

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)

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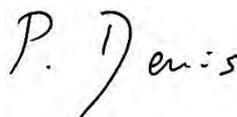
Supervisor: Professor Philippe Denis

December 10, 2015

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I, Albert Stephen Motshetshane, declare that:

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I dedicate this study to the church at 4th Street and 4th Avenue in Benoni Old Location.

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Chapter 1

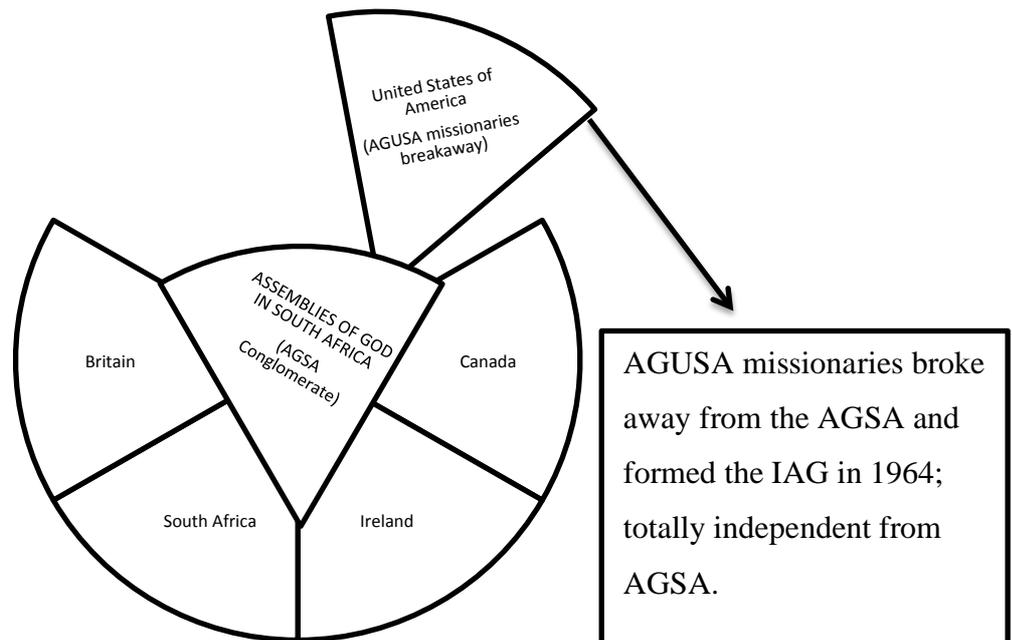
1.1. Short descriptive title

Culture and Conflict in Pentecostalism: The Assemblies of God in South Africa, Nicholas Bhengu and the American Missionaries, and Founding of the International Assemblies of God (1917-1964)

The objective of this study is to interrogate the extent to which the phenomena of race and culture influenced the split between missionaries of the Assemblies of God USA (AGUSA) and the Assemblies of God in South Africa (AGSA) in 1964. In this work I use Cecil Robeck, Jr., definitions of 'Prejudice,' 'Discrimination,' and 'Racism.' More will be said about this in the section on the theoretical framework.¹

The AGSA was initially a loose structured conglomerate of missionaries from abroad who independently started working among black people in the townships and villages as early as 1917 (see diagram below). In 1964, AGUSA missionaries were no longer happy with this loose arrangement and they split. Almost immediately, they formed the International Assemblies of God (IAG).

¹ See C Robeck, *The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism*, 4-8.



AGUSA missionaries arrived in the early 20th century, only to be ushered into a context heated with race and cultural confrontations. South Africa was just recuperating from the fierce Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). After the war the situation of racial tensions did not go to sleep; instead, it was kept alive by a black majority who had been marginalised in the 1902 'Peace Treaty of Vereeniging' between Boer and Briton. Black people on various platforms continued to show that they were not willing to be relegated to the peripheries of the unfolding socio-political processes in South Africa.

The non-racial beginnings of early Pentecostalism have been well documented. One early witness described it as follows:

Colored and white mingled there from the first, and there began a great world-wide revival that drew people from all parts of the earth, by the hundreds and thousands.²

Despite this background, AGUSA missionaries were nurtured in a culture that divided Pentecostalism along racial lines in 1914. When they arrived in the early 20th century, not only did they mirror their own religious and cultural background, but their behaviour

² R Evans, 'When the Spirit Fell in Los Angeles,' *Pentecostal Evangel*, April 6, 1946, 6-7.

was not congruent with the message they preached. As we shall see as this study unfolds, they enjoyed white privileges in South Africa while they insisted on working among the very black South Africans who were exploited by white privilege.

The socio-political situation in South Africa was not altogether unfamiliar to the AGUSA missionaries. Their own national and denominational backgrounds were haunted by issues of race and culture similar to those in South Africa. When the AGUSA was founded in 1914, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, it revealed the extent to which it had been influenced by the prevailing American culture of prejudice, discrimination and racism in the USA.

Armed with the racial and cultural trappings of their own background, the first AGUSA-credentialed missionaries arrived in the 1920s. They walked straight into a racially polarised South Africa. Their stay was not an easy one, especially as they insisted on working among the ‘natives’ despite the socio-political tensions of the time. Black townships and villages were simmering political volcanoes and AGUSA missionaries often found themselves in the thick of things. They travelled a narrow and suspicious path between the governments of the day and the oppressed black majority; never earning total trust on either side.

1.2. The Research Question

This study therefore seeks to answer the question, *“How did AGUSA missionaries respond to the race and cultural tensions of 20th Century South Africa?”*

It will focus on the period 1917-1964, with particular emphasis on Edgar Pettenger, Nicholas Hepworth Bhengu and the formation of the International Assemblies of God (IAG). Bhengu was the leader of the African wing in the AGSA, while Pettenger represented the AGUSA missionaries; both of them were part of the AGSA conglomerate. By and large, they gave direction to the situation and represented the race and cultural dynamics that went on between missionaries and indigenous pastors and evangelists in the AGSA. It was the tensions and contradictions of these race and cultural dynamics that ultimately led to the formation of the IAG in 1964.

1.3. Background and identification of research question

Motivation for this project was born from the fact that I grew up in the AGSA. My Pentecostal roots were shaped in the first church that Nicholas Bhengu planted, at 4th Street and 4th Avenue, in Benoni Old Location. I was a very active participant in 'Sunday School' programmes that took me on various trips to conferences around the country. Not once did I see a missionary in the church, it did not even strike me that the church had a relationship with them.

Later, as a pastor, I became part of the IAG. Only then did I pick up the tension evoked by the mere mention of Bhengu's name. The IAG was the church started by the AGUSA missionaries and other indigenous ministers after they split from the AGSA in 1964. That tension implied that there was a problem in the history of the AGSA and the IAG. It was also clear that race and cultural matters may have contributed to the split. The missionaries were white and the indigenous pastors and evangelists were black. There were many disputes over power, resources and space; and the prevailing question in my mind was, "How did matters of race and culture contribute or influence the split in 1964?"

Much has been written about missionaries in the mission-churches. The Pentecostal missionaries were latecomers on the scene in South Africa. They arrived in the early 20th century and not much has been written about them. This study will therefore place the history of the AGSA in the context of the historiography of Pentecostalism in South Africa. That history was not born in isolation but in the crucible of the unfolding racial and cultural tensions of the 20th century. It will attempt a synthesis of those two scenarios and the impact they had on the history of the AGSA.

1.4. Preliminary literature study and location of research

African scholars have written extensively on the subject of Pentecostalism in Africa. Adogame makes the widely acknowledged observation that Pentecostalism is at the core of shifting paradigms in global Christianity.³ That assertion is affirmed by other African scholars such as Asamoah-Gyadu⁴ and Ogbu Kalu.⁵ This unrelenting shift requires an understanding of Pentecostalism in the context of the African socio-political historiography; perhaps it is in learning from the mistakes of the western missionaries that African missionaries can make an impact in western countries.

Elphick contends that there was an ambiguous relationship between missionaries in the mission churches and their egalitarian message and central to this ambiguity was the question of race and culture.⁶ He shows how Protestant missionaries made an impact—positive or negative—on the South African socio-political landscape. That trend is common even in the history of Pentecostal missionaries. On the whole, Pentecostal missionaries were simply immune to the socio-political conditions around them and often used the situation to advance their own cause.

Walshe makes the well-known submission that missionary education made a substantial contribution to the awakening of African political consciousness.⁷ Pentecostal missionaries were less interested in the education of their converts; even less so the

³ A. Adogame, *The African Diaspora: New Currents & Trends in World Christianity* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

⁴ A-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock, 2013).

⁵ O Kalu, 'Gospel, Culture, and Mission: Revisiting an Enduring Problem,' *Skrif en Kerk* (2008), 283-300.

⁶ R Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 2012).

⁷ P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Craighall JHB, AD Jonker (PTY) LTD, 1987), 1-25.

African pastor and evangelist. Often they engaged in literacy development only as a measure to assist their converts in reading the bible. As we shall see throughout the study, many of these missionaries were themselves not educated.

Anderson alludes to the “blunders” made by Pentecostal missionaries in the 20th century and beyond. His corpus on “Classical Pentecostalism” in South Africa and around the world is admirable. His thesis revolves around the tendency of missionaries to impose western religiosity on their converts. In some sense he seeks to shift the origins of Pentecostalism from Azusa Street to other parts of the world. Anderson rescues Pentecostal history from the bias of western historians.⁸ That is helpful, given the manner in which the history of Pentecostalism has ignored important locations (not in the west) where people spoke in tongues long before Azusa Street; including the 1860 revival in older Andrew Murray Sr’s Dutch Reformed Church in Worcester.⁹ Anderson’s overall argument is well known and confirmed by anthropologists Comaroff & Comaroff.¹⁰

Other historians in South Africa, like Cochrane and de Gruchy, have highlighted the ambiguous relationship of missionaries to their egalitarian message.¹¹ They point out how the English churches in South Africa were also confronted with the challenge of opposing a system that worked to their advantage. The Pentecostal missionaries did not oppose the system of apartheid, instead they may have encouraged it. Generally, they

⁸ See among others, Allan Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004). The book gives an overview of Pentecostalism around the world and mentions a few places where the phenomenon of ‘Tongues’ occurred long before Azusa Street.

⁹ Dr Andrew Murray Sr., was the pastor in Worcester when the 1860 revival broke out. His son, also Andrew Murray and a certain JH de Vries were in charge of the prayer meeting where people started praying in a ‘chaotic’ manner and a little colored girl prayed in a strange language.

¹⁰ JL. Comaroff & J Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1987).

¹¹ See R Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of English Speaking Churches in South Africa, 1903-1930* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987); see also John de Gruchy *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2004).

wanted to eat their cake and have it too; apartheid worked for them even though they did not want to be identified with it.

Harvey Cox has confirmed the cultural component of contextual Pentecostal expressions around the world.¹² Some missionary converts found ways to embrace the message without capitulating to the racial and cultural prejudices of the messenger. The study will show that AGUSA missionaries sought, among other things, to clone the AGSA into an 'American' church. This created an area of conflict between them and indigenous pastors, especially the world renowned evangelist, Nicholas Bhengu. This confrontation of Bhengu and American missionaries will be the zenith of the overall study. It is here that we will see how racial and cultural dynamics played out on both sides.

Robeck and others have made an impressive contribution in writing about the tensions of race and culture in American Pentecostalism. He refers to the early beginnings of Pentecostalism in the USA and its heavy connection to an African-American preacher named William Seymour. Seymour was later isolated from mainstream Pentecostalism and the multiracial work at Azusa Street was taken over and divided along racial lines.¹³

The American Pentecostal missionaries who arrived at Bree Street, in Johannesburg, in 1908 were the catalysts of a great Pentecostal 'Revival.' The study will show how the race and cultural patterns that isolated William Seymour and Charles Mason in the USA soon began to emerge at Bree Street, in less than a year of the arrival of John G. Lake and his missionary entourage. We will see how white Pentecostals usurped authority from the African Zionists in Wakkerstroom and established a white powerbase in Johannesburg that totally ignored and denigrated Zulu Zionists. We will also see how the Zulu Zionists responded to the situation.

¹² H Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (Cambridge MA, Da Capo Press, 1995).

¹³ C Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006).

The AGUSA itself is a product of the culture of its time. MacRobert has written a remarkable book that shows the race and cultural challenges the church had to face in its early days. In 1914 it was launched as an all-white movement despite its connection to the influential bishop C.H. Mason. Mason was a black preacher who had previously given preaching credentials to most of the more than 300 white preachers who gathered in Arkansas. He was side-lined when the new church was organised along racial line.¹⁴

Blumhofer gives a well-argued history of how AGUSA in particular was chiselled in the context of 20th century white American culture. She gives a well-rounded view of the origins of Pentecostalism and the early theological and ideological influences that continued to bless or curse the movement as it evolved over time.¹⁵

In this study, we will see how those influences played out in the context of race and cultural tensions in South Africa. Ironically, the similarities are striking and the parallels are many. As AGUSA missionaries landed in South Africa, the socio-political environment was familiar despite the fact that they tried not to be identified with it. Their mission was to preach ‘Christ’ to the ‘Natives;’ an act that they found very difficult to balance with their denominational and racial background.

1.4.1. English speaking churches and racial oppression in South Africa

As pointed out earlier, Cochrane has written on the role of English speaking churches and their relationship with apartheid. He considers—among others—the economic and socio-political predicaments that confronted these churches. They criticised the racial inequalities of the situation; but more often than not, they benefited from it. Unlike in the Dutch Reformed Church, there was at least recognition of the racially oppressive

¹⁴ I MacRoberts, *The Black Roots & White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (New York, St Martin Press, 1988).

¹⁵ EL Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois, 1993).

structures of the time, but a gross inability to resist the temptation to “transmit the values and structures embodied in British imperial colonialist expansion.”¹⁶

1.4.2. The Dutch Reformed Church and racial oppression

While the ‘Reformed’ family of churches was unreservedly pro-apartheid, Walshe shows that there were others, like Beyers Naude, who were not at home with the system.¹⁷

Earlier in 1955, there was Professor B.B. Keet, at the Stellenbosch Seminary who recognised apartheid as the greatest producer of “non-white agitators and revolutionaries.”¹⁸ He admitted that apartheid was South Africa’s greatest generator of hostilities at home and abroad. Their opposition of apartheid, especially its theological sanction, caused many to walk a lonely path of ostracism by family and fellow ministers. Walshe also shows how a particular strand of Calvinism and Nazism influenced apartheid policies.

The story of the Dutch Reformed Church and racial discrimination is well-known. Moodie has ably exposed the thoughts and ideologies that inspired apartheid. This study shows how religion played a vital role in convincing apartheid ideologues that their path and destiny in South Africa was chartered by divine will.¹⁹ By the time the National Party took over power in 1948, the die was cast and Afrikaners were determined to cross the apartheid Rubicon. There was no going back on an ideology that sought to root itself in the oppression of the black people of South Africa.

¹⁶ J Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of English Speaking Churches in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), 26.

¹⁷ P Walshe, *Church versus State in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute* (London, C Hurst & Co, 1987), 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7

¹⁹ DT Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1975).

This study will show that apartheid's theological basis, as espoused by the Dutch Reformed Church, did not differ in principle with the thinking of some AGUSA leaders. W.F. Carothers is a good example of what some leaders thought of white-black relations in the AGUSA.²⁰ Even some members of the AGUSA tried to baptise prejudice, discrimination and racism in the name of God. Overall, there were similarities in terms of what some DRC theologians at the Cottesloe Consultation at Wits University in 1960, called 'Differentiation' of races. AGUSA missionaries drew heavily from their denominational influences with regard to matters of race and culture.

The Cottesloe Consultation, held in December 1960, at University of the Witwatersrand, was probably the highest level of theological consultation since apartheid was introduced in 1948; it was facilitated by the World Council of Churches (WCC). While participants held different views on the equality of races in political and ecclesiastical systems, they all agreed that no race was created more superior than another.²¹

Pentecostals across the board in South Africa did not participate in Cottesloe, neither were they part of the WCC. It is not clear if the AGUSA missionaries at the time knew about the 'Consultation,' it is however doubtful that they would have attended. To be sure, the AGUSA abhorred the WCC and often spoke of it as a religious arm of communism.

The missionaries were however not absolved from an environment that was politically explosive and often violent. The 1960s were particularly challenging for AGUSA missionaries; they often found themselves in the middle of insurrection in the townships and villages. We will see how shortly after the 'Sharpeville Massacre,' thousands of their converts marched through the very site where 69 people were gunned down by the

²⁰ Robeck, *Azusa Street*, 45-51.

²¹ Walshe, *Church versus State in South Africa*,

police on March 21, 1960. Such conduct raised a lot of suspicions with township political radicals and even put the lives of African evangelists in danger.

1.4.3. Nicholas Bhengu

Nicholas Bhengu, born in 1909, was an African evangelist who joined the AGSA in 1938. He was converted to evangelicalism in 1929, in the Kimberley diamond mines of the Northern Cape. Earlier influences in ideological and political influences in his life included membership of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in Natal. He later went to the diamond mines in Kimberley and became a member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). Bhengu was only twenty-one when he started preaching. His ministry was deeply impacted by these early political and ideological influences. On the whole, they guided his uneasy relationship with white colleagues in the AGSA, especially the American missionaries.

In comparison to other studies on Bhengu, which are briefly described below, this study places particular emphasis on his relationship with AGUSA missionaries. The notion of missionary paternalism is well known in missionary history; here we will see how that evoked Bhengu's wrath on missionaries and indigenous pastors alike. The study will also highlight aspects of his ministry on international platforms about which very little is known or written.

John Bond, a long-time executive member of the AGSA and close Bhengu associate, has written an indispensable personal memoir of his long relationship with NBH Bhengu.²² Bhengu was not the founder of the AGSA but he was undeniably the embodiment of its

²² J Bond's memoirs have been removed from the Internet. I have however made copies of these references.

African wing. While Bond's work is not an academic treatise of any sort, it provides credible insights into AGSA/AGUSA relationship and the ambiguity it involved.²³

Hollenweger, a pioneer and leading authority in Pentecostal studies, quotes extensively from the German works of Katessa Schlosser.²⁴ His analysis of Bhengu revolves around the evangelist's work and theology. There is very little on Bhengu and his relationship with missionaries; or the historical context in which both Bhengu and the missionaries carried out their ministry.²⁵ Schlosser highlighted an aspect of Bhengu's ministry that will be confirmed by this study. According to Hollenweger, Bhengu told Schlosser that he preached apartheid before Malan's government.²⁶ He said:

Only through apartheid can we Bantu gradually achieve so much that the Europeans will finally...themselves have to grant us social recognition.²⁷

Bhengu abhorred racial segregation; yet he found the principle conducive in moving his agenda forward. Apparently, he believed that if black people were left to go it alone, they could turn their own situation around to the point of not depending on white people to endorse their worth. Indeed, that was the agenda he pursued with passion in the AGSA.

We will see later how he insisted on white people preaching to other white people and leaving the African locations to African pastor and evangelists. On another occasion,

²³ J Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God in South Africa*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Nicholas%20Bhengu.html>,

²⁴ K Schlosser, *Eingeborenenkirchen in Süd- und Südwestafrika, ihre Geschichte und Sozialstruktur. Erlebnisse einer völkerkundlichen Studienreise*. Mühlau: Walter, 1953. 355 pp.

²⁵ WJ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 126-136.

²⁶ Nicholas Bhengu used racial segregation in South Africa as a tool to preach and to empower Africans. He had his own vision in terms of how the African people could be moved forward despite the debilitating socio-political environment that oppressed them. It was in pursuing this agenda that he clashed vociferously with American missionaries.

²⁷ Quoted in Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 135.

when consulted by Ralph Riggs, General Superintendent of the AGUSA, on how to deal with the ‘colored problem’ in the AGUSA. Bhengu proposed that the church should start a ‘colored’ wing of the church. Ironically, he was willing to champion that cause for the AGUSA; racial oppression was a common phenomenon between black people in South Africa and in the USA, and Bhengu—had the proposal been approved—wanted to use the same approach in addressing the two situations.

Schlosser and Hollenweger are examples of how Bhengu caught European attention very early in his ministry. He was more inclined to deal favourably with Europeans than he was in dealing with Americans.

Peter Watt, an AGSA historian, has written a history of the AGSA in which he mentions the split in 1964.²⁸ However, he does not support his assumption that the missionaries broke from the AGSA because of the austere leadership provided by Nicholas Bhengu in the African locations. Perhaps his was the first attempt to deal with the history of the AGSA on an academic level. His book is based on his doctoral thesis with the University of South Africa.

Watt believes that Bhengu was a trailblazer in “Black Consciousness” thinking long before the advent of Steve Biko.²⁹ Bhengu believed, among other things, in the worth, education and self-sufficiency of the African people. I agree with both Watt and Bond; Bhengu focused on the development of the whole person. His ministry was not limited to ‘saving the soul,’ he empowered people to change their environment despite a political system that denied them a myriad of social and political rights. Bhengu—very early—broke the cycle of dependence that Gatu cried about in the 1970’s in his call for a missionary moratorium.³⁰

²⁸ P Watt, *From Africa’s Soil* (Cape Town, Struik Christian Books, 1992).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁰ J Gatu, ‘Missionary Go Home!’, *International Documentation*, Volume 63 (1974), 70-72.

While missionaries in the AGSA spoke of the ‘Indigenous Church,’ they also worked against it. We will see how the financial dependence of African pastors on the missionaries contributed to the AGUSA missionary split in 1964. Gatu’s call was later repeated by young people in the IAG, especially in the aftermath of the 1976 uprisings in Soweto and many other black townships across the country.

Other historians who mention the split are Anderson and Pillay—but only in passing.³¹ Anderson has written extensively on Pentecostalism around the world. His roots however strike deep into Pentecostalism in South Africa. He has made a tremendous contribution in resolving the ‘myth of Azusa Street.’ Anderson has shown that the ‘Spirit’ phenomenon, for which Azusa is so famous, actually happened in other place long before Los Angeles. It was however, Los Angeles that put the Pentecostal movement on the world map.³² This study will be placed in that international context.

The Rev P-N Raboroko, an IAG pastor in Soweto, has recently written a book on the history of the IAG.³³ Raboroko is a second-generation minister of the church after it was formed in 1964. He also had contacts with early pioneers of the church as it took off the ground. While the study is also not academic, it does however provide some credible information on African pastors on the ground. He has done extensive work interviewing pastors and collecting documentation of the early days in the IAG. However, his writing lacks the missionary side of the story. Raboroko’s work provides insight on some founding members of the IAG who have since passed on.

