



Spirit-empowered preaching: Nicholas Bhengkosi Hepworth Bhengu's power for impact



Authors:

Kelebogile T. Resane¹ 
Daniel S.B. Lephoko² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Historical and Constructive Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

²Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Kelebogile Resane,
resanekt@ufs.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 16 Oct. 2025
Accepted: 04 Dec. 2025
Published: 21 Jan. 2026

How to cite this article:

Resane, K.T. & Lephoko, D.S.B., 2026, 'Spirit-empowered preaching: Nicholas Bhengkosi Hepworth Bhengu's power for impact', *African Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3(1), a102. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajops.v3i1.102>

Copyright:

© 2026. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Background: This year, 2025, is the 40th anniversary of Nicholas Bhengu's passing. The legacy he left behind continues to impact the lives of thousands of people both nationally and internationally. The problem addressed here is that Pentecostal preaching should make an impact on people's lives, and can do so if it is biblical, Christocentric, pneumatological and culturally relevant.

Objectives: This presentation shows that Bhengu's narrative preaching was Spirit-empowered, and in humility one can communicate the oracles of God and make an impact in peoples' lives. The presentation aims to show how one fully yielded to God can become a giant of faith in simple terms without even a formal education, as is always thought by some people. It is demonstrated here that gospel presentation done in and through cultural relevance can change the dynamics within the context in which it is communicated.

Method: This presentation on 'Spirit-empowered preaching – Bhengu's power for impact' is based on a literature review and some experiences from those who walked and worked with Bhengu.

Results: It is discovered that for the gospel to make an impact, it must be Spirit-empowered. The Spirit-empowered preaching is biblical, Christocentric, pneumatological and culturally relevant. The preacher should demonstrate humility when ministering to people.

Conclusion: Bhengu's way of life and commitment to the *Missio Dei*, *Ecclesia* and *Missio Spiritus* should be an example to all Pentecostals and Charismatic preachers.

Contribution: This article contributes towards understanding of the life of the African man who stood on par with international preachers yet remained African with the zeal to serve his people. Church historians, missiologists and Pentecostal or Charismatics learn pastoral ethics of caring in the face of adversities such as racism, poverty and disease.

Keywords: Pentecostal; power; preaching; church; Christ; Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Nicholas Bhengkosi Hepworth Bhengu was born and raised as a Lutheran on the Entumeni Norwegian Mission Station, 21 km from Eshowe in KwaZulu-Natal. In 1929, while working in Kimberley, he was saved in a revival meeting conducted by two young white evangelists of the Full Gospel Church from the United States of America. He later studied at the Evangelical Bible School, in Kwa Dumisa, now known as Union Bible Institute (UBI). In 1938, Bhengu joined the Assemblies of God (AOG), a missionary Pentecostal denomination from the United States of America. It is during his ministry with the AOG that he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, though he did not emphasise it in his ministry or even emphasise its evidence of *glossolalia* (Lephoko 2005:100–101). The anointing and empowerment of the Spirit in his preaching resulted in thousands of people coming to Christ, and criminals turning in their weapons of crime and returning stolen goods, which were taken in truckloads to the police. Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal preachers are enjoined to seek spirit empowerment to impact their audiences with the saving and healing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Pentecostal movement was born through and out of preaching. Preaching occupies the central stage of Pentecostal fellowship. However, Pentecostal preaching is unique, as it does not strictly follow the fundamentals of hermeneutical and homiletical rudiments (Motuku 2010). Sermons are made to be messages. Nel (2017) notes that historically Pentecostal preaching style:

[W]as not merely to impart information or explain what a biblical passage means for the first listeners or even for today's readers, but primarily to build faith in the listeners' hearts to receive what God wants to give them ... (p. 286)

