

CHAPTER 6

BHENGU'S PROPHETIC ROLE: HIS SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLITICAL STANCE AND PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

6.1. INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATION

Chapter Two sketches the context within which Bhengu ministered. The stage was set with the founding of the ANC in 1912 and the National Party in 1914 respectively. Both organisations came into being in Bloemfontein. The ANC's objective was to seek equality for blacks, in particular African people, whilst the National Party sought to establish Afrikaner identity - language, culture, religion and racial purity - for its people.

The socio-political landscape in South Africa changed dramatically when the National Party came to power in 1948. The National Party enacted laws that would cause pain and suffering to other races, notably blacks. These included pass laws which restricted movement of black people; the Bantu Education Act designed to keep blacks subservient to whites as suppliers of labour on mines and on farms; and the creation of the Bantu Homelands. The latter epitomizes grand apartheid as Dr Verwoerd, then Minister of Bantu Affairs in JG Strydom's government, orchestrated the division of the country into African ethnic groups: Zulu, Swazi, Venda, Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Tswana, Tsonga, Xhosa (Transkei and Xhosa Ciskei), giving self- rule and independence to those who asked for it. The National government also established Coloured and Indian residential and business areas.

During this period life in South Africa was based on race. The colour of a person's skin determined what he could or could not do: where he could live, send children to school or university, die or to be buried. This state of affairs led to racial polarisation. Attempts by Liberation movements to find a negotiated settlement failed, leaving organisations such as ANC and PAC with no option but to take up arms and fight for liberation. South Africa was inevitably plunged into a prolonged war for liberation led by Liberation movements with counter attacks by the State. This period lasted for about fifty years and resulted in the deaths of thousands of black people and some coloured, Indian and white people.

The church was, inevitably drawn into the fray. Many churches made pleas to government in an attempt to bring a socio-economic and political solution to apartheid. Several conferences were organised to address the problem. These efforts by the broader church to find a solution to the scourge of apartheid ended up dividing the Evangelical, Pentecostal, English and Afrikaans churches on grounds of race and the diverse strategies to defeat apartheid.

Clearly Bhengu, as one of prominent church leaders of his time, would have been expected by both the government and liberation movements to take a stand for or against apartheid. It was not an easy road that he had to travel in pursuit of his calling and mandate to preach the gospel to all creation. (Mat. 28: 18-20), He endured criticism from liberation movements for not joining the struggle. He was monitored by government agents who feared that he might turn the people against them.

The colonisation of South Africa began with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in the Cape on 6 April 1652. He had been sent by the Dutch East Indian Company to set up a halfway station between Europe and India to supply fresh produce to passing ships. Jan van Riebeeck introduced the Protestant Reformed faith to the country. For many years the Dutch Reformed Church was the dominant faith among the majority of White Afrikaners. However, the occupation of the colony by the British in 1806 opened space for other church denominations to do mission work: Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican and societies such as the London Mission Society and others.

Cochrane (1987: 182- 183) says:

The end of the nineteenth century brought the diamond and gold discoveries, transformed the economic geography of the region, introduced the first major phase of industrialisation, and set up labour supply and control systems matched to the unique conditions of a tight monopoly in the diamond market and a usually strict monopoly on the low-grade, highly capitalised, but immensely rich gold reefs. From this point on the economy of South Africa was locked into structures that would produce a marked degree of exploitation of colonised labour, a white labour aristocracy, and underdevelopment of the rural reserves. That the gold reefs lay in a Trekker Republic generated at first an imperial war and then a peculiar and momentous competition between national and foreign capital, a competition for hegemony in the face of various recurrent threats from labour.

Mojake (in Saayman 1991:25) has this to say:

It is against this background of vast economic forces that the influx of missionaries to the colonies acquires meaning. The missionaries came from a capitalist Christian civilization that unblushingly formed religious sanctions for inequality, as it does to this day, and whose ministers solemnly blessed its wars of aggression. Churches became captives of the ruling elite whose focus was bent on making profit from cheap black labour.

Cochrane (1987:183) castigates them for colluding with colonial masters of the day:

White governments created labour reservoirs for cheap black labour in the native reserves with the cooperation of chiefs. The captivity of the churches to the ruling powers and their functional dependency on the industrial economy, itself connected in important ways to the imperial metropolis, can be understood at a number of levels. The Victorian tradition, a colonial mentality, the structures of the church itself, the material interests of its white members, and the impact of European immigrants – all played a part in determining the theory and the practice of the Church along lines prejudicial to the colonised indigenous people and the working class in particular. Regularly the Church stumbled through confusion, ambiguity, inactivity, and occasional protest from its black members among whom it desired no loss of influence. Its undoubted contribution to their welfare and to their ability to cope in a new environment imposed upon them, does not undermine or reduce the force of this assessment of the Church in relation to blacks and to the working class in particular.

6.2. THE PERENNIAL DEBATE: SPIRITUAL GOSPEL VERSUS SOCIAL GOSPEL

The debate around spiritual versus social gospel has been raging on for many decades to the point of causing divisions between Evangelical-Pentecostal groups and World Council of Churches denominations.

The controversy was about what the gospel entailed – spiritual matters, saving of souls or changing societal structures to make life somewhat more bearable for the poor and oppressed.

The Evangelical theologian, Michael Green [1992: 15 – 16], addresses the inseparable need of both spiritual and social gospel. He believes that it is wrong to separate them. In

essence the one should not exist without the other. Jesus did both, he preached and he fed and healed the people:

What is more, evangelism is neither Christian proclamation alone nor Christian presence alone. It is both. There has been a disastrous tendency for some Christians to concentrate on proclaiming the gospel without showing it; so to emphasize that the feeding, the healing, the educating and the liberating fall in the background. In reaction those who have concentrated on a 'social gospel' have been content to get among people and embrace them with the arms of Christ's love without bearing any overt witness to the one in whose name they do it . The very idea of separating the spiritual from the social gospel does despite to the New Testament. Jesus went about doing good and preaching the good news of the kingdom. His followers must aim for the same balance. There is only one gospel - of a God who reaches people in their need, rescues them, builds them into a new society, and is concerned with every aspect of their lives in this world and the next. This message must be both proclaimed and lived out. Presence alone and proclamation alone are equally useless. The early Christians employed both. So must we.

Lloyd-Jones (in Stott 1975:87) writes: "The hospital does not, cannot and never will be able to take over the functions of the Church! It is quite impossible for it to do so... The authentic task of the Church is not primarily to make people healthy... her essential task is to restore men to the right relationship with God... Man's real problem is not simply that he is sick, but that he is a rebel." Lloyd-Jones believes that the ministry of the church is primarily to restore people to God.

It is common knowledge that the majority of Evangelicals lay high priority on the salvation of man's soul and the need of an individual to be connected to God through the New Birth or regeneration. The Gospel of John with its emphasis on being born again is seen as key to a change from death to life.

"I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (Jn 3:5-8)

The Apostle Paul maintains that being saved means becoming a new creation:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:17 - 21)

This newness in Christ should be the guiding light in changing, not only the lifestyle of an individual; it should also impel the new person in Christ to become an ambassador for a change model, structural or societal renewal including socio-political transformation.

So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. (Phil 2: 15 – 18)

According to John Stott, in the eyes of many the most prominent Evangelical thinker at the end of the 20th Century, the priority of the Gospel, the heart of our calling, is service evangelism. Referring to the Lausanne Covenant (par. 6), he wrote (1925:35f):

Christians should feel an acute pain of conscience and compassion when human beings are oppressed or neglected in any way, whether what is being denied them is civil liberty, racial respect, education, medication, employment, or adequate, clothing and shelter. Anything which undermines human dignity should be an offence to us. But is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the gospel? And how can we seriously maintain that political and economic liberation is just as important as eternal salvation? Both are certainly challenges to Christian love. But listen to the apostle Paul when he writes with solemn emphasis about this concern for his fellow Jews: "I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race' (Romans 9. 1-3). What was the cause of his anguish? That they had lost their national Jewish independence and were under the colonial heel of Rome? That they

were often despised and hated by Gentiles, socially boycotted and deprived of equal opportunities? No. 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved' (Romans 10.1), and the context makes it plain beyond doubt that the 'salvation' Paul wanted for them was their acceptance with God (v. 2 -4)

In South Africa the debate was of equal importance. Wilem Nicol saw David Bosch and Albert Nolan as representatives of the two sides. Bosch, in Nicol's view, over-emphasized the role of the church as minister of reconciliation by creating an alternative community in the world, not taking God's providential activity in the world seriously enough. Nicol (1990:93) compares Bosch, the DRC theologian, with Nolan, the Roman Catholic priest:

For Bosch, Christian reconciliation precedes social justice, while the reverse is true for Nolan. Bosch pleads that the church should keep a critical distance from any specific historical movement like the present struggle, Nolan sees it as the main task of the church to give its full support rating to the struggle. For Bosch the liberating role of the church is indirect in that it should in its uniqueness and weakness be a catalyst of change, while Nolan calls the church to directly empower the masses. Bosch stresses powerlessness, and Nolan power, but neither emphasises the unconventional combination of the two that leads to non-violent action. Social analysis and planning of liberation strategy are for Bosch not really the task of the church and theology, while for Nolan they are.

Nicol believes that Nolan's way is the correct one:

. . . If the church reads the signs of the times like the suffering and hope of the poor, and the actions of the trade unions and the political organisations working for liberation, she can have no doubt as to what God is doing in South Africa today. The church should proclaim this as the gospel and thereby give very powerful support to the struggle. This proclamation is not abstract. The church should "encourage people" to participate in the struggle, "support the organization" in the struggle, "protest", "propose new ways of acting" and "even give a helping hand" (1988:217). She does not spread a spirit of violence, but if some violence should occur within the struggle, it should not frighten the church from supporting it. All this should be done by the church as institution which is distinguished from the church as the people who belong to it. The meaning of the distinction is to show that the latter, and not the former, can move into practical politics, formulate policies and thereby make compromises. The church as institution should shun this

as a third way. So from the uniqueness of the church, Nolan makes the opposite deduction to what Bosch makes: Nolan deduces that the church should uncompromisingly side with the struggle, while Bosch deduces that the church should keep a distance.

In his widely acclaimed book *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch provided a historical note to the controversy (1991:297):

By the end of the nineteenth century the rift between conservative (or fundamentalist) mission advocates on the one hand and liberals (or social gospellers) on the other was becoming ever wider. Still, representatives of both groups could argue that evangelism preceded civilization, while other spokespersons again of both persuasions could plead equally convincingly for introducing civilization as a precondition for evangelism. They therefore did not necessarily differ about strategy in this respect, for the simple reason that all of them, whether liberal or conservative, postmillennialist or premillennialist, were committed to the culture of the West, which they propagated equally vigorously. Where they did, however, increasingly differ was about the overall aim of mission. Whereas some insisted that the grand object of mission was not to bring pagans into an ordered and cultured society but to bring them to Christ and eternal salvation, others were more concerned about the creation of a gospel-centred civilization and the benefits this could bring to all nations than about doctrine and people's eternal destiny.

My personal view is that a balance should be struck between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the gospel - bringing the people to Christ but also teaching them to be salt and light (Math 5:13ff):

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

In my book, *A Guide to Dynamics Youth Leadership – A challenge to the Church* (4th Edition 2001) I write:

In South Africa the question of racism has become a bone of contention. Blacks accusing whites of racism and vice versa. Racism is the attitude that says one race is superior to another. It is the product of the sinful nature inherent in all men. It must be seen as sin and that racial attitudes displease God. Christians are not immune to this sin. Although in public most Christians will pretend all is well, whilst in private the venom is spewed out against others, thereby poisoning them as well. We should help our youth to deal with it and try to root it out at an early stage of their development. We should care enough to confront a brother or sister when they express a racial attitude. But we also need to deal with it in our own lives before we attempt to look at the speck of sawdust in our brother's eyes while paying no attention to the plank in our own eyes. (2001:22)

Cassidy (1989: 323) emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as the enabling power for involvement in dealing with issues confronting the church and society.

Deep Christian spirituality, where the Holy Spirit is empowering and in charge, has got to the matrix from which all human endeavours flow, especially those which relate to the four categories of this scripture - the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. And if Jesus had to move in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14) and had to have the Spirit of the Lord upon him (Luke 4:18) in order to fulfil his liberating mission, then certainly we cannot manage with less.