³¹ A Anderson & G Pillay, ‘The Segregated Spirit,’ in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, R Elphick & THR Davenport, eds (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997), 227-240.

³² A Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³³ P-N Raboroko, *The IAG Heritage Story*, unpublished manuscript. 2014. A copy of the manuscript is in my possession. I also had an interview with Rev Raboroko at his office in Soweto to clarify some issues in his book where it was necessary.

Lephoko's study is strong on biography. He gives a genealogy of the Bhengu family and some history of theological upbringing in the Lutheran Church. He gives a very romantic account of Bhengu; perhaps that should be expected because he is an AGSA man and did work with Bhengu on many occasions. He reiterates Bond's submission that Bhengu refused to be lured by apartheid's attempts to work for them. Liberation Movements were also appalled by his seeming apolitical stance. As we shall see, Bhengu was resolute and committed to his vision as he understood it; outside intrusion was by all means side lined or dismissed. Many pastors, like Daniel Masondo, who dared to challenge Bhengu's authority were expelled from the church. Masondo had worked with Bhengu for many years and was once the pastor of the church at 4th Street and 4th Avenue in Benoni Old Location in the 1960's. The study will show how that church was probably the first hint of Bhengu's dislike of missionary intrusion in his work. It was in that little church where the first split occurred in the late 1950's, led by persons who later became involved in the formation of the IAG.

While Lephoko's study is vital, it reveals the same weakness as seen in the other studies; very little is mentioned on Bhengu's relationship with the AGUSA missionaries, except to reiterate what Watt and Bond had already said.³⁴ Worthy of note in Lephoko's work (both Masters and PhD studies) is the mention of the significant economic role played by women in pursuit of Bhengu's vision of an empowering evangelism. To this day women in the AGSA raise millions towards Bhengu's vision of preaching the gospel from 'Cape to Cairo.'

Sundkler makes a scanty reference to Bhengu and only in reference to Job Chiliza.³⁵ Perhaps Sundkler reveals how Pentecostals themselves differ on the definition of

³⁴ D Lephoko, 'Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy: A Study of One of Africa's Greatest Pioneers' (PhD Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2010).

³⁵ B Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (London, Oxford University Press, 1976), 85-94.

“Pentecostalism.” Bhengu was of the “Classical” sort even though he differed with them on the crucial question of “speaking in tongues.”³⁶

Dubb and Balcomb emphasize Bhengu’s social ethic. He was politically conscious but did not actively take part in politics after his conversion.³⁷ In fact, he even discouraged his followers from participation in ‘political’ activities. Yet, he was possessed by a robust inclination to motivate his followers towards economic independence within their situation.

This study will show that Bhengu insisted that white members of the AGSA should minister to other white people and leave African locations to African pastors and evangelists. This presented a serious area of conflict between him and the AGUSA missionaries. When the AGUSA missionaries could not adapt Bhengu to their own requirements or penetrate his work in the townships and villages of South Africa, they tried to shut him down. The moratorium on the missionaries was purely a political matter for Bhengu. On the other hand, the missionaries may have been concerned with the loss of the economic benefits they accrued in exploiting the ‘cultural distance and illiteracy’ of the American donors.

1.4.4. AGUSA Missionaries in South Africa

The AGUSA missionaries of the period under investigation have not written on their work in South Africa, except in articles appearing in Pentecostal periodicals. Many reports appear in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, an AGUSA periodical dating back to 1914. The problem is made worse by the fact that the Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM), former division of Foreign Missions, will not allow access into its archives

³⁶ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 128.

³⁷ A Dubb, *Community of the Saved: An African Revivalist in the Eastern Cape* (Braamfontein, WITS University Press, 1976); A Balcomb, *From Apartheid to the New Dispensation: Evangelicals & the Democratisation of South Africa*, in *Evangelical Christianity & Democracy in Africa* (London, Oxford University Press, 2008), 208-212.

housed at the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre (FPHC).³⁸ As a sequel to my first request through the FPHC, the AGWM responded:

Since the focus of your research is on Nicholas Bhengu and AG missionaries in South Africa, it was necessary to check with the Assemblies of God World Missions office. To see if they have any restrictions on the files you would be interested in viewing. The AGWM office has decided that any files pertaining to Nicholas Bhengu might be sensitive, and do not wish to offer access to records in their files relating to Africa or to Nicholas Bhengu.³⁹

This of course raises curiosity and concern on the part of any researcher who is denied permission to access this ‘sensitive’ information. What does the AGWM (and ultimately the AGUSA) authorities have to hide and how does that impact on honesty, transparency and trust between missionaries and nationals abroad? What more did the AGUSA do in foreign lands that is so secretive and sensitive. In the final analysis, for whom is this information ‘sensitive,’ and who decides?

The FPHC however granted access to articles in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, Minutes of the AGUSA General Council, pastoral letters and other forms of reporting by missionaries to the churches abroad. While these tell the often exaggerated and tantalising stories their sponsors wanted to hear; they are helpful in understanding the relationship of missionaries and their converts.

Rollin G. Grams, an Associate Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has written a book about his parents, Eugene and Phyllis Grams, and their missionary adventures in South Africa. Naturally, he sings their praises.

³⁸ The AGWM archives are housed at the FPHC, but managed separately. Access can only be granted by the Director for Africa or the General Secretary of the AGUSA. Both officials were consulted. After several submissions, since 2013, to the AGWM for access into ‘Missionaries Files,’ the requests were denied on the basis of the ‘sensitivity’ of the information.

³⁹ GW Gohr, e-mail, 28 August, 2013. Subsequent requests were pursued up to General-Secretary level through the assistance of Dr Cecil Robeck. Communication with the AGWM was ignored.

However, he exposes the naiveté and cultural vulnerability that characterised donor perspectives and missionary accounts of activities in foreign lands.⁴⁰

Eugene Grams is an important piece in putting together the puzzle of the relationship between AGUSA missionaries and the apartheid government. The book fills in important gaps in the history of AGUSA missionaries as the Grams family gathered around the table to reminisce on their time in Africa. While Rollin tells the story of his parents until 1962, his father was still in South Africa in the late ‘mid-1980s.’⁴¹ Indeed he does touch on some aspects of the period beyond 1962. It was Eugene who struck a deep relationship with a high ranking official of the apartheid security police during his stay in South Africa. That relationship raised many concerns.

Edgar Pettenger was among the earliest of AGUSA missionaries to arrive in South Africa in arriving 1921. Many of his writings appeared in AGUSA periodicals such as *The Latter Rain Evangel*. In 1928 he outlined his vision for missions in South Africa at the Stone Church in Chicago.⁴² His statement—although not official—guided AGUSA missionary activities in South Africa for 42 years. This and other missionary writings in various Pentecostal periodicals shed light on how missionary perspectives were informed more by their cultural and psychological models than what they found on the ground.⁴³ Edgar Pettenger and his son Vernon shared more than eighty years between them in South Africa; in the meantime, they tried to convince their sponsors abroad that they were in South Africa building the ‘Indigenous Church.’

⁴⁰ R Grams, *Stewards of Grace: A Reflective Biography of Eugene and Phyllis Grams, 1951-1962* (Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴² The Stone Church was a vibrant Pentecostal Church in Chicago. The church had a robust missionary programme supporting several missionaries around the world. Edgar and Mabel Pettenger were on the sponsoring list.

⁴³ E Pettenger, ‘The Most Strategic Center for Mission Work in South Africa,’ *The Latter Rain Evangel*, April, 1928, 17-20.

Allan Pettenger, a third generation missionary and Edgar's grandson, did not have any information on either Edgar or Vernon (his father), and this is what he had to say:

...I do not have stories about my father and grandfather that involve Bhengu. My father died two years ago and he took all the stories with him to the grave. We never did speak about the great man. I have absolutely no information.⁴⁴

Another early missionary forerunner was Fred Burke who arrived in South Africa with Edgar Pettenger in 1921. He was responsible for the education and training of AGSA pastors in Witbank. As we shall see later, it was Burke's school that yielded many of the people who sided with the missionaries against Bhengu when he proposed that the missionaries should stay out of the African locations.

James Stewart, a South African 'naturalised' American, accredited as a missionary in 1962, later took over from Burke when the institution was relocated to Rustenburg in the Northwest. He provided an explanation of what went on in the 'missionary's mind' when they broke away in 1964.⁴⁵

The archives at the FPHC went a long way in piecing together a history of missionaries hitherto not written. In that context, it would not be farfetched to say, the history of AGUSA missionaries, for the period under consideration in this study, revolved around the men mentioned above.

1.4.5. History of the Assemblies of God USA

A helpful history with regard to the forces that shaped the thinking of AGUSA pioneers is written by Edith Blumhofer and Cecil Robeck. Blumhofer, a historian and director of the Institute for the study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College, provides a

⁴⁴ I had written to Allan requesting any information he might have on his father and grandfather during their time in South Africa. I was asking for things like letters, pictures or any other documentation he might have in his possession. The request was sent on March 12, 2014; and I received his response on March 31, 2014 via Facebook-Messenger.

⁴⁵ JW Stewart, e-mail, July 29, 2013.

general history of the Pentecostal movement in the USA with particular emphasis on the Assemblies of God. While Robeck, a Professor of Church History at Fuller Theological Seminary, highlights the racial and cultural issues that emerged in the early stages of Pentecostalism at Azusa Street in Los Angeles.⁴⁶ Both studies are helpful in understanding an environment that was so spirited in sending missionaries around the world and ignored its own situation at home.

Edith Blumhofer and Cecil Robeck Jr further provide a more global framework in which activities of AGUSA missionaries can be interpreted in South Africa. This study leans heavily on the work of these two scholars.

1.4.6. History of the International Assemblies of God

As pointed out earlier, the history of the IAG remains largely unwritten, except for scanty references in the context of larger academic and historical considerations. This project will conclude with the history of the church in the wider context of the history of the Assemblies of God in South Africa.

1.5. Research problem and objectives

This study aims to locate the history of the Assemblies of God in South Africa in the context of the historiography of Pentecostalism in South Africa. It will establish the historical connection between early Pentecostalism in the USA and South Africa and how that found expression in the socio-political inequalities of the 20th century South Africa.

It will reconstruct the history of the AGSA and its connection with the AGUSA missionaries and show how the missionaries of the AGUSA undermined the notion of

⁴⁶ EL Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and the American Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993); and Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville TN, Thomas Nelson, 2006).

the 'Indigenous Church.' This was exposed in their relationship with Nicholas Bhengu in the AGSA. Bhengu on the other hand will emerge as the champion of the very principles missionaries claimed to be passionate about. It will also be clearer that Bhengu, in the 'Peter-Paul' agreement, sought to apply the principle of 'racial segregation' in order to promulgate the gospel.

We shall see, as the study unfolds, that the AGSA structure that brought missionaries together from different countries abroad was not conducive to harmonious working relationships. Each agency had its mandate and the AGSA promised to create space for that. However, it was in the confrontations between Bhengu and the American missionaries that the structure proved to be problematic. It was therefore inevitable that the schism between the AGSA and the missionaries would happen in 1964. As a matter of fact, other splits, involving missionaries, happened within the AGSA in 1981 and 1977. This study will focus on the split in 1964.

1.6. Objectives

The objectives of this study are, firstly, to discuss the context in which Pentecostal missionary activities emerged in the socio-political struggles in South Africa in the 20th century. Secondly, to discuss the history of the AGSA in relation to the AGUSA with particular emphasis on Nicholas Bhengu; and thirdly, to discuss the role of AGUSA missionaries in the formation of the International Assemblies of God in 1964 in relation to power, money and space.

1.6.1. Sub-questions

This study will address the following sub-questions, firstly, how did the overall activities of the AGUSA missionaries fit into the scheme of the denomination's missionary strategy at home and abroad? Secondly, to what extent did money play a role in the relationship between the AGUSA missionaries and the indigenous pastors? Thirdly, how successful was the IAG as a new missionary experiment?

1.7. Theoretical framework

Pentecostalism, in the USA and in South Africa emerged in the race and cultural tensions of the 20th century. Thus the notions of race and culture are pivotal in the effort to understand the history of the AGSA, and ultimately the International Assemblies of God in South Africa. This study will use an anthropological or cultural framework in developing and connecting the various themes emerging from the research.

Thomas Sowell argues that a universal definition of culture is almost impossible. Each discipline is likely to develop its own definition for the convenience of interpretation or explanation of whatever phenomenon that is under investigation. He makes one important observation relevant to this study, and that is:

Cultures are not erased by crossing a political border or even an ocean, nor do they disappear in later generations which adopt the language, dress or lifestyle of a country.⁴⁷

As pointed out earlier, in this study I use Cecil Robeck, Jr., definitions of ‘Prejudice,’ ‘Discrimination,’ and ‘Racism.’ In the thought of Robeck, ‘Prejudice’ is possible with anyone regardless of race. “Prejudice is making a judgement before you have all the facts,” he writes. Prejudice therefore is not necessarily racial or cultural, it can happen even with people within the same ethnic group. “Discrimination,” on the other hand, is the ability to discern difference. It is more of an ability to distinguish between what one considers to be ‘wrong’ or ‘right.’ It also need not be racial; yet it can be expressed in a race and cultural terms. “Racism” however, is the discrimination of another based on race or ethnicity. It is the extreme downside of ‘Prejudice’ and ‘Discrimination.’ It is often marked by one’s sense of a racial superiority demonstrated by the urge to

⁴⁷ T Sowell, *Race and Culture* (New York, Basic Books, 1994), 6.

physically impose one's racial convictions on the other who is perceived to be of an inferior race or culture.⁴⁸

Culture is strong and it permeates every fibre of how we go about adapting to our environment. We, as a people in a given environment, determine culture; and yet, given time, in concealed ways culture determines us. Our 'way of doing things' become entrenched in the psychology of everyday behaviour. We live and move and have our being in culture. That is not altogether bad until 'our culture' becomes the standard against which we mirror the cultures of others. Every culture, at one level or another, considers itself to be 'superior' to the other. It is only as we unlearn the dogmatism that comes with one's culture that we realise that all cultures are created equal. Cross-cultural conflict is often the refusal to place the cultures of others on an equal level as ours; and to learn from their culture as we would want them to learn from ours.

This study shows how difficult it is to bridge the real from the ideal, if one has any recognition of the ideal. It is not impossible to unlearn what one has always known, but it is a difficult and deliberate process. There must be a recognition first, and then a willingness to undo one's attitude towards others.

Hall looks at some ways "beyond culture" according to which humans classify experience and world.⁴⁹ Our cultural perceptions are formed largely on a subterranean level. Behaviour on the surface is the tip of an iceberg of cultural models frozen and shaped by many factors. If we can succeed in transcending our cultural frameworks, then we shall have begun the process of melting our own perceptions about anything and developing the ability to "see" the other's perspective. That melting of frozen perceptions is the beginning of what he calls 'cultural literacy' and nurtures the ability to

⁴⁸ See C Robeck, See article by Robeck, *The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism*, 4-8.

⁴⁹ ET Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York, Anchor Books, 1976), 9-24.

accept others on their cultural terms. Missionary history is an empirical validation of the struggles we go through, if at all, to stand above one's own culture.

Avruch liberates traditional culture theories from 19th century trappings. Culture for some people is captured in symbols, schemas and other cognitive representations to which people attach a particular meaning in the dynamics of everyday living. The importance of the culture of the other person is interpreted and accepted or rejected based on whether or not it fits the schema of the things to which another person attaches meaning.⁵⁰ To be sure, in the thought of Avruch the credibility of one's culture must not be determined outside its own borders. Essentially, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

He argues that there usually are identifiable categories in cross-cultural conflict. Among others are, the incompatibility of goals and the scarcity of resources to acquire those goals. Avruch suggest ways in which cultural conflict can be resolved, what Hall calls 'cultural literacy.' The assumption made is that, if people can learn more about the 'ways' of the other then the cultural distance between the two groups can be bridged, and people of different cultures may start finding each other.

While that is possible, it hinges on one's willingness to open up to learning the 'ways' of the other. More often than not, belief in the 'superiority' of one's culture is the stumbling block in learning about the other's ways. This project will show that the conflict that resulted in the split in 1964, between the AGUSA missionaries and some members of the AGSA was largely a consequence of a refusal to learn from the other's way of doing things; and that it revolved around the questions of resources, space and power.

⁵⁰ K Avruch, *Culture and Conflict Resolution* (Washington DC, USA Institute of Peace Press, 1998).

1.8. Research design and methodology

1.8.1. Library based research

One must say outright that this project would not have been possible without the unfathomable access to information provided through the Internet. Some libraries (UKZN, UNISA and UPTA), provided information online which made tracing relevant sources in their libraries accessible and easy to manage. This access made it possible to place the history of Pentecostalism, and ultimately the IAG, in its international context. While many early Pentecostal missionary connections in South Africa were North American (USA & Canada), we will see how Europeans also made a contribution, especially through the Pentecostal Missionary Union (PMU) led by Anglican Vicar, Rev A. Boddy in the United Kingdom.

1.8.2. Archival research⁵¹

Extended first-hand archive information, like original articles written by missionaries in Pentecostal periodicals were an immense source of information provided on the Internet. Among other documents found were, Constitutions, Minutes of the highest governing bodies, pictures, field reports, financial reports and other pertinent information to the project. The following Archives were accessible in facilitating the overall objective pursued in this project:

- Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center (Springfield, Missouri, USA).
- Dixon Pentecostal Research Center (Church of God, Cleveland TN).
- David Du Plessis Center (Pasadena California, Fuller Theological Seminary).
- Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Washington DC (Howard University, Washington, DC).

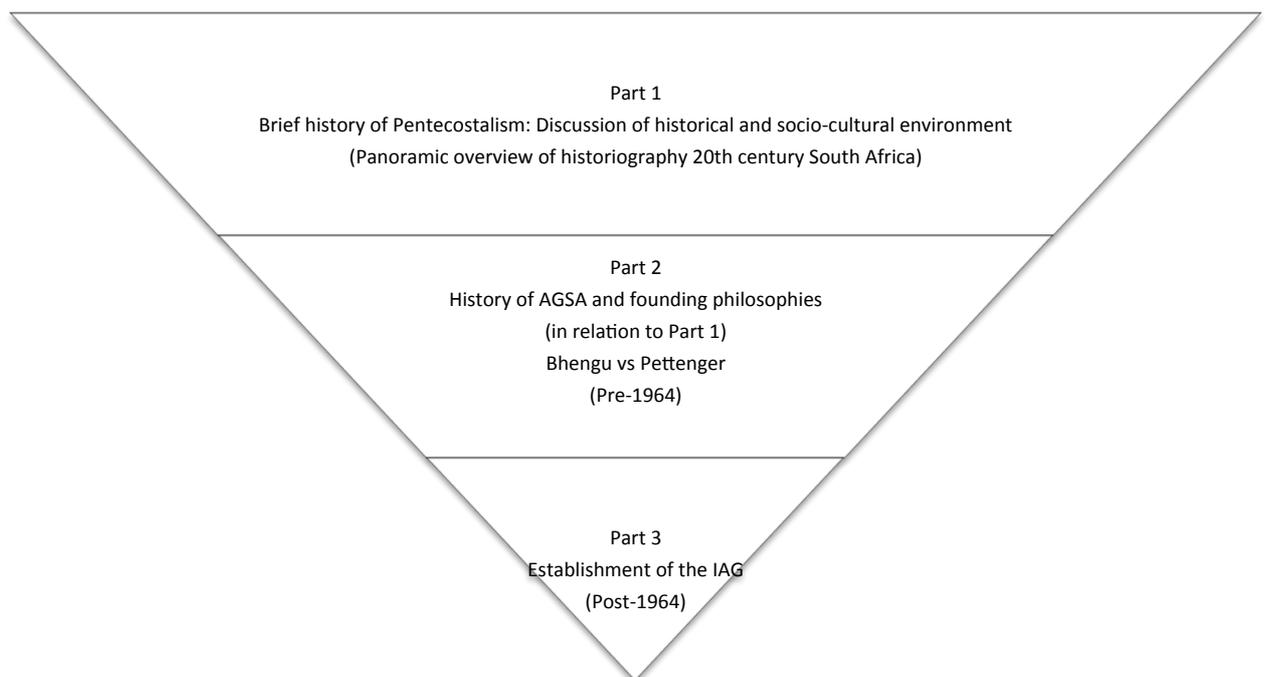
⁵¹ Archival resources were accessed through the ‘Consortium of Pentecostal Archives,’ <https://pentecostalarchives.org/> This service is made available for researchers around the world by affiliated churches and denominations. A list of members of the ‘Consortium’ is given on the website. The Assemblies of God Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre makes its information available through this service.

- International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (Los Angeles, USA).
- International Pentecostal Holiness Church (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma).

1.8.3. Interviews

The study culminates in the split between the AGSA and AGUSA missionaries in 1964. Some assumptions are drawn from the context of the historical information; chief of which was to seek an answer to the ‘Research Question.’ Information in this regard was gathered and validated through interviews; participants were paid personal visits or, contacted through e-mail, social media, and telephonic discussions. People contacted for interviews were *inter alia*, original members of the IAG, missionaries, a former African faculty member at the African Bible Institute in Rustenburg, African pastors who worked very close with missionaries before the split, relatives of pastors who worked with the Rev Nicholas Bhengu, youth and current district officials in the IAG. A total of twelve people were interviewed.

1.9. Schematic overview of structure of dissertation



PART 1

1.9.1. Chapter 1

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the whole study. It discusses the motivation, problem, objectives, research methodology and design relating to the project. It also reviews relevant preliminary literature and the theoretical framework in which the research question was formulated.

1.9.2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2 will give a brief background of Pentecostal history in South Africa. It provides an overview of early Pentecostalism in South Africa, especially in the context of the socio-political historiography of the 20th century. If ‘healing’ is part of the Pentecostal corpus, then Pentecostalism was introduced in South Africa in the late 1800’s through John Alexander Dowie’s *Leaves of Healing*. Dowie, through his worldwide church, the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, was an important forerunner of ‘Classical Pentecostalism’ in both South Africa and the USA. This chapter will discuss the connection between the origins of African Zionism (African Independent Churches) and Classical Pentecostalism in South Africa. It will show that John G. Lake found an existing Pentecostal community in Johannesburg in 1908, it was his introduction of the Azusa phenomenon that revived a stifled religious life among Dowie’s white Zionists in Johannesburg. Thus Lake built on Dowie’s work to launch his own. The American Zulu Mission also played a significant part in making inroads into the black community around Doornfontein and also provided Lake’s first preaching platform in Johannesburg.⁵² John G. Lake was an important herald of AGUSA missionary work in South Africa.