It has always been a *kerygma* accompanied or followed by conversions, miracles, physical manifestations such as slaying in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, etc. Other manifestations can be emotional bursts such as shouting hallelujah or Amen, weeping, laughing, etc. All these are regarded as tangible manifestations of the presence of the Spirit in the lives of those who heard the Word. For Pentecostals, 'God is not an idea but a presence and a power' (ed. McClung 1986:48). All these manifestations are associated with the Spirit's power and presence. Although Pentecostals' spirituality is biblically pneumatic, it is predominantly theocentric, focusing on God's person and his works in peoples' lives. As far as Pentecostals are concerned, 'God saves; He has the power to save, and even more concretely the power to cure, whether it be from the effects of sin or of illness' (Epinay 1969:204). One needs to also note that Pentecostal *kerygma* is Christocentric. Their Christology centres more on Christ, especially his atoning work. In all their ecclesial deliberations, Pentecostals focus on Christ as the centre of life and the leader of the church, while the Spirit is the combustion engine of life, both personally and ecclesiastically.

Bhengu's Spirit-empowered preaching

It has been historically evidenced that during Bhengu's ministry with the AOG, he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the cardinal and salient doctrine of the Pentecostal experience. Baptism in the Holy Spirit, in Pentecostalism, is central to empowerment for preaching, teaching and performance of miracles. It locates the Spirit at the centre of Pentecostal life, as pointed out by Damboriena (1969:87), that there is 'centrality of the Third Person of the Trinity in their theology and lives'.

Bhengu was a classical Pentecostal preacher whose preaching was seasoned with the African sage of storytelling. This is the legacy he imprinted on many AOG Back to God late and current preachers, such as Dingaana Gumbi, Philip Msiza, Elijah Maswanganyi and Fred Shabalala. This articulation skill is enhanced by the fact that African communication in social settings is interactively narrative and conversational. He planted a preaching legacy of sermons that are conversational, emphasised by means of mimicry, stories and so on (Dubb 1976; Watt 1992:104). Storytelling is the effective means of conveying the facts. Instead of the Western preaching style of following the hermeneutical rhetorics, Bhengu's gospel presentation was through storytelling; therefore, his preaching was narrative. He 'was not an ordinary preacher. He was specially gifted in speech and in his command of languages' (Lephoko 2018:104). To capture Bhengu's philosophy of preaching, Lephoko (2005:103, 2018) makes a succinct description of Bhengu's preaching as follows:

Bhengu's preaching stood on four legs. (1) His total belief in the Bible as the Word of God. (2) Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer and Saviour of man. (3) His total dependence on Prayer and the

Holy Spirit. (4) His understanding of the cultural dynamics and needs of the people he ministered to. (p. 104)

Examining Lephoko's citation above, which aligns with Hughes' description of Pentecostal preaching (in Lephoko 2018:105; ed. McClung 1986:91), one can deduce that Bhengu's preaching was *biblical*. Bhengu never deemed the Bible suspicious, as is accustomed to most Pentecostals. He fully ascribed it as the Word of God. Apart from the influence of classical Pentecostal biblicism, the Bible was central to his personal devotional walk with God and in his ministry. Probably this was motivated by his vision of calling to the ministry, which is described by Dubb (1976) as:

Jesus appeared and lifted me out. He showed me an open Bible and said: This is the Word of Life; study this Word and through the Words of this Book you will break these fetters and free your people ... (p. 10)

For Bhengu, God and the Bible could not be separated. His theology, especially that of preaching, was biblical, and it was out of the Bible he derived his message. He enthused to his followers that the Bible should be open and be read aloud in all gatherings of the believers. This legacy lingers on in the AOG Back to God churches. Bhengu also introduced structured biblical liturgies across all AOG Back to God churches, notably incorporating 1 Corinthians 14:26–33 (Orderly Worship) and 1 Timothy 2:1–8 (Prayer for governments). These passages became foundational for worship services, emphasising that 'when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation', thereby promoting participation from the entire congregation rather than a clergy-dominated service. By embedding these texts into the liturgical rhythm of Back to God assemblies, Bhengu advanced the priesthood of all believers, ensuring that every member had an active role in worship and intercession. The inclusion of prayer for governments also reflected his vision of socially responsible Christianity – encouraging believers to pray for leaders and the nation as part of their regular worship life. Together, these practices fostered maximum 'pew' participation, community unity and a sense of shared spiritual responsibility among all members. Bible reading is the dominant feature in all the meetings, and in step with the principle of maximum participation, it is read aloud by any volunteer from the pew once prompted by the one standing at the front. This, of course, enhances the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In keeping with African communicative traditions, Bhengu's sermons often incorporated music and hymns, much like the preaching style of Job Chiliza. For Bhengu, music was not merely an accompaniment but a form of theology-in-song – a means of communication, reflection and response. Hymns, choruses and spontaneous singing were interwoven with preaching, transforming sermons into communal acts of worship. This integration of word and song reflected the African understanding that music is communication, a vital medium through which theology is experienced, internalised and shared by the whole community.