Whether, therefore, we see ourselves preaching good news to the poor, releasing the captives, restoring sight to the blind or setting at liberty the oppressed, we need the Holy Spirit in control to ensure that each activity is done in his time and way.

Any method of working for either spiritual or any other kind of freedom which does not go the Spirit's way is therefore to be held in suspicion.

6.3. BHENGU AND POLITICS

Amongst all the forces at play in the country between the theological differences of his time, Nicholas Bhengu had to find his own position, to define his message.

Bhengu did not participate in party political activities, he was however very much alive to the happenings in the country. He had committed himself to preaching the gospel by which he hoped to bring peace and stability amongst different racial groups which would

result in eliminating racial and political tensions with the ultimate goal of introducing democracy in South Africa.

Bond [2000:100-101] says the following about Bhengu and the political situation in South Africa:

In a very true sense, Bhengu would not allow himself to become captive to any political faction. Thus he kept in a position where he could minister to everybody. Perhaps it was due to his wisdom. Perhaps it was due to the sovereign working of God. Bhengu seemed to find favour with all political leaders in apartheid South Africa, both black and white. He even found a high degree of tolerance from the South African government, although it fell short of outright favour.

There was a time towards the beginning of his ministry when the Department of Native Affairs placed some strictures on him, accusing him of being a Communist. On the advice of Jim Mullan, Bhengu wasted no time but sought an audience with the Secretary for Native Affairs. At that time, it was a certain Dr Louis Eiselen. Bhengu completely won the day. With a gentlemanly grace that none of his successors ever sought to emulate, Dr Eiselen personally apologised to Bhengu, first verbally and then followed it up with an official written apology. A decade later such courtesy would have been unthinkable from any native administrator. By then the Department had become a virtual kingdom within a kingdom. Many of the officials were dictatorial, masterful and arrogant.

In the 1960s some black radicals regarded Bhengu as a "sell-out". He received threatening letters in the post. "Bhengu, look what you're doing to us!" "When we get you, we will boil you in oil". Yet in the same period, radical activists sent Nicholas Bhengu messengers to promise that in times of trouble, none of his churches would be burnt down. Later from Robben Island, verbal messages were conveyed. "Greet our father for us". "Tell him that I was the one who came to him in East London about not burning churches".

A few years ago at a diplomatic function which I attended, I made myself known to the head of the Foreign Affairs Department, an ANC government official. He said, "Oh, the Assemblies of God! I know you! You're for us! Well, to some extent at any rate!" The statement was equivocal but friendly. When the African church dedicated the conference centre which it had purchased for some four million Rands at Henley-on-Klip, President Mandela consented to be the guest of honour. I had the

privilege with others of sharing the platform with him and with Mrs Mary Metcalfe, the MEC for Education who spoke glowingly of the Assemblies of God's efforts at educating black children and women.

Yet in the apartheid era, homeland leaders courted Bhengu's friendship. George Mtanzima, then President of the Transkei, visited the Back to God East London Convention and spoke there. Bhengu had no choice but to open the platform to him. His speech somewhat embarrassed Bhengu with its racialism. Mtanzima expatiated on heaven. He said, "If I get to heaven and there's white man there, I'll walk out! Bhengu had to wait until the following day to repudiate the statement in Mtanzima's absence. He did so with characteristic wit. "If you get to heaven," he asked, "and there's a white man there and you walk out, where will you walk to? There are plenty of white men in the other place."

This has to be powerfully stressed, because much so-called Christian action, be it supposedly spiritual or in the socio-political arena, so lacks the style and fruit of Christian grace and spirituality that it becomes a travesty of the gospel and a source of utter confusion to a watching world. The non-Jesus spirit makes those who might otherwise be willing to change stubbornly resistant to doing so.

6.3.1. Bhengu criticised for his non-partisan political stance

The struggle against apartheid was fought on many fronts: churches, liberation movements, labour unions, student bodies, international organisations and others participated.

It was to be expected that a man of Bhengu's stature would publicly oppose the apartheid governmental and support the struggle for political freedom. Instead, Bhengu continued to minister to homeland leaders. He also invited them to his church conventions. For this, Bhengu was strongly criticized. Inter alia by Chief Albert Luthuli, the highly respected president of the ANC. His family, too, was perplexed. Black journalists, above all Lawrence Tutu, openly raised their voices against Bhengu's stance.

6.3.1.1. Bhengu criticised by Chief Albert Luthuli – former President of the ANC and Nobel Prize winner.

Schlosser (Hollenwegen 1972:136) speaks of Bhengu being in the crossfire of politics and of Luthuli's criticism:

Bhengu pleads for peace with the whites – a phenomenon amongst 'educated natives' in the Union of South Africa – and is consequently branded and threatened as a 'traitor' by the nationalist natives who belong to the African National Congress. In fact in South Africa it is no longer so easy even for a Pentecostal pastor to remain outside politics, something which is incomprehensible to most of his colleagues in other countries. Albert Luthuli, who died in 1967 while under house arrest, was a lay preacher of the American Congregational Church and President of the African National Congress, and in his youth was a teacher in a village near Bhengu's home. Ketesa Schlosser reports:

He told me that he respected Bhengu as a sincere and honest man. Bhengu, who is conscious of the danger that threatens him from the extremists of the African National Congress, has in his turn a great human respect of Luthuli; 'He is one of the best Christians we have. But I do not understand why he has declared his support for the passive resistance movement.'

She decries the fact that Bhengu was left to fight the attacks alone without the support of South African and World Pentecostal Movements. 'He was left to deal with these difficult problems completely on his own.' She concludes 'Bhengu is far from a blind admirer of whites, but he is too reasonable to be a fanatical black nationalist.'

6.3.1.2. Bhengu criticised by Professor Sibusiso Bhengu (his nephew)

Professor Sibusiso Bhengu is Bhengu's nephew, son of Jeconiah. Sibusiso Bhengu went into exile in Switzerland. Bhengu mentions him in a letter he wrote to me from Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, England. 'My nephew (Sipho's younger brother) has written his Thesis for PhD in Switzerland. We are going to have a Doctor in our family, and he loves the Lord Jesus. This is a wonder of wonders.' (cf 6:12:1)

Professor Bhengu (in an interview 2005.01.04), said about his uncle, 'We were all puzzled by my uncle's lack of open support for the ANC's liberation struggle. It was as though he was sitting on the fence'.

6.3.1.3. Bhengu criticised by Lawrence Tutu (his church member)

Bhengu's arch critic, however, was Lawrence Tutu, a member of his East London Assembly. Tutu, whose parents were staunch and trusted members of Bhengu's East London church, wrote a number of articles in the *Daily Dispatch* in which he criticised Bhengu. Tutu's grievance was that whilst Bhengu invited Homeland leaders to his church conferences and conventions to address gatherings, he did not do the same for liberation movements. Bond, concerned about Lawrence Tutu's articles in the press, prompted Bhengu to respond. An open letter written by Bhengu is of such importance, that I quoted the key points:

7th May 1980

Dear Brethren

Greetings in His Name!

Quite a number of articles have been appearing in the Daily Dispatch about Assemblies of God and me. These articles have disturbed those who do not know Mr Lawrence Tutu personally plus those who rejoice at seeing mud thrown at the Assemblies of God and at me personally. But I have never worried myself concerning the small men who try to pull me into political controversies so that I attend to them instead of concentrating on God's work which is so important to me at this time. They are too small to attend to and if I do attend to them I would be making him great.

I am surprised if these articles have disturbed the brethren in our fellowship. These brethren have known me for years and know that I do not change.

Lawrence Tutu has been writing many things in the past with his friend, the late Hargrievs Mpetukana, who tried a smear on me, but the brethren finally found that it was all a concoction of lies.

The following points have to be considered:

- Lawrence Tutu earns his livelihood as a journalist and needs material for the press and so he finds his target or victim in me.
- Lawrence Tutu is not really shooting at me; he is shooting at Homeland Governments and the South African Government indirectly.
- All the statements in the press are a distortion of facts from a disgruntled, frustrated and venomous person who cares for neither the Church he claims to belong to nor any person in any station.
- Tutu has no scruples for the Church and his theological ideas are questionable and border on modernism. I have all the clippings here with me from the newspaper. It was not my intention to write this letter of explanation but Brother Bond felt I should say something to the Executive and so I am doing so.
- Tutu's mother was one of the most faithful and saintly followers of Christ and member of the East London Assembly. Tutu's mother died in the faith. His father is an ardent Christian brother and deacon in our East London Church. I had decided to keep silent as an honour to Lawrence Tutu's late mother and to his father who has never been found at fault since he was saved in 1950 in the East London Revival.
- Chief Justice Mabandla was at the convention in 1978 and was invited again in 1979 but apologised because he was held up somehow. Did the press interview Chief Justice Mabandla? Chief Mabandla was only left out one year and the fault was made by the staff which sends out invitations.
- We invite anybody who is a leader, we make no preference for parties. We maintain our neutral position in party politics but honour chiefs and all

leaders. This is why I attended Chief Botha Sigcau's funeral in Transkei, Mr Biko's funeral at Graaf Reinet. I am a Christian and I adhere to the Bible and to I Timothy 2:1-4 which Tutu has doubts about.

- I am a Christian first of all and I am a brother to all men of good will irrespective of tribe, ethnicity, colour, political or denominational affiliation. Tutu and the venom in the press will not change me an iota.
- Everyone knows that we began to invite chiefs and leaders since 1957 at the dedication of the East London Church and they have been invited yearly ever since. We operate in the homelands and almost 75 per cent of the Blacks come from and return to the homelands. We, therefore, have no choice but honour chiefs and leaders in those homelands.
- We have people from all parts of the world in our churches and we cannot afford the luxury of favouring certain parties and disfavouring others. We are a church catering for the spiritual and social welfare of the people and so we do not bark.
- Finally we believe and teach what the New Testament teaches. We love God, we love the brethren, we love fellowship. If Lawrence Tutu had anything he thought will be harmful to the body of Christ, he should have discussed it with us if he did not intend to damage our good name to the simple folk who read the newspaper. His motives are questionable and his Christian spirit is also questionable. I will not write and disgrace him to the public through the press but I am writing to those who are worried and depressed by these articles.

Yours in his Fellowship

Nicholas B.H. Bhengu

In view of Bhengu's use of strong language, I invited Lawrence Tutu to provide copies of his articles on Bhengu's inability to give liberation struggle leaders an opportunity to address his meetings. Tutu promised to check with his former newspaper, *Daily Dispatch* but has not come back to me.

6.4. BHENGU'S SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTIVITIES ON CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the criticism levelled at Bhengu by one of its reporters (Lawrence Tutu), The East London *Daily Despatch* reported very positively on Bhengu's role in bringing socio-political changes to South Africa. Three examples, all taken from the year 1966 will suffice.

6.4.1. *Daily Despatch* 1966: Not enough changes in South Africa

East London - South Africa's policies had caused hostile and rebellious attitudes abroad and the country's domestic strife had estranged her from the West as well as the Third World countries.

This was the warning sounded by Rev N. Bhengu, widely travelled evangelist and social reformer who was reporting on his impressions and experiences about the attitude of overseas countries towards South Africa at a lunch forum of the Institute of Race Relations.

He said the West was ready to lend a helping hand to anyone who promised to destroy South Africa's racial society. He said the task of every South African was to extend a hand of friendship. "We are all component parts of South Africa. We must behave, talk and treat men like people – we must do to others like we would like others to do to us." Rev Bhengu said:

Fears especially among Christian circles were that changes in South Africa were too few. There is a great concern to assert and affirm the Christian stand without dabbling in politics, just the simple teaching of the Gospel. But the Gospel message itself is becoming meaningless."

He said although South Africa was militarily strong it could not withstand a long drawn-out war. There had to be changes in the relation of man to man. Rev Bhengu said there were two alternatives - violence and peaceful negotiation - and he urged for the latter with patience. "It will be a slow process it, will need a good

education and patience when people's hearts are changed and their minds are purged of poison which has been there for years."