⁵² The missionaries of the American Zulu Mission were sent to South Africa by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). At the time of Lake’s arrival, the ABCFM was a worldwide empire of missionaries around the world. They had mission stations in many parts of rural

1.9.3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3 will show how John G. Lake took over Dowie's territory in Johannesburg. It will discuss the race and cultural issues that developed within early Pentecostalism with particular reference to Azusa and Bree Street in Johannesburg. It will highlight the parallels, similarities and connections that defied the reconciling character of the 'Spirit' in an atmosphere that appeared, on the surface, to bring people of all colours and races together. The claim to a 'superior' pneumatology of 'speaking in tongues' did very little to impact the race and cultural prejudices chiselled over time in the minds of early Pentecostals; instead, white Pentecostals used restorationist views to affirm superior notions of race and culture and baptised them in the 'Holy Spirit.' These claims ultimately led to the secession of African Zionists and thus introduced African Independent Churches (AIC's) of the Pentecostal sort. We will see how the 'Spirit' spoke in many and various ways among white Pentecostals, but failed to expose the sin entrenched in racial prejudice, discrimination and racism.

PART 2

1.9.4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4 will discuss the founding of the AGSA. It will show that it began as a loose structured conglomerate of Pentecostal missionaries who were ultimately responsible to their home agencies abroad. Thus the conglomerate was made up of a hodgepodge of Pentecostal missionaries who affiliated with the AGSA to facilitate dealings with a government that was not willing to deal with an increasing avalanche of independent Pentecostal missionaries from abroad. Thus forming a denomination was lowest, or virtually non-existent on the AGSA agenda.

Zululand, and started several around Johannesburg as many people in the villages migrated to Johannesburg to look for work in the mines.

A problem was however introduced by the connection of the AGUSA to the AGSA in 1917. Lake's previous American supporters shifted focus from Doornfontein to Doornkop. Doornfontein was now under white control after Dowie's Zionists became the AFM; the AGUSA sought to concentrate on the 'native.' With the unrelenting African secessions in Doornfontein, Doornkop in Middelburg became a viable alternative; but that too had its own complexities.

This chapter will discuss how the AGSA model of creating a conglomerate of different Pentecostal agencies into one increasingly presented various challenges for the AGUSA. The biggest challenge was financial, support was dwindling for missionary support worldwide, especially during WWII, and the AGUSA seemed to shoulder the financial burden incurred by non-AGUSA missionaries in the AGSA.

1.9.5. Chapter 5:

Chapter 5 will discuss in-depth the financial challenges that faced missionaries after 1917. This situation led to the first AGUSA withdrawal from the AGSA in 1932; ironically missionaries continued within the conglomerate on a more cost effective level. It will also introduce one Edgar Pettenger, a missionary who arrived in South Africa in 1921. Pettenger, soon became the leading spokesperson for AGUSA missionaries in South Africa. It will show how his philosophy of missions as presented at the Stone Church in Chicago in 1928 influenced the AGUSA's attitude towards missionary work in South Africa. His focus was on the gold mines in the East Rand and his efforts reveal how missionaries made minimal impact in African locations. The chapter shows that the AGSA missionary enterprise was struggling financially and ineffective in outreach to the 'native.' At least, nothing happened on the magnitude of the John G. Lake revivals of 1908 in Johannesburg. By and large, they depended on African converts in the mines, who would hopefully continue to preach to their own people on their return home from the gold mines.

1.9.6. Chapter 6:

The AGSA was, from the beginning, a missionary led organisation with a black majority membership. In 1938, three men from 'Zululand' were introduced into the AGSA fold;

Nicholas Bhengu, Gideon Buthelezi and Alfred Gumede. This trio challenged and changed perceptions on Africans in a way that made an indelible impact on race relations in the AGSA. This chapter will discuss how that became a challenge for the AGUSA missionaries. Bhengu, undoubtedly a leading evangelist of his time, insisted that white missionaries should focus on white suburbs, while Africans would evangelise their own people in the townships and remote villages of South Africa. The chapter will discuss the ideological influences in Bhengu's thinking and the challenge it posed for the AGUSA missionaries in particular.

PART 3

1.9.7. Chapter 7

Chapter 7 will reveal the incongruities in understanding that which constitutes the 'Indigenous' church. The conflict in understanding rolled out in the townships and villages of Johannesburg, the Eastern Cape and much of what is today known as Limpopo and Mpumalanga. As Bhengu insisted on keeping missionaries out of the townships, they defied his freeze. They invaded black locations through African leaders; many of whom were graduates of the Assemblies of God Bible School in Witbank. Bhengu's rival was Rev Phillip Molefe who joined the AGSA in 1951. In 1955, Bhengu finally got the opportunity to present his vision to a meeting of AGSA missionaries and African pastors. In a paper he called 'The Thesis,' Bhengu unfolded his passion for evangelism in Africa. However, AGUSA missionaries were even more determined to continue with their initiatives in black locations despite Bhengu's apprehensions.

1.9.8. Chapter 8

This chapter will discuss selected themes emerging in archival research, and interviews conducted with participants in the circumstances beyond 1955. It will also show how an atmosphere of mistrust developed between Bhengu and the missionaries, and those who became their 'co-workers.' It was a suspicious environment peppered with lies, truths, half-truths, and rumours; and may have involved the highest officials in the apartheid government. It will also show how money was the single most important factor in the debacle between Bhengu and missionaries; not so much for Bhengu, as it was for the

missionaries. Missionaries knew that some pastors were dependent on them for financial survival; we will see in the next chapter how they exploited that leverage to further their intentions and to justify their continued presence in South Africa.

1.9.9. Chapter 9

Chapter 9 will focus mainly on the build-up to the split in 1964. There were many factors that contributed to the AGUSA missionaries severing ties with the AGSA. Among others concerns, they raised many dissatisfactions with the loose structure, they were not happy with the constitution, but most importantly there was a threatening ultimatum from the American headquarters to close South Africa as mission field. In the context of this threat, AGUSA missionaries connived with some African pastors who subsequently made a submission to the AGUSA for the continued presence of American missionaries. This presence however, was dependent on new directions that ultimately resulted in the split, and the formation of the International Assemblies of God.

1.9.10. Chapter 10

This will be the concluding chapter. It will evaluate the successes or failures of the International Assemblies of God as a new experiment. The AGUSA missionaries insisted that they started the IAG because it was what the indigenous pastors wanted. However, there was more to it than that, and it revolved around the affluence that came with being a missionary of the AGUSA after World War II.

CHAPTER 2

2. Zulu Zionists and the Anglo-Boer War, 1897-1908

Pentecostalism in South Africa was not born in a vacuum. There were social, political and economic forces at work, especially in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The Peace Treaty of Vereeniging, signed between Boer and Briton in 1902, ignored the political and economic aspirations of black people in South Africa and focused on reparations to the Boers and how the English would continue flexing their economic muscle. Among those affected were the Zulu farmworkers in the Wakkerstroom area. Wakkerstroom and Zandspruit were very active areas during the war. It is the majority of these people who joined John Alexander Dowie's worldwide 'Zion' movement. It was introduced in the area by a former Dutch Reformed Church missionary—Pieter le Roux.⁵³ This chapter gives a brief background of the history of Zulu Zionists in South Africa, especially in the context of the socio-political historiography of the 20th century.

Elphick writes about the “ambiguity” of the relationship between missionaries and their message. They taught:

...that Jesus died on the cross for people of every nation and race, not for whites alone; and that in consequence, all who accepted him were brothers and sisters.⁵⁴

⁵³ JA Dowie was an Australian who started a 'Healing' movement in Australia and New Zealand. He later migrated to the USA in 1888. After a short and controversial stay in Chicago, he pioneered 'Zion City' just north of Chicago. He envisaged that this little city would emulate the biblical city of Zion on earth. Many Europeans relocated from their countries of origin to become part of 'Zion City, Illinois.' His message of healing first reached South Africa through a periodical called, *Leaves of Healing*. Dowie's first 'Overseer' in South Africa was a former Congregationalist whose name was Johannes Büchler. It was Büchler who introduced le Roux to Zion.

⁵⁴ R Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012), 1-2.

Pentecostals did not only emphasize the Christology of the “equality of believers,” they also added a ‘Spirit’ dimension to it. They claimed direct and divine communication with God through the Spirit. It was not entirely foreign in Pentecostal meetings to hear an individual say, ‘God spoke to me;’ and yet in all the prophecies and divine oracles received by its prophets, not once did God say anything about racial prejudice, discrimination or racism.

It is now established that race and cultural tensions were part of early Pentecostalism; what is in question is the extent to which that was influenced by the socio-political environment in which it was born. This chapter will discuss how black and white Pentecostals in South Africa were affected by the Anglo-Boer War and how they responded to the situation. The overall assumption is that, it was in fact, the socio-political and economic conditions created by that milieu that provided fertile ground for the roots of Pentecostalism to strike deep. It will also highlight earlier connections of Zulu Zionism with John Alexander Dowie’s Zionism in Chicago, Illinois.

If ‘healing’ is part of the Pentecostal corpus then Pentecostalism was introduced in South Africa, in the late 1800’s, through John Alexander Dowie’s *Leaves of Healing*. Dowie, through his worldwide church, the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, was an important forerunner of ‘Classical Pentecostalism’⁵⁵ in both South Africa and the USA. The race and cultural tensions that later emerged in Pentecostalism perfectly reflected the socio-political milieu in which the movement was born. We will see later, how striking the similarities were, despite the fact that there was a difference in location and distance between the two places.

⁵⁵ V Synan describes ‘Classical Pentecostals’ as “...churches which had their origins in the US at the beginning of [the 20th century].” They were first known as “Pentecostals,” The “Classical was added in 1960 to distinguish them from ‘Neo-Pentecostals’ in the mainline churches and the Roman Catholic Church, who were later known as ‘Charismatics.’” See article by V Synan, ‘Classical Pentecostalism,’ in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M, Burgess & Eduard M. Van Der Maas, eds (Michigan, Zondervan, 2003), 553.

2.1. The Political forces that influenced early Pentecostalism

The 19th and 20th centuries in South Africa were marked by social, political, and economic upheaval. It was a contest of British imperialism on the one hand, Afrikaner republicanism, and African nationalism on the other. It was during this period that Britain flexed her imperial muscle through key players such as Cecil John Rhodes⁵⁶ (on the economic front), Joseph Chamberlain and Alfred Milner (on the political front).

Afrikaner republicanism was not to be outdone in the quest to annex African land. Their cause was championed by Paul Kruger, the only one to have been elected president of the South African Republic no less than four times. It was the clash of Afrikaner republicanism, and British imperialism that ultimately led to the Anglo-Boer War in the period 1899-1902. For four years, Boer and Briton engaged in the most devastating and costly war in South African History.⁵⁷

There was an agreement between Boer and Briton to keep the war “White,” but that rule was overridden. Black people were enlisted for various reasons, thousands were engaged even in matters of confrontation in combat.⁵⁸ To be sure, they were not taken as key players in this contest for power; they were regarded as appendages, or *agterryers*

⁵⁶ While Rhodes was capital inclined in every sense, much of what is written about him suggests that he was preoccupied more with his own African continental aspirations for power. More often than not he side-lined imperial powers to advance his cause. As one historian described him, “Rhodes succeeded in deluding himself, as he convinced others, that his cause was Britain when in fact his cause was Rhodes.” See article by John S. Galbraith, ‘Cecil Rhodes and his Cosmic Dreams: A Reassessment, in *South Africa in the 20th Century*, S.F. Malan, Ed (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1987), 338.

⁵⁷ THR. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1991), 167-191.

⁵⁸ For purposes of this study the term “Black” refers to Africans, Indians and Coloureds. Where reference is made to Africans only the term “African” will be used, and where reference is made to “Coloureds” only, the term “Coloured” will be used. The same principle applies to Indians. The distinction between “Boer” and “Briton” is assumed to be obvious.

(those who ride from behind), as the Boers called them.⁵⁹ Even worse, thousands died in the concentration camps of the British.

Some black people were optimistic in relation to the British and their sympathy for black suffrage. That optimism was thwarted, when the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging between Boer and Britain, was signed in 1902. The “Treaty” ensured that black people were ignored in the unfolding post-war economic and political processes. A widespread sense of dissatisfaction among black people reached its zenith with the formation of the South African Native National Congress in 1912.⁶⁰

The animosity between Boer and Briton was born in the Cape. It all began with the exploration of a half-way station by the Dutch in 1652. With the second occupation of the Cape by the British in 1806, it grew so severe, that several Afrikaners groupings decided to abandon the Cape in what became known as the “Great Trek,” and move inland in 1834.⁶¹

While Afrikaners resented British domination, they felt deeply undermined when their slaves were recognised as equals; especially when baptised slaves insisted on being treated as equals.⁶² The consequences and confrontations between African, Boer and Briton precipitated by the “Great Trek” are well recorded in South African history. The big showdown was however introduced by the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in 1866 and gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886. The rush to these mineral fields changed South Africa from an agricultural society to one driven by capital. Essentially, that was the difference between Boer and Briton.

⁵⁹ D Judd; K Surridge, *The Boer War* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 2002), 100.

⁶⁰ P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Craighall: A.D. Jonker PTY LTD, 1987), 34-35. The SAANC was the forerunner of what later became known as the African National Congress.

⁶¹ Davenport, *South Africa*, 44.

⁶² Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 26-29.

Boers were largely farmers and the British were imperial and capitalist. For the Afrikaner South Africa was a new found home, some even called themselves the ‘White Tribe’ of Africa. For the English speaking thousands, who rushed in from Britain and her colonies, the mineral strike was about money. The diamond and gold fields promised a lot of that for a hundred years or more to come. Tensions developed around land for the Afrikaner and capital for the English., and so they culminated in what some historians now call the South African War of 1899-1902.

Alfred Milner—an emissary of Richard Chamberlain—was driven by an unrelenting desire to advance the British Empire. While Paul Kruger, President of the South African Republic, was ardent to defend Afrikaner republicanism at all costs. Pushed to the limit by what was considered to be Milner’s ludicrous demands for *Uitlander*⁶³ franchise; in 1899 the Boer Republics declared the inevitable War on the world’s biggest empire.⁶⁴

2.2. The “Siege” in Northern Natal

Some of the first shots of the war were fired in Northern Natal in what finally became the “Siege of Ladysmith.” It was in these areas where Pentecostalism first sprouted. In Zandspruit, on the border of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, Muneli Ngobese, a Zulu-Zionist farmworker reported how he was affected by the War,

One of our sorrows is that we live on land rented from the White man. We pay him rent but have little peace...The English have raised my tax to two pounds a year...before the War I paid twelve shillings...We had nothing to do with the War. The Dutch commandeered my horse promising to pay me for it when peace was declared. The English burned my house and carried off my furniture. I put in a claim for the loss of my horse and home, but the English told me they

⁶³ Most *Uitlanders*, mainly foreigners, were British citizens (or came from British colonies) who flooded the Witwatersrand after the discovery of gold. It was their large numbers that threatened President Kruger with regard to the franchise. If given the power to vote they could very easily take over the Transvaal government. Kruger made calculated concessions but refused to give them equal voting rights. When Milner pressed for equality with the Boers Kruger declared War against Britain. See, Davenport, *South Africa*, 191-200.

⁶⁴ Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 1-30.

had nothing to do with the Boers taking my horse, and they were not paying for the houses they had burned. I live upon what I get from my garden and my people help me to reap the crop.⁶⁵

Muneli Ngobese told his story to Daniel Bryant, an emissary of the John Alexander Dowie. Dowie was the charismatic leader who founded Zion City, Illinois. As we shall see later, Dowie's Zionist movement soon became a serious religious force to reckon with in the farms of Wakkerstroom and surrounding areas. His 'Healing' movement was found in major centres around the world after some very humble beginnings in Australia.⁶⁶

When Zulu farmworkers in Northern Natal finally joined Dowie's Zion, they were among the black people impacted by the political skirmishes between Boer and Briton. There is no doubt that Ngobese referred to Kitchener's "Scorching earth policy." The fact that he complained shows at least the emotional impact of a war that was raging around him. It was in Zandspruit where one Dietlof Van Warmelo reported the presence of an unprepared Boer Commando in the area. They spent some nights in the open because no proper arrangements were made for their arrival.⁶⁷ In May, 1902, in Holkrantz, fifty-six members of the Vryheid commando were butchered to death by Zulus.⁶⁸ All of this must have been known to early Zulu Zionists in the early 1900s.

Equally, when Dowie sent his first emissary—Daniel Bryant—to South Africa in 1904, he was aware of the socio-political conditions of the time. A certain "A.W.N." wrote in Zion's Weekly,

⁶⁵ M Ngobese, "Address of Muneli Ngobese," in *Leaves of Healing*, December 30, 1905, 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 94-95.

⁶⁸ Davenport, *South Africa*, 199.

Even while the horrible fratricidal strife between Boer and Briton was dyeing with blood the plains and hillsides of this great land, Zion bombardment was also going on.⁶⁹

Zion's "bombardment" came in the form of a periodical called *Leaves of Healing*. This was sent to Zion churches around the world. At least use of the word "Fratricidal" seemed to suggest that Zion, in Chicago—despite her sympathies for the oppressed—recognised the South African War, essentially, as a 'White Man's War.' Something about it was reported by Bryant in his letters to Dowie,

Here at Harrismith we baptized sixty natives within a stone's throw of the place where the Boer General De Wet made his terrible Christmas night slaughter of the British, shooting and stabbing to death the sleeping soldiers.⁷⁰

According to Sullivan, Bryant arrived in South Africa in 1904; attended the funeral of Paul Kruger and wrote to tell Dowie about it.⁷¹ Zulu Zionists in the farming areas of Wakkerstroom were predominantly African, with a sprinkling of Coloureds. They met in a coloured church and sang from a Moravian hymnal "*Zion's Liedere*." In Johannesburg however, over and above African membership, there was also a sizeable number of poor Boers who could not return to their farms after the war. Judd and Surridge also confirm that there were "several thousand pro-Boer volunteers from the *Uitlander* community."⁷² The fact that some of these were Irish, probably explains why they would side with Boers against their colonial master.⁷³ Other *Uitlanders* were however more than willing to lay their lives down for Queen Victoria.

⁶⁹ "A.W.N.", "Zion Among the Zulus," *Leaves of Healing*, October 08, 1904, 854.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 858.

⁷¹ AL Sullivan, "A Brief, critical history of Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa (MTh Thesis, South African Theological Seminary, 2013), 31.

⁷² Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 56.

⁷³ Thomas Pakenham, *The Anglo Boer War in an Illustrated History of South Africa*, Trehwella Cameron; SB Spies, Eds (Johannesburg: Southern Publishers, 1986), 200-218.

Bryant addressing members of Zion City, Illinois, mentioned how Boer and Briton were coming together “in Zion,” despite the socio-political animosities that were going on at the time.⁷⁴ However, the thought of Boer and English coming together for any reason was appalling to both; especially for the Afrikaner. These *Uitlanders* must have, in some way, demonstrated a special affinity to the Boer community. The white membership of Zion in Johannesburg must have drawn from both of these poor communities. The church also had a sizeable Coloured and African membership, mostly found in and around Doornfontein. Zion in Johannesburg provided a confluence of various cultures, which refused to come together under any other circumstances. On the surface at least, it seemed as if ‘Peace-in-Zion’ prevailed in Johannesburg.

The relations in Zion, between Afrikaner, English, Coloured and African were far from amicable. There was discrimination in race and culture even in the poverty of Zion’s adherents. If this situation was latent during Bryant’s time, we will see later, how it surfaced with the arrival of Pentecostal missionaries in 1908.

2.3. The economic forces that influenced early Pentecostalism

It was among these poor communities, found on the peripheries of life in the ‘City of gold,’ where Pentecostalism first sprouted. Scholars, like Allan Anderson, and others, have long recognised the existence of poverty among early Pentecostals in Johannesburg.

When some of the first Pentecostal missionaries arrived in Johannesburg in 1908 the city was a hub of economic activity oiled by gold mining. Fortune-hunters and workers had descended on the city in large numbers from East and Southern Africa, as well as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States of America. Yet, poverty was the irony in the city of gold.

⁷⁴ D Bryant, “Unity at the cross,” *Leaves of Healing*, June 19, 1908, 151-152

Thousands struggled to make ends meet, especially Afrikaners, Coloureds and Africans. Charles Van Onselen made the following observation regarding poverty in the Witwatersrand before the War in 1899:

Some of the men turned to the manufacture of bricks and all kinds of transport work, and it was not long before girls from some poverty-stricken Afrikaner homes were caught in the extensive network of prostitution in the Witwatersrand.⁷⁵

Mining was disrupted by the war, but the conditions of poverty continued after the war. Subsequent to 'The Peace Treaty of Vereeniging' people started going back to the Witwatersrand in large numbers. There were poor Boers who could not go back to the farms that had been scorched by the English, they flooded Johannesburg and so did thousands of black people who were recruited as cheap-labour in the mines. In 1908, a missionary in Johannesburg described in the following terms the conditions in a "Dutch Settlement:"

There is a Dutch Settlement at Vrededorp, and here you can meet with the most abject poverty at every corner. This was sadly a neglected place, the home of the poorest of the poor.⁷⁶

Another Pentecostal missionary, Verna Barnard, reported her fascination with the great numbers of Africans found in the mines:

A few weeks ago I went with some of the [Pentecostal missionaries] workers to one of the compounds. It was rather curious, yet blessed, to see those men come out by their hundreds. Many were only partially dressed. Many had their faces tattooed. Many had noble faces and were anxious for truth. Some compounds contain 4000 or 5000 men. I have heard it said that there are 250 000 natives on the Rand here that have not heard of Jesus yet.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Quoted in A Grundlingh, 'Prelude to the Anglo Boer War,' in *an Illustrated History of South Africa*, Trehwella Cameron and SB Spies, Eds (Johannesburg: Southern Publishers, 1986), 186.

⁷⁶ WJ Kerr, "Has Pentecost come to Johannesburg," *Confidence*, February, 1909, 2.

⁷⁷ V Barnard, "From South Africa," *The Pentecost*, July, 1909.

