. Influenced by the Holiness Movement, Stanford believed in sanctification and divine healing.

William Seymour, an African-American son of a slave, had been discipled by Parham, but it was Seymour who preached healing at the Azusa Street Revival (1904 - 1906). It began among the poorest of the poor. The meetings were interracial and intercultural. Azusa led to the founding of denominations such as the Apostolic Faith Mission, Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ. It saw the beginning of what is now known as classical Pentecostalism. (Anderson 2006-04-23/2:107-111)

4.4.3.1. Agreement among Pentecostals

Among Pentecostals there are general agreement on the central doctrines of the Christian faith. These include:

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 life-style 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.

(Clark and Lederle et al, 1983:17)

4.4.3.2. Gee on Spirit Baptism

Warner in a foreword to Gee's book *Now that You have Been Baptised in the Spirit* 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're Been Baptized in the Spirit* to the Donald Gee book series so well received by Christians in many lands. (Warner (ed) in Gee: 1972: ii-iii)

Gee 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?" (Ac19:2). 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."

The above passage, like its parallels, reveals that there is an intimate connection between the supernatural gifts of 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.

The very phrase “manifestation of the Spirit” makes this clear. (1 Cor. 12:7). The Greek word is *phanerosis*, a shining forth. Those nine “gifts” that follow are examples of the different ways in which the indwelling Spirit might reveal Himself through believers. It is the light shining through the lantern. A splendid modern illustration is provided by the well-known pocket electric flashlight. There is the power of the battery within the lamp that shines forth (literally *manifests* itself) whenever the owner places his finger upon the trigger. (Gee 1937:4-5)

Gee, however warns against what he calls disappointing baptisms. He categorises them into three groups: The first group are people who have experienced no change in their lives after the Pentecostal baptism. 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. 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.” (Gee 1972: 24- 25).

From the above self-criticism by one of the foremost pioneering fathers of Spirit baptism, it is clear that 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 whilst 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.

Gee is supported by other Pentecostal writers including David J du Plessis, one of the world renowned Pentecostal leaders of the twentieth century who went around the world introducing the ministry of Spirit baptism and the attendant manifestations of the Spirit to numerous mainline churches, including the Roman Catholic Church.

4.4.3.3. Du Plessis on Spirit Baptism:

Gee was supported by David du Plessis, 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 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 (Ezek. 36:26; John 1:12, 13; John 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 baptized 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. (Du Plessis 1970:70-71)

4.5. BHENGU'S DECLARATION OF FAITH

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:

1. The Trinity of the Godhead, i.e. 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.
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.
(Hollenweger 1972:517 – 518)

The Bhengu Declaration of faith is similar to that of the Assemblies of God, Things Commonly Believed Amongst Us but it differs on its inerrancy emphasis on the inerrancy of scripture.

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, "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". 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 to 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 - in speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, reading of scriptures, singing of hymns, prophecy etc., 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" (I Cor. 14:40). Doing things in a fitting and orderly way was Bhengu's objective.

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

The doctrinal statements of all three major Pentecostal Churches – the Apostolic Faith Mission, 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 proof of baptism with the Holy Spirit. According to the Apostolic Faith Mission, "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....". 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" (Acts 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: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than a thousand words in a tongue". (1 Cor 14:18-19)

In 1976 at the first Campus Crusade for Christ Executive Seminar in Plettenburg Bay to which Bhengu and his wife Nokwethemba had been invited (Campus Crusade for Christ, 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?"

4.6. BHENGU IS BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

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:

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. This apparently re-enforced his calling.

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 baptized. I came back; I believed in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. For five years I prayed to be baptized 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 baptizing 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 baptized 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 baptized 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 baptized 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 2am. 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. Back in our dormitory, one of the young men was rocking in his bed, so I took my belt and tied him to his bed so that he would not fall over. (Bhengu – cassette-recorded sermon s.a). 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.

Neil Scheepers, a minister and a member of the Executive of the Assemblies of God, who was responsible for raising funds in white churches to support Bhengu's Back to God Crusade, affirms that Bhengu did speak in tongues but never promoted it by laying hands on people to receive Spirit Baptism. He remembers:

We in the predominantly westernized 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.

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

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 baptized in the Spirit. Healings would take place. The power of God would sweep over the people with mighty revivalistic force. [Bond 2000, 71-72].

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.

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

4.7. BHENGU’S TEACHING AND PREACHING

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.’ Professor Ian Pitt-Watson writes, ‘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’. Bishop Stephen Neill develops another metaphor. ‘Preaching is like

weaving,' he writes. 'There are the two factors of the warp 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 (Stott: 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

4.7.1. Centrality of the cross in Bhengu's preaching

The cross was central to Bhengu's preaching. In his book *We serve a Big God*, Roberts quotes from a sermon preached by Bhengu in the USA:

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. (Roberts 26 – 27, s.a).