6.4.2. *Daily Dispatch* 1966: Bhengu on race

East London - The race problem was troublesome but not a hindrance to the work of evangelism in any country, the Rev. N.B.H. Bhengu, head and founder of the Assemblies of God and Back to God Crusade, said in an interview yesterday. He returned yesterday from Berlin, West Germany, where he attended the first World Convention on Evangelism, and from Canada and the United States. There were allegations that evangelism did not progress in a country faced with race problems like South Africa. This was not correct, Mr Bhengu said. "Even the countries without race problems cannot claim to have advanced the work on evangelism better than we have done in South Africa," he said. "Nothing can stop the work of God. No laws can stop the spread of the Gospel."

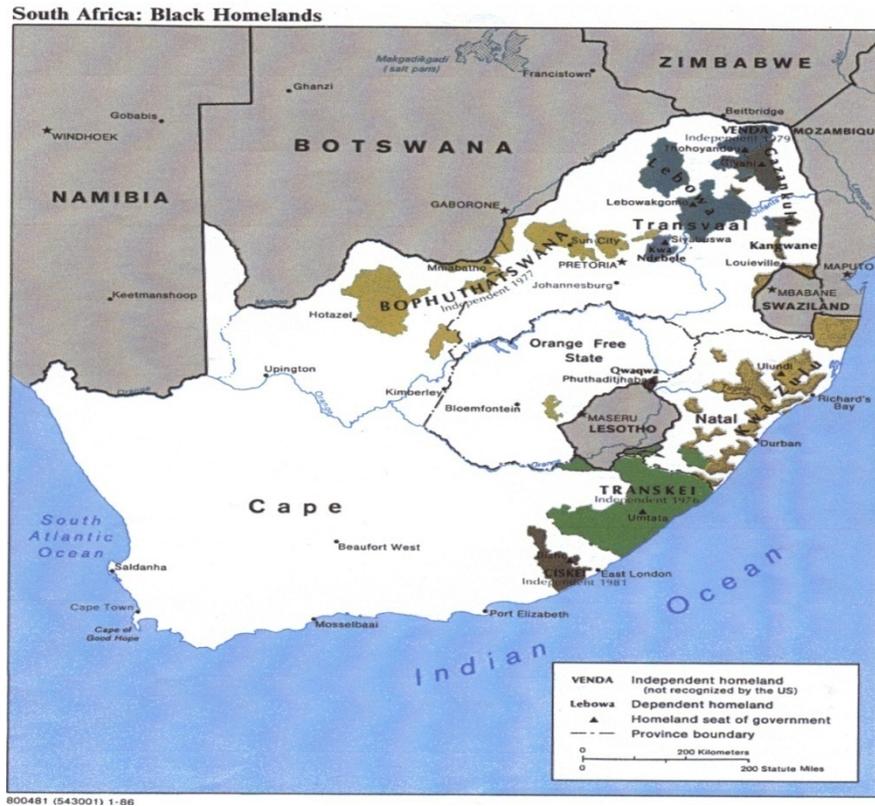
6.4.3. *Daily Dispatch* 1966: Bhengu on separate development

Bhengu was not an admirer of separate development as an ideology or solution to South Africa's race and socio-political problems. Because many of his people came to the cities from rural South Africa, however, he was compelled to work with homeland leaders in order to reach their people with the gospel.

The *Daily Dispatch* reported that Bhengu said that separate development had its own difficulties as the developed Africans had to be at the beck and call of the undeveloped, who manned institutions like tribal authorities. He also said that members of his congregations were sometimes victimised in certain rural areas because of their faith: 'It has been difficult for us to obtain church sites in some rural areas,' he said. 'We have been opposed by chiefs and their tribal authorities. Some bigoted Christian churches have even opposed our establishing congregations in their midst. It is our intention to establish a Bible school in the Transkei. We are meeting with strong opposition in some areas and we may be forced to establish it in the Free State.'

Some of these areas – Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei - opted for so-called independence from South Africa. Other homelands which did not opt for independence but

accepted legislative functions in their areas were Kwa-Zulu, Ka-Ngwane, Kwa-Ndebele and Qwa Qwa. Bhengu had to work within these structures as well as some white areas of South Africa.



A map of homeland areas

The fact that some homelands leaders did not grant Bhengu church sites indicates he was not the darling of homelands authorities.

6.4.4. *Daily Dispatch* 1966: Bhengu on white responsibility

White South Africans, also had a grave responsibility in meeting the challenges of apartheid, Bhengu said. His message, captured by an East London journalist, left no doubt about that:



The Rev. Bhengu speaking to a White audience in East London.

African preacher on White responsibility

EAST LONDON — The Gospel of Jesus Christ was the only salvation against the pending catastrophe and the holocaust of war that was now facing the world, the Rev. N. B. H. Bhengu, of the Assemblies of God, said here over the week-end.

Mr. Bhengu, founder of the non-White section of the Assemblies of God, was addressing a White audience at the City Hall on Saturday night.

The world was seething and boiling. People stood in awe watching what was to happen. The Africans were puzzled and bewildered by what was happening today, but Christ was the answer, he said.

"The Europeans in this country have a great responsibility. Of these to whom much has been given, much will be expected," he said. "The European Christians have done much to help us in our task and much has been accomplished."

A lot of missionary work has to be done. This was a challenge for 1968. The message of God had to reach the population in greater measure, and this was the answer to race relations and a remedy to all political upheavals.

People were looking at the United Nations Organisation with interest. There was no peace. World leaders were sitting and talking under fear and rumours of war throughout the world.

"Help us to rescue the souls of our men in peril. Rescue them from the pending bloodbath," he said. "Rescue them from communism. Rescue them from mad nationalism."

Mr. Bhengu said he committed himself to communism when he was a young man. This he did through vague promises. But now he had committed himself to God.

—DDR.

6.4.5. Bhengu's message to political leaders

As a prophet and evangelist Bhengu preached the Word of God to all people including politicians, traditional leaders, business students, youth - the rich and poor without distinction. They all needed to hear the message of salvation, the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of a future in heaven with their Creator.

6.4.5.1. Bhengu preaches to the ANC

In 1951, Dr Gamedze a prominent Evangelical leader in Swaziland, was on a ship bound for England. He told me the following in an interview in 2003:

Whilst the ship docked in Port Elizabeth, I requested to disembark to go and see Bhengu in Port Elizabeth, with a plan to drive with him from Port Elizabeth to East London. During this time I got to know more about Bhengu and all the suffering he went through. He related of times when he had only one shirt. He would wash the shirt and wait for it to dry, wear it again until it was torn. He always wore a jacket so as not to show the tear in his shirt. Bhengu also told me about how he had lost his child and since he did not have money to bury the child he used his suitcase, he used his suitcase to bury the child on the roadside.

For a man to go through all that because of the gospel! He is an example of what an apostle should be - that's why I had so much respect for Bhengu. When we got to East London there was a big commemoration of the ANC youth league and there was a great presence of police. I expressed concern at the risk of being arrested especially because of the special permission I had obtained to leave the ship. I decided to remain in the car whilst Bhengu went ahead to address the meeting.

Bhengu had a way of capturing crowds. He would start with jokes and stories. He would just deliver the powerful message during the last five minutes. This meeting ended well. I remained in East London for some days. Bhengu told me that he was going to meet the people who were saved on that day. I did not believe that any one got saved on that day. This taught me that 'anointing has nothing to do with what you say - it has something to do with the power that propels what you say.'

(interview 2003.10.18)

Gamedze is corroborated by Nene, who told me (interview 2003.07.02):

In Port Elizabeth, Bhengu lived in an ordinary four-roomed municipal house. As children we used to sing for the ANC. Bhengu was often invited to pray at ANC meetings where crowds were singing liberation songs. We would go and sing in the mountain, sometimes in the rain. Mandela was also there. The police wanted to lock us up as Communists. Rev Molefe took Bhengu to Pretoria where he explained his mission for preaching the gospel.

6.4.5.2. Bhengu preaches to King Sobhuza II of Swaziland

Dr Hynd of the Church of the Nazarene talks about how King Sobhuza used to invite Bhengu to preach at the King's Imbizos (gatherings of the nation).

Hynd (interview 2003-10-18) says this about Bhengu:

His ministry widened from the Nazarene... He had links to the Assemblies of God ...I would say that he had a big influence. His influence widened and others were invited and then somehow ... I don't quite remember how but I see here there's a mention of his relationship to the king. The king was always very open to the evangelists who came, and invited them to come. Bhengu then developed a pretty close relationship with king Sobuza II who would invite him here. He used to call us all together, Christians, for special times, for prayers and national events... He would invite someone to speak to us... Bhengu,... was that powerful, spiritually and in every other way as a person, his personality, his voice, he was commanding, he knew what he was saying and he was sensible in what he said so he could not help but make an impression, widening his ministry.

6.5. BHENGU PERCEIVED AS A THREAT, BOTH TO THE STATE AND TO BLACK RADICALS

As mentioned before, Bhengu refused to bow to the state or to black radicals. Dr Moses Ntshangase, (interview 2003.09.24) one of Bhengu's highly educated ministers, had this to say about Bhengu and politics:

Bhengu was born into a certain social environment. He was involved with the Communist Party's concern for the poor, and with the people who were as opposed

to the elite who were enriching themselves. Communism proper is Biblical. The liberation motif came through very strongly in Bhengu's preaching. He said that people can have political freedom but still not be liberated if their spirit is still in bondage. He was saying, people can have political freedom but if they are not liberated in their spirit they would still be oppressed. He hammered in the fact that we needed to be liberated spiritually in order to participate in the political arena as liberated people.

Ntshangase told me that Bhengu used to be followed by the Special Branch in South Africa. The police were not totally convinced that he was preaching the gospel only. Because he had a large following of people coming to hear him and gangsters getting converted and turning their weapons in to him, they felt that he was too powerful and could easily turn the people against the State. But Bhengu was faithful to his calling.

6.6. BHENGU'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Bhengu's vision and strategy was to develop young black men and women to participate at all levels of entrepreneurial activities. His aim was to prepare them for leadership when freedom from apartheid eventually arrived. Bhengu was convinced that South Africa would one day become a free country where one's standing would no longer be not based on the colour of one's skin. He established development programmes for young people and for women.

6.6.1. Bhengu and Socialism

I own a copy of one of Bhengu's sermons on socialism, based on Matthew 5:32 (cassette taped message - no date). For lack of space I will not transcribe the message in full. Parts of the message are in IsiZulu, IsiXhosa and English. It may be said without any doubt that Bhengu's early association with Communism influenced his socio-economic outlook. Some parts of message are a free translation from IsiZulu and IsiXhosa to English:

Jews are capitalists. When Jesus came he found that there were poor and rich people. You only need to read your Bible, without asking me; you will see what

Jesus did. Among Xhosa-speaking people, there are those who have livestock and those who have none. Black people are not capitalists in the Western way of life. When people have no food because there was no rain in their area, they would go to those who have, to ask for food. In African culture, he who has gives to him who has nothing. If I have cattle and you have none but want to get married, I lend you cattle to go and pay lobolo for your wife. You are allowed to pay back when you can with no interest charged.

In African culture there is no capitalism as experienced in the West. When someone has no cows, he is loaned a cow so as to have milk to feed his children, so that his children may not die from kwashiorkor. In Western culture a ten times millionaire will ignore you. African people look after one another, we do not watch other people suffer when we can help.

Soviet Russia's socialism is premised on Karl Marx's scientific socialism. This socialism is like religion, it does not address the question of racism, tribalism and ethnicity;

We Christians are socialists. He who is in us (Jesus) although he was rich, He became a socialist and He had compassion. The difference between Marx's dialectics and us Christians is based on two things.

- The Communist says, what is yours is mine
- Christianity says, what is mine is yours. Christian Socialism is nothing more than compassion.

Capitalism: the rich have plenty to eat and what is left is given to the dogs when there are hungry people around them. Compassion is not forced on people, it is not forced on people at gun point. I went on tour to Israel. Our bus stopped at a place near the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus had sat and taught thousands of people. I visualised him sitting and teaching the people for three days. He had compassion because the people were hungry.