There was a clear trend of poverty among early Pentecostals; but there is often very little connection made to its relation to the economic dynamics of the day. The rich grew richer and the poor poorer, and nobody asked why; least of all Pentecostal missionaries. Poverty was strewn along a gold reef that had the largest deposits in the world, and promised wealth for a hundred years or more to come.

Johannesburg was driven by an unsurpassed infatuation with capital that practically ignored the needs of the thousands that came to dig the mineral. As pointed out earlier, Cecil John Rhodes was preoccupied more with his own African continental urges for power and the connection it had to the massive reserves of capital. He was going to make money at all costs, including the overthrow of governments as attempted in the Jameson Raid of 1895.

The gold deposits in the Witwatersrand were massive but not easy to mine. The cost of mining was exorbitant and the Randlords had to explore cheaper ways of mining.⁷⁸ Recruiting cheap labour was therefore strategic in relation to keeping down the cost of mining. Thousands of Africans were uprooted from agrarian backgrounds and brought to Johannesburg.⁷⁹ Making life easy for mine workers was neither a priority nor the motive for the Randlords; their biggest drive was profit and keeping mining costs down.

The first Pentecostals were there in 'Jew-Burg,' as it came to be known, when Vereeniging entrenched political and economic guarantees for Afrikaners, and *Uitlanders*. There were Jews attracted to Pentecostalism; but on the whole this affluent community, was unhappy with the religious euphoria and seeming uncontrolled mixing of races introduced by early Pentecostalism in Johannesburg.

⁷⁸ See Grundlingh, *Prelude to War*, 184-186.

⁷⁹ See C Bundy, 'The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry, in *South Africa in the Nineteenth Century*, S.F. Malan, Ed (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 1987), 215-234.

Later we shall see how these economic disparities contributed to racial and economic discrimination in early Pentecostalism. Suffice it to say for now that the political and economic anxieties fermented by the war were more pronounced among the poor in Johannesburg. Pentecostals cried ‘Jesus is the answer’ in a surrounding bubbling with many social, political and economic questions.

2.4. The religious forces that influenced early Pentecostalism

Over and above the political and economic woes that impacted early Pentecostalism, the atmosphere in Johannesburg was influenced by three streams of religious thought. First it was Andrew Murray Sr., and the Worcester Revival of 1860 in the Dutch Reformed Church. John Alexander Dowie with his healing movement was second, especially through Pieter le Roux, a Murray Jr., protégé, and missionary to Wakkerstroom in Mpumalanga. Thirdly it was the “Apostolic Faith” missionaries who arrived in Johannesburg from the USA in 1908. Johannesburg became a confluence of Dowie’s Zionism and the ‘speaking-in-tongues’ phenomenon spread through missionaries with some connections with 312 Azusa Street. Azusa Street was the place where ‘Classical Pentecostalism’ began to spread around the world after a revival broke out in 1906.

Pieter le Roux, was the single most important connection between these three strands of religious thoughts. He began as a missionary to the farms of Wakkerstroom sent from a church pastored by Murray Jr. He later dissented and joined Dowie’s Zion movement in what ultimately became the birth of Zulu Zionists in Wakkerstroom and surrounding areas. Later he moved to Johannesburg and switched allegiance from Zion to the Pentecost. It was during le Roux’s tenure that the Apostolic Faith Mission relinquished its non-racial roots in Zion and became a Pentecostal version of the Dutch Reformed Church. In the process the AFM also drew heavily on the AGUSA in terms of doctrinal and other controversial matters of faith such as participation in the two world wars. To be sure, the AFM looked up to their American counterparts for guidance in matters that they could not resolve. Indeed, they considered themselves to be a sister-church in South

Africa; a point that David du Plessis tried to drive home with the students at the Central Bible Institute in 1948.⁸⁰

2.4.1. Andrew Murray Sr., and the Worcester Revival of 1860

The Worcester Revival of 1860 is hailed by many as the spiritual revolution that injected an evangelical dimension into the Dutch Reformed Church.⁸¹ The story of a 15-year-old Coloured girl who asked to sing in a prayer meeting where Murray Sr., was pastor is widely told. She was almost denied the opportunity by the leader because she was Coloured. On second thought the leader granted her request. “She gave out her hymn-verses and prayed in moving tones” the leader reported.⁸² It was while she was singing and praying that the Spirit moved the congregation of about sixty people.

According to the leader—a certain JC de Vries—they suddenly heard a noise of a mighty rushing wind coming towards them. The people began to pray and cry uncontrollably. When the older Andrew Murray Sr., tried to shout them down, they continued unabated; the revival in Worcester had begun. It is also possible that the “moving tones” in which the Coloured girl prayed were signs of “speaking in tongues” in South Africa. Perhaps, very little of the Pentecostal ‘tongues’ phenomenon was known at the time, and that prompted the senior Murray’s pastoral indignation.⁸³

In the context of this revival the Dutch Reformed Church developed a strong sense of evangelicalism. The church started sending out missionaries within South Africa and beyond. Pieter le Roux, who later became instrumental in the founding of Zulu Zionists, maintained a close relationship with the younger Andrew Murray’s church. Perhaps this

⁸⁰ D du Plessis, ‘Pentecost in South Africa,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 30, 1938. 2

⁸¹ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 41.

⁸² WJ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic move in the Churches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 111-112.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 111-116.

Murray Jr., is often linked with the genesis of Pentecostalism in South Africa.⁸⁴ More significantly, Andrew Murray Jr., believed strongly in the doctrine of “Healing.” It was a personal experience he had in London when he lost his voice for two years.⁸⁵ From that point on, he wrote books on healing and other evangelical themes.

Pieter le Roux, in his struggles with the doctrine of healing, sought the advice of the Murray Jr. As we shall see later, he advised affirmatively but with caution. It was this Murray who became a fervent chaplain to the Boer Commandoes during the South African War. He spoke against the concentration camps which housed Afrikaner and Black prisoners during the War.⁸⁶ His impact on Dutch Reformed theology and missions is felt in the Dutch Reformed Church to this very day.

2.4.2. John Alexander Dowie: “The First Apostle and Elijah the Restorer”

John Alexander Dowie, was a founder of a healing ministry with international proportions. He arrived in the west coast of the USA, from Australia, in 1888. Soon thereafter he established a church in Chicago, Illinois. Dowie’s ministry in Chicago began in what scorned called the “Miserable wooden hut.”⁸⁷ Indeed, it must have appeared “miserable” in the shadow of the colossal Chicago Fair of 1893. Harvey Cox refers to the Chicago Expo, but connects it to Azusa Street, more than three thousand kilometres away, in Los Angeles, California. Thus, completely ignoring Dowie just on the doorstep of what was popularly known as the “White City.”⁸⁸ The Fair included, as

⁸⁴ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 50.

⁸⁵ HM Van de Vyfer, *Andrew Murray’s Theology of Divine Healing*, available on <http://www.ve.org.za/index.php/VE/article/viewFile/75/62>

⁸⁶ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 113.

⁸⁷ JA Dowie, “The Story of Zion,” *Leaves of Healing*, October 28, 1899, 1-2.

⁸⁸ H Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1995), 23-25.

a nucleus of its deliberations, a “Parliament of Religions.” Dowie was not invited, probably considered to be a case of some sort of religious fanaticism.

Unfortunately, between 1893 and 1894, the “White City”⁸⁹ went up in flames. Chicago was gripped by a financial crisis, the Mayor was murdered, and there were riots all over the city. These events worked together for the good of Dowie’s “miserable wooden hut.” Thousands of people around the city and beyond began to pay attention to what was happening in the little church opposite the Expo.⁹⁰ Hundreds were reported to have received physical healing, and Dowie’s ‘healing houses’ displayed crutches, wheelchairs, and all kinds of articles used by the sick before they received their miraculous healing.⁹¹ All this was reported in a periodical called *Leaves of Healing*. The periodical was highly effective in sowing the seeds of Dowie’s Zionism in South Africa; it was also his first contact with early leaders of Zulu Zionists. It was spread by Johannes Büchler, Dowie’s first ‘Designated-Overseer’ in South Africa. More will be said about him later.

The zenith of Dowie’s ministry was when he established “Zion City,” just north of Chicago. This was to be his ideal biblical ‘Zion’ with six thousand of his followers. Zion City, would be the one place where all of his ideal religious teachings would be upheld, and observed without fail. Zion City attracted many investors; at one point a lace factory was relocated from Great Britain with its machinery and all its personnel.⁹² Zion City enterprises were the well-oiled economic machinery that later sponsored Dowie’s downfall and subsequent death in 1907.⁹³

⁸⁹ The Expo was dubbed “White City” because it was built out of makeshift material with a glowing white colour.

⁹⁰ A.R. Heath, “Apostle in Zion,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* LXX, no 2 (1977), 98-113.

⁹¹ G Lindsay, *John Alexander Dowie* (Dallas: Christ for the Nations, 1980), 3.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Heath, “Apostle in Zion,” 98-113.

2.4.3. “Ethiopia stretching her hands out to God”

John Alexander Dowie’s position on matters of race was well known,

Zion stands for the Ethiopian, and for men of every race, and claims them all for Christ her Lord, as the common children of one common God and Father. Zion’s songs are sung by the voices of White and Black in sweetest unison.⁹⁴

He was vehemently vocal about missionaries who rush to foreign lands, and ignored racial tensions in their own backyards:

Shame to the hypocrites who are consumed with love and devotion for the Negro in Africa, who talk of giving their lives to win him from sin and Satan there, and who murder him with fiendish accompaniments in the city of Urbana, and tell the story of their devilry in special editions of their daily papers.⁹⁵

His vision of non-racialism was short-lived in South Africa, especially in Johannesburg where diverse cultures came together. This utopia was however ‘possible’ in a theocracy with Dowie at the helm. He believed that he alone had been endowed by God with the anointing to be “Elijah the restorer.” With Byant’s departure, his first American emissary in South Africa, and the arrival of the Apostolic Faith missionaries, things took on a different racial turn. Dowie’s white Zionists in Johannesburg returned to strictures imposed by a deep sense of Afrikanerdom.

There were three key players in the establishment of Dowie’s Zion in South Africa. As early as 1897, Johannes Büchler, Pieter le Roux, and Edgar Mahon had read *Leaves of Healing*. These men completed the white troika of Zionism in South Africa. All of them had at one level another been affected by the South African War. To be sure, Dowie’s Zionism in South Africa was born as the war was raging. Its members found spiritual solace in it from the fatigue of what was going on around them.

⁹⁴ JA Dowie, “Ethiopia Stretching Out Her Hands,” *Leaves of Healing*, August 14, 1897, 658.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

2.4.4. Johannes Büchler: Zion among the Boers, Coloureds and 'Uitlanders'

Johannes Büchler was 80 years old when he died, born in 1864, and surrendering in 1944. He was of Swiss origin and arrived in Johannesburg around 1889.⁹⁶ Like all *Uitlanders*, he was attracted to Johannesburg after a brief stay with his parents in Kimberley. In 1892, he was an ordained minister with the Congregational Church to a group of coloured people in Johannesburg. His ministry also reached out to English speakers in the area. In 1895 he resigned from the Congregational church and established his own "Zion Church" complete with a Moravian songbook called *Zion's Lieder*.⁹⁷ His ministry in Johannesburg, and around the country revolved around healing.

Büchler began to correspond with Dowie probably around 1896. In 1897, Zion in Johannesburg was recognised in Chicago. Through his healing campaigns around the country Büchler subsequently became Dowie's first 'Overseer' in South Africa. In 1899 Dowie reported that Büchler had been stripped of his position.⁹⁸ Apparently, he questioned Dowie's self-imposed colossal image. However, 1899, was too early to question the mega-spiritual-stature of a man who left many of his followers overwhelmed with an unquestioning religious stupor.

According to Sundkler,⁹⁹ it was Büchler who introduced Pieter le Roux and Edgar Mahon to *Leaves of Healing*. Büchler visited le Roux in Wakkerstroom in 1897,¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ AL Sullivan., *A Brief, critical history of Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa* (MTh Thesis, South African Theological Seminary, 2013,) 32.

⁹⁷ B Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 31.

⁹⁸ JA Dowie, 'The Story of Zion,' *Leaves of Healing*, October 28, 1899, 12.

⁹⁹ Sundkler, *Zulu Zionists*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ H le Roux, White Afrikaner Zionist Pieter Le Roux (1868-1943), *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* xxxiii, no 2 (2007), 6

which means Dowie's spirit of Zionism was already hovering around the area even before the war in 1899. The periodical had the same impact on le Roux and Mahon that it had on Büchler the first time he read it. All three men had been influenced by a miraculous healing experience, either personally or in their immediate families. It was these experiences that initially attracted them to the new movement. After his demise in Zion, Büchler practically disappeared from the scene of ministerial activity in Johannesburg. Daniel Bryant, now recognised as Dowie's 'Overseer,' was sent as his replacement in 1904.

2.4.5. Pieter le Roux: Zion among the Zulus

Pieter le Roux was a missionary to Wakkerstroom sent from the Dutch Reformed Church in Worcester. He trained as a teacher and spent two years at the Dutch Reformed Seminary in Stellenbosch. When he arrived in Wakkerstroom in 1893, most farmworkers were indulged in sensualities such as drunkenness, womanising, dagga (Cannabis) and tobacco. Later he described his understanding of the "Zulu Native,"

The Zulu native is immoral to the backbone. He lies and deceives without compunction. He is lazy because he has had no need to work in the past. What little work in putting down the crops was invariably done by the women. The men did nothing but milk cows, go to beer-drinks and look for more wives.¹⁰¹

In the beginning he baptised about 14 converts, but his preaching had very little effect on the people's behaviour. It wasn't until the introduction of Zion's teachings that he saw some positive moral effects on the Zulu. Dowie taught abstention from beer, tobacco, medical drugs, swine-flesh, and other indulgences he considered abusive to the human body.¹⁰² As in Chicago, a great attraction to the Zulu masses that flooded Zion in Wakkerstroom was healing. Le Roux's own 15-month old daughter was miraculously healed through the prayers of an African evangelist, Charles Sangweni.

¹⁰¹ P le Roux, "Report of Pieter le Roux," *Leaves of Healing*, December 30, 1905, 6

¹⁰² I Burger, *Geskiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloofsending van Suid Africa* (Braamfontein, Evangelie, 1987), 223.

It was the new teaching on healing that caused a rift between le Roux and the farmers in Wakkerstroom. According to Nel,¹⁰³ the farmworkers now refused to be paid with cheap wine; they wanted money. This must have been an unsettling for the farmers, because paying farmworkers with farm-products was the norm; it also guaranteed a place to live on the farmer's land. Le Roux's teaching on 'divine healing' was changing all that and causing a lot of trouble.

Le Roux consulted widely regarding the teaching on 'divine healing,' including seeking the wise counsel of his mentor, the younger Andrew Murray Jr. Murray endorsed the teaching but advised caution in public ministry. Le Roux—in a report to Dowie—wrote,

The one man to whom I especially looked for counsel was my old minister, Andrew Murray. In his letter he plainly stated that Divine Healing was the teaching of the Word of God-and a glorious divine truth. At the same time he said, if I insisted on publicly teaching it, I might expect to be put aside, as the church would not allow it in its public ministry.¹⁰⁴

Le Roux was now convinced that the 'divine healing teaching' was right, he acknowledged the futility of trying to change the Dutch Reformed Church from inside and finally resigned. His first attempt in 1900, was rejected by the local missions committee on the basis of the war. Soon after the war in 1902 he was recused and kicked out of the house. Later, he was given accommodation in a "spookhuis" owned by an English farmer in the area.¹⁰⁵

When le Roux finally relocated from Wakkerstroom to Johannesburg, Zulu Zionists had grown from 400 to several thousands; thanks to the 'native evangelists' who carried the

¹⁰³ M Nel, "P L le Roux, Dutch Reformed missionary, Zionist Preacher and leader of the AFM." *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae* XXXI, no 1 (2005), 127-143.

¹⁰⁴ P le Roux, "Zion Among the Zulus," *Leaves of Healing*, October 08, 1904, 862.

¹⁰⁵ A loose translation into English would be "Ghost-house." This was a broken down structure not in use in which someone had apparently died.

message far and wide. Until his relocation, Wakkerstroom was considered to be the headquarters of Dowie's church in South Africa.

In the earlier years, Dowie Zionists believed in the power of prayer and healing so strongly that they gave up the use of medical drugs and what some called "witchcraft." Le Roux reported to Murray that he wasn't using medical drugs anymore. Daniel Nkonyane and Fred Lutuli told of cases where people had thrown out African medicine. Many of those believed in divine healing and received their miracle. Stories (testimonies) were told of how people rose from the dead through prayer. They did not only believe the witness of *Leaves of Healing* and the narratives of the miracles of Jesus in the New Testament, they practically lived the experience.¹⁰⁶

Zulu Zionists, did not doubt le Roux's commitment to them as a spiritual-father. They had witnessed him ostracised by his own on their behalf; in some ways considered him to be one of their own. He lived and ministered among them and even spoke their language. He also translated some Zion work into Zulu. Le Roux however, was still an entrenched "Afrikaner at heart."¹⁰⁷ On a visit to le Roux's home, Bryant made the following observation,

It is a pleasure to observe that although Elder and Evangelist le Roux have been cut out largely from white civilisation and have daily and hourly in the most intimate association with Zulu life... Yet there has been none of the foolish and fatal practice of "being Zulu with the Zulus."¹⁰⁸

It was important for Bryant that le Roux remained white, Christian and 'civilised,' even though he lived and ministered among the Zulu. We will see later how le Roux's paternal bonds were tested and shattered when the John G. Lake and his Pentecostal

¹⁰⁶ See stories or testimonies as given by Nkonyane and Lutuli, *Leaves of Healing*, December 30, 1905, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Sundkler, *Zulu Zionists*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ D Bryant, "Report of Zion's work among the Zulus in South Africa," *Leaves of Healing*, December 30, 1905, 3.

entourage arrived in 1908. It is important for now to consider the third key player in the formation of Zulu Zionists in the early 20th century.

2.4.6. Edgar Mahon: Zion among the “Basuto”

Edgar Mahon, a former Salvation Army Officer, was introduced into Zion by Büchler. He completed the White South African triumvirate that established Dowie Zionism in the early 20th century. Mahon’s work was in Harrismith and focused largely on the Orange Free State and “Basutoland” (Lesotho). Emma Bryant—Daniel’s wife—reported that the work in Harrismith, was just as good as what they had seen in Wakkerstroom, she wrote,

Mr Mahon’s native work is of about equal extent to that which we visited. One of the most interesting features is the choir which he has formed from young Zulu boys and girls.¹⁰⁹

Mahon’s biggest contribution to South African Zionism was in music, especially the culture of brass bands among the mainly Basotho Zionists, better known as ‘Ma-Apostola’ (The Apostles).¹¹⁰ He was married to Büchler’s half-sister; like all others, his biggest attraction to Zion was healing. He had been prayed for by his brother-in-law Johannes Büchler. It was in Harrismith where a certain Mr Putterill—a local farmer—admired the work ethic among Mahon’s farmworkers introduced by the teachings of Zion. He was filled with so much admiration that he built a church and supported an African evangelist on the farm. Mahon told Putterill:

I can trust them anywhere, with anything. They work as hard when I am away as when I am with them.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ E Bryant, “Zion Among the Zulu,” *Leaves of Healing*, October 08, 1904, 861.

¹¹⁰ The culture of “Brass Bands” is probably the most distinguishing factor between Zulu and Sotho Zionists to this day. In fact many of the Basotho Zionists prefer to be called “Ma-Apostola,” meaning “Apostles” instead of Zionists; a term preferred by most Zulu Zionists. The Zion Christian Church founded by Engenas (Ignatius) Lekganyane—despite its largely Basotho/Bapedi make up—still holds on to the use of “*Masione*,” which is a Sesotho translation of “*Zulu Zionists*.” .

¹¹¹ E Mahon, “Zion Among the Zulu,” *Leaves of Healing*, October 08, 1904, 857.

That was unheard of in the history of farming. Before the teachings of Zion farmers could not control their workers. As mentioned earlier, drug abuse, alcohol consumption and other sensual indulgences were prevalent among farmworkers. The men were generally considered to be lazy; the teachings of Zion turned all of that around. The irony was, farmworkers in Zion sought to stay and work, rather than stay away from work.

As we shall see later, it is the Pentecostal missionaries of 1908 who broke the connection between le Roux and Mahon. When le Roux switched allegiance from Zion to Pentecost, Mahon stayed on and later struck a more intense relationship with Bryant, in the latter's new breakaway church from Zion City, Illinois.

2.4.7. Daniel Bryant, Dowie's first and last emissary to South Africa

Daniel Bryant; an emissary of John Alexander Dowie from Zion City, Illinois arrived in South Africa in 1904.¹¹² When Bryant landed in South Africa he was part of Dowie's ambitious plan to spread his religious empire across the world.¹¹³ Zion's work was already going on in South Africa; thanks to Büchler, le Roux, Mahon and other black evangelists like Daniel Nkonyane, Muneli Ngobese and Peter Bhengu.

Dowie's movement was financially self-sufficient. His missionaries, or emissaries, were sent and supported directly from Zion City, Illinois, the international headquarters of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion. Bryant and his team were housed at No 74 Harrison Street in Johannesburg. The house was a double storey, situated on a hill, and above average. The group included a "Business Manager," as was customary of Dowie to develop autonomous enterprises wherever Zion was found. His business plans for South Africa however did not materialise.

¹¹² Daniel Bryant, "Overseer Bryant's account of arrival in South Africa," *Leaves of Healing*, October 08, 1904, 863-864.

¹¹³ Lindsay, *John Alexander Dowie*, 128.



EVANGELIST DANIEL NKOYANE AND FAMILY, WAKKERSTROOM, TRANSVAAL.

Figure 1: Daniel Nkoyane and his family in Wakkerstroom (*Leaves of Healing*, December 30, 1905, 4).

In 1904 Bryant visited Wakkerstroom and reported “Kaffirs on horseback” lining up the streets in a royal, majestic and colourful performance.¹¹⁴ It took almost 15 months before all of Zion could meet “*Umfundisi omkhulu*.”¹¹⁵ Pieter le Roux reported that the day finally dawned on September 16, 1905.¹¹⁶ The big occasion to welcome the ‘Overseer’ from America was staged in Zandspruit. This was the closest the Zulu Zionists ever came to meeting Dowie, he himself had never set foot in Africa. The display of excitement on both occasions was a show of first impressions in what was

¹¹⁴ D Bryant, “Overseer Daniel Bryant’s account of work among the Zulus”, *Leaves of Healing*, October 08, 1904, 855-859.