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 one criminal insulted Jesus whilst 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:

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?

Below he deals with the person of Jesus Christ, the second member of the Godhead - the One God:

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 (Bhengu: cassette tape s.a).

4.7.2. Perfectionism

Schlosser (in Holleweger 1972; 129) 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.

According to Schlosser in Holleweger, 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.

4.7.3. Bhengu on healing

“I will prove that there is a God and that he is stronger than the Devil!” he 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 8 April and 2 November 1953 Bhengu affirmed that in East London he cooperated with two doctors, to whom he sent everyone suffering from an organic disease (Schlosser in Hollenweger 1972:129).

This however did not stop Bhengu proclaiming the healing of the organically sick. In the vernacular his church was known as the ‘Healer’s Church’ (icawe kamphilisi – of the healer).

God desired a healthy mind in a healthy body. “The body is the temple of God,” he said. “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.”

4.7.4. War on 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 (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 England, “Mr Mullan we have confidence in Mr Bhengu and we want this work to go on by all means”.

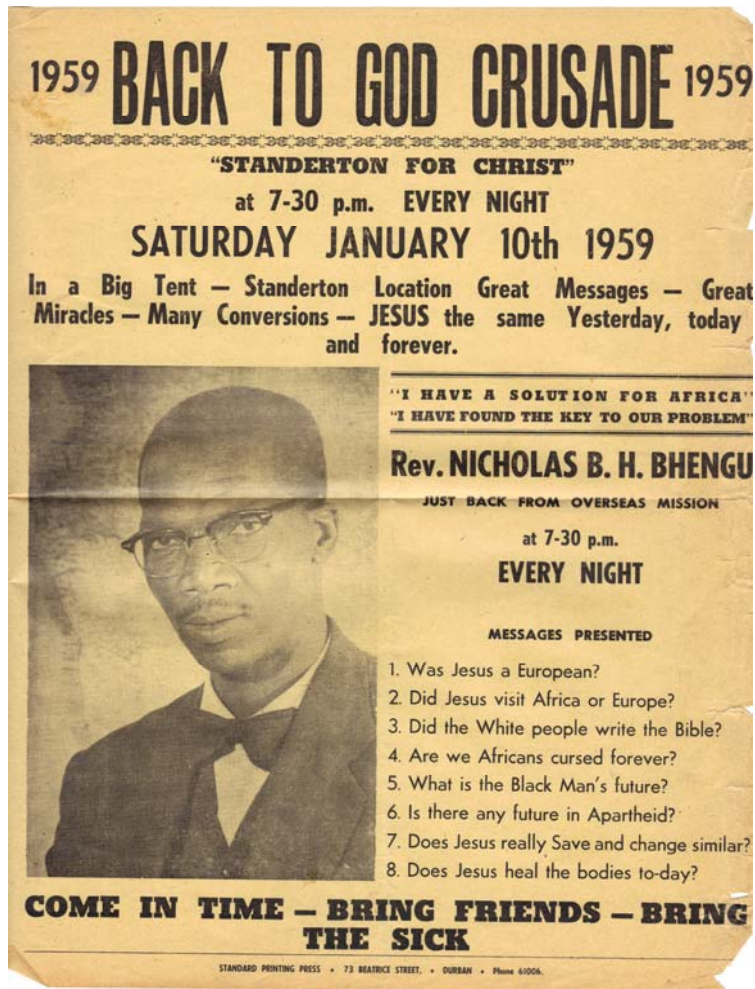
4.7.5. Bhengu on superstitions

Bhengu was not obsessed with ancestral worship, he believed the gospel that accepting Jesus Christ would deal with that:

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 interdenominational conventions, telling African people that, because you can never find God by rationalizing. 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" [Roberts s.a:8].

4.7.6 Bhengu understood the psychological and emotional make-up of his audience

He raised and answered questions people were asking.



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:

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 are, 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” (Schlosser. Free translation by a German Theology student at the University of Pretoria 2003).

4.7.7. Bhengu was a great story teller

He told stories to explain his messages - like the parable of the farmer (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. 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]

4.8. BHENGU PREACHED AND TAUGHT UNDER THE ANOINTING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Bond describes how powerful Bhengu’s preaching was, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit:

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 preaching in the early days in England said when Jeffries went into a ‘hwyl’ they would switch off the microphones and he could be heard in every corner of the vast auditorium.

Bond 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, (processing) 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 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" [Bond 2000:60].

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 baptize 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 baptized in front of a crowd of 5,000 witnesses. Influential African political leaders were among the converts.

Bhengu is now 75 years of age and respected by both black, white and coloured, throughout South Africa. He has preached throughout Africa and visited Japan as well as Britain, Canada and America. (<http://hometown.aol.com/thewaycm/revival/africa.html>)

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:

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 (Interview Gamedze 2003.10.23).

* * * * *

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.