Jesus had compassion. He did not send the people away hungry; he feared they may collapse on the way. He fed the multitudes. Capitalists would have sent the people away whilst they remained behind to feed themselves. They don't care about the hungry as long as they themselves are full. This attitude is the cause of wars and industrial strikes among the workers and on mines. There is a lack of compassion, Christ's compassion. Christ's heart of compassion can eliminate the

strikes. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. It is not right that you should eat pudding but give me only pap (maize porridge) to eat. Why do you do that to me when our needs are the same, only compassion can address that

6.6.2. Bhengu develops future leaders through education

Bhengu believed that education was the key that would unlock talents embedded in the youth and women. According to Ntshangase, Bhengu was well ahead of his generation in introducing reconstruction and development programmes in the church long before the ANC thought of it.

As early as in the 1960s, Bhengu established a Bursary Fund for the youth to enter tertiary institutions. Provincial Education Boards were formed throughout the country. Led by special committees, funds were raised at local, district and regional levels for this purpose. Provincial Boards would receive bursary applications and select deserving candidates for funding. After successfully completing his studies, a bursar would refund the money so that others could also benefit. In a circular (s.a) Bhengu set up structures and procedures to facilitate raising and distribution of funds (see Appendix 5).

Thousands of young people were assisted in this manner. Some of them hold high positions in government, business, church, institutions of higher learning, etc.

6.6.3. Bhengu trains women in self-reliance

The relationships and roles of women and positions of leadership have always been a thorny matter to deal with in a satisfactory manner – as Bhengu also found.

Kretzschmar and van Schalkwyk (UNISA tutorial latter TIC 301 – B/501/2001: 18-19) address the lack of common transformations among churches regarding women in leadership positions. Whereas many Protestant Churches do ordain women in priestly positions, others such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church still resist the ordination of woman.

This point can be illustrated by using the issue of leadership in the church as an example. For twenty centuries, the vast majority of men and women have argued that it was

acceptable for men to be priests, ministers and pastors but not for women. During this time individual men and woman have rebelled against this common understanding, but they were the exception to the rule. During the twentieth century, however, an increasing number of men and women from certain sectors of society have adopted a different view and agreed to the ordination of women. The vast majority of Protestant churches do now ordain women to the ministry. However, certain Protestant churches, together with other churches such as the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches, do not accept the notion of women's ordination. Therefore, these churches do not have women in senior leadership roles within the Church. There are no female Bishops and Cardinals. This leads to the question: Why have certain Christians accepted the validity of the ordination of women whereas other Christians have not? Is it not true that these two groups understand the identities and roles of women differently.

Bhengu empowered women by creating entrepreneurial opportunities for them to earn money for themselves, feed their families and send their children to school. He organised women at local, regional and national levels. These women were taught to use their hands to create wealth, by sewing, knitting, baking and cooking.

Women were also taught how to look after their families, and how to keep their homes clean and presentable as befitting Christian women. He integrated the reds (unschooled) from rural areas and the schooled (educated) people, creating a bond between the two groups. He made it clear to them:

In heaven the streets are shining gold and the dresses shining white. Let us, as good Christians, be as clean and shining in our appearance as we can, even here It is difficult for people to break away from their old customs. Africans in the country like to relieve themselves in the bush, but here we have lavatories. Use them. I shall not be pleased to hear that dirty paper is lying about in them. I see that you are even too lazy to flush the lavatories. That is being very dirty. This church, too, is cleaned every day, but look at it just now, with all these papers lying around. It is this kind of thing that makes the location streets unnecessarily dirty too. (Hollenweger 1972:134)

Women in Bhengu's church acquired skills that made them stand out in home management and business. They became shining examples of what African women could do for themselves. Even though many of them, especially those from rural areas, had not had

much education they were able to compete with educated people for social and economic challenges with success.

Haddad (2003:441-442), speaking on poverty, women's networks and faith among the Nxamalala in Vulindlela, KwaZulu – Natal, says:

My experience in working with the women of Nxamalala in Vulindlela, is that they literally attribute their survival to God. In times of dire need they are unable to “explain” how they manage to provide meals for their children or pay their school fees. For them, God provides these material needs. The following excerpts from Bible study group discussions illustrate this point:

Umyeni wami washona ngo 1988 ngasebenza waphela umsebenzi kodwa uNkulunkulu uyangipha nje ukudla ngidle . . . Ngihleli ekhaya angisebenzi . . . Nazi izingane ziyafunda kodwa uNkulunkulu uyangisiza ukuthi ngikwazi ukuthola ukudla ngidle . . . [My husband passed on in 1988, I worked and I lost a job but God always gives me food to eat . . . I am at home. I am not working. Here are the children; they go to school, but God always helps me to get food to eat . . .] (Janet Nzimande, 27 May 1999, Nxamalala).

Sifundile ke manje ukuthi, “Nkosi yami” uma uthi nje hayi ake ngiyekele kuJesu, gempela imali ebengiyithola ibiyisimangaliso nje ukuthi bengiyithola kanjani angazi, kodwa ngangibona nje hawu, nonesikweleti sami esidala nje ngibone nje hawu ngibone ukuthi hayi ngamandla kaNkulunkulu. [We have now learned that if you just say, ‘My Lord, let me leave everything with Jesus,’ ... in fact, the money that I was getting was mysterious because I don’t understand how did I get it, but I found anybody that owed me, paying my money back, and I realised that it was the power of God] (Thembani Khoza, 27 May 1999, Nxamalala).

Bhengu created networks for the women in the church. These networks proved to be highly effective: women prayed together, and shared their knowledge and skills with one another, especially during difficult times.

6.6.4. Bhengu develops church leaders

For Bhengu leadership development for church leaders was a critical element to successful ministry. He sent some of the ministers to overseas institutions for training, such as Rev Fred Shabalala to Christ for All Nations Theological College in Houston, Texas, USA.

He gave his blessing to White churches to support Elijah Maswanganyi. In this regard Bhengu wrote to Bond to say that he had no objections to White churches giving support to Maswanganyi:

14/01/1980

Mr J. W. S. Bond
Assemblies of God
P.O. Box 10555
Johannesburg
2000

Dear Brother Bond,

Greetings in His Name!

1. I am writing to confirm that I have absolutely no objections if you open the Assemblies doors for Brother Maswanganyi to come in and present his Mission and Vision to the people of God. I accept what the Lord leads the people to give for or to the Back to God Crusade and would not like to monopolise or restrict them to my Missions or Visions only. People are led by God to give to that which they feel is a worthy cause.
2. I also have similar convictions about Siphso Bhengu. Those workers or individual Christians or Assemblies wishing to invite, help and maintain him are absolutely free to do so. I should not feel I am the only person to be helped. The Lord leads His people all the day long.'
3. I leave for Rhodesia on 17/01/1980 and shall be there till the middle of February.

God bless you, Jesus in Him

Signed: Nicholas BH Bhengu

Bhengu also encouraged and supported Ntshangase to study both locally and overseas notably the USA. He arranged with John Bond for financial support.

On 17 September 1979 Bond wrote to the Commissioner for the Department of Co-operation and Development requesting that Ntshangase be granted a passport to travel to the USA to study at Drew University.

On numerous occasions Bhengu encouraged and supported young men and women to study and improve their academic qualifications.

Rev. Nicholas Bhengu

P.O. Box 10555

JOHANNESBURG

TEL. 23-0449

Dear Moses

Greeting in His Name!

Thanks for your letters I received this morning on my arrival from Rhodesia. I am in agreement with your ambition and plans for your knowledge. You have my wholehearted approval.

I am unable to write anything more because I have a big pile of letters on my desk.

The heart desires to say much more in volumes but I have no time.

Correspondence has accumulated much while I was away.

God bless you and greet all the students for us

Yours in his fellowship

Signed: Nicholas B. H. Bhengu

Another of Bhengu'd protégés was Rirchad Sihlobo Ngidi, who was saved and blessed by Bhengu for the ministry. In his book *What a giant of faith* [s.a:10-11], Khathide writes on how Ngidi, the man he calls a 'giant of faith', got saved during one of Bhengu's campaigns in Lamontville township on the outskirts of Durban:

Ngidi, having seen God work miracles through the ministry of Bhengu, asked for an appointment to see Bhengu. It was in one of these tent revival meetings of Nicholas Bhengu that Ngidi found rest for his soul. The miracles that Jesus did through the hands of Nicholas Bhengu captivated the attention of Richard Ngidi. Within days of his new birth experience Ngidi knew that he had not been saved to be a pew-warming Christian. He knew that God was choosing him for high destinies.

Before the revival meeting came to an end Richard requested an audience with the preacher, Rev. Bhengu. The preacher agreed and an appointment was made. Rev. Bhengu asked, 'What do you want, young man?' 'Mfundisi, (Pastor) I am here to ask a very serious question.' 'Go ahead'. 'How did you receive the power of God to heal the sick?' Before the old man could answer the question, he took a deep breath and asked: 'Have you received Christ as your Lord and Saviour?' 'Yes, I have.' 'When?' the old man probed. 'During this revival'. Rev. Bhengu directed another question at Richard Ngidi, 'Do You know anything about the power of the Holy Spirit?' 'Not quite". Rev. Bhengu then began to give Richard Ngidi a lecture on the power and the workings of the Holy Spirit. He told the young man that anybody who was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit was capable of doing works of power. This was the challenge Richard was looking for. He then asked the preacher to lay hands on him in order that he might experience the power of God's Holy Spirit in his life.

As soon as Richard left the preacher, he knew that a change of identity had occurred in his life. He was to trust God for a great move of the Holy Spirit. For him there would be no going back.

Like his spiritual father and mentor, Ngidi was greatly used of God. He saw thousands of people come to Christ, lives charged and remarkable developments taking place.

CHAPTER 7

BHENGU AS AN ECUMENICAL FIGURE: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DENOMINATIONS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Right from the beginning of his ministry, Bhengu became involved in inter-denominational work, reaching out to, and preaching for other denominations. He was not in favour of “sheep stealing”. In his crusades in East London and other places, he encouraged his converts to return to their own churches. He was however forced to accept into his church those who were not churched or who felt that their new-found faith would not be welcomed in their original churches. He attended and spoke at various ecumenical conferences in South Africa, the rest of Africa and overseas: the UK, the USA, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Scotland, Singapore etc. Bhengu also seconded his men to para-church organisations and sent his ministers to non-Pentecostal Theological Colleges.

7.2. ECUMENISM: A WORLD WIDE PHENOMENON

In reaching out to Christians from other denominations, Bhengu proved himself to be a man of his time - for the 20th century may indeed be called the ecumenical century, in the history of the Christian Church.

What do we mean when we speak about ecumenism, and the ecumenical calling of the church? According to Tenny (1967: 232-233) the word *ecumenism* derives from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning the whole inhabited world.

An older adjectival derivative is *ecumenical*. Thus the first worldwide councils from Nicea (A.D. 325) were described as ecumenical, and the patriarch of Constantinople claimed to be the ecumenical bishop in virtue of his assumed primacy. More recently, the term ecumenical has come into Protestant usage through missionary conferences aimed to bring the Gospel to the whole inhabited globe (New York, A.D. 1900). It was adopted by Archbishop Söderblom of Sweden when, after the First World War, he convened a conference to study the role of the church in

reconstruction (Stockholm, A.D. 1925). Since then, the efforts of the churches to work together and to try to achieve closer unity have been commonly styled the Ecumenical Movement, and ecumenism has been coined to express concern for, participation in, or the fulfilment of this or similar movements.

The goal of ecumenism was to build fellowship and unity among churches. The World Council of Churches (WCC) is by far the largest ecumenical body in the world, and includes the majority of Protestant and Orthodox Churches – with the Roman Catholic Church as a participant observer. The WCC was established on 23 August 1948, when four ecumenical streams merged: Life and Work, Faith and Order, the International Missionary Council and the World Council for Christian Education (Raiser 1991: 23- 24). Today 340 churches from 115 countries belong to the WCC.

In South Africa the ecumenical ideal was first fostered by the mainline churches who founded the Christian Council of South Africa, that in later years was to become the South African Council of Churches. According to Thomas (2002: xviii-xxvi) many churches, or “blocks” of churches, took part in the process. The first block of churches comprised the English speaking churches, the Methodist, the Presbyterian and Anglican Churches. The second block included the Lutheran Church, the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, the Moravian Church and the Rhenish Mission, as well as the Hermannsburg Mission. The third block included the Afrikaans churches, especially the Dutch Reformed Church which identified with the apartheid policy of the National Party government, and who has over the years divided itself into a family of churches, with different “sister churches” for Whites, Africans, Coloureds, and Indians. The fourth block was occupied by the African Initiated Churches, churches in search of black selfhood. This group emerged as early as in the 1880s. The largest denomination of this group is the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). The last group mentioned by Thomas is the Pentecostal block, with churches like the Apostolic Faith Mission where, according to Thomas, whites retained power and control – although, in recent times, a number of black members of Pentecostal Churches did step out of this control, one of them being the Rev. Frank Chikane.