¹¹⁵ This would probably be how le Roux spoke of Bryant before his arrival. He was the “Big Preacher” from America.

¹¹⁶ P le Roux, “Report of elder Pieter le Roux,” *Leaves of Healing*, December 30, 1905, 4.

anticipated to be a long and lasting association with “The First Apostle,” John Alexander Dowie.¹¹⁷

While Zulu Zionists were not known for good western-education, there were others like Bhengu who spoke English, and preached to “the Kaffirs with great power and effect.”¹¹⁸ Bryant reported all that, to show that they were not working among “savages.”

In 1907, John Alexander Dowie died, and Bryant was abruptly called back to Zion City. His leadership mantle fell on Pieter le Roux. Le Roux was charged with all of Zion’s work in South Africa including the Tabernacle in Johannesburg. In the midst of the controversies brewing in Zion, IL, regarding Dowie; Bryant resigned and formed his own church.¹¹⁹ It was this church that continued a relationship with Edgar Mahon and Zulu Zionists after le Roux had joined forces with the Pentecostal missionaries who arrived in 1908. However, it was never to be in line with Dowie’s vision of worldwide a religious empire.¹²⁰

2.4.8. “*Ukuthula eZion:*” The cry of ‘Peace’ among African Zionists

It is not far-fetched to conclude that the socio-political conditions of the day, contributed to Zulu-Zionist attractions to Dowie’s teachings. It was their new-found faith that provided the liberating space, albeit religious, that was neither accorded by the political nor the economic situation. Some took part in the war, but it wasn’t their war, when it was finally ceased, the ‘Peace Treaty of Vereeniging’ left them out in the cold.

¹¹⁷ D Bryant, “Overseer Bryant’s account of arrival in South Africa”, *Leaves of Healing*,” October 08, 1904, 863-864

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ The story surrounding the controversies at Zion City is told by a certain “AWN.” See article, “John Alexander Dowie Rebuked for Sin and Suspended from Office,” *Leaves of Healing*, April 5, 1906. 436-438.

¹²⁰ See AL Sullivan, *A Brief, critical history of Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa* (MTh Thesis, South African Theological Seminary, 2013,) 24.

Dowie was a drastic departure from the socio-political norm of the day, he openly advocated for racial equality in his world-wide religious empire. However, we will see how that norm was overridden by white Zionists in South Africa. While Wakkerstroom—in the beginning—was considered to be the headquarters of Dowie’s Zionism; a racial shift began to surface after Bryant was recalled to the USA, and Pieter le Roux relocated to Johannesburg.

Pieter le Roux, who took over the administrative reigns from Bryant, was not known for doctrinal stability. That much was clear with his shift to Dowie’s ‘Healing’ from the Dutch Reformed Church. After the arrival of John G. Lake he switched to ‘Pentecost.’ His last move was a catalyst to the rise of African Independent Churches of Zulu Zionists type; a movement that has continued to thrive relentlessly without missionary involvement or assistance.

Le Roux had been accepted into the fold of the Zulu Zionists in Wakkerstroom; but in Johannesburg, he undermined the deep sense of independence that African people had found in Zion. When Zion switched allegiance to Pentecost it allowed the socio-political and economic prejudices of the time to ruin Zion’s liberated spaces. Effectively, the AFM became the Dutch Reformed Church ‘speaking in tongues.’ Discriminatory practices were introduced early in the history of the AFM and the liberating spaces of Zion were choked. That was what Zion had become to the Zulu Zionists in Wakkerstroom. Daniel Nkonyane expressed the sentiment,

The Lord gave me peace when I went into Zion’s work. In Zion we saw great things. God was doing which we did not see before. I saw three people who were supposed to be dead for two days raised up the third day when I prayed for them.¹²¹

Whether the people were dead, or in a coma, is the subject of another discipline; what is clear is that Zulu Zionists had found in the ‘Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion’ a liberating space. When it became evident that the forces of racial-superiority at play in

¹²¹ D Nkonyane, “Address of Daniel Nkonyane,” *Leaves of Healing*, December 30, 1905, 8

the socio-political and economic arena were now infiltrating the church and ‘*Ukuthula*’ (peace) in Zion was under threat;¹²² Daniel Nkonyane seceded in 1910 and started his own church. That move, was the catalyst of a replication of hundreds of African Independent Churches that has continued to this day. When White-Zionists switched to Pentecost, the ‘ambiguity’ of the ‘equality of believers,’ as argued by Elphick,¹²³ was reintroduced in the form of the AFM. It happened, even with their claims to exclusive ‘access’ to the ‘Spirit of God.’ Pieter le Roux was the common thread running through it all; from the Dutch Reformed Church, to Dowie’s Zionism and finally to the AFM in Johannesburg.

Le Roux was held in high esteem in the Apostolic Faith Mission; a church he led for thirty years (1913-1943). When David du Plessis, second secretary of the AFM, spoke to the students at the Central Bible Institute in America, he expressed his unreserved veneration for his leader:

The man that can’t agree with Pieter Louis le Roux must be the devil himself.¹²⁴

¹²² The traditional way of greeting in ‘Zion’ was the Zulu phrase, “*Ukuthula e-Zioni*,” which means ‘Peace in Zion.’ That ‘Peace’ implied that all were equal in Zion.

¹²³ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 1-9.

¹²⁴ D du Plessis, ‘Pentecost in South Africa,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 30, 1938, 2.

Chapter 3

3. Usurping the Work of the ‘Spirit:’ Race and cultural parallels and connections between 312 Azusa and Bree Streets, 1908-1913

This chapter will discuss and compare the parallels and connections in matters of race and culture in early Pentecostalism in the USA and in South Africa. Particular emphasis will be placed on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, and Bree Street in Johannesburg. These are arguably the two most important locations in the early history of Pentecostalism in South Africa.

At Azusa Street a revival broke out in 1906, with far reaching tentacles across the globe; it was led by an African-American man named William Seymour. Bree Street on the other hand erupted in 1908, and revival spread across South Africa and beyond. The leaders were two white Americans, John Graham Lake, and his partner Tom Hezmalhalch. The pair had been at Azusa before they came to South Africa. At some point, they had also been to Zion City, Illinois. This was John Alexander Dowie’s stronghold; at least one of them, John G. Lake, was an elder in Zion. In both Azusa and Bree Streets, the myth of the ‘Spirit’ was the nucleus of the ecstatic events that caught world attention within a very short space of time.

To be sure, any study of Pentecostalism connecting South Africa and the USA must in some way touch on these two locations. They provide the historical aegis of the early beginnings of Pentecostalism in South Africa.

In the beginning the revivals had something of a heavy ‘Spirit’ presence. Eye-witnesses testified to a ‘divine’ presence that brought people of all races and cultures together. People celebrated the ecstasy of the ‘Spirit’ with no consideration for race and culture; the two most divisive elements in the race relations of the time. Ironically, when the euphoria of the ‘Spirit’ subsided, the subtle forces of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism began to creep in and people reconciled by the ‘Spirit’ were again divided along racial lines in agreement with the race and cultural prescriptions of the time.

3.1. Azusa Street and the Pentecostal revivals around the world

The story of Azusa Street revolves around an African-American man of no social significance. A son and grandson of slaves; William Seymour was born on May 2, 1870. His theology of the 'Spirit' was deeply influenced by his Wesleyan-Holiness background and the Parham-teaching on the Holy Spirit. Charles Parham was an American Southerner whose sympathies for the Ku Klux Klan were not a secret.¹²⁵ Seymour attended his 'no-curriculum' school in Brunner, Texas. Students in Parham's school only used the Bible as their text. Due to the racial laws of the time he could not sit with his fellow white-students in a class, he had to listen-in sitting somewhere outside, where he could at least hear the teacher's voice. Parham taught 'Baptism in the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance.' That doctrine, based on the events in Act 2, soon became the cornerstone of 'Classical-Pentecostalism.'

Seymour arrived in Los Angeles from Texas, in 1906, at the invitation of a holiness-preacher, Rev. Mrs Julia Hutchins. He brought with him the Parham-teaching much to the distaste of Rev Hutchins and was subsequently locked out of the church.¹²⁶ In no time he had a few followers, and they ended up in a run-down African Methodist Episcopal building on Azusa Street.¹²⁷

What happened at Azusa made a rowdy impact in the neighbourhood and the few despised African-Americans that gathered at the old Stevens African Methodist Episcopal became both a centre of attraction and ridicule. Something unusual was

¹²⁵ CM Robeck, Jr., *The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism*, 1994, p. 9; this paper was delivered at a conference in Memphis TN in 1994. The purpose of the conference was to reconcile black and white Pentecostals after decades of racial division in the movement.

¹²⁶ CM Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission & Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 4.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 5.

happening at Azusa and the participants called it, “Revival.” Healings and other ‘supernatural’ phenomena were reported; above all people were ‘baptised in the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.’ The local media caught the frenzy and reported mostly negative on it. The more negative the reports, the more people of all colours were raced to the scene. William Seymour was the African-American pastor at the centre of it all.¹²⁸

Cecil Robeck, a leading historian on Azusa Street, describes Los Angeles as a city of opportunity in the early 20th century. Many immigrants were attracted to the area and it had a booming economy. It was from this multi-racial context that the revival at Azusa Street drew its participants in 1906.¹²⁹ While the City was reasonably racially integrated in its schools and other social systems; the Apostolic Faith Mission on Azusa Street was spectacular in its mixing of races. Frank Bartleman’s famous statement described the events:

The place was packed out nightly...There were far more white people than colored coming. The color line was washed away in the blood.¹³⁰

Robeck described the situation at Azusa Street:

It became one of the most racially inclusive, culturally diverse groups in Los Angeles at that time. It included people from all classes. It held the attention of the highly educated alongside the illiterate. It had something for new converts as well as seasoned professionals in ministry.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 53-57. Here Robeck gives a brief background of the city of Los Angeles in its early years.

¹³⁰ F Bartleman, *Azusa Street: An Eyewitness Account* (Gainesville, Bridge-Logos, 1980), 61.

¹³¹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 88.

3.2. Azusa Street ridiculed by those who sang its praises

Not too long after the revival burst in Los Angeles, the “Spirit” euphoria slowly subsided and those who sang its praises began to ridicule it. The first to undermine Azusa Street was none other than Charles Parham, Seymour’s former teacher in Texas. His attempts to take-over in 1906 were thwarted and he started spewing ‘sour- grape’ messages against Seymour and his church. He spoke ill of the situation and his singular irritant was the liberal mixing of races at Azusa that seemed to have gone out of control. His attempts to usurp Azusa Street failed and he slid into obscurity.

In 1908, two women, Clara Lum and Florence Crawford switched the location of the publication of the popular Azusa periodical *The Apostolic Faith* from Los Angeles to Portland, Oregon. Crawford, once a faithful and loyal supporter of Seymour, left Azusa Street to start her own church in Portland. She used the same name as Seymour’s church in Los Angeles, the Apostolic Faith Mission. Many other churches sprung up all over America using the same name, especially if they could trace their beginning to Azusa Street. In Oregon, Crawford hoped to restore what spiritual standard she thought had been lost in California.¹³²

Clara Lum, editor of the *Apostolic Faith*, left Los Angeles unceremoniously and surfaced in Portland. As editor of Seymour’s periodical, she took the publication with her and started issuing it from the Crawford AFM. Azusa Street was left without a ‘Newspaper’ to spread its propaganda. Lum’s shift of the periodical from Los Angeles to Portland shifted attention from Seymour to Crawford and presented Portland as the new centre of the Pentecostal revival.¹³³

¹³² Ibid., 301-302.

¹³³ Ibid., 284.

William H. Durham was probably the man who dealt a heavier and final blow on Azusa Street. He was a pastor from Chicago who first came to Azusa in 1907.¹³⁴ He received his 'baptism in the Spirit' at the mission. For two weeks he prayerfully sought the experience, until he 'was filled with the Holy Spirit.'¹³⁵ He spoke well of Seymour in the beginning and noticed that he was "strong in his weakness." Seymour's humility and unassuming personality was his 'strong point' but it also opened him up to abuse. Durham returned in 1911 to exploit the "weakness." He arrived in Los Angeles in Seymour's absence and articulated a new doctrine—what he called the 'finished work of Christ.' Durham believed there were no incremental stages of 'sanctification.' The work of Christ on the cross was a once-off; under that one act those who were saved were also 'sanctified.' Seymour on the other hand believed in a second experience of sanctification distinct from one's initial experience in Christ. The second was a form of sanctification in process leading to human perfection; however, it came in instalments. One could not be baptised with the Holy Spirit unless one lived a sanctified life, sometimes referred to as 'holiness.' Durham however insisted that 'baptism in the Holy Spirit was available and possible for all, because all had been sanctified in the 'finished' work of the cross. Durham's teaching was regarded as very controversial, while some embraced his teaching, there were others, like Seymour, who could not bring themselves to accepting what seemed to lack crucial elements of the 'Holiness' teaching.'¹³⁶ By the time Seymour returned much damage had already been done. Durham had worked his way into people's hearts, many of them white members of Seymour's church. Seymour subsequently locked him out; he did to Durham what Hutchins had done to him earlier. Durham took with him a sizeable chunk of the white membership and started a new church not far away from the Azusa Street mission.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 97.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 179.

¹³⁶ See article on William Durham, R.M. Riss, 'Durham, William. H,' in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), 594-595. See also an article on the 'Finished Work Controversy,' by the same author on pages 638-639.

Azusa Street, after three years of revival, was finally set on a path of decline prompted more by issues of race and culture. From Charles Parham to William Durham, the disruptions at Azusa were caused by white men and women. While they blamed it on low spiritual levels of a revival once vibrant; it was clear that they blamed Seymour for the decline. Seymour on the other hand, blamed it all on the white people who broke away to start their own situations. In 1922, he died and his wife took over leadership. Azusa Street finally folded amidst court disputes between Seymour's wife and an African-American minister, Ruthford D. Griffith, who sought to usurp control of the Mission.¹³⁷

Three things characterised the demise of Azusa Street, racial and cultural tensions and a developing culture of dissent. The same characteristics played out in Johannesburg after the arrival of John G. Lake and his entourage of Pentecostal missionaries. The two locations were thousands of miles apart and yet the similarities are striking.

3.3. The connection between Azusa and Bree Streets in Johannesburg

As the revival at Azusa Street rolled to its demise its impact had been carried around the world by missionaries born of the situation.¹³⁸ In the first half of the 20th century, an entourage of thirteen Americans, led by John G. Lake, arrived in South Africa from Indianapolis in the USA.¹³⁹ They landed in South Africa on May 15, 1908; a little more than two years after the Pentecostal revival in Los Angeles in April 1906 erupted. Lake was a former 'Elder' in Zion City, Illinois, where John Alexander Dowie was the 'Super-Apostle.'

¹³⁷ Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 320.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 235-280.

¹³⁹ JG Lake, 'Missionaries for Africa,' *The Pentecost*, August, 1908, 2.

God—they claimed—had spoken to them, and they received the divine charge to come to South Africa. They reported in *The Pentecost*,

Last February at the close of the Missionary Convention in Indianapolis a number of God's children announced that God had called them to Johannesburg, South Africa, and that he told them they would leave for the dark land about the first of April. To the question "Have you your fare," they replied, "No, not yet, but Jesus will take care of that." He has called us and he will open the way.¹⁴⁰

According to Lake, God provided the required \$ 2 000 when an unknown person got touched to send the money to "Bro Tom," as Hezmalhalch was popularly known.¹⁴¹ The belief in 'divine providence' was the trademark of 'Faith Missionaries.' They left home with no guarantees for financial support except pledges from friends and sometimes family. When Lake landed in South Africa he claimed not to have had any money at all. His story of 'faith' was that another unknown man handed him an express order of Forty pounds as he stood in the queue to disembark, saying, "Boy, the Lord told me to give you that, and He's been telling me that for the last two weeks."¹⁴² On arrival in Johannesburg they had no contact whatsoever, but as they stepped off the train another miracle happened. Lake told the story:

...a little bustling lady, whom I at once recognised as American, stepped up to me and said; "Are you a missionary?" I replied "Yes." She said, "The Lord told me to come down here, that I would find a family on this train who were missionaries. I have a house for you furnished in real missionary style. You can have the house."¹⁴³

This arrangement was rent-free because the Lord told the lady not to charge rent. The "little bustling lady" was identified by Lake as Mrs. CL Goodenough.¹⁴⁴ She was HD

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ HJ Chadwick, *How to be Filled with Spiritual Power* (Gainesville, Florida: Bridge-Logos, 2006), xvi.

¹⁴² Lake, "Missionaries for Africa," 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Chadwick, *How to be filled*, xvii.

Goodenough's wife, a missionary of the Congregational church in Johannesburg. According to Denis, the couple owned and rented out accommodation in the Johannesburg area around this time.¹⁴⁵ Mr and Mrs Goodenough were missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and in charge of the American Zulu Mission migrant work in Doornfontein.

These adventurous stories were a big part of missionary reporting. Despite their audacious faith, sometimes money matters seemed to bring out the worst in them. In the face of financial stringencies their faith in God seemed to dissipate. The funds were not always forthcoming and they sometimes laid their sponsors with guilt. Hannah James, from the United Kingdom, wrote in the *Bridegroom's Messenger*,

Have you dear reader truly sacrificed anything to enable your substitutes to do the work. You bade them Godspeed when they left the homeland, you assured them they would never be forgotten, but have you kept your promise?¹⁴⁶

Another, Verna Barnard from the USA lamented,

Sometimes I have felt all in the home land had forgotten me and did not feel concerned in regards to my welfare; but God permits these tests to draw us nearer to Him and to depend wholly on Him.¹⁴⁷

3.4. "Has Pentecost come to Johannesburg?"

Lake's party got to work as soon as they arrived in Johannesburg, they began their ministry in a "Native tabernacle" which belonged to the "Congregational American Mission" in Doornfontein.¹⁴⁸ This "little church" was called many names by the missionaries; it was 'Native,' then "Colored," but popularly known as the "Zulu

¹⁴⁵ P Denis, "Financial Resources and Economic Agency in the early history of African Independent Churches," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37, No. 2 (Sept 2005), 14.

¹⁴⁶ H James, "A Plea for Africa," *The Bridegroom Messenger*, November 15, 1912, 2.

¹⁴⁷ V Barnard, "A Letter from South Africa," *The Pentecost*, Vol 1 No 8, July, 1909. 8.

¹⁴⁸ JG Lake, *The Pentecost*, August, 1909, 6.

Mission.” As pointed out earlier, it was largely made up of migrant workers, perhaps predominantly Zulu, but by no means all Zulu. One of Lake’s favourite “native evangelists” was Edward “Lion” Motaung, a Mosotho (from Lesotho). Another was Elias Letwaba, more will be said about him later. Some work had already begun among Coloureds to the credit of Johannes Büchler before he joined Dowie’s Zionist movement.

On arrival, Lake was invited to preach in the ‘Native Church’ whose Zulu pastor was on leave. Presumably, the invitation came from HD Goodenough. His first audience was a group of about 500 Zulus.¹⁴⁹ The people were extremely poor and largely drawn from the peripheries of the social and political ironies of a booming economy in Johannesburg. Lake described the situation of poverty,

This land is just recovering from a great war which has utterly devastated the country. Everything that could be burned was burned, and the cattle were killed, simply to cut of the food supply to the Boers in order to end the war.¹⁵⁰

In a strange twist of events, the services in the “Zulu Mission” attracted the white Zionists in Dowie’s church. They came in overwhelming numbers almost to the point of forcing black people into “timidity.” J.O. Lehman, one of the missionaries, described the situation as follows:

We began our services in a colored church, and notwithstanding the prejudice that exists with the White people against the “Natives”, when God began to work the White people came in such crowds that the “Natives” became timid and were crowded out.¹⁵¹

Probably the most objective description of the events in Johannesburg was given by W.J. Kerr.¹⁵² He was a convinced missionary sceptic already working in Johannesburg when

¹⁴⁹ JG Lake, *Adventures in God* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House Publishers, 1981), 19.

¹⁵⁰ JG Lake, ‘Important Instructions for Missionaries,’ *The Pentecost*, June, 1909.

¹⁵¹ *The Pentecost*, Vol 1, No 1, August, 1908, 7.

¹⁵² W.J. Kerr, ‘Has Pentecost Come to Johannesburg,’ *Confidence*, February, 1909, 27-31.

the Lake entourage arrived. He did not belong to the group and was probably not American. The man was impressed by the simple faith of the American missionaries and their willingness to work in the “vilest surroundings of perhaps any place in Africa.”¹⁵³ Here, he witnessed first-hand, the fetters of sin being broken among “drunkards, gaol-birds, harlots and whoremongers.”¹⁵⁴ Kerr reported on the various aspects of the American missionaries’ message. He highlighted the work in the slums, poverty in Dutch settlements, speaking in tongues and a host of other issues. He was quick to point out the presence of the fake in the midst of faith as hypnotists and impostors tried to emulate the situation of miracles. His lengthy statement was endorsed by the leadership of the Lake group.¹⁵⁵

In a report in the *Latter Rain Evangel* Lake reported that some prominent Afrikaners were among people who were being influenced by the moral revolution that was taking place, including a Mr Schumann (probably Schoeman); a former editor of a popular Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Transvaaler*.¹⁵⁶

When the crowds became too big for the small American Zulu Mission the meetings were moved to a bigger venue, Dowie’s Zion Tabernacle on Bree Street. Pieter le Roux was now in charge after Bryant’s recall to Zion City, Illinois. Pentecost introduced a second twist in le Roux’s fluid doctrinal journey after healing got him kicked out of the Dutch Reformed Church. Lake’s emphasis was not only on healing but also on Pentecost. In the Zion tabernacle J.O. Lehman observed,

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ JG Lake, “What God is doing in South Africa,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*, November, 1908, 12-13.