In a nutshell, Bhengu's preaching, according to Watt (1992), [D]id not lack content or structure, nor was the sermon delivered in a frenzied way ... it was characterised by clarity of content and structure, a well-modulated voice and, occasionally, a dramatic impact. (p. 104)

The skilful ability to express the text narratively was fundamental to Bhengu's preaching.

Another observation is that Bhengu's preaching was *Christocentric*, where Christ remains the central theme of preaching. This aligns well with Pentecostal *kerygma*, which is Christ-focused. Listeners were invited or encouraged to hear or see Christ through his Word, the Bible. Hughes (1986:91) points out that 'Pentecostal preaching always exalts Christ'. In a similar vein, Bhengu 'told people not to seek gifts but the giver – Jesus Christ' (Lephoko 2005:101). This is further highlighted by Mochechane (n.d.:230) that 'While others sought to assert the importance of Africa in other ways, Bhengu's emphasis revolved around grounding African identity in the Christ of God'. His preaching aim was to invite listeners to experience the healing power of Christ, the Healer of human sin and disease today. Nel (2017:296) agrees that Pentecostal 'preaching should not depend on lofty speech or wisdom (οὐ καθ' ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας) but Jesus Christ as crucified should be the sole focus'. Bhengu held to this view that the focus should not be a preacher or a denomination, but Christ. His commitment to preaching the crucified Christ is evident in one of his sermons, 'the cross is our starting point, and I preach the cross of Jesus Christ as a starting point for Africa' (Lephoko 2018:106).

Bhengu's preaching was *pneumatological*. In line with historical Pentecostal preaching, Bhengu's preaching was built on the Word and, of course, 'according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and depends upon the Spirit to convict and bring miraculous results' (Hughes 1986:91). The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not central to Bhengu's ministrations, but as the Word was declared, the Holy Spirit's presence was manifested. This was evidenced by the exuberance of the reception of the Word and miracles of conversions and healings. When these came to the fore, there was shouting, weeping and sometimes people slain in the Spirit. Bond (2000:59) recalls one tent crusade where Bhengu was preaching and his sermon 'had been interrupted by crying out and prayers from the hearers'. The descriptive word for these manifestations is 'supernatural', referring to signs, wonders, healings, confrontation with cosmic powers and miracles. Lephoko (2005:35) avers that 'Bhengu's teaching emphasised the work of the Holy Spirit in ministry'. Lephoko (2005:101) further attests that Bhengu 'thirsted after the Holy Spirit. He encouraged his people to seek the power of the Holy Spirit in ministry'. Bhengu did not teach his followers any conventional or mechanical methods of speaking in tongues. He never promoted any formula of or evidence of speaking in tongues. Lephoko (2018) further highlights that:

Bhengu did not teach speaking in tongues in his Back to God Crusade campaigns because he believed that speaking in tongues

was not the essence of the Gospel that brings people to repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ. (p. 104)

A serious note is that:

He did however emphasize that some supernatural incident must happen to confirm baptism in the Spirit. It could be bursting in laughter, song, falling to the ground under the power of the Holy Spirit etc. (Lephoko 2005:101)

Bhengu's own baptism was dramatic but without the evidence of speaking in tongues.