In Bhengu’s time the following churches belonged to the S A Council of Churches:

Membership of the South African Council of Churches, 1975



Black churches Founded by mission societies	African Independent churches	Multiracial With a Black majority	Multiracial With a White majority	White Churches	Mission Societies
Bantu Presbyterian Church	National Baptist Church	Church of the Province of South Africa	Presbyterian Church of South Africa	Baptist Union*	Paris Evangelical Mission
Evangelical Lutheran Church Cape/Orange	African Baptist Church	Methodist Church of South Africa	Salvation Army	Evangelical Lutheran (Transvaal)*	
Evangelical Lutheran Church South Eastern Region	African Baptist Church	United Con- gregational Church of South Africa	Society of Friends (Quakers)*		
Evangelical Lutheran Church Transvaal	African Methodist Episcopal Church	Roman Catholic*			
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tswana Region					
Moravian Church Eastern Cape					
Moravian Church Western Cape					
Nederduiste Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika					
Tsonga Presbyterian					
United Methodist					
United Evangelical Lutheran Church Of South West Africa*					

* These were observer member churches which while having full rights of participation and speech in the organisation, did not have voting rights on its committees or national conference.

7.3. THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES IN ECUMENISM

Despite the unity that is very dear to the different churches, there are also many theological differences. One of these differences has to do with the role of the church in society. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance was, over many years quite critical of the World Council of Churches brand of Liberation Theology. The approach by the World Council of Churches to equate salvation and liberation with structural political liberation and social change, to the point of supporting strategies that sought to overthrow unjust governments through violent means, was also of great concern for Evangelicals and Pentecostal Churches.

In his book *Barriers to Ecumenism. The Holy See and the World Council of Churches on Social Questions*, Thomas (1983:15) presents the ideological difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches on salvation and liberation: In its insistence on a strict separation between Christian faith and any aspect of a historical ideology, we meet that dimension of Catholic thought often called, whether in praise or blame, "otherworldly," and contrasted with the "this-worldly" activism of the World Council. This distinction is such an old cliché that one advances it with some hesitation, and yet there is something to it after all. Roman Catholicism has been traditionally reluctant to identify salvation with any intermundane liberation. Salvation is not historically immanent, does not deal with the material situation, but is beyond all temporal hopes. The kingdom of God is reached by faith and membership in the Church, not "by the mere changing of structures and social and political involvement". It should not be interpreted "as being present wherever there is a certain type of involvement and activity for justice". The Church's commitment to the needs of the disinherited notwithstanding, "it is wrong to state that political, economic, and social liberation coincides with salvation in Jesus Christ". "This idea of Christ as a political figure does not tally with the Church's catechesis". "[Christ's] mission was not in the social, economic, or political order. Likewise Christ did not give the Church a mission which is social, economic, or political, but rather a religious one."

Despite all the differences within the ecumenical family, McLeod (in Murphy and Asprey (eds) 2008:108) defends and calls for unity among all Christians. In essence the church

has no choice but to be ecumenical. It is a given from God. This underlying family unity exists regardless of whatever may divide us: denominational allegiance, church order, doctrinal differences, cultural divergence or liturgical oddity. Even in our sectarian hatreds we are one; and we are one especially in Christ Jesus. Every single believer is united to Christ. He lives in us (Galatians 2:20). And because Christ and the Spirit, the second persons of the Trinity, are inseparable (2 Corinthians 3:17), we are equally united to the Spirit. We are baptized in him, led by him and filled with him. By him, by means of this baptism in the Spirit, we are incorporated in to the body of Christ, sharing in its life, and related to every other single member. This body is one. Christ cannot have two bodies. And this is the only place where we can enjoy salvation. Every saved person is a member of this body. This is the essential meaning of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. If someone is not a member of this body, he or she has no share in salvation.

This body is the church, consisting of all believers spread geographically throughout the world and distributed historically through every age from Pentecostal to the end of time. The clergy, and even the Magisterium, cannot distinguish themselves from it. They are part of it. Every minister, priest and bishop is first and foremost a member of the laity, the people of God. No further grace puts us outside or above this people. Even Christ himself is a member of it: the Chief Shepherd is also a Lamb (Revelation 7:17). Only in this body of Christ, dependent on its every other member, have we any spiritual life; and only in living, organic contact with this body are we any use. And it is just this body, in its entirety, which is holy, catholic and indefectible.

In recent years, these sentiments were shared by Catholic theologians and church leaders. Pope John Paul II's strong statement in this regard, reverberated in ecumenical circles: The ecumenical movement must not be allowed too flounder. The reunion of Christians is divinely willed. This is based also on the fact that Christ prayed that the church should be united Derr (1983:3-7).

7.4. BHENGU STRADDLED THE PROTESTANT, EVANGELICAL AND PENTECOSTAL DIVIDE

Bhengu was both Evangelical and Pentecostal in his theology and ministry, with heavy learnings toward Pentecostalism, since this is where he spent most of his life and work.

According to Bebbington (quoted by Ranger, 2008:5) Evangelicalism revolves around the following: *conversion* (emphasis on the need for change of life), *activism* (emphasis on evangelistic and missionary efforts), *biblicism* (a special importance attached to the Bible) and *crucicentrism* (emphasis on the centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the cross). Bhengu seems to have fitted this mould perfectly.

When, after the merger of the International Missionary Council with the World Council of Churches, IMC members withdrew from the WCC, an evangelical ecumenical body was formed in 1966, operating from Wheaton (Ohio). The subsequent conferences of this movement at Wheaton (1966) Lausanne (1974) and Manila (1989) was attended by Bhengu as well. He identified wholeheartedly with the Lausanne movement's emphasis is on the priority of evangelism – but acknowledging, in the words of David Bosch, that “evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witnesses, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation” (Bosch 1991:461).

7.5. BHENGU SUPPORTED ECUMENICAL INITIATIVES

Bhengu was a man of influence in ecumenical circles. He attended, spoke and lent support to national and international initiatives: the Pentecostal World Conference in Toronto, Canada in 1952, the Lausanne conference in 1966, the Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism in 1973, the Pan African Leadership Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya in 1974, as well as the World Charismatic Renewal Conference in Singapore, 1978, to mention just a few.

In 1979 the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA), one of the most influential events in the recent history of the churches in South Africa, was held in Pretoria. David Bosch who served on the SACLA committee with Bhengu wrote in his foreword to Watt's book *From Africa's Soil – The story of the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa*:

I have been privileged to know two of the leaders I referred to above: Nicholas Bhengu and John Bond. From first to last, their integrity and the quality of their leadership impressed me. I first heard about Bhengu and his remarkable ministry when I was a missionary in Transkei in the late fifties and the sixties, but I only came to know him intimately during the 1973 Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism. Since then we were together many times until he passed away. I particularly remember his participation in the committee that organised the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA), which was held in Pretoria in July

1979. For two years before this we had met monthly to discuss all possible aspects relating to the planning of that mammoth convention. Bhengu attended virtually all the committee meetings. At many critical moments he gave quality to our deliberations, always in his modest and quiet way. For me, Bhengu epitomised the Assemblies of God (in Watt 1992:12).

Bhengu supported credible evangelical Christian para-church organisations: Campus Crusade for Christ, Africa Enterprise, etc. Although he had some reservations about their position on Pentecostal experiences, he nonetheless seconded some of his men to work with them.

7.5.1. Africa Enterprise

Africa Enterprise was founded by Michael Cassidy in 1964 with a vision to evangelize the cities of Africa. These citywide missions are usually interdenominational and serve to unify the church in local cities. Over the years, AE has developed considerable credibility among the churches throughout South Africa because of its ability to mount such missions and unite the church. AE also mounts major congresses of church leaders of particular topics. Three have been particularly significant: the Durban Congress on Mission and Evangelism (1973), the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (1979), and the National Initiative for Reconciliation (1985). Two other foci in Cassidy's ministry are important: his keen interest in influencing leaders, both political and ecclesiastical, and his untiring efforts to bring leaders together. His efforts to reconcile warring political parties in the province of KwaZulu Natal during the 1980's were significant. In the National Initiative for Reconciliation, convened at the height of that period's political unrest, AE under Cassidy's leadership proved itself the one Christian group with the credibility to organize a meeting of racially, politically, and denominationally diverse church leaders, even though the conference and subsequent follow-up meetings served mainly to highlight the vast differences between blacks and whites on the issue of reconciliation. To Africa Enterprise he seconded Abiel Thiphanyane. Bhengu also served on Africa Enterprise Board of Reference (Ranger (ed), 2008: 204 -205).

7.5.2. Campus Crusade for Christ SA

Rossouw (1989:22) describes the establishment and vision of the founders of Africa Enterprise and Campus Crusade for Christ International:

In a vision that he received in 1951 Bright got the idea to start preaching the gospel on university campuses. The programme was launched in Los Angeles and in the course of time extended to the rest of the USA and South America. The headquarters of the enterprise was moved to Mound, Minnesota in 1956. By 1960 there were already 109 full time workers. In 1963 the current headquarters, the Arrowhead Springs Hotel, was bought for two million dollars.

Bright, according to Rossouw, offered three reasons for the success of the CCC ministry:

- Dedication to the Saviour and his cause in all circumstances;
- Strong emphasis on the work and ministry of the Holy Ghost in the life of every believer;
- Special, exact and thorough training and equipping of every co-worker.

Bright calls their evangelization, used in a wider sense than we are accustomed to, "aggressive evangelization". In his own words he describes it as follows: "By aggressive evangelism I mean going to men with the good news of our living Christ and His love and forgiveness, not in an argumentative tone nor with the high pressure techniques but taking the initiative to tell (as the apostle Paul wrote), all men everywhere about Christ". He continues: "We realize that this can best be accomplished by multiplication rather than through addition"

Bhengu seconded Siphso Bhengu, John Ndlovu, Charles Maphosa and Dan Lephoko to Campus Crusade for Christ International. He held Campus Crusade for Christ in very high esteem, despite the fact that CCC Intl was opposed to speaking in tongues, prophecy, etc. Approving my secondment to CCC in 1973, he said. "Campus Crusade for Christ had some of the best methods of reaching out to people with the gospel and training them to become disciples." Bhengu confided to me that if he were young he would have joined it himself. He opened his churches to CCC to train his ministers and hundreds of his church members in lay evangelism and in discipleship.

7.5.3. Africa Co-operative Action Trust – Food Faith and Work for Africa

One of Bhengu's colleagues, Joseph Dambuza was seconded to ACAT, a Christian organisation that worked in Rural Development among the poor. Dambuza was its Regional Director in Ciskei. Dambuza also worked for the Student Christian Movement

7.6. FEDERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Theological education was dear to Bhengu's heart. He therefore sent Moses Ntshangane, one of his very able co-workers, to the Federal Theological Seminary of South Africa, where students of a number of main-line churches were trained. Ntshangane received his theological education from the same institution at which he later became Dean of students. He also worked for the Pietermaritzburg Urban Mission Project, an SACC initiative, with Bhengu's blessings - whilst still pastoring Assemblies of God Churches.

7.7. BHENGU'S FAREWELL MESSAGE: A CALL FOR UNITY

A few years before his death, Bhengu started to preach about his immanent departure. He gave instructions on what the church should do when he was no longer around. He also warned against those who would see his departure as an opportunity to create division in the church, and replace the Holy Spirit by elevating academic achievement in the work at the expense of the role of the Holy Spirit. He also called for unity in the broader church.

In his farewell message to the church, he wrote *inter alia*:

Build the Church of God. The names of our Churches are our own inventions and not God's! Let the Christians come together a God's children. Build the Nation when you are remembering that you are part of that Nation and you are in for a specific purpose for God. Pray for all leaders in Africa, support leaders of your Nation and present Christ to them by all means. The Church is the light of the world. The Church is the salt of the earth and the Church should lead the Nation to Peace, Unity and Prosperity

In this, Bhengu strongly emphasized the role of the church as God's agent for Nation building. He used phrases like: "Build the church of God", "Church members have the responsibility to build the church. The church belongs to God". The church is "God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." In this respect he emulated Paul in his address to the Ephesian Church leaders:

I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me the task of testifying

to the gospel of God's grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent to the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:23-35).