I never saw a more hungry people than these Zion folk. Truly God is working.¹⁵⁷

With the move from the Zulu Mission to the Zion Tabernacle Dowie's church became the nucleus of the work of the American missionaries. They spread far and wide in Dowie's territory, making their mark in strongholds such as Wakkerstroom, Vryheid, Harrismith and Lesotho.¹⁵⁸ Lake later wrote to Daniel Bryant, Dowie's former emissary to South Africa, informing him of what was happening in Johannesburg:

Brother this work in Africa has passed beyond our wildest dreams, even in the one hundred days in which we have labored here. I feel that we are but reaping the result of the prayers of a multitude of precious saints of God whose prayers have gone before and followed us day and night.¹⁵⁹

Thus Pentecost in Johannesburg, as in Los Angeles, was spreading across the country. Lake reported miracles happening as far as Zululand and Lesotho. Indigenous leaders like Edward 'Lion' Motaung and Elias Letwaba were rising and also spreading the message of healing and Pentecost in their own locations. Pentecost had indeed come to Johannesburg.

3.5. Lake and the \$100 question

It was pointed out earlier that money was a problem for the missionaries in Doornfontein, it came out strongly when Lake lashed out at the sponsors in America with regard to the welfare of Theo Schwede. Schwede arrived unannounced in South Africa and was stuck with immigration officers in Cape Town. He did not have the required \$100 to disembark. Lake was contacted and his team had to pay the money. He was

¹⁵⁷ *The Pentecost*, Vol 1, No 1, August, 1908, 7.

¹⁵⁸ See article in, *The Pentecost*, Vol 1 No 4, December, 1908, 1.

¹⁵⁹ JG Lake, "Portion of a letter from John G. Lake," *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, Vol 2 No 29, January 1, 1909. 4.

enraged despite the fact that he claimed landing in South Africa with no money whatsoever.¹⁶⁰

Schwede was an extra expense and Lake was worried that it would impact negatively on their standard of living. The more missionaries they had, the less money they would spend on themselves. This was despite the fact that both he, and J.O. Lehman, called for more workers immediately after their arrival in South Africa.¹⁶¹

He told his American friends, “We are compelled to live as we did in America,” and added, “People cannot change their manner of life suddenly in this respect.”¹⁶² He emphasised to his American readers that missionaries could not live on the food that “Natives” were accustomed to, “If we tried, we would all die.”¹⁶³ To be sure, missionaries were now being scared off because they responded overwhelmingly to the call to Africa.

The missionaries insisted on ‘American standards of living’ in the midst of extreme poverty and often exploited those conditions to justify their need for funds. Very little of that money they raised was spent on those in whose name it was raised. In Johannesburg, Lake assumed poverty to be the fate of the “Natives” around him. No one in his team drew the correlation between the poverty of the thousands of African mine workers and Cecil Rhodes’ exploitative capital machinery.

Where money was concerned, Lake was something of a controversial figure. At one stage, the Pentecostal Missionary Union (PMU) in the United Kingdom advised its

¹⁶⁰ JG Lake, “Missionaries for Africa,” *The Pentecost*, August, 1909. No page number.

¹⁶¹ *The Pentecost*, August, 1908. 6.

¹⁶² JG Lake, “Important instructions for missionaries,” *The Pentecost*, June, 1909. No page number.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

financial donors to make careful enquiries before giving any help to the Pentecostal work in South Africa.¹⁶⁴ They had received “very disquieting” reports. The statement read:

Before giving any help to work among the “Natives” in South Africa, we would suggest that enquiries be carefully made, as we have received very disquieting reports from South Africa recently.¹⁶⁵

This statement was withdrawn three months later; the “disquieting reports” implicated Lake in some way. Seemingly, on a visit to the USA, he was reprimanded. He promised his USA friends that he would keep clear of the charges made against him.¹⁶⁶ The retraction read,

We have received an important letter from a number of very prominent Pentecostal workers and leaders in South Africa. They fear that the warnings contained in the September number of “Confidence” may result in the withdrawing of help from a very good work among the Natives... We have received letters from Mr. G.D. Studd of Los Angeles, saying Mr. Lake has been there and satisfied a number of friends in the USA that he will keep clear of the things mentioned. We hope that friends will continue to let their practical sympathies go out to South Africa.¹⁶⁷

3.6. Lake and racial equality

The 100-dollar controversy did not only expose Lake’s attitude towards money, it also exposed his views on the equality of races. He was against what he called “teaching the Native brand new American ideas about racial equality.” He wrote,

One of the curses of American missionaries is that they teach race equality. Now the African is a very different man from the American Negro. The African

¹⁶⁴ The PMU was an agency that facilitated support of Pentecostal missionaries around the world. It was inter-denominational and one of its leaders was an Anglican Vicar, the Rev. Alex Boddy.

¹⁶⁵ A Boddy (ed), “South Africa,” *Confidence*, September, 1909, 209.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

man is a heathen. He does not wear anything but a blanket until he is taught and Christianised.¹⁶⁸

Indeed, throughout his ministry, he reported on nothing else but ‘naked heathens.’ This was despite the fact that black people in South Africa, in the 20th century, were already attracted to western fashion. That was partly why English missionaries were accused of turning Africans into “black Englishmen.”¹⁶⁹ At least Daniel Bryant did admit as early as 1904 that they were not ministering to “naked savages.”¹⁷⁰ Lake could not connect the people’s poverty to the “blankets” they were wearing. Even worse he could not relate that poverty to the socio-political and economic environment of the time. To be sure, “blankets” were not necessarily a sign of poverty, especially with the Basotho, among who he ministered often times. It was a cultural thing, perhaps induced more by the cold conditions of the Free State and Lesotho. For Lake however, the people wore the “blankets” because they were poor. There were many who received his ‘Christian message’ and remained sedated in their poverty.

He was reportedly a prosperous businessman in Chicago who had given up all to come to Africa. An editorial in the *Pentecost* used him as an example of utmost dedication in trying to motivate others to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and to go into missionary work,

This has been especially manifested in the lives of Bro. Lake and family who so recently went to Johannesburg, South Africa, and whom God has been using so marvellously there. A few months ago he was a businessman in Chicago and making good money with the prospects of a very bright future, but when he and his family were baptised with the Holy Ghost and they received a call to go forth and thrust sickle in the ripening grain of South Africa, they willingly forsook all. And the results of that obedience to God have more than proved that they are in the will of God.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ JG Lake, “Important instructions for missionaries,” *The Pentecost*, June, 1909. No page given.

¹⁶⁹ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 5.

¹⁷⁰ D Bryant, “Zion Among the Zulus,” *Leaves of Healing*,” October 08, 1904, 858.

¹⁷¹ *The Pentecost*, August, 1908, 4.

Morton disputes Lake's claims to miracles and riches but his argument is not very convincing.¹⁷² He accuses him of 'fraud and deception,' and of using an 'array of healing techniques' used by Dowie. He turns Lake and Dowie into charlatans or hypnotists, and ignores the hundreds of testimonies from people who claim to have received sustained healings from the ministries of these men.

While Lake seems to have embraced African evangelists like Letwaba and Motaung, it was with a touch of paternalism.

G.B. McGee notes that the early missionary enterprise was not at all a bed of roses. He wrote,

The general impact of the earliest missionaries appears to have been short-lived and disappointing. Disillusionment quickly crept in because of the harsh realities they faced, their inability to communicate with the people, financial instability, and lack of preparation.¹⁷³

3.7. The rise of the Zulu Zionists

Lake and Hezmalhalch were once involved with Dowie, at one level or another, before they went to the AFM at Azusa Street in Los Angeles. They were therefore fully aware of the problems going on in Zion, Illinois, especially after Dowie's death. Perhaps this void of leadership contributed to Zion in Johannesburg becoming the AFM. The "White work," led by Pieter le Roux, asked Lake and his associates to lead the Pentecostal work in Johannesburg. On January 15, 1909 Lake reported to his supporters to register the force they had become:

¹⁷² B Morton, "The Devil who Heals" Fraud and Falsification in the Evangelical Career of John G. Lake," *African Historical Review* 44, no 2 (2012), 98-118. Morton is obviously not into this 'divine healing' story; he allows for his own biases to interfere with his work. He sounds more like someone who is on a witch hunt to discredit what other people perceive to be Lake's good contributions.

¹⁷³ GB McGee, Missions Overseas (N. American Pentecostal), in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 889.

In order that you may understand what the Lord is doing here, I will say that in the past fifteen days we have been asked to become overseers of thirty-five thousand Native people and five thousand Dutch and German, in one locality in giving them divine guidance and direction (the five thousand are in German South West Africa).¹⁷⁴

If this deal was sealed then it underestimated the commitment of Africans to Dowie Zionism. Wakkerstroom and surrounding areas still had a very strong African base of Zulu Zionists, and so did the Orange Free State among the Basotho. When le Roux tried to incorporate his work in the farms into the AFM, he was met with vehement opposition and dissatisfaction.¹⁷⁵ Johannesburg wanted to treat them as attachments and not full members of the church. All decision-making was centralised and revolved around the White leadership at Bree Street; and that was not congruent with the non-racial spirit of Dowie Zionism. Even more, Daniel Nkonyane and other African leaders in Wakkerstroom chose to remain in Zion. Better still, they had received visions and prophetic messages of their own with regard to spiritual direction.¹⁷⁶ They wanted to move on with their 'Staves' and 'bare feet' because they had received a message in 'prophecies' at various times.¹⁷⁷ All that happened during le Roux's prolonged absence and ultimate departure to Johannesburg.

Zion in Johannesburg, now turned AFM, was not happy with the new visions and prophecies in Wakkerstroom. The same people who resisted the doctrinal parochialism of the Dutch Reformed Church, now sought to impose it on the Africans in Wakkerstroom. The Zulus Zionists were not happy, and in 1910, Daniel Nkonyane seceded from the AFM to form the "Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in

¹⁷⁴ J.G. Lake, "Extracts from a very important letter from Bro. J.G. Lake," *Confidence*, March, 1909, 74.

¹⁷⁵ M Nel, "Pieter le Roux, Dutch Reformed Missionary, Zionist Preacher and Leader of the AFM," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXI, No. 1 (2005), 127-143.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Zion.”¹⁷⁸ That first secession was a catalyst of a relentless rise of hundreds of African Independent Churches in Southern Africa with “Zion” or “Apostolic” retained in their new names. These ‘break-aways’ were the unexpected consequence of le Roux’s action. It was a gross miscalculation of the intelligence of the ‘uneducated.’ Daniel Bryant—who had by this time formed a new church—continued an independent relationship with Edgar H. Mahon who did not follow le Roux into the AFM.¹⁷⁹

3.8. The “Native” problem in Johannesburg

Very early into the arrival of the Lake entourage in Johannesburg references were made to the ‘Native work’ and the ‘White work.’ Lehman mentioned how “natives” were being crowded out of the Zion tabernacle at Bree Street due to “timidity” and “the terrible barrier of race distinction.”¹⁸⁰ Zion at Bree Street was already predominantly white and Afrikaner even before the switch to Pentecost. Considering Elijah Lutango’s optimism; race relations were more amicable in the Bree Street tabernacle during Bryant’s time. Lutango wrote to Dowie extolling Bryant’s character:

If he were bound by the love of money, he would have gone long ago. May God bless him and his good wife! Peace to you, my dear Overseer, and to your wife and the Church of the Christ which is in Johannesburg.¹⁸¹

However, the focus of Bryant and his wife was on the “Africander people” in Johannesburg. She wrote in a report to Dowie,

¹⁷⁸ See, A Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 107-108.

¹⁷⁹ AL Sullivan, *A Brief, Critical History of Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa among AmaZioni of South Africa* (MTh Thesis, South African Theological Seminary, 2013), 36-37.

¹⁸⁰ *The Pentecost*, Vol 1, No 1, August, 1908, 7.

¹⁸¹ E Lutango, *Leaves of Healing*, Vol 17 No 26, October 14, 1905, 853. Lutango also spoke well of race relations in Zion, Johannesburg, see J Cabrita, *Revisiting ‘Christian Independency’: Urban Moderns and the Pursuit of Self-Perfection in Early Twentieth Century Johannesburg*. This is a work in progress and information from a ‘Draft’ is used with the author’s permission.

At Harrismith we bade good-by to our Native Zion, and entered upon our ministry to the Africander people.¹⁸²

Le Roux however was not entirely enthused with the mixing of races. There is no doubt that a sizeable component of the membership at Bree Street was “Native.” The ‘native problem’ was even more pronounced with the switch to the AFM. The “Native problem” was so acute that some Pentecostal missionaries explored division along racial lines to facilitate smooth worship. Lehman’s report is quiet on the specifics that made “Natives” unhappy except to refer to them as “timidity and barriers of race distinction.” Missionaries did not challenge the barriers; instead they explored other ways, like moving back to the Zulu mission, in which their ministry to the ‘natives’ could be carried on.

Verna Barnard later reported that “coloreds” had returned to the Zulu Mission in Doornfontein; it was just a little over a year since Lake and his group arrived. She wrote,

We have meetings every night in our little new chapel, just finished for the colored people...Right here in Doornfontein, in this Native church is where the American missionaries first held services and the Holy Spirit fell, so we are expecting Doornfontein to lead still in this wonderful work.¹⁸³

Barnard added another dimension to the problem of race relations, what she called the “Cape Colored work.” She wrote,

This building is for the Coloreds not “Natives.” We call it the ‘Cape Colored Work.’ Many of these are nearly White; they are so mixed up with different races. They consider themselves above the “Natives” and therefore are harder to deal with often; still God has wrought a blessed work with several.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² E Demptyc Bryant, “Interesting article from the pen of Elder Emma Demptyc Bryant, *Leaves of Healing*, October 08, 1904, 861. ‘Africander,’ was obviously a wrong spelling of ‘Afrikaner.’ Spelling mistakes were common among 20th century American Pentecostal missionaries.

¹⁸³ Barnard, “From South Africa,” *The Pentecost*, Vol 1 No 8, July, 1909, 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Barnard's article suggests that even black people were prejudiced against each other. If this was true, then Africans were side-lined both at Bree and what was previously known as the "Zulu Mission" The Pentecostal missionaries became a connection only between the Zion tabernacle in Bree and the "Colored Church" in Doornfontein.

It is clear that racial discrimination featured in the AFM scarcely a year into its existence. According to Allan Anderson, it is in the minutes of one executive meeting held in March, 1909, that the baptism of Whites, Coloureds and "Natives" would as from that moment on be conducted separately.¹⁸⁵

As early as the mid-19th century, the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church decided that there would be 'no equality between coloured people and the white inhabitants, either in church or state.' That pattern was repeated in the AFM; when the euphoria of the 'Spirit' in reconciling different races dissipated, patterns of racial and cultural prejudice began to resurface.

3.9. "The Missus who prayed"

The greatest loss to Lake and his children was the death of his wife just eight months after their arrival in South Africa. Mrs Lake, after a short illness, died on December 22, 1908 at 9 p.m. According to her husband, she was buried at the Braamfontein Cemetery, in Johannesburg.¹⁸⁶ The people in Doornfontein called her, "The missus who prayed." In Lake's own words,

I was absent in the Orange Free State holding Native conferences in connection with Bro. Inahon (sic) when I received a telegram from Allie my oldest son, saying "Mama is ill come."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ A Anderson, 'African Pentecostalism,' *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXII, No 2 (1996), 118.

¹⁸⁶ JG. Lake, "Asleep in Jesus," *The Pentecost*, January-February, 1909. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. "Inahon" was most probably a misspelling of "Mahon." Edgar. H. Mahon was responsible for Dowie's Zion work in the Orange Free State and Lesotho. This was a common error in early missionary letters.

When Lake arrived his wife had already passed on. He immediately informed the people back in the USA and stayed on in South Africa for another 5 years. Lake may have been obnoxious in race and money matters; but it cannot be disputed that he made a huge contribution to the birth of Pentecostalism in South Africa. To be sure, it was his introduction of the Parham-teaching of “baptism in the Holy Spirit” that shifted Zion to Pentecost in Johannesburg. When his entourage arrived in Johannesburg ‘Healing’ was already entrenched among Dowie’s Zionists; what they didn’t know was “speaking in tongues.”

3.10. Parallels between Bree and Azusa Streets

The connection and parallels between Azusa and Bree Streets have not been sufficiently explored, especially with regard to matters of race and culture. Those patterns are clearer if we consider the lives of the two black men who were at the centre of the race and cultural cyclones that later spiralled out of control. On the one hand, William Seymour in Los Angeles became a victim of racial discrimination in the revival that broke out at Azusa Street in 1906.¹⁸⁸ The same people who spoke highly of him later ridiculed his capacity to lead the revival. They proceeded to organise other centres, both in Los Angeles and other locations.

On the other, Elias Letwaba at Bree Street in Johannesburg, despite very close connections with John G. Lake, and a very effective ministry, was almost written off in the history of the AFM in South Africa.¹⁸⁹ He was relegated to leadership positions in his area of influence that did not have any significant impact on the direction of the AFM.

¹⁸⁸ CM Robeck, “The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Studies*, (n.d.), 21, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/robeck.html>.

¹⁸⁹ A Anderson, “Pentecostals and Apartheid in South Africa during Ninety Years, 1908-1998,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Studies* (2000), 4. <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj9/anderson.html>.

3.10.1. William J. Seymour and the racial divide at Azusa Street

Pentecostal scholars like Cecil Robeck agree that early days of the revival at Azusa Street were marked by racial egalitarianism.¹⁹⁰ That however did not last very long before racial and cultural tensions began to plague the situation. The holiness preacher-turned-Pentecostal was ridiculed; even by his own teacher Charles Parham. Parham was the founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement mainly in the American South. That geographical part of the world was once known for racial and cultural bigotry; especially against African-Americans. Parham was also a Ku Klux Klan sympathiser; it is well known that some White Pentecostals were part of the Klan, and did not find that in violation of faith or conscience; they worshipped God in the morning and lynched black people at night.¹⁹¹

Parham was something of a controversial figure, and after a well-known moral failure many Pentecostals distanced themselves from him. However, they continued to use the name AFM. Seymour chose to use the name even when he had some bad experiences with Parham's paternalism. As we shall see later, it was the same name Lake used to usurp the work of Zion in Johannesburg.

Thus the first man to publicly undermine the work of 'Spirit' was the man who first made the doctrine popular in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. Seymour embraced the egalitarian nature of the work at Azusa but it soon became evident that certain measures had to be taken along racial lines in order to preserve—on a structural level—what the Spirit had begun. Later he reluctantly decided that White people—while they were

¹⁹⁰ CM Robeck, "The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism," *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Studies*, (n.d.), 5-10, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/robeck.html>.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

welcome at Azusa—would no longer participate in the leadership structures of the church.¹⁹²

3.10.2. Elias Letwaba: The “Native” with no name

In Lake’s evangelistic adventures in South Africa there were at least two “Native” evangelists that impressed him, Edward “Lion” Motaung and Elias Letwaba. Motaung was the ‘uncultured’ and ‘uneducated’ evangelist anointed by God who healed 75 lepers in Lesotho. Letwaba was the more educated one; once he prayed for seven hours to bring back a little girl from the dead whose neck was broken. Such were the capturing narratives of early Pentecostalism.

Motaung was in Lesotho and probably some parts of the Orange Free State, and Letwaba was in the North-eastern parts of the then Transvaal. “Lion,” like Daniel Nkonyane may have been unhappy with the AFM for one reason or another, in 1920, he seceded from the AFM and founded his own Zion AFM Church.¹⁹³ It was from his group that Engenas (Ignatius) Lekganyane seceded to form the Zion Christian Church in 1925.

Elias Letwaba joined the revival at Bree after a long search for spiritual meaning in various Protestant traditions. Someone referred him to the “Zulu Mission” in Johannesburg where Lake and his team had just begun a swirling revival. He rubbed shoulders with John G. Lake from the very inception of his ministry. It is said that at one time, the white Pentecostals at Bree Street threatened to throw Letwaba out when Lake invited him onto the stage, Lake responded by saying, “If you throw him out then I will go too.”¹⁹⁴ In some instances Letwaba invited Lake to come and preach in the

¹⁹² Ibid., 8-10.

¹⁹³ See, A Anderson, ‘Pentecostals & Apartheid in South Africa during Ninety Years, 1908-1998, *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*, September 2000, 3, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj9/anderson.html>.

¹⁹⁴ Healing and Revival, “*The Mantle of Healing*,” <http://healingandrevival.com/BioELetwaba.htm>

Potgietersrus area where he had already made a notable impact in his evangelistic initiatives. Lake spoke fondly of Letwaba, and often did not mention his name. To be sure, he mentioned him to Seymour on one occasion at least, and this was when he told his popular narrative of a little “Black thing” that came back to life,¹⁹⁵

At Potgietersrus a dead child came back to life when our native evangelist prayed seven hours after it died.¹⁹⁶

WF Dugmore, secretary of the AFM, mentioned him in a fleeting remark in an article in the *Word and Witness*,

Yesterday I heard the news that Bro. Letwaba was down with fever. We are praying for him.¹⁹⁷

There was another “Bro Booysen” who worked in the same area as Letwaba, the paragraph reporting on his work follows the one on Letwaba, but was given more coverage. Reporting on Letwaba in this instance may also have been due to the fact that he was already known to the Americans, largely due to reports by John G. Lake.

12 years after Lake’s departure in 1913 Letwaba was still active in the AFM. A certain B. Fockler—a visiting American Pastor—reported of him and his Patmos Bible School in Pretoria.¹⁹⁸ He was not effective only in terms of being an evangelist but he trained pastors and ran a Bible School with very limited resources. That was a great vision considering not even the White Pentecostals in the AFM had a school at the time. Like the “Non-Pentecostal” mission churches, growth and expansion of the work among “Natives” was largely as a result of the “Native evangelists.”

¹⁹⁵ JG Lake, “South Africa, Orange River Colony,” *Confidence*, August, 1909, 185.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ WF Dugmore, “South Africa in unity” *Word and Witness*,” August, 1915, 6.

¹⁹⁸ CB. Fockler, “Great Native Pentecostal Work in South Africa,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 7, 1928, 5-6.

As in most missionary articles in Pentecostal periodicals, Dugmore ended with a solicitation for funds, “all overseas offerings, unless otherwise designated, shall be put into the Native work.” The money, if it came, would be administered not by the “Natives” but by the white superintendent. Denis in an article on African Independent Churches discusses the controversies around money between missionaries and African leaders.¹⁹⁹

In 1913 when Lake returned to the USA the mantle of leadership in the AFM fell on Pieter le Roux. Some would argue that Letwaba was a natural successor to the work that Lake and his team had begun.²⁰⁰ Nel however mentions a letter in which the executive of the AFM wrote to Lake acknowledging the endorsement of his ‘revelation in the Spirit’ confirming le Roux as his successor.²⁰¹ If that is true then le Roux succession as leader of the AFM had Lake’s approval. It is also not plausible, given the racial animosities of the time that the white Pentecostals in Johannesburg would have agreed to the leadership of Letwaba. Le Roux became leader of the church from 1913 until his death in 1943.

