NI CHOLAS BHEKI NKOSI HEPWORTH BHENGU’S LASTING LEGACY: A study of the life and work of one of Africa’s greatest pioneers

By

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DECLARATION

I Daniel Simon Billy Lephoko, do hereby declare that the publication submitted for the doctoral degree has not previously been submitted to this university or any other tertiary institution for such a doctoral degree.

I further declare that the publication is my own work and that I be recognised as the copyright holder of the thesis.

Signature: ___________________________  28 April 2010

D S B Lephoko
The study is dedicated to:

- Firstly and foremost to my wife Aggie and our children, especially my son Kenneth Winston Sikhumbuzo who, in spite of me being unable to spend quality time with him during my studies, still loves me.
- Waxy, Mvusi, and Dawn, Bhengu and Mylet’s children, who generously agreed to be interviewed and provided three family photo albums for the research.
- Aaron Musa Shongwe and his wife Linda (my spiritual children) for transporting me to Durban (3 times), Swaziland (once), Entumeni (once) to conduct interviews in their car without charge; I thank you son and Makoti for your generosity.
- The Mothers’ Movement, the women who annually generate millions of Rand to fund the Back to God Crusade for the realization of Bhengu’s vision to preach the gospel from Cape to Cairo.
- Researchers and church leaders interested in effective strategies used by Bhengu in the development of an organization that continues to grow and still touches many lives, twenty five years after his death.
- Mrs D D Gumede widow of Alfred Gumede a friend, colleague and one of Bhengu’s early associates who joined the Emmanuel Mission and Assemblies of God with Bhengu. The study is also dedicated to their children.
- The children of Gideon and Virginia Buthelezi, one of Bhengu’s early associates. Buthelezi was the first person to support Bhengu financially when Bhengu set out to Port Elizabeth in 1945. It is also dedicated to their children especially to Bongani and Thelma who agreed to be interviewed and provided correspondence between Bhengu and their father dating back to 1938.
- Professor Sibusiso Bhengu, son of Jeconia Bhengu’s elder brother for agreeing to be interviewed on two separate occasions.
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NICHOLAS BHEKI NKOSI HEPWORTH BHengu’S LASTING LEGACY:
A study of the life and work of one of Africa’s greatest pioneers

A number of articles in books and newspapers have been written on the life and work of Nicholas Bhengu, in the past four decades. However, to date no focused academic research had been devoted to his life, his mission, his message and his influence in South Africa as well as beyond the borders of South Africa.

The different chapters in the thesis focus on Bhengu’s life, his call to ministry and the role he played in South Africa, in rest of Africa, and beyond the borders of our continent. Although Bhengu did not overtly address political issues by supporting either the liberation movements nor the Nationalist Government, the impact of his work was felt by both to the extent that liberation movements such as ANC criticised him for not lending his public support to the struggle they waged against apartheid. On the other hand, the South African government also tried to co-opt him as an ally of their socio-political ideology. The government disappointed by Bhengu’s lack of support for its political programme, became suspicious of his intentions and set the Special Branch of the South African Police to monitor his movements, teaching and preaching.

Bhengu ministered during a tumultuous period in the history of South Africa which called for people as well as the faith communities to take sides for or against the system of apartheid. Bhengu’s teaching and preaching had a great impact on the social and political psyche of the people in South Africa. Through his Back to God Crusade he, with great effectiveness, called people to return to God. Thousands devoted their lives to God. Wherever Bhengu conducted his crusades, crime went down significantly, with criminals turning in their weapons of trade and returning stolen goods to the police. He also performed spectacular Healings and miracles.

Apart from his evangelistic campaigns, Bhengu planted churches, established a formidable women’s ministry that to this day continues to raise millions of Rand to fund the Back to God Crusade. The Youth Ministry provides bursaries for young people to study in any field of their choice. Bhengu’s goal for providing these bursaries was to empower a new generation to contribute to the development of their country. He also established self-governing, self-supporting
and self-propagating churches, at a time when Black Churches were dependent on handouts from missionary sending agencies.

The study finally evaluates the contribution and lasting legacy of Bhengu: his example, his missionary endeavours, his preaching and church planting efforts, his socio-political involvement, and his leadership. The strategies that he employed to building a cohesive and successful movement – the Back to God/Assemblies of God Movement – receive special attention. The impact of the movement is still felt in South Africa and the neighbouring countries, Swaziland, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, twenty five years after his death. There is every reason to consider Nicholas Bhengu to be the Billy Graham of Africa.
Africa
Apartheid
Assemblies of God
Back to God/Assemblies of God Movement
Church Planting
Church Struggle
Communism
Crusades
Ecumenism
Evangelism
Maxism
Mission
Missionaries
Reconstruction and Development
South Africa
Theology
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