7.8. A CALL FOR PRAYER FOR AFRICA AND ITS LEADERS

Bhengu encouraged his followers to pray for all leaders in Africa:

"Support leaders of your nation and present Christ to them, by all means", Bhengu used to say. Praying for those in leadership was paramount in Bhengu's life and ministry. His liturgy includes praying for all leaders regardless of who they were. This is based on Paul's teaching in which he urges the church to pray and intercede for "everyone, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in godliness and holiness (1 Tim 2:1-7). Praying for those in leadership includes kings, political as well as homeland leaders, and all those in authority.

7.9. TO THE VERY END, AN ECUMENIST WITH AN EVANGELICAL HEART

Bhengu was an ecumenist – as the previous paragraphs do witness. He nevertheless kept to his evangelical credo, and used every opportunity at conferences and assemblies, as

well as in dialogue with ecumenical partners, to warn against the inroads that liberal theology – in his opinion – was making in the Christian community in his time.

In a personal letter he wrote to me from Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, on 12 November 1974, Bhengu expressed his dismay with Liberal Theology which sanctioned and blessed everything including killings. Liberal Theology, Bhengu says it puts Jesus Christ on par with Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius by saying “all religions are all right”:

Theology is one of the things that killed the early Church and has destroyed the faith of many in the Western world; a matured (sic) man only can survive. It is a battle of champions and survival of the fittest. There is more theology but all Churches are dreamy and dead! This is a lesson to Africa, Africa Awake! They find enough theology to sanction bloody revolution and everything. They find theology to place Jesus Christ at (sic) par with Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius, all religions are alright! Africa must reject the Western philosophies! Jesus is God, Jesus is King and Jesus is the only Saviour! He is the only one who rose from the dead! Others, all of them came from below but Jesus came from above and is above all. (John 3:31.)

With Love to all in your family and in the family of God

Yours in his fellowship,

Signed: Nicholas BH Bhengu

In a letter to John Bond, on 20 November 1974, also written from Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, Bhengu expressed his disquiet with Liberal Theology, Black Power and Black Theology:

There are serious developments in Africa today. (1) There is Black Power (2) There is Black Theology which seeks (both) to throw away old accepted Theology and resuscitate Africa's primitive beliefs. These are supported and funded by the universities and Theological Colleges of the West. Theology explains away the

Bible word by word, statement by statement and sentence by sentence, it's giving pagan origin of what influenced the writers of the Bible until the Bible, ceases to be the word of God. This is where Black Theologies step in. Do you realise the implication? The truth must be broadcast in Africa as never before to forestall this evil devices of the devil. I feel we ought to send a few young men to Bible Schools and then to Theological Colleges in order to equip them with weapons to counteract Liberal Theologies. So I am already here, I am a member of the central staff as a lecturer and attending many other lectures. I do research work at the same time. Each lecturer opens my eyes more as to the situation; the church in the West is completely off the line! Bless God for the Evangelical groups which I met in Lausanne in July.

Signed: Nicholas BH Bhengu

At PACLA (Pan African Leadership Assembly) Bhengu used the opportunity to address church leaders from across the African continent (Cassidy and Verlinden (eds) 1978: *The Gospel for Everyman*, 633-634). He never missed an opportunity to present Christ the Saviour even among these eminent church leaders. After relating stories about Admiral Byrd, the explorer to the North Pole and the propensity of sheep to go astray, Bhengu went straight into the finished work of Christ on the cross, ending his message with an appeal to his audience to accept Christ:

In the Word of God I find one thing. Jesus said in John 10: "I am the door; if any man enters by me, he will be saved." That is definite. In John 14:6 He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." In 1 Corinthians 1:8 is found the preaching of the cross. What is this cross all about? It must be the starting point. When you want to be saved, you can't be saved any other way. There must be a starting point.

What happened on the cross? Was this just two sticks which someone put together? No. Something must have happened on the cross. Romans 5:10 says when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Now

we get somewhere. Our reconciliation with God is by Jesus Christ who died on the cross. In 2 Corinthians 5:20: 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you . . . '

'Verily I say unto you, he that heareth my Word and believeth on him that sent me, has everlasting life. And whoever believes in me shall never die . . . For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life . . . I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live'. What must I do to be saved? Believe on the lord Jesus Christ . . . He that has the Son has life. He that has not the son has not life . . . 'hat is the story of the cross. This is the only way. If you want to be at peace with God, if you want to get right with God, the whole job has been done.

Jesus Christ on the cross accomplished everything so that we could start from the cross and walk straight to God. Without the cross there is no salvation. What is it? It is the payment that Jesus accomplished on the cross. He poured out His soul on the cross. He paid with His very life on the cross. He died on behalf of sinners. He died in our stead. He died our death. Where I should have died, Jesus died so that I might believe in Him. I should die no more. What is left for me to do? 'To accept Jesus Christ because he came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him. He gave them the authority to become the sons of God.'

If you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you are taken from the place of sinners and placed among the sons and daughters of God. This comes by faith in Jesus Christ. Not only to believe that He is the Son of God, not only to believe in His incarnation. It is all very good to believe in those things, but the greatest thing is the death of the Son of God on the cross. So we have got free salvation. We don't work for it. We don't have to toil for it. All we have to do is to accept the work done by Jesus Christ on the cross.

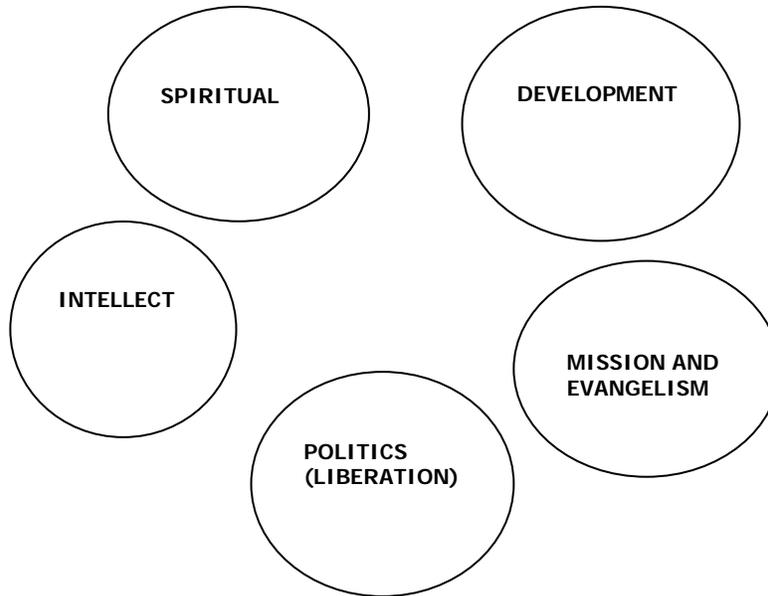
That is how we are accepted by God in His beloved Son. That is how salvation comes to us. We are all lost like sheep. We don't know how to get home. We don't know how to get back to God. But there is the cross. It is planted there. Remember

how the man rejoiced when he found his tent. He could have drifted further and further away but he provided himself with a starting point and that made it possible for him to find his tent. Then he went into the tent, he lit his stove, he warmed himself, he made soup, he made some coffee, and then he was warmed again. The joy he had. The assurance he had. He was inside his tent. He was saved from being frozen to death. How he thanked God to be in the tent. How he rejoiced for he knew he was safe. When you accept the Lord Jesus Christ, you know you are safe; you know you are at peace with God because Jesus satisfied God. The wrath of God fell upon him and the punishment fell upon him that we should get no more punishment. There is therefore no condemnation waiting for us. We have passed from death unto life. It is not because you are better than others. Jesus has done it for us. And the only way to please God is to accept His Love. God loves you [s.a 19:633-634].

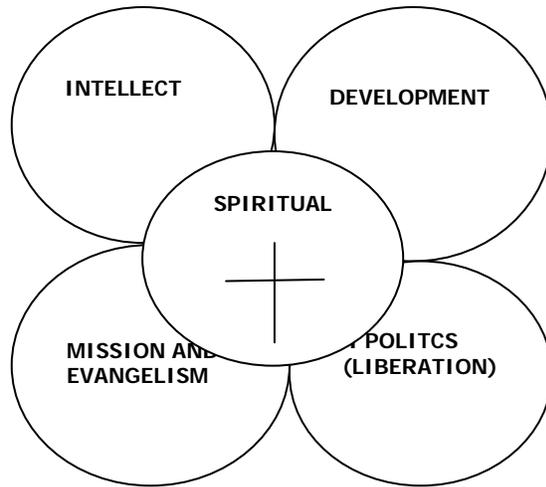
Nicholas Bhengu, an ecumenist and an evangelical, to the very end!

Bhengu developed the following integrated networks for his work, the Back to God Crusade, Women's Ministry, Girls' Ministry, Men's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Teaching Team and Sunday School. Although all of these had their own committees, they nonetheless worked together and supported each other.

Bhengu rejected the disintegrated strategy below:



The strategy he employed was an integrated one



Bhengu was a great evangelist and church planter, committed to bringing people the simple, undiluted Good News of salvation through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross; establishing them in a community of the saints; building them up in a relationship with God and others and challenging them to become part of God's missionary plan by involving them in giving and by commissioning them as missionaries in their own right.

Bhengu's leadership style may be regarded as dictatorial when the need of the hour demanded it, consultative when seeking the opinion of others, or pioneering when charting a way forward. But he never strayed from what he saw as God's demand on him:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age (Mt 28:18 – 20).

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: BHENGU'S LASTING LEGACY

8.1. HYPOTHESIS REVISITED

At the beginning of the study, the hypothesis was posed that Nicholas Bhengu may be considered one of Africa's greatest Christian pioneers, who during a turbulent time in Southern played a significant role, particularly in South Africa by pioneering the development of self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting churches, at a time when most black churches were heavily dependent on support from missionary sending countries and institutions. His theology, his evangelistic campaigns, his leadership style, his prophetic voice at a time of political and social upheaval in South Africa as well as his ecumenical sensitivity, left a lasting imprint on the ecclesiastical scene in South Africa, and the rest of Africa and the wider world.

From the research that was done - the many *literary* sources that were used as well as the various *interviews* that I conducted with men and women who had crossed Bhengu's path, who benefited from his ministry and who had become his co-workers - it was clear that the hypothesis was proved to be correct. Bengu has indeed left a lasting legacy not only to us today, but to generations to come.

In this chapter, to conclude my thesis, I attempt to underline some of the main findings in the previous chapters.

8.2. BHENGU, CALLED AS A WITNESS IN A TURBULENT TIME

The Bible as well as Church History tells us that God endows his servants with special talents for their ministry, suited to the specific needs of their time. This was the case with Nicholas Bhengu. The times in which the evangelist from Zulululand was born and was called, were full of challenges: socially, politically and economically. In 1910 the Cape, Natal and the two Boer Republics, Transvaal and Free State, formed the Union of South Africa. For Whites a new political future beckoned. Blacks were left in the wilderness.

The coming to power of the National Party in 1948 introduced a system that governed the lives of all people in the country: education, homelands governments and employment opportunities were regulated by law. Apartheid laws were challenged by liberation movements such as the ANC (African National Congress) and PAC (Pan African Congress), who after a protracted attempt to persuade the government to negotiate an acceptable political settlement acceptable to all the people had been rebuffed, resorted to armed struggle.

The Church in South Africa was challenged to help find solutions for the country's problems, to help to bring a very unjust dispensation to an end. A number of initiatives were launched, *inter alia* the Cottesloe Consultation, the Durban Congress or Mission and Evangelism, the South African Christian Leadership Assembly and the National Initiative for Reconciliation

These initiatives did help to conscientize their members, and to work towards reconciliation. But it also divided the churches, especially the Afrikaans speaking churches which supported government policies, and the English speaking churches, aligned to the South Africa Council of Churches, that were vocal in their opposition to apartheid.