I only said three words and all five of us were baptized at the same time. We did not know where we were. We shouted, we closed our ears, we were down on the floor, we made noise, we were crying, we were weeping, we were giggling, we were laughing, we did not know what to do. I was the only one that had been at Pentecostal meetings. (Lephoko 2010:100)

This is also captured by Bond (2000:71) that Bhengu 'believed strongly in speaking in tongues but he deprecated the insistence of some Pentecostal enthusiasts on trying to get people to speak in tongues'. He understood the African worldview that laying hands on people to speak in tongues could be misconstrued and make people believe in him as the possessor of the divine power instead of believing in Christ.

Finally, Bhengu's preaching took *cultural context* seriously. He understood the cultural dynamics and needs of the people he ministered to. Some scholars criticise Bhengu for political inertia, claiming that he did not criticise the political *status quo* of the time. Watt (1992:178) makes a reference that 'Bhengu did not feel it was his task to oppose the government, he did not often include political themes in his preaching'. Bond (2000:99) reiterates Watt's reference to Bhengu's political perception that 'Nicholas Bhengu always avoided political involvement. He warned his people to steer clear of it'. This assertion of political silence does not assume that he was politically unaware or that he chose the path of political ignorance as if he was not a black South African burning at the end of the stick of racial discrimination. After his conversion, Watt (1992:178) claims that Bhengu 'abandoned his political involvements because he perceived them as being motivated by hatred, and he allowed his attitude to be shaped by love'. Those who understood Bhengu find it difficult to label him a politically disconnected character. See what Balcomb (2005) says about Bhengu:

Bhengu clearly became disillusioned with the possibility of apolitical solution to the problems of South Africa and when he converted to Christ, he became convinced that the Gospel was the answer. He believed that a 'new nation' would emerge 'born from above with the likeness of God'. (p. 337)

Bhengu probably understood his calling to be the preacher of the gospel, not a political activist. He wanted to reach out to all people without any inhibitions, prejudice or reservation. Bond (2000:100) enlightens us that 'Bhengu would not allow himself to become captive to any political faction. Thus he kept in a position where he could minister to everybody'. He knew that his socio-political context is complex, riddled with

all forms of bigotry, but opted 'to become all things to all men... that he may by all means win some' (1 Cor 9:22). He valued the importance of adaptability and relating to diverse groups in order to effectively preach the gospel.

Bhengu was an Africanist who was passionate about Africa; he dreamed of seeing black people liberated from colonial and apartheid tethers by turning to Jesus and embracing self-reliance instead of coiling into the cocoons of self-pity. He believed that African salvation is through faith in Christ and called Africans to desist from what Resane (2000:272–273) calls navel-gazing theology, meaning spending excessive time in 'thinking too much or too deeply about oneself, one's experiences, one's self-interests or one's feeling'. Bhengu's preaching was not just proclamational but contextual, hence establishing and building the church polity around the departments (children, youth, mothers, fathers and girls) focusing on self-improvement towards quality of life. This is confirmed by Resane (2022), who points out that:

In order to engross the philosophy of indigenous church, Bhengu organised his churches in such a way that the local church takes charge of its growth and development. The church organisation into age or gender regimentation had opened the doors for both evangelistic and discipleship endeavours by the local church, where youth reach youth, women reach women, men reach men, etc. (p. 5)

Ascribing Bhengu's ministry of preaching as detached from political realities of the time is a misnomer. He believed that education is a powerful weapon for emancipating Africans from an oppressive slavery mentality. Resane (2022) promoted education more than any Pentecostal leader of the time.

Bhengu's love for education is significantly displayed through the Youth Department that raises funds for a bursary that has impacted many people by sending deserving youngsters to schools, colleges and universities. That bursary has produced thousands of professionals through South Africa and abroad. (p. 5)

Bhengu was geared to the times yet remained anchored to the rock. He preached liberation through faith in Christ leading to social upliftment. Education was the preparatory tool for the future politically liberated South Africa. This vision is succinctly captured by Mochechane (2015):

He was motivated by an ideology of 'African consciousness' which drove him to pursue a ministry that had a strong component of social responsibility. He didn't only preach to 'save lost souls'; but he also inculcated a sense of economic independence in his followers. He emphasised education and sent hundreds of young people to universities around the country. He promoted skills development among the men and women of the AGSA, thus introducing a culture of innovation and creativity among his people. (p. 149)

It will take another scholarly research to analyse these tenets in order to amplify and clarify the basis, content, methods and strategies of Bhengu's preaching.