Le Roux was not only overall superintendent of the church but also superintendent of the “Native” work. In any event, the AFM was already divided along racial lines and all “Native” work was regarded as “Mission work.” Letwaba’s effectiveness could only be determined within the confines and stipulations of le Roux and his Missions Committee. He was chosen as ‘Native’ superintendent in his area of influence; but always under the watchful eye of Pieter le Roux.

¹⁹⁹ See article, Denis, “Financial Resources and Economic Agency,” 29-49.

²⁰⁰ See abridged biography of Letwaba, Healing and Revival, “The Mantle of Healing,
<http://healingandrevival.com/BioELetwaba.htm>

²⁰¹ M Nel, ‘Pieter le Roux, Dutch Reformed Missionary,’ 127-143.

Letwaba was willing to flow along with the racial discrimination of the AFM; and until recently very little was known about him. The AFM—on its website—mentions William Seymour in Los Angeles and totally ignores one of its African pioneers—Elias Letwaba.

3.11. When race and culture usurped the liberating work of the Spirit

There is no doubt that there were racial and cultural tensions in early Pentecostalism both in the USA and in South Africa. The people themselves acknowledged being brought together by an overwhelming power beyond the limitations of race and cultural prejudices; yet they later backslid into their old patterns of life determined within the strictures of race and culture.

At Azusa some of the white Pentecostals people broke away and began their own churches. In South Africa, a similar thing happened, the work that began in a small ‘native’ church in Doornfontein was literally taken over and usurped by Lake and his Pentecostal entourage; and Afrikaners went on to draw racial demarcations around the liberating work of the “Spirit.” So-called “Natives” also began to find their way back to the Zulu Mission in Doornfontein or seceded completely to establish their own independent churches.

Indeed, the refrain, “God is doing a new thing” is very familiar in the unrelenting and varying ripple effects of Pentecostalism around the world. If Pentecostals could not change the undesired situation, they either took it over, if they had the power; or returned to the old and adapted it to their own desires. Whenever that happened, the “new thing” became the old replaced by another “new thing.” In the unfolding processes of the religious dissent and foxtrot where someone else would wait for the day “*Umoya*” (The Spirit) dictates new directions.

Chapter 4

4. Shifting Sands, from Doornfontein to Doornkop

When the AGUSA was organised in 1914 it demonstrated racial and cultural ideological patterns similar to those which first surfaced in the AFM in 1909. These two locations, totally independent of each other, demonstrated similar behaviour in matters of race relations, especially between black and white people. It was pointed out earlier how Elias Letwaba and other African leaders were discriminated against in the AFM; and about the same time, William Seymour suffered a similar fate at Azusa Street.

To be sure, there were connections between some members of the AGUSA and the group of missionaries who arrived in Doornfontein in 1908. However, that connection did not suggest any form of influence, with regard to race relations, on one group by the other. Lake's group occasionally voiced their dissatisfaction with what was going on in South Africa between black and white despite the fact that similar racial and cultural dynamics were brewing in the USA.

This is where the irony was introduced; American Pentecostal missionaries seemed to sympathise with the cause of the oppressed in South Africa and yet they were comfortable with the denominational structures back home which discriminated against the African-American. J. Roswell Flower, for instance, was the stenographer that publicised the missionary activities led by John G. Lake in Johannesburg; and played a pivotal role in raising financial support for missionaries in Doornfontein. He pioneered and published the periodical *The Pentecost* in 1908 and told the stories of Pentecostal missionaries to their supporters at home.²⁰² He later became the General-Secretary of the new AGUSA and continued to champion its missionary programmes; retiring in 1959

²⁰² D Ringer, 'J. Roswell Flower: Pentecostal Servant and Statesman,' *AG Heritage*, 2012, 17. An abridged biography of Flower is given in this article, and it shows the influence and impact he commandeered in giving direction to AGUSA missionary programmes.

after fifty-one years in the Pentecostal fraternity. He determined—through his publications—the ideological framework of the AGUSA missionary work. Yet during his tenure, as we shall see later, he was indifferent to the question of the ordination of African-Americans in the AGUSA.²⁰³

Following 1914, the AGUSA had a dying-off financial relationship with independent American missionaries and their AFM counterparts in Doornfontein. WF Dugmore, as we saw earlier, tried to put forward an argument in defence of continued support; his submissions however fell on deaf ears as the AGUSA established a new relationship with Henry M. Turney in Doornkop, Middelburg.²⁰⁴ Dugmore and other AFM missionaries, like one G Booyesen, had every reason to be concerned, they also received support from American donors even though they were South African.

This chapter will interrogate the reasons behind the decline of financial support for the work in Doornfontein. Why did the AGUSA suddenly lose interest in Doornfontein and what was the new church's biggest attraction to Doornkop?

The chapter will give a brief overview of the early history of the AGUSA and its connections with Parham's Apostolic Faith Movement. It will also discuss the connection of one Bishop C.M. Mason and his relationship to the organisers of the whites-only convention that gave birth to the AGUSA in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914.

The chapter will show how 'Arkansas 1914' impacted the relations of the AGUSA with the AFM in South Africa. It will also show that the switch by the AGUSA from Doornfontein to Doornkop was motivated by at least by two factors; first a reluctance to support work among white people, and second, an assumption that white Pentecostals in America were only willing to support work among the 'natives.' Essentially, the move

²⁰³ EL Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 247.

²⁰⁴ See article, WF Dugmore, 'The Lord Blesses in So. Africa,' *Weekly Evangel*, October 30, 2015, 4.

was economic and driven by a prejudice that defined missionary activity along racial lines; as in all missionary history, the ‘heathen’ were ‘native,’ ‘non-white’ and ‘non-western.’

4.1. The “Call” to Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1914

John G. Lake, leader of the Pentecostal missionary team that arrived in Johannesburg in 1908 from Indianapolis, returned to the USA in 1913. The reasons for his departure are not entirely clear; it was exactly five years since his arrival in 1908. He later surfaced at a Pentecostal meeting in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in the USA where the Assemblies of God was organised in 1914. According to “Minutes of the General Council” published in *The Christian Evangel*, Lake was a member of the committee and represented Pennsylvania and South Africa.²⁰⁵ That meeting—despite a heavy experience and realisation of the interracial nature of Azusa Street in 1906—was intended to divide Pentecostalism in the USA along racial lines. That would happen despite the central role played by pioneering African-American Pentecostals, like Lucy Farrow and William Seymour, in the early history of Pentecostalism in the USA.²⁰⁶

There were racial schisms at Azusa after 1906 but these revolved largely around individuals.²⁰⁷ The meeting in Hot Springs, Arkansas, represented a group of white

²⁰⁵ See “Minutes of the General Council,” *The Christian Evangel*, Nov 14, 1914, 1. Apparently Lake decided to be independent and continued to establish “Healing Homes” in many parts of the USA. See *Assemblies of God Heritage* (Springfield, MO: Spring, 1982), 6.

²⁰⁶ For an in-depth account of the events at Azusa Street, see C.M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2006), 1-16.

²⁰⁷ Robeck describes in a nutshell the events at Azusa. This footnote is an adaptation of his own, see, “The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* (2004), 20-21, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/Robeck.pdf>, Accessed January 25, 2015. “Between late summer 1906 when Bartleman took about 25 Whites from the mission, mostly former members of the Los Angeles Holiness Church, and formed a new congregation at Eighth and Maple, and Fisher took many of the Whites from Azusa Street along with a number of people who were disgruntled with Pastor Joseph Smale at First New Testament Church, (Charles F. Parham, “Leadership,” *The Apostolic Faith*, Baxter Springs, KS, 1:4 (June, 1912), 8, claims merely that Fisher “stole his congregation from Azusa”) and the spring of 1911 when William Durham walked away with a very large number of those who were now at the mission and formed a

Pentecostals with common interests and cultural convictions. Most of these men had previous connections with Charles Parham's Apostolic Faith Movement. Parham was a known sympathiser of the racially bigoted Ku Klux Klan in the American South.²⁰⁸ This extremist movement was notorious for lynching black people in the American South and upholding weird notions of racial purity. That racial and cultural predisposition was present in early Pentecostalism, and a generous component of representatives in Arkansas. Most of them came from the Southern States of the USA, and notions of "racial purity" were prevalent in that region. Some leaders in the AGUSA shared and defended these ideas, and tried to sanction them from 'biblical' basis.

Parham later ran into moral problems and many of his admirers distanced themselves from him.²⁰⁹ However, some revived the name Apostolic Faith Movement; others used Bishop Mason's "Church of God in Christ." Ironically, the invitation to Arkansas was directed to all "Churches of God in Christ" but ignored Mason, except as a spectator sitting on the balcony with his choir. More about him will be said later.

The headlines of a small article in the March 20, 1914, issue of the periodical *Word and Witness* read, "General Convention of Pentecostal Saints and Churches of God in Christ; Hot Springs, Arkansas, April 2 to 12, 1914."²¹⁰ This was one of a series of announcements in the periodical; the first was issued on Dec 20, 1913.²¹¹ More than 300 White ministers were persuaded to gather at the "Old Grand Opera House, 200 Central

new congregation just five blocks away at Seventh and Los Angeles Street, there were about half a dozen splits which occurred at the mission. All of them fell along racial lines. But throughout these years, many other Whites continued to pour into and go out of the mission."

²⁰⁸ See JR. Goff Jr., *Fields unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 157.

²⁰⁹ EL. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, Illinois University Press, 1993), 82.

²¹⁰ *Word and Witness*, March 20, 1914, 1.

²¹¹ "The Call to Hot Springs, Arkansas," *Assemblies of God Heritage 2*, number 1 (Springfield, MO: Spring, 1982), 1.

Ave.”²¹² They disagreed on many things but had one thing in common; the Pentecostal experience as taught by Parham and invariably identified by “the evidence of speaking with other tongues.” They also believed that the ‘baptism’ was a form of empowerment from ‘on-high,’ preparing and sending missionaries out to the ends of the earth.

Many eye-witness accounts affirm the reconciling work of the “Spirit” in achieving what went against the race and cultural stereotypes of the time at Azusa. A well-known statement was made by Frank Bartleman when he wrote “The color line was washed away in the blood.”²¹³ However, that had very little implications for the voices that made the call to Arkansas. In the name of the ‘Spirit’ they gathered to divide what the ‘Spirit had brought together.’

There are five men usually credited, by Assemblies of God historians, with the “Call” to Hot Springs: M.M. Pinson, A.P. Collins, H.A. Goss, D.C.O. Opperman and E.N. Bell. All men were involved in Pentecostal ministry at one level or another. Howard Goss was the man who had negotiated with the African-American, Bishop Mason for the right to sign credentials for white members of the Apostolic Faith Movement and Churches of God in Christ.²¹⁴ The “Call” had been made; it was not an easy task given the apprehensive minds of early Pentecostals against organisation, but the die was cast. Goss expressed their determination to carry out the plan,

We stuck to our guns and prayed. This took some courage, but it seemed we had a special filling of grace from the Lord, and we truly felt that he was leading.²¹⁵

This was the same Goss who “spoke in tongues” after a Black Pentecostal woman—Lucy Farrow—had prayed for him at Azusa Street.²¹⁶ In the beginning, those who issued

²¹² *Word and Witness*, March 20, 1914, 1.

²¹³ F Bartleman, *Azusa Street: An Eye Witness Account*, the Centennial Edition (Gainesville, FL: Bridges-Logos, 1980) 61.

²¹⁴ Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 83.

²¹⁵ “The Call to Arkansas,” *Assemblies of God Heritage* Vol 2, No 1 (Springfield, MO: Spring 1982) 1.

the “Call” were careful not to use the word “organization,” they settled for “affiliation” or “association.”²¹⁷ Probably because men like William Durham, a pastor in Chicago, were against ‘organising’ the work of the ‘Spirit.’²¹⁸ The meeting therefore, initially called for some formalised structure that would facilitate cooperation among its affiliates, it was not intended to organise a Pentecostal denomination. The issue was more around legal recognition, control of “scrupulous” individuals, foreign missions, unity in doctrine, a training institution and other common needs the “affiliates” might have had.²¹⁹ Up till then some of those functions were sourced from Bishop Mason’s church.

4.2. Bishop C.H. Mason and the “Call” to Arkansas

In attendance at Arkansas was a black man, Bishop C.H. Mason. He was leader of a mostly African-American group legally recognised as the “Church of God in Christ.” It was this status that attracted white Pentecostal preachers to seek credentials with his church. There were many advantages to it, including travel concessions on American railroads.

However, these white preachers had always sought to maintain a clear distinction in identification. Thus when Bishop Mason granted permission for leaders of the Apostolic Faith Movement to sign credentials for their members, it was always with the

²¹⁶ *Assemblies of God Heritage* (Springfield, MO, 2008), 41.

²¹⁷ “The Call to Arkansas,” *Assemblies of God Heritage* Vol 2, No 1 (Springfield, MO: Spring 1982) 1, 6.

²¹⁸ Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 114.

²¹⁹ *Word and Witness*, March 20, 1914, 2.

qualification, “Churches of God in Christ, and in unity with the Apostolic Faith Movement.”²²⁰

Bishop Mason did not attend ‘Arkansas 1914’ as a participant in the business of the convention; he was there, assumedly to bless the situation. Thus Goss—one of the conveners of Arkansas—who was among the first to be credentialed by Mason explained the relationship of white preachers to the bishop merely as a “business arrangement.”²²¹

Wayne Warner, former-director of the Assemblies of God archives in Springfield, Missouri, argues that the white “Churches of God in Christ” or the “Apostolic Faith Movement” did not break away from Mason in 1914 because there is no documentary proof that the two were ever one.²²² However, Warner does not deny the racial and cultural nuances of Arkansas; his contention is more around proof of the two arriving at some sort of formal agreement to merge. He does not answer the question, “Why did the AGUSA have to organise when they had access to Mason’s legal status?” Why was it important to shun the bishop and go separate ways?

It is not clear as to whether or not Mason’s opinion was asked for in the matter regarding Arkansas; nonetheless he was there in attendance with his choir. Perhaps his presence in Arkansas was a good gesture to cross the colour line. That may have been true of Mason but the rest of the attendees were there to redraw the colour line that “was washed away in the blood” at Azusa Street. Notably absent in the convention was William Seymour or a representative from Azusa Street. Thus the two most important black men in the early

²²⁰ See quote in, CM Robeck, “The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism,” *Cyberjournal For Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* (2004), 72, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/Robeck.pdf>.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²²² WE. Warner, “A Call for Love, Tolerance and Cooperation,” *Assemblies of God Heritage* 14, no 3 (Springfield, MO: Fall 1994), 3-4, 31.

history of Pentecostalism in the USA were among the first victims of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism.²²³

There was some recognition of the “race problem” in the new AGUSA as early as 1915, barely a year into its existence. Otherwise—as Robeck observed²²⁴—it would not have been necessary for a high ranking official like W.F. Carothers to address the concerns of “our Northern brethren” regarding the “race question” in the Deep South.²²⁵ A sizeable constituency of the Assemblies of God churches lay in the South of what was popularly known as “Mason-Dixon line.” This imaginary line divided the ‘Slave States’ in the South and the more liberal States in the North. The “North” was more accommodative and open to racial equality.

In a very skewed hermeneutic; Carothers maintained that racial prejudice, discrimination and racism were not a problem in Pentecostal churches in the American South. He argued at length that God created different nations and placed them in different geographical parts of the earth. That, according to Carothers was God’s way of preserving ‘the purity of nations.’ He didn’t say anything about the ‘Native-American’ on whose geographical apportionment he stood; at least according to his logic.

Carothers displayed an indifference towards the oppression of black people that was all too common in white Pentecostal circles. According to him, it was God who made people different nations or ethnicities; if God willed different God would have made humanity one colour as God made them one blood. He wrote,

²²³ E Alexander points out that among other reasons for white Pentecostals to break away from black Pentecostal leaders was their reluctance to accept “Negro” leadership. See *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2011), 20-27.

²²⁴ Robeck, *The Past*, 34.

²²⁵ W.F. Carothers, “Attitudes of Pentecostal White to the Colored brethren in the South,” *Weekly Evangel*, August 14, 1915, 2.

If our God had intended for man to have one color, as he did that they should have one blood, doubtless he would have attended to that in the making of nations.²²⁶

In his writing, he wanted to assure the “Northern” brethren that all was well in the South. Thus he concluded his justification,

Let our Northern brethren be assured that the Pentecostal people of the South, while conforming cheerfully to the generally wholesome regulations made necessary in the South, have not the slightest prejudice or lack of divine love for the colored people, nor is there any lack of mutual interest in the work they are doing and their spiritual welfare. They generally get better along with the Lord than we do.²²⁷

Thus worshipping the God of reconciliation in division, Carothers implied, was permissible if the laws of the land so determined. God was the ultimate appeal for matters of faith but never for matters of politics and society, that was left to the chiselling of the infamous laws of racial segregation known as ‘Jim-Crow Laws.’

To that extent Carothers represented the thinking of the new organisation and struck unison with the white Pentecostals of the AFM in the African South (Johannesburg). The AFM in Johannesburg introduced racial discrimination even to the extent of dividing waters of baptism as early as 1909. As we shall see later, the situation in South Africa, despite the similarities, developed independently of the USA.

Despite much common ground, the period beyond 1913 revealed trends of parting ways between the AGUSA and the AFM, especially after John G. Lake returned to the USA. Arkansas announced the demise of the Apostolic Faith Movement (USA) and of White Churches of God in Christ. After the meeting all churches affiliated with the new organisation were expected to use the name “Assembly of God” as soon as was practically possible. Thus a resolution of the meeting in 1914 read,

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

That we recognize all above Assemblies of various names, and when speaking of them refer to them by the general scriptural name, “Assemblies of God,” and recommend that they all recognize themselves by the same name, that is “Assembly of God” and adopt it as soon as practicable for the purpose of being more scriptural and also legal in transacting business, owning property, and executing missionary work in home and foreign lands, and for general convenience, unity and fellowship.²²⁸

In the final analysis Arkansas was successful in launching the aspirations of its conveners. Its focus went beyond the borders of the USA and covered “Canada and Foreign lands.” That caption appeared in the minutes of every General Council between 1914 and 1920. Thus, decisions made in the USA were legally binding to all member churches around the world. The intention was not only to spread the gospel but also to extend the imperial boundaries of the new AGUSA.

In November, 1914, leaders of the new AGUSA, met at the Stone Church, in Chicago, and affirmed their commitment to world evangelism,

As a council... we commit ourselves and the movement to Him for the greatest evangelism the world has ever seen.²²⁹

4.3. The connection between the AGUSA and the AFM after John G. Lake

‘Arkansas 1914’ was in many ways a replica of Johannesburg in 1908/09; and it refuted John G. Lake’s racial insinuations that “Negroes” had the right to fight for equal rights because they were more “civilised” than Africans.²³⁰ While Lake and some members of his group seem to have voiced some concern over race relations in South Africa, it was

²²⁸ *Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands*, Hot Springs, Arkansas, April 2-12, 1914-1920, 4.

²²⁹ *Assemblies of God World Missions*, www.worldmissions.ag.org/about.cfm.

²³⁰ This point was alluded to earlier. John G. Lake was not enthused with the idea of missionaries teaching equality to Africans, he insisted that Africans were not as “civilised” as American Negroes, they still needed to be Christianised and civilised before they could be taught notions of race equality, see “Important instructions for missionaries,” *The Pentecost*, June, 1909, no page.

only because it impeded their missionary initiatives. They did not connect the socio-political implications of the message they preached and the conditions of poverty and oppression of the people they were preaching to.

Lake was present in Arkansas, and participated in its deliberations; however, he did not continue with the newly formed AGUSA. It is safe to assume that after 1914 he did not have a ministry connection with the group that first sent him out from Indianapolis to Johannesburg in 1908. While he was part of the “Conference Committee” his name did not appear in the final “Ministerial Roll” of the minutes of the first AGUSA General Council Arkansas.²³¹ It is not clear what connections he explored with the AFM in South Africa after his departure in 1913. However, WF Dugmore, secretary of the AFM, maintained a constant flow of communication with his colleagues abroad, his main objective was to sustain the relationship between the AGUSA and the AFM that existed before Lake’s departure in 1913.²³²

4.3.1. Dugmore defends unity among missionaries in South Africa

Dugmore did his best to paint a perfect picture of unity among local and expatriate missionaries. Following Lake’s departure, he reported the existence of two missionary camps in Johannesburg: one “Apostolic” and the other “Pentecostal.” “Apostolic” was a designate for White AFM workers and “Pentecostal” was used for all expatriate missionaries.²³³ He also reported of a separate meeting of ‘native workers’ in the same breath; missionaries could attend “native” meetings but “natives” could not attend missionary meetings.

²³¹ *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands*, Hot Springs, Arkansas, April 2-12, 1914, 8-12.

²³² There wasn’t much information in the IFPHC archives regarding Dugmore’s biographical information. He was definitely English and may have been part of the *Uitlander* community that belonged, first to Dowie’s church, and then to the AFM. The AFM archives in Johannesburg could not be reached.

²³³ WF Dugmore, “Council Fosters Unity among all missionaries and missions,” *Weekly Evangel*, October 30, 1915, 4. See also, W.F. Dugmore, “South Africa in Unity,” *Word and Witness*, Aug, 1915, 6.

This message of “Unity” appeared first in the *Word and Witness* and then later in the same year in the *Weekly Evangel*.²³⁴ No doubt it was intended to reach as wide a readership of the participants in Arkansas as possible; this was where the money came from. His letters to the USA however suggest the existence of a problem between the “Apostolic” and the “Pentecostal” missionaries. Otherwise it would not have been necessary to write:

Much has been done in the direction of union. At one time it appeared that we might have amalgamation with the Pentecostal Mission, but the solution arrived at was affiliation with the appointment of an advisory council consisting of four members from each mission with Bro. Le Roux as Chairman.²³⁵

Le Roux was thrown into the deep-end of leadership. The Lake revivals had undoubtedly attracted many independent ‘Faith’ missionaries to Johannesburg. In 1917 George Bowie—an American—reported 43 expatriate missionaries who were active in and around Johannesburg. They were all part of the “Advisory Council of the Apostolic and Pentecostal Missions of South and Central Africa.”²³⁶

Naturally, the presence of so many expatriate missionaries had implications for money received from abroad. The question of money had earlier incessantly tormented missionaries in Johannesburg; it was again becoming a serious issue. There were too many expatriate missionaries and not enough money to support them. To aggravate the problem, both the “Apostolic” and “Pentecostal” missionaries were raising funds from the same sources.