In attempt to find a solution, President PW Botha introduced the so-called Tri-Cameral System of Government, in attempt to create a new dispensation for the country. This move was rejected by the majority of South Africans. A large number of political, civil and religious groups came together to form the United Democratic Front (UDF), which developed into a powerful organ in the fight against apartheid. In reaction to the strong opposition that was mounting in the country, the government declared a state of emergency. Troops were sent into the townships, across South Africa, to quell the violence that was erupting. Rent boycotts and attacks on township councillors and other people perceived to be supporting the status quo, became the order of the day. In Soweto students rose up against the use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction in schools.

Bhengu's legacy as a leader, family man, preacher: evangelist, prophet, ecumenist, and strategist must be measured in relation to all of this. He was truly a man of his time.

8.3. THE MAN, NICHOLAS BHENGU

Bhengu was born of peasant Christian parents, his father and mother being devout members of the Lutheran Church. Bhengu's father had been brought up by Norwegian missionaries and he later became a worker for the mission. Three of his brothers were ministers of religion as well. Religion played a significant role in Nicholas Bhengu's home. Appreciative of his upbringing under the strong discipline of Norwegian and missionaries, he and his wife Mylet wanted to raise their children, Waxy, Mvusi and Dawn, in Christian values. Prayer was a vital part of their lives. But there was love in the family, the parents were like friends to their children. They were taught never to beg, and never to owe anyone money. The children knew for that they would not inherit anything from their father. He had put all his resources into the ministry. The only inheritance they would get was education.

His call to ministry was dramatic. He saw a vision of many people drowning in the ocean. He heard them cry for help. They pointed at him to pull them out of the ocean. It was then that the Lord spoke to him and showed him a Bible and told him that it was with the Bible that he would be able to rescue the people. Bhengu's call to ministry may be likened that of Moses who was called and given a mandate by God to go to Egypt and living out the children of Israel out of bandage. Paul had a similar experience when the risen Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, while on his way to persecute Christians.

Bhengu was a man of prayer which, according to his friend Bond, explained the power of his personal life and ministry. The death of his wife Mylet left a huge vacuum in his life. The valediction he wrote to her expressed the beautiful and deep companionship that existed between them. She had suffered with him. They had been "welded together by God's Spirit". They were one in God's hand. He had lost a friend.

Bhengu made arrangements for his own funeral with strict instructions. He wanted for himself a simple inexpensive funeral - during the time when black funerals used to cost a fortune to the poor. He decreed that there would be no speeches, no slaughtering of a beast. Bhengu's banning of speeches, a sermon and the slaughtering of a beast at funeral was a surprise to many, especially to his followers. But it is quite understandable that Bhengu, a strong crusader against any form of ancestor worship did not want, in death, to be associated with the practice of slaughtering of a beast, or any ritual that may have been associated with ancestor worship.

8.4. BHENGU, THE PREACHER

Bhengu's theology had different roots. He was born and raised at Entumeni, a Lutheran Mission station where he received his early education there. He was also a convinced Evangelical, having attended the KwaDumisa Bible College, where he trained for the ministry. But his longest association was with the Assemblies of God, one of the largest Pentecostal Churches in South Africa, which had the greatest impact on his life and work, especially on his preaching and healing ministry. The many healings and miracles that took place at Pentecostal crusades made a huge impression on him.

Bhengu preached Christ. He spoke of the cross of Jesus Christ being his starting point of his sermons, as well as the core of his messages. He preached the cross to all people regardless of their station in life: to politicians, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, to church members and church leaders alike. He emphasised Jesus as the only redeemer. He declared war on crime, ancestor worship and superstition. The healing ministry he exercised was to authenticate the power and existence of God.

Bhengu was an accomplished story teller. He prepared his sermons with anecdotes that helped him get his message across to the people. He understood the psycho-social and cultural needs of his audiences. He called people to go back to God. He was not judgemental in his preaching. He invited drunks, boyfriends or girlfriends, the sick and criminals, to come to his meetings as they were. He trusted the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to change their lives once they were there. That is how he himself was converted. He had gone with his girlfriend to a meeting in Kimberly, where God transformed him.

Above all Bhengu depended on prayer and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in his preaching ministry. He was an anointed man of God.

8.5. BHENGU, THE EVANGELIST - THE "BILLY GRAHAM OF AFRICA"

As an evangelist Bhengu pioneered tent evangelism in South Africa. He travelled around the country preaching from his huge marquee tent in cities, and towns and in rural communities. His crusades were highly successful. Hundreds of thousands of people gave their lives to Christ. Starting from Port Elizabeth, in 1945, he moved to East London from where he launched the Back to God Crusade organisation. The East London crusades were

so effective that on one occasion, in one day, he baptised 1300 converts. In his crusades Bhengu addressed crime. Many people returned stolen goods which were taken to the police in truck loads. In many cases Bhengu would be accompanied by the perpetrators of crime, who were willing to face prosecution at the hands of the law.

The Back to God Crusade was used by Bhengu to plant churches, hundreds of which were planted throughout South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia. Bhengu was serious about his reports to his donors. He wrote quarterly reports on what was happening at each tent campaign. Reports to white churches were organised by Noel Scheepers. Scheepers also organised a special meeting in East London for Bhengu to address his donors about the status of the work. Bhengu's first official report was probably written in Port Elizabeth, on 10 February 1948. In true Pauline style Bhengu mentions his companions Gumede, Dlamini, Ggcobo and Burman (I Cor 16:20; Phlp 4:21-23).

Bhengu had a passion for souls and empathy for his audience. He explained the gospel in simple language so people could understand. He wanted to see people throwing away the burden of sin. He was critical of missionaries who made it difficult for converts to do so. He once told Schlosser (in Holleweger 1972:129):

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.

The same idea was also expressed in the testimonies made about his own conversion (source?):

Today I believe in the assistance of God Almighty and I fear him, for I have learnt that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I am no longer what I used to be, *udlalani*, an aimless lover of woman.

Because of the impact of his Back to God Crusade, Bhengu was often called "the Billy Graham of Africa". This is how a journalist, writing for the American newsmagazine *Time* put it (*Time Magazine*, 23 Nov 1959 p 56):

One of the strongest Christians influences in Africa is a 50 years old Zulu with a special line moustache and horn rimmed spectacles who has a knack of persuading criminals to turn in their weapons and often themselves. Wearing a dark business

suit, the Rev Nicholas Bhengu stands on a packing case platform and says quietly in Zulu: “Ubugebengu abukhokheli lutho [Crime does not pay].” There is movement in the crowd, especially among the young toughs is ducktail haircuts, dungarees and safari jackets. “Nikelani izikhali zenu nani kuNkulunkulu [surrender your arms and yourself to God].” He continues, and a pile begins to grow at his feet knives, blackjacks, brass knuckles (natives are forbidden to own fire carted arms), and quantities of stolen goods. At one meeting police carted away three vanloads, and it is not usual for Evangelist Bhengu to end up by walking down to the police station hand in hand with someone on the wanted list.

It was inevitable that Bhengu became known throughout Africa as the black Billy Graham – although his manner and technique were quite unlike Graham’s. He used no publicity or promotion to advertise his campaigns, and his only assistance was a ten member choir of amateurs supplied by the churches of his mission. His platform presence was almost subdued. But whether he was talking to black audiences or white, Bhengu woved a spell no less effective than Billy’s. *Time’s* reporter continued:

Last week Bhengu was busy in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. Whites jam packed Salisbury’s Methodist Hall to hear him tell them, in precise English, what was wrong with white Christianity: “The greatest dangers in Africa today are Communism and Islam. Both offer the African equality. The churches are divided. There are too many and their different dogmas and doctrines are too confusing for Africans. Christianity has failed in India and China because Christians have failed to live up to Christ’s teaching, and in Africa it’s proving an empty shell for the same reason

Although Bhengu did not enjoy the luxury of the American evangelist’s organisational capabilities such as television, worldwide networks, financial muscles, the equipment available to Billy Graham at his quarters in Memphis Tennessee I visited in November 1986. Bhengu was able to do a lot for his Lord with whatever little resources he had at his disposal. Another significant difference between Bhengu and Billy Graham is that Graham was an itinerant evangelist. He work with and valued partner churches to take care of his converts, to accept them in their congregations, and to build them up in their faith. Although Bhengu also started as an itinerant evangelist, he started planting new churches as early as 1943. He used the churches that he established to conserve the results of his

crusades. These churches were to be the launching pads for further missionary outreaches in the area.

8.6. BHENGU, THE STRATEGIST

Bhengu registered the Back to God Crusade as a Section 21 company (Companies Act No. 61, of 1973: Registration No 21/76/22) in order to be able to raise funds from individuals, groups of people or organisations. Most of his financial support came from the women in the church. The second largest donor was White Assemblies of God Churches. Occasionally Bhengu would go overseas especially to the USA to raise funds. It was whilst he was in America that he saw a vision about organising women back home to raise money for the Back to God Crusade.

Bhengu developed strategies to empower different groups in the church: women, men, youth, and girls to be self-sufficient. He also established policies and procedures for good governance in his churches. He assigned responsibilities for each group or department in the church. The project was initiated by Bhengu and his first wife Mylet. In 1961 they were assisted by other women, Sikiti , Buthelezi and Mngoma. Later the team was enlarged to include Moduka and Qina. A total of R2000 was collected at the first mother's convention in 1969, in Bloemfontein. The amount of money raised is used to buy equipment: tents, tracks, chairs, generators and to support crusade workers. Women continued to raise more money. In 1969 they raised R 2000 and in 2010 they collected R 11 m. He divided the country into regions. Each region brings their bags at Thaba- Nchu over Easter Holidays, to be opened.

Women were assigned the responsibility of raising funds for Back to God Crusade. Women caught Bhengu's vision of the evangelisation of Africa from Cape to Cairo. Each local Assembly had a committee consisting of women responsible for organising the spiritual and raising of funds, and skills development for women. Organisers were trained to visit local churches and regions to teach and encourage women to stay focused on Bhengu's original vision. Supervisors operated at national level. In local churches the women were supported by the whole church.

A similar strategy for *men* was devised. They were also organised at local, regional and national level. Their mandate was to raise money to build churches. They also took money

to ThabaNchu during the Christmas season. The projects assisted churches to buy land and to build their own churches without having to go to the bank to borrow money, something that Bhengu was adverse to. He wanted the church to be debt free. Men also had special services, once a week, where they met for fellowship. They taught one another about how to be a good parent, and how to help manage church affairs. Young men joined the senior men to learn how they should look after their families when they get married.

Bhengu's people built their churches themselves, without any money from overseas or borrowing money from the bank (see 5.8.4). Bhengu wanted his people to be proud for doing things for themselves. This motivated congregations to work together by encouraging and assisting each other, by lending a helping hand to a sister churches. Bhengu believed in the *youth*. They were the future leaders of this country. For Bhengu it was important that the youth be developed spiritually, physically, emotionally and intellectually, if they were to become well rounded individuals and builders of the nation.

The Youth were also organised in the same pattern as women and men. Their responsibility was to raise funds, to assist young people who went to tertiary institutions with bursaries. Education Boards received and evaluated applications, and disbursed money to deserving students. Bhengu's vision with the bursaries was to provide quality education to young people who eventually would take up leadership positions in society, once democracy arrived. Some of the young people who benefited from the fund include Vusi Mona (Chief Communications Director in President Zuma's Presidency), Dr Honey Mabuza (lecturer at the Medical University of South Africa) and Mxolisi Lephoko (who established a thriving church on the Hill in Nelspruit). There are many others around the country working in government, business, some of them are in politics, who also benefited from Bhengu's bursary scheme.

Girls had the responsibility to furnish mission houses. They had special services on Wednesday evenings in which they received spiritual teaching and collected money for their project. The funds were also collected at Thaba Nchu over the Christmas weekend.

The churches that were planted were governed by pastors, elders and deacons. They gave oversight to all matters relating to the church. Church governance was paramount in Bhengu's mind. Church money was to be protected and used according to policy and

procedure agreed to and as directed by Bhengu. Money was to be collected and counted by at least three people (deacons) before the congregation and banked on the first business of the week. A bank slip was produced to the church on Sunday for examination by members of the church, to satisfy them that the money was safely banked. Three signatories were required for cheque payments. Bhengu's signature was the control signature, the other two representing the local church. To set an example to others, those who collect money had first to put their own money on the table. If they declined, they were prohibited to receive the collection from the people.