Bhengu's Spirit-empowered preaching evidenced by his life

Bhengu's secret of powerful preaching lies in his life of holiness, humility and honesty. These three marks of his life were unquestionable to his followers and those who walked with him. This does not mean the man was perfect, but that he displayed the full embodiment of a Spirit-filled life.

Holiness

The first reason for Bhengu's Spirit-empowered preaching was holiness. Historically, Pentecostal internal debates were hot on the issue of holiness. Emergence and evolutionary appearance out of Holiness Movement drove early Pentecostal preachers to engage robustly on 'holiness' and how is it required and what is its evidence. Many of those thinkers such as Phoebe Palmer suggested that holiness is power, and that purity and power are identical. Holiness and sanctification were always discussed as either synonyms, homonyms or antecedents (Dayton 2004:95–100; Horton 1987:105–109). The AOG ended up agreeing that sanctification is twofold, i.e. positional and instantaneous or practical and progressive (Horton 1987:113–126). In some circles, holiness was equated with legalism, asceticism and some sectarian marks. Modern Pentecostal teachers refute these that they have no attachment to faith or holiness (Duffield & Van Cleave 1987:258–259, 484). Subsequently it was broadly agreed by all Pentecostals that baptism with the Holy Spirit purifies believers' hearts and empowers them for service (Dayton 2004:94).

Bhengu's preaching encapsulated the early Pentecostal preachers who insisted on living holy lives. These preachers studied the Bible to avoid sin and to shun the very appearance of evil. Bhengu's biblicism emphasised holiness. Like his Pentecostal predecessors and contemporaries, 'the committed life with all its attendant blessings came to be appreciated by people who recognised the greater price which had to be paid for selfish and sinful living' (Zimmerman in ed. McClung 1986:59). For Bhengu, careful and reverent attitude was 'I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27)'.

Bhengu's theological training at Dumisa left its mark on him, especially 'its ethical teachings and emphasis on holy living in obedience to the Holy Spirit' (Bond 2000:81). He always remained open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, especially when carnal manifestations offered themselves to his presence or availability. A few incidents to attest to this are mentioned by Bond (2000:81–83). One sees that 'His experience of the Holy Spirit was not only in charismatic acts of power, but in the area of conduct too' (Bond 2000:81). For Bhengu, holiness was life that represents the Christ that he preached. The messenger and the message had to synergise. His message was the incarnation of both the person and the works of Christ. He fully subscribed to Cheyne's (1996:24) elucidation that 'if the incarnational agent is to be true to the spirit of our Lord, the gospel must first of all become incarnate in the life of the proclaimer'.

Humility

One of the outstanding characteristics of his life and ministry is his humility. Once the word 'humility' is pronounced, one thinks of modesty, diffidence or meekness. These words have nothing to deal with cowardice or indifference. Humility speaks of not being proud but being considerate and accommodative, without abandoning one's identity or legal rights. This attitude can only be exemplified by that of the Lord Jesus Christ, 'and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phlp 2:11)'. Jesus could have called all protocols of heaven to display him as royalty but did not consider it an option to follow.

Bhengu was an umZulu from rural KwaZulu-Natal; being a priest's son who grew up in a mission station, he was always aware of his background (Lephoko 2018:41; Roy 2017:128). He never opted to live a pompous life but always sided with those he was with. According to Lephoko (2018:292), 'In spite of his very strong personality, Bhengu was a true, humble, servant who tried to serve his people ... He exhibited a spirit of humility and servanthood'. This is also confirmed by Bond (2000), who correctly ascribes this humility to Bhengu:

He would not dwell anywhere else but among his own people. He lived like one of them, though he could easily have demanded more sumptuous accommodation. One never failed to note his simplicity in the austerity of the tiny township houses he took as his home. In each place the assembly would accommodate someone in the house to be caretaker, leaving a bedroom tidy for Bhengu's use when he needed it. (p. 54)

Bhengu experienced outstanding results from his teaching, preaching, healings and miracles, yet he remained humble. 'He was easy and sociable, a charming companion, always interested in one's conversation ...' (Bond 2000:93). He humbled himself so far as to be able to walk together with his companions in the light. He expresses this in one of his circulars to the church:

My hands and my conscience are clean before God and before men that I have desired no high life, luxury, pomp, greatness, wealth, name, fame or vain glory. I have taken no money from you for myself apart from what I take for the work of God in other poorer countries. I have spent hundreds of thousands of rands or dollars, which were mine by right, in helping Church buildings and workers, whether or not they say thank you I do not mind for what I have done I have done for God and not men (Circular to all assemblies pastors and district councils. (n.p., n.d.)

Bhengu's ministry of preaching was undoubtedly dynamic, Spirit-empowered, yet administered in humility. It was in line with the early Pentecostal preachers, offering a dynamic religious alternative, packed with values, practices and associations appropriate to the needs of the people (Wilson 1997:14).

Honesty

The third secret for Bhengu's Spirit-empowered preaching was because of his honesty. Honesty, integrity and credibility

are intertwined into one behavioural component. These three influence morality and leadership style in some dynamic manners. Honesty is sometimes associated with transparency – what some wisdom calls walking together in the light. While honesty speaks of sincerity or truthfulness, integrity encompasses a broader meaning which encompasses moral soundness and adherence to strong moral and ethical principles. Conduct and character articulate into integrity. Integrity means doing the right thing, both in private and in public. It is marked with consistency in actions that align with moral values. 'People with integrity have nothing to hide and nothing to fear. Their lives are open books. They are integers' (Wiersbe 1991:21).

On the other hand, credibility is believability. A person of credibility is a believed person. It is a person who is followed because the speech and conduct are harmonious. Kuscus (2021) picks up that a person of credibility

[E]ngages with the world in a unique and authentic manner, remaining faithful to your inner convictions and not a proxy for external agendas...credible people are not only believed but they are trusted, admired, and respected. (p. 40)

Nicholas Bhengu's honesty ripples through his ministry when the apartheid government saw the impact of his ministry as an evident tool for reducing crimes in townships. They proposed to coerce him into civil service by abandoning AOG to become non-denominational like Billy Graham (Bond 2000:65) but he refused, as he insisted on remaining faithful to his inner convictions, serving no external agenda (Mochechane n.d.:169–170). Bhengu remained the man of integrity by even taking the bulls by their horns, the American AOG missionaries who wanted to derail him from his conviction of the 'Indigenous Church'. He opted for a lonely road of marginalisation and was labelled a 'Communist' for disagreeing with foreign missionaries using the indigenous preachers as tools of their successes instead of partners in Christ.

Bhengu stood and remained truthful to his calling that the liberation of a black man is salvation through Jesus Christ. He gained followership because of his credible message and life of integrity. Truthfulness to his calling, preaching and morality was evidenced by Spirit-empowered ministry, bringing some incredible and tangible results as observed by churches he planted throughout the subcontinent. Ecclesio-political red tape could not dissuade or derail Bhengu from his mandate of preaching the gospel, because he remained honest to his preaching. He remained consistent with typical AOG preaching, where 'A good preacher is one who is easy to listen to, who faithfully expounds the message of the Bible, and who speaks with the power of the Holy Spirit' (Watt 1992:105). Bhengu never wanted to abandon his passion because of politics – either of the government or of the church. Bond (2000:58) captures it well that 'the depths of his compassion were stirred by the presence of a group of Africans, his own people, hungry for the Gospel'.