8.7. BHENGU, THE PROPHET

Bhengu was a prophet called by God to proclaim the message of salvation to all people. He testified before great and small, to kings, political leaders, to scholars at Cambridge and Oxford, to hundreds of thousands across the globe. He had one message to all of them: "Christ is the only Saviour". His approach was in the Pauline style of presenting Christ:

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the gentiles (Ac 26: 19).

He stood for what he believed God had sent him to do. He did not flow with the tide. He actually swam against it, despite all criticism levelled against him by those who felt he should join the struggle and fight apartheid from the pulpit and support the armed struggle. For a self-confessed Evangelical and Pentecostal, he did not shy away from speaking about socio-political matters – something many of his colleagues never dared to do. Bhengu criticised the Nationalist government openly as seen from the *Daily Dispatch* newspapers cuttings in Chapter Six. He preached the Word as per Paul's instruction:

"... in season and out of season". In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season;

correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Tm 4: 1 – 5)

According to Hugh Wetmore, retired missionary and lecturer at the Union Bible College in Pietermaritzburg (interview 2009:01-09), “Bhengu did not compromise on sin, he called sin, sin. He held up high the flag of evangelism in South Africa when it was not popular to do so”

Balcomb (in Ranger (ed) 2008:212) says:

Although Bhengu did not enter the struggle against apartheid on a political level, it is clear that his ministry had profound effects on apartheid. That he bequeathed a moral and social legacy affecting the future of democracy indeed, one that helped prepare the way for democracy is clear. Individuals converted to evangelical Christianity through the Back to God movement populate every sector of black society: teachers, lawyers, traders, clerks, businessmen, gardeners, and even politicians. Bhengu’s teaching emphasizes the pre-eminent existence of a transcendent reality that relativizes the material realm, centralizes spiritual values, exalts the dignity of the individual, and compels political reflection to imagine radical alternatives.

From the above it is clear that Bhengu’s legacy as a prophet will last for a long time. He was a man who was willing to stand alone. In response to Lawrence Tutu’s criticism, he charged Tutu as man with “no scruples for the church” and that his theological ideas “were questionable and boarded on modernism”. He committed himself to continue with what he was doing by saying “I am a Christian first of all, I am a brother to all men of goodwill, irrespective of tribe, ethnicity, colour, political or denominational affiliation. Tutu and the venom in the press will not change me one iota” (see 6.4).

Bhengu was a man of conviction. He was not ashamed of the gospel he preached. He was under an obligation to preach it to all people:

That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Ro 1: 14-18):

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (I Cor 2:1-5).

8.8. BHENGU, THE ECUMENIST

Bhengu was an ecumenist at heart - although he did have a theological difference with WCC for their support for armed struggle. He also had problems with liberal theology which, in his opinion, placed Jesus on par with other founders of religions such as Mohammed, Budha and Confucius. As a true evangelical he rejected any notion that there could be salvation without Christ. He further he called upon African Christians to reject Western secular philosophies. He emphasised "Jesus is God, Jesus is King and Jesus is the only Saviour!" (cf 7.5.1).

Despite all his concerns he still supported ecumenism, and reached out and related to Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches alike. In a 1968 report, Bhengu delighted in his contact with other denominations (1968 report):

After the great crusade in Johannesburg, I left at the end of April 1968 for Canada and the United States, where I was a convention guest speaker at the People's Church in Toronto Canada.

Space will not allow me to give a full report of what I saw in that great church, with no branches, just one church supporting over 300 missionaries in many countries. For the first time in the history of that church, its Magazine will feature names of

three African workers. They will support these workers for one full year and the \$1200.00 has been sent to our office already for monthly allotments.

In Los Angeles at the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International World Convention I saw what I had never expected to see in this life. I saw Anglican bishops, Roman Catholic priests, nuns and university professors of theology, Doctors of Divinity, judges, attorneys and celebrities from all walks of life. These all have had a touch of Charismatic revival with real experience of glossolalia (speaking in tongues), no sophist or sceptic could easily dismiss this from such learned men and women of our modern times. There is definitely a new move by laymen. This is real ecumenism brought about by similar deep experience of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Bhengu was involved in a large number of ecumenical initiatives, in South Africa, Africa, and in the wider world. His presence at PACLA (Nairobi, 1976) and SACLA (Pretoria, 1979) was deeply appreciated by representatives of many denominations. His support of para-church organisations such as Africa Enterprise and Campus Crusade for Christ, was an encouragement to many of his colleagues.

8.9. BHENGU, THE LEADER

Bhengu was not an easy man to understand. He was a man who depended on the Spirit most of the time. He would say that when God told him to change direction, he would do so without any hesitation and would apologize to his people for having taken a certain course.

Bhengu was a *powerful leader* who, when convinced of the leading of the Spirit, would let no one convince him otherwise. A typical example is that no politician, including liberation leaders or government officials, would get him to toe the line. He was very assertive and did not gladly accommodate adversaries. He did not try to curry favour with anybody. Like Paul, Bhengu could say, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ". (Gl 1:10)

Bhengu was an *African leader* to the core, who tried to blend his culture with the Bible in his preaching and teaching. In 1955 Bhengu had demanded that Africans should lead the Church's work in Africa. This was two years before the independence of the Ghana, the

first Africa country to receive independence from Britain, its former colonial power. He said that Africans had no desire to lead the whole church, but “we want to accomplish what no other man will accomplish in Africa”, but the Africans.” (Bhengu 10.10.1955, see appendix 8).

Bhengu was an Africanist. But as a Christian he promoted an Africanism that accommodated other people in the country, that reached out to all human beings around the world. He was in agreement with Steve Biko who spoke of Black Consciousness as the process that makes a man see himself as being complete in himself. “It makes him less dependent and more free to express his manhood” (1972:92). In his quest to promote African leadership, he instituted a bursary fund for young men and women to study at tertiary institutions to prepare them for leadership, to rediscover their African identity.

As far as Western missionaries were concerned, he did not call for a moratorium, for missionaries to go home, but assigned to them the responsibility to teach and empower African workers, to be able to take the lead. His dream for Africans to take leadership in Africa has since come true in the church, in government and in civil society.

Bhengu was a *visionary leader*. A leader was once cautioned: “Do not walk ahead of me, I may not be following. Do not follow me for I may not be leading. Walk along side me and be my friend.” Leadership is about building harmonious relations with those you lead. It is also about walking alongside the people that you are leading (Lephoko 2001: 98). Do not disappear out of their sight. This was the way Bhengu led his people.

It has already been stated elsewhere in this thesis that Bhengu had a vision of reaching all of Africa for Christ. Indeed he travelled to many parts of Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and planted churches in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho and Botswana (Bhengu 10.10.1955):

We want to evangelise before these threatening powers of darkness swallow the sub-continent. A powerless church, broken fragmentary kind of movement whose groups are disunited, who hate, fight and devour one another and are split into factions, will neither impress the world nor bring an impact to the dark continent.

Fear grips the missionaries and many denominations as they see the inevitable birth of a National Movement. Distrust and suspicion rule in some quarters. Africans pose as friends of the missionaries and carry false news and subvert everything and destroy everything we are trying to build for the church in Africa.

We visualise therefore, united church with autonomous Assemblies throughout the country. Assemblies well taught in the doctrines of the bible, whose monies are kept on order by the elected officers of the Assemblies and books kept in order so that the African leaders will be debarred from becoming capitalists by taking all the money to themselves. Where the workers are supported by the Assemblies and everything goes through the hands and books of the church. Where there will be scope for White South African Students to minister but not to lead, and permanent scope for foreign missionaries as we shall always need them.

Today the missionary must take heed and not impede or frustrate this move but rather co-operate with us and assist us towards that goal.

As a visionary leader Bhengu was able to motive and build teams, but he led the charge. He motivated women who caught his vision to raise money for the evangelization of Africa. He constantly kept the vision of reaching Africa driven by the slogan "Africa Back to God: Africa for Jesus and Jesus for Africa". He organised and built teams to accomplish his goal: evangelists women, men, girls and youth all rallied behind this goal.

Shawchuck and Heuser (1993:70,71) say the following about a vision:

There are, however, not two but three dimensions of a vision for ministry. The vision gives (1) new insight into the glory and grandeur of god-an "upward" view of God, and (2) new insight into the severe limitations of oneself, an "inward: view of the self. The perspective becomes three dimensional if the vision (3) gives new insight into how things might be an "outward" view of circumstances as our ministries might influence them.

A three-dimensional vision is the "impossible dream," in which god is dreaming god's dream in the heart of those who are called to lead. Such "vision" requires a particular "eyesight" that does not match the seeing of those who are not thus

“sighted.” so they tend to label the one with vision as crazy or dangerous or harmless but “blind” to reality.

This consuming vision that Bhengu had, was not always shared by expatriate missionaries and politicians. It was often the cause for their unrelenting criticism of him, labelling him as crazy, dangerous, and blind to reality. He complained of being “misconstrued, misunderstood and misinterpreted.” (Farewell Message to the Church see appendix 12).

However, it is true that Bhengu, once convinced of the way he had to take, would not let anyone stand in his way even though it might cause hurts along the way, notably among missionaries and some whites in the church.

8.10. BHENGU, A SERVANT LEADER

Servant leadership is a big challenge to Christian leaders. When men rise above their equals, the temptation to lord over them becomes enticing. In recent times or successful Christian leaders are called by names that would have made Bhengu shirk: “the man of God”, “the spiritual eagle”, and many others. Some of the great men of God have their Bibles carried for them by assistants, as they escort him to the pulpit.

Jesus warned his disciples against becoming lords of the people:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. for even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many. (Mk 10:41-45)

Peter echoed his Master’ words in admonishing church leaders not to lord it over those God has appointed to them to lead. They must not be greedy for money. They must be humble, “humble yourselves therefore under God’s might hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Pe 5:1-6).

In spite of his very strong personality, Bhengu was a true, humble, servant who tried to serve his people. He was not greedy for money. In May 1985 I flew to East London to see

Bhengu. I went to ask him to serve on our Life Ministry Board (Campus Crusade for Christ SA) of which at the time I was the national director. We talked till about midnight. He said to me “Dan, I have suffered a lot in my life. I was poor, so money has no meaning to me except that I use it to do God’s work and not for personal gain”.

At conference and conventions he would walk around to ensure people were well served even to the extent of checking the menu.

In his book, *The Master Plan of Teaching*, Matt Friedman speaks of the servant as the wise fool:

There is perhaps no better way to describe the servant-teacher. First of all, he is “foolish” enough to take Jesus’ advice to heart. He truly desires to emulate the Master: washing his students’ feet, laying down his own life for the lives and careers of his disciples, taking up his cross daily and following after the dreams of God. Let’s face it, in they, short haul those choices seem rather foolish. Your friends and family, probably just like Jesus’, tell you to wake up and be sensible – save your life for something better, go for the gusto, climb the corporate ladder, make some real money, choose a more profitable profession, or set your own agenda (Friedman 1990:152).

This is what we will remember Nicholas Bhengu for. He was in all respects a servant-leader, the man who was foolish enough, to take Jesus’ advice and Jesus’ example to heart.

* * * * *

Nicholas Bhengu was indeed the Billy Graham of Africa. He accomplished much for his Lord, for the Church, and for the continent of Africa. Through his work he lifted the lives of ordinary people *and* established links with leaders in high places. He prepared Africans for the dawn of democracy in South Africa. He was a great apostle, a prophet, and an evangelist. The call for Africa to go to God, still rings out in the townships and in the mountains.

With all his successes, Bhengu was still human, with faults and frailties like all of us. He was intolerant of people who differed with his vision. The way he organised his work was one of the causes for missionaries and for some white and black churches to leave the

Assemblies of God. One such instance was the Cyara Conference (1981) when he canvassed his followers to vote for Bond, in an attempt to change the Constitution. The appointment of elders and deacons into life positions in the church, is another such instance. Because of old age some of the men have lost their sharpness of mind and are unable to respond to the changing situation currently in our country.

But in the end, Paul's words to Timothy are appropriate in describing Bhengu's ministry:

"I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, when the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Tm 4:7f).

I can hear the Lord saying to the man that He had called, many years ago, who had travelled the world over for his Master: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness" (Mt 25:21f).