Bhengu's honesty is also observed in the management of finances. Bond (2000:67) highlights that Bhengu 'was honourable, honest and precise in money dealings ... He kept a tight hand on the spending of local assemblies'. In one unpublished manuscript by Diko (1959) (in Balcomb 2005:339), Bhengu is quoted as saying, 'We are not preaching for the sake of preaching. We are not motivated by the selfish desire to have a following and finances, but we are burdened for Africa'. One can see from this that Bhengu's motivation was exonerated from selfish gain. 'He was not greedy for money' (Lephoko 2018:292). He would not fit into today's salient feature within some charismatic circles, known as the commercialisation of the gospel. Mochechane (n.d.:238–239) goes into details of how finances became a bitter pill that drove a wedge between Bhengu and Assemblies of God USA (AGUSA) missionaries. These missionaries wanted to be seen as the forefront of the ministry, though ministry was done effectively by Bhengu and other African evangelists. The reports and photos reflected the missionaries instead of African workers, and disagreement with Bhengu on this led to financial disputes. Americans wanted to control all the ministry funds, but Bhengu refused that the funds should be disbursed for proper channelling and be locally administered by those ground workers doing ministry at the grassroots. Since 1964, after the Americans left Assemblies of God South Africa (AGSA), finances have been handled by the indigenous churches, and properly so. The withdrawal of American funds did not change Bhengu's stance on the indigenous church that is self-supporting and self-governing. It is this honesty that has seen AGSA ballooning in all communities at an exponential rate difficult to elucidate.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that Bhengu's Spirit-empowered preaching was aligned with worldwide Pentecostal preaching by emphasising the personal response to Jesus Christ. The power in Bhengu's preaching lies behind preaching based on the Bible, focusing on Christ, emphasising empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and relevance to the context in which the ministry is undertaken. The impact made through Spirit-empowered preaching is evidenced by conversions, healings, miracles and wonders. What remains to be grasped is highlighted by Balcomb (2025):

His legacy is not simply a movement of some million adherents and growing. It is a legacy of transformed lives that continue to impact society on all levels. Back to God people are still to be found throughout the societal and political spectrum – bringing their influence at a juncture in South African history when it is desperately needed. (p. 348)

Bhengu's way of life and commitment to the *Missio Dei*, *Ecclesia* and *Missio Spiritus* should be an example to all Pentecostal and Charismatic preachers. 'He set an example that should be studied carefully, and should be followed, by generations to come' (Lephoko 2018:112). His life of holiness (doctrine), humility (character) and honesty (conduct) leaves the indelible marks that every Pentecostal preacher should admire. He left behind the everlasting legacy of Spirit-empowered preaching that is reflected by Kirsch (in eds. Miller & Lwesya 2011):

May it be that, as Pentecostals, our Spirit-empowered witness, coupled with Spirit-directed compassionate acts, will propel our testimony to greater visibility whereby the eternal, life-changing gospel will be proclaimed, and Christ's compassion will be known, through us and truly transform our society and our world in ways otherwise unattainable. (p. 147)

The legacy left behind by Bhengu is that the Pentecostal preaching is Spirit-empowered if it is theologically sound, biblically based, Christ-focused, Spirit-directed and, of course, contextual. The ministry should be simplified for the context and delivered narratively as Africans relay messages through storytelling.

Let the Spirit arise and Pentecostal faith resurge through the legacy of Spirit-empowered preaching of Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu!!

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author, Kelebogile T. Resane, serves as an editorial board member of this journal. Kelebogile T. Resane has no other competing interests to declare. The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Kelebogile T. Resane: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Resources. Daniel S.B. Lephoko: Conceptualisation, Project administration, Validation, Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

- Balcomb, A.O., 2005, 'Nicholas Bhengu – The impact of an African Pentecostal on South African Society', *Exchange* 34(4), 337–348. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157254305774851475>
- Bhekinkosi, H.B., 1959, 'Religion: The black Billy Graham', *Time Magazine*, 23 November 1959.
- Bond, J., 2000, *For the record: Reflections on the assemblies of God*, NU Paradigm, Cape Town.
- Cheyne, J.R., 1996, *Incarnational agents: A guide to developmental ministry*, New Hope, Birmingham, AL.
- Damboriena, P., 1969, *Tongues as of fire: Pentecostalism in contemporary Christianity*, Corpus Books, Washington, DC.
- Dayton, D.W., 2004, *Theological roots of Pentecostalism*, Hendrickson Publishers, Metuchen, NJ.
- Diko, M., 1959, *The man with a vision and a mission – The life and ministry of Nicholas*.
- Dubb, A., 1976, *Community of the saved: An African revivalist in the Eastern Cape*, WITS University Press, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
- Duffield, G.P. & Van Cleave, N.M., 1983, *Foundations of Pentecostal theology*, L.I.F.E. Bible College, Los Angeles, CA.
- Epinay, C.L., 1969, *Haven of the masses: A study of the Pentecostal movement in Chile*, Lutterworth Press, London.
- Horton, S.M., 1987, *Five views on sanctification: The Pentecostal perspective*, Academic Books/Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Hughes, R.H., 1986, 'The uniqueness of Pentecostal preaching', in L. Grant McClung (ed.), *Azusa street and beyond: Pentecostal missions and church growth in the twentieth century*, pp. 91–96, Bridge Publishing, South Plainfield, NJ.
- Kirsch, W., 2011, 'Missional tensions: Theological training systems and compassionate ministries in African missions', in D.R. Miller & E. Lwesya (eds.), *Globalising Pentecostal missions in Africa: The emerging missionary movement in the Africa assemblies of God*, p. 127158, AIA Publications, Springfield, MO.
- Kuscus, M., 2021, *Credibility matters: Learn it, live it, lead it*, Westbow Press, Bloomington, IN.
- Lephoko, D.S.B., 2005, 'The mission of Nicholas B.H Bhengu in a divided and polarised society: An analysis of the life, work, and contribution to mission in Southern Africa of an important 20th century pioneer', M.A (Theology) dissertation, Department of Science of Religion and Missiology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Lephoko, D.S.B., 2010, 'Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's legacy: A study of life and work of one Africa's Greatest Pioneers', PhD thesis, University of Pretoria.
- Lephoko, D.S.B., 2018, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's legacy: World's best Black Soul Crusader*, HTS Religion & Society Series, vol. 4, African Online Scientific Information Systems (AOSIS), Cape Town.
- McClung, L.G. (ed.), 1986, 'Truth on fire: Pentecostals and an urgent missiology', in *Azusa street and beyond: Pentecostal missions and church growth in the twentieth century*, pp. 47–54, Bridge Publishing, South Plainfield, NJ.
- Mochechane, A.S., 2015, 'Culture and conflict in Pentecostalism: The assemblies of God in South Africa, Nicholas Bhengu and the American missionaries, and the International assemblies of God (1917–1964)', PhD thesis in the History of Christianity Programme at the School of Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mochechane, S., n.d., *Bhengu and Pan Africanism: Running with the horses*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Motuku, Saarbrücken.
- Motuku, P., 2010, 'Critical analysis of the use of scripture in the assemblies of god movement: A hermeneutical perspective', Magister Artium (Systematic Theology) dissertation, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Nel, M., 2017, 'Re-enactment leading to transformation: A critical assessment of the distinctives of Pentecostal preaching', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3(1), 285–307. <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2017.v3n1.a13>
- Resane, K.T., 2020, *South African Christian experiences: From colonialism to democracy*, Sun Media, Bloemfontein.
- Resane, K.T., 2022, 'From small country churches to explosion into megachurches: A modern Pentecostal cultural fit for the assemblies of God in South Africa', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), a2460. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2460>
- Roy, K., 2017, *The story of the church in South Africa*, Langham Global Library, Carlisle.
- Watt, P., 1992, *From Africa's soil – The story of the assemblies of God in Southern Africa*, Struik Christian Books, Cape Town.
- Wiersbe, W.W., 1991, *The integrity crisis: A blemished church struggles with accountability, morality and lifestyle of its leaders and laity*, Oliver-Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN.
- Wilson, E.A., 1997, *Strategy of the spirit: J. Philip Hogan and the growth of the assemblies of god worldwide 1960–1990*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle.
- Zimmerman, T., 1986, 'The reason for the rise of the Pentecostal movement characteristics', in L.G. McClung (ed.), *Azusa street and beyond: Pentecostal missions and church growth in the twentieth century*, pp. 57–61, Bridging Publishing Inc., South Plainfield, NJ.