It is plausible therefore to assume that some of the tensions between the “Apostolic” and “Pentecostal” missionaries probably revolved around money and space. Some white workers in the AFM considered themselves as competent for missionary work as their

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ G Bowie, “Pentecostal Work in South Africa,” *Weekly Evangel*, November 24, 1917, 13.

American or European counterparts; and therefore just as worthy to receive financial support from abroad. They also believed that they knew more about the “native” than their colleagues from abroad.

After Arkansas 1914, missionaries were now under pressure to account for the monies they received, especially as the AGUSA focused more intensely on evangelising the “heathen.” Even worse, they were expected to subscribe to the doctrinal tenets of the AGUSA and had to be sent and monitored from an American home church.²³⁷ This move was unprecedented; in the past missionaries just left for foreign lands under the auspices of a divine calling and the sanctioning of a few friends.

Whatever the tensions were between the two missionary camps, they seemed to necessitate the formation of “The Advisory Council of the Apostolic and Pentecostal Missions of South and Central Africa.” There were others like J.O. Lehman in the group that arrived in 1908 who decided to work independently from this Advisory Council.²³⁸

Dugmore’s message of “unity” sought to create a more stable and accountable picture of Johannesburg. That was important because no one could afford a hostile and divided missionary community. The situation also called for a revision of missionary strategies and the challenge to look beyond South Africa. Thus in 1915 the “Advisory Council” sent out W.F.P. Burton, W. Salter, Mr Blakeney and Bro Armstrong to the Belgian Congo.²³⁹ Armstrong, almost sixty years old, died on arrival due to that menace of all missionaries— “Blackwater Fever.”²⁴⁰ The Belgian Congo was later dubbed the

²³⁷ *Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands, 1914-1920, 20-21.*

²³⁸ EL. Wick, “South Africa,” *Weekly Evangel*, August 21, 1915, 4.

²³⁹ *Word and Witness*, November, 1915, 6.

²⁴⁰ WF Dugmore, “Council Fosters Unity Among all Missionaries and Missions,” *Weekly Evangel*, October 30, 1915, 4; W.P.F. Burton, “Encouraging Report on the Work in the Belgian Congo,” *The Weekly Evangel*, October 27, 1917, 4.

“Whiteman’s graveyard” because many Christian missionaries had either died or fallen desperately ill.

4.3.2. Dugmore and the “Native Fund”

Reporting on “work among the natives” was up-to-the-minute among Pentecostal missionaries, and connected to it was a constant request for funds. The period beyond 1914 seemed particularly challenging as the new AGUSA insisted on more stringent measures to control missionaries and funds. Dugmore, secretary of the AFM, did everything in his power to justify continued financial support.

In his letters to sponsors abroad he sought to assure that all monies received from abroad will be designated to the “Native Fund.” He wrote,

A special fund called “The Native Fund” has been created, and to this fund all overseas offerings are placed as well as local funds designated for that fund.²⁴¹

According to Dugmore, the fund would be administered by AFM Superintendent Pieter le Roux; who also served as general overseer of the AFM. Why was it necessary for le Roux to manage a “Native Fund” when he had a church to lead? In reality, while Dugmore was secretary of the AFM, he was the superintendent of the “native work.” It is plausible that le Roux’s name was used for ‘guarantor’ purposes in fund-raising because he was known abroad as an apostle to the ‘natives.’ As we shall see later, Dugmore’s reports very often place Pieter le Roux in the forefront of leadership in South Africa.²⁴²

Why was it important for the white leadership in the AFM to lead the “native work?” African leaders were already in the forefront of missionary work in their own areas with little or no support from abroad. Among these, Elias Letwaba, Lake’s favourite ‘African

²⁴¹ WF Dugmore, “The Lord Blesses in South Africa,” *Weekly Evangel*, October 30, 1915, 4.

²⁴² Ibid.

evangelist,' had demonstrated evangelistic, educational and management acumen to lead missionary work among the Africans. Letwaba was already known abroad, thanks to reports by John G. Lake, and Dugmore himself had reported on him and "Africans leap[ing] into the kingdom of God" during baptism in the good work the evangelist was doing.²⁴³ He later disclosed his unreserved apprehension with "native" leadership,

Our policy is and has been from the beginning one of trusting the native. It would seem that right here is the failure of all mission work that has been done in South Africa. The Natives have been trusted and have failed; the trust has been withdrawn and colour is blamed, and confidence destroyed.²⁴⁴

It is not clear what this "failure" was attributed to, but the statement did not recognise the failures of missionaries that constantly raised concern with sponsors.²⁴⁵ It assumed that workers in the AFM and expatriate missionaries could be trusted with ministry to the "natives" by virtue of colour. This was despite the fact that they reported more on what African pastors and evangelists were doing as compared to their own work. If "natives" could not be trusted with ministry, how could they be trusted with money?

Dugmore reported of "scattered elements"²⁴⁶ among 'natives.' Some assurance had to be given to supporters regarding overall control of the "work among natives." In another letter he assured them that these "scattered elements" are beginning to refocus. They were "good preachers" he wrote, but they "erred in doctrine."²⁴⁷ Effectively, he claimed that the white leadership in the AFM determined the measure of the Pentecostal message. This yardstick, largely undefined and unwritten, revolved around healing and 'speaking in other tongues.' He emphasised that the integrity of the "native work" could only be

²⁴³ "Native Work in South Africa," *The Weekly Evangel*, November 18, 1916, 12.

²⁴⁴ WF Dugmore, "Missionary Work and the Natives," *The Weekly Evangel*, February 12, 1916, 13.

²⁴⁵ *The minutes of the General Councils of the Assemblies of God (1914-1920)*, show a concern on the part of the AGUSA sponsors with missionaries on the field who could not account for funds allocated to them.

²⁴⁶ WF Dugmore, "The Lord Blesses in South Africa," *Weekly Evangel*, October 30, 1915, 4.

²⁴⁷ *Weekly Evangel*, Feb 12, 1916, 13.

maintained by Superintendent Pieter le Roux. Le Roux himself, didn't seem to have said much since the secession from John Alexander Dowie. Dugmore asked for prayers on his behalf,

Brother le Roux the Superintendent of the native work has much before him. We ask all Saints to stand by him in prayer. It has been decided that all overseas offering, unless otherwise designated shall be put into the native work. This should be done through the Superintendent in order to ensure that it shall be properly placed.²⁴⁸

In 1914 he reported in the *Christian Evangel* of a visit to Ezra Mbonambi in Zululand.²⁴⁹ Mbonambi was self-sufficient and lived in a “tolerable” house he wrote; he continued to add, “From a native’s point of view.”²⁵⁰ That condescending tone marked his paternal relations to African leaders in the AFM. Mbonambi later broke away to form his own independent church and was numbered among great Zulu prophets of his time.

In the same report Dugmore mentioned a visit to Basutoland (Lesotho today) in the company of Pieter le Roux and W.P.F. Burton.²⁵¹ The meeting was attended by early AIC leaders such as Elias Mahlangu and Edward “Lion” Motaung. Like Mbonambi, the two later seceded from the AFM to form their independent churches.

Dugmore had undermined whatever brewing dissatisfactions were taking place among African leaders in the AFM. His prophecy of stability with regard to factionalism and “scattered elements” was gradually falling apart before his eyes. His undertaking that the spirit of what he called “Ethiopianism” was not a threat in the “Native work” fell apart. He had promised,

²⁴⁸ WF Dugmore, “South Africa in Unity,” *Word and Witness*, August, 1915, 6.

²⁴⁹ WF Dugmore, “A Visit to Zululand,” *The Christian Evangel*, November 7, 1914, 4.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Burton was the British missionary who—with others—pioneered Pentecostal work in what was then the Belgian Congo.

Before the event of the AFM in South Africa,²⁵² Ethiopianism (a word used to describe a spirit of independence and refusal to recognise European control among the natives of South Africa) was a strong force. Within the AFM they have found that they are trusted, and given scope to work for the Lord. So that today Ethiopianism is no longer the same force that it was, and this forward movement among the native, which is out of touch with the government, has the touch and sympathy of Europeans in the AFM.²⁵³

What is clear in this statement is that Dugmore sought to assure his sponsors abroad that ‘Ethiopianism’ was not a threat in the AFM. He obviously had misinterpreted the signs of the time; secessions in the AFM came very early in its history. According to Allan Anderson, in 1910 Daniel Nkonyane broke away and started the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion. In 1917 Elias Mahlangu formed the Zion Apostolic Church of South Africa. Paulo Mabilitsa²⁵⁴ started the Christian Apostolic Church in Zion in 1920.²⁵⁵

African leaders also had disagreements among themselves, which led to further secessions. In 1920 Edward “Lion” Motaung broke away from Elias Mahlangu to form the Zion AFM Church. In 1925 Engenas (Ignatius) Lekganyane seceded from Motaung and formed the Zion Christian Church.²⁵⁶ While these independent churches can trace their beginnings to the Lake revivals of 1908 in Johannesburg, they were not started by Lake and his associates. Many of them came long after Lake’s departure.

Dugmore’s letters immediately cast a bad light on how Africans related to leadership and money. The man practically punctured every optimism or interest of moral or financial

²⁵² Here Dugmore is referring to the founding of the AFM in 1908. He is obviously referring to the “Ethiopian Movement” of Nehemiah Tile and other secessions that happened in the Mission Churches.

²⁵³ WF Dugmore, “Missionary work among the natives,” *Weekly Evangel*, February 12, 1916, 13.

²⁵⁴ Missionaries are well known for incorrect spelling of African names; this was probably a spelling caricature of the name “Mabiletsa.”

²⁵⁵ See A Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 107-108.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

support towards African leadership. Indeed, there is very little evidence to suggest that early African leaders in the AFM received funding from abroad. However, it was the “Native work” that attracted more funds.

4.4. New directions in missionary work after Arkansas in 1914

As mentioned earlier, after 1914, the AGUSA was increasingly becoming uneasy in supporting independent missionaries over which they had no control. The ultimate objective of the new body was to consolidate all finances and to support missionaries from centralised coffers. The move was more in favour of Americans than it was for people like Burton who was Briton. The net was also closing in on American missionaries who were reluctant to affiliate with the AGUSA. General Council resolutions emphasised that such missionaries would only receive funds specifically assigned to them. All non-assigned funds would be shared among missionaries with good standing with the General Council of the AGUSA. Nothing would be allocated on the basis of “compassion.”²⁵⁷ All missionaries would in future be subjected to “proper testing of those who claim to be called to foreign work,” and there would be “proper supporting and supervising of those approved.”²⁵⁸ All attempts would be made to consolidate mission funds from different centres and dispensed to deserving missionaries. The General Councils (1914-1920) resolved,

Whereas in the providence of God there have sprung up spontaneously in this movement throughout the country Pentecostal centres, and whereas these places have gathered about them a constituency by the publication of periodicals for the dissemination of Pentecostal truths, and whereas in consequence moneys for missionary purposes are being sent to these several centres and distributed upon the missionary field, therefore be it resolved that the Presbytery be instructed to seek to bring about a more perfect co-operation among these centres, in the

²⁵⁷ *Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands, 1914-1920.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

matter of the distribution of funds and the sending out of missionaries with a view to greater efficiency in each of these various centres.²⁵⁹

The implications for missionaries who were already on the ground were dire, especially because some missionaries often took the opportunity to write to different periodicals reporting the same situations.

4.4.1. The reluctance to support missionary work among White people

There was another twist with these sponsors; they were not willing to support missionary initiatives to other white people in South Africa. In fact, some missionaries proposed that missionary funds should be focused solely on “native work.”²⁶⁰ Missionaries among white people—it was argued—could raise support with the affluent people among whom they worked. Henry Turney—an American missionary—was said to be a proponent of this theory. It prompted a rebuttal from one Frances Taylor who was vehemently opposed to the non-support of Pentecostal missionaries just because they were reaching to other white people.²⁶¹ A rebuttal of her rebuttal insisted that Americans were more committed to evangelising the “native.”²⁶² Reports of missionary work among white people in South Africa were very few and strewn apart. A certain M. Lak, reported in 1918, of the cost-effective work he was doing among the Dutch, but such missionaries were not many.²⁶³ Thus a persistent perception with sponsors overseas was to see the missionary field as “native” and not “white.”

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 22-23.

²⁶⁰ F Taylor, “South Africa,” *Christian Evangel*, August 15, 1914, 4.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ M. Lak, “Riebeeck, East South Africa,” *The Christian Evangel*, December 28, 1918, 10.

4.5. Shifting sands from Doornfontein to Doornkop

In 1914 Lake had been away for only a year, and in that short space of time funding for ‘work among the natives’ in Johannesburg took a plunge. Not only did the funding gradually dry up but American interests shifted from Doornfontein to Doornkop. The people who now made up the AGUSA were the same people who were members of the Apostolic Faith Movement and of the White Churches of God in Christ before Arkansas. Doornfontein had earlier become their focus and every Pentecostal missionary’s wish in a foreign land. Suddenly, there was very little coming through by way of the ecstatic reporting that flooded Pentecostal periodicals around the world during the Lake revivals.

Pentecostals were not the only active missionaries around Johannesburg. Elphick points out to the saturation of missionary initiatives mushrooming all over urban areas around the mines,

Many other societies, aware of the strategic value of urban missions, were becoming active in Johannesburg, among them the South African General Mission, the Berlin Missionary Society, and the Methodists. In 1896, a new interdenominational society, the South African Compounds Mission, began work in the gold mine compounds, and several years later, the Anglicans founded the Rand Native Mission. By 1912 there were fourteen mission societies on the Witwatersrand; by 1923, twenty-six.²⁶⁴

4.5.1. Why Doornfontein did not measure up to AGUSA requirements

If the early history of the AGSA is traced to Doornkop in Middelburg as stated by Christine Carmichael,²⁶⁵ then a question arises; why was Doornkop chosen over Doornfontein? As pointed out earlier, the AGUSA adopted new and stricter approaches in evangelising “the native.” The General Councils after 1914 became more rigid around issues related to human and financial resources as well as matters of doctrine.

²⁶⁴ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 139.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

There were Pentecostal missionaries already spread around the world before the “Call” in Hot Springs, Arkansas, but most of these were independent and support mechanisms were not well coordinated. Doornfontein in Johannesburg was already swamped with independent missionaries. In 1917 there were more than 43 expatriate missionaries reported around Johannesburg. The fact that most of these did not appear in the approved list of missionaries after 1914 meant that they no longer qualified for financial assistance from AGUSA related sources; except if the funds were specifically designated to them. A resolution read,

Resolved: That all missionaries who desire the endorsement of the General Council should make application for a Fellowship Certificate, provided they already hold credentials from the General Council; and that those who do not have credentials should make application for the same and for fellowship certificate.²⁶⁶

On one level, that requirement was a drastic departure from the pre-1914 era, where ‘Faith’ missionaries were not required to demonstrate affiliation of any sort. It probably may have been too much to ask for with regard to missionaries who were not American; or those, like J.O. Lehman, who chose to remain independent. Missionaries were expected to belong, and to be monitored by a home-church. The missionary’s home-church was expected to uphold General Council resolutions with regard to missionaries in foreign lands. Most ‘Faith’ missionaries” neither had a home-based church nor a sending agency.

On another level, Doornfontein in Johannesburg—despite recognition to the contrary—had long passed the “field” stage. The AFM was now a *bona fide* movement, with its own leadership and missionary structures. They made their own decisions and gave direction to work among the natives.’ The AGUSA would not have the control it desired over its missionary work; moreover, there were no guarantees that funds allocated for ‘native work’ would always be used among the “natives.”

²⁶⁶ This constitutional proviso appeared in all *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Canada and Foreign Countries* between 1914-1920.

“Natives” could however not be trusted with money after Dugmore passionately discredited their competency and morality in that regard. As seen earlier, Dugmore went to great lengths trying to validate a continued funding relationship with the AGUSA, but it all seemed to fall through. The AGUSA had also made it clear in their constitution that no funding for the ‘natives’ would be done directly; such funding, if available would be facilitated by a missionary.

If the AGUSA continued with the “Apostolic” or “Pentecostal” missionaries, then they would have had no control of any sphere of work in Johannesburg. The only thing they would do is pour funds into a situation they could not manage. This “control” element was increasingly becoming an important feature in relation to missionaries in foreign lands.

4.5.2. Henry M. Turney: Founder of the Assemblies of God in South Africa in 1917

Henry Michael Turney, one of the early Pentecostal missionaries arrived in South Africa in the second half of 1909. In 1916, he reported in the *Weekly Evangel*, he had been in South Africa for seven years.²⁶⁷ A small article in *The Apostolic Faith* places him at Azusa Street in 1906.²⁶⁸ After that he established a ‘mission’ in San Jose, California, and another in Honolulu. He was called to Africa while doing evangelistic work in Alaska; he immediately started preparing for his journey to Africa.

He left New York for England in April, 1908. In England he established a number of ‘Pentecostal Missions;’ in one of these, at a place called Bedford, Miss Hannah James was the first to receive her ‘Pentecost.’ James resigned her work as superintendent of

²⁶⁷ HM Turney, ‘Letter from Henry M. Turney,’ *Weekly Evangel*, June 17, 1916, 4.

²⁶⁸ “Came from Alaska,” *The Apostolic Faith*, November, 1906, 2.

the “Railway Mission” and joined Mr and Mrs Turney to Africa.²⁶⁹ They left England on March, 1909, with a stopover in Paris, Egypt and Jerusalem. They arrived in Lourenco Marques (Maputo) about the middle of May, 1909.²⁷⁰

On Arrival in South Africa, he joined the other Pentecostal missionaries in Johannesburg, but working from Pretoria. In 1909, he was elected as Treasurer of the AFM, but resigned the position in 1910.²⁷¹ In 1911 he moved to Doornkop, he reported,

The work lies altogether among the natives, headquarters being at Doornkop 42, a native settlement situated about fourteen miles north of Middelburg... We have also five outstations which are cared for by native evangelists and pastors. Two of these are in the Pietersburg district, one in Potgietersrus district, one in Benoni near Johannesburg, and one in Sekhukhuneland.²⁷²

The mission station at Doornkop was handed over to him and his wife by a certain Mr. and Mrs Alex McDonald who were getting ready to start another mission station a little further from Middelburg.²⁷³ There was also a certain E.T. Slaybaugh who reported frequently on Doornkop and held the fort between McDonald’s departure and Turney’s arrival.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ Turney always reported on ‘pioneering’ mission stations that already existed. He reported on these ‘stations,’ as he called them as if they were his own initiative. The ‘stations’ in Doornkop, for instance, had been started by the IPHC before he arrived, and later he reported on them to the AGUSA. This was the work he ‘registered with the government. It is not clear however, if this IPHC work continued as AGUSA work after Turney died in 1920.

²⁷⁰ HM Turney, ‘Letter from Henry M. Turney,’ *Weekly Evangel*, June 17, 1916, 4.

²⁷¹ Robeck, *Azusa Street*, 278-279.

²⁷² HM Turney, ‘Letter from Henry M. Turney,’ *Weekly Evangel*, June 17, 1916, 4.

²⁷³ See article by the McDonalds, “Among the Matabele,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*, February 15, 1911, 3.

²⁷⁴ “From Brother ET. Slaybaugh,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*, March 1, 1911, 4.

Some archive documents at the Flower Heritage Centre in Springfield, MO, credit Turney with taking the gospel to Middelburg in 1910.²⁷⁵ However, that would be too generous because a lot of gospel activity was already going on in that area long before him or other Pentecostal missionaries arrived in the area. Missionaries of the Berlin Missionary Society deserve more tribute in that regard. Alexander Merensky—already ran the well-known mission station Botshabelo (place of refuge) near Middelburg.

According to Deborah James, Doornkop was founded in 1905 by a group of about 284 people.²⁷⁶ This was a small community of Bapedi who broke away from Merensky's Botshabelo for unfair labour practices and other tenant frustrations. Such a precedent had earlier been set by the Pedi Paramount Sekhukhune's half-brother, Johannes Dinkwanyane. In 1873 he led a breakaway from Merensky's mission station demanding ownership of land for his followers.²⁷⁷

4.5.3. The shift to Doornkop

Doornkop near Middelburg was less known despite some Pentecostal activity taking place there under the auspices of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. There were 'native' evangelists mentioned in reports by different missionaries. The names of David Mokwena, Chief Seth Ramaube, Noah Kaka and Gideon Magoane appear frequently in these.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ C Carmichael, "Progress of Pentecost in South Africa," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 31, 1964, 7.

²⁷⁶ D James, *Gaining Ground? "Rights" and "Property" in South Africa and Land Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 52.

²⁷⁷ Peter Delius gives a thorough account of the missionary activities that were taking place in and around Middelburg before Turney arrived. Merensky's Mission Station, Botshabelo (place of refuge) was in Middelburg not far from Doornkop. See Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the 19th Century Transvaal* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 108-123.

²⁷⁸ See one such article in, "A Call for More Workers." *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, May 1, 1911, 2.

In the combined minutes of the General Council of the AGUSA (1914-1917), 5 names appear on the approved missionary list in Middelburg; Charles Daniel, Emily Peters, Henry M. Turney, Annah E. Turney and Hannah James.²⁷⁹ These missionaries did not did not achieve anything on the scale of the Lake revivals; yet, it was “Doornkop” and not “Doornfontein” that eventually struck a formal relationship with the new AGUSA to form in 1917.²⁸⁰

Doornkop qualified where Doornfontein failed. Firstly, the Turney group worked among ‘natives,’ which was a very strong point against Doornfontein whose work was among Afrikaners. As far as ‘native’ work is concerned, there was more missionary presence in the area, even among Pentecostals themselves. That at least ensured that work among the ‘natives’ would continue. Thus Doornkop was an opportunity to explore new territory.

With the switch to Doornkop, it was clear, as we shall see later, that American sponsors were not keen on supporting either “white-to-white” or “native-to-native” missionary initiatives. However, that decision was reserved for opinion-makers such as J. Roswell Flower to make. The unwritten rule that determined all missionary activities, even as early as 1914, was ‘white to native’ evangelism.

4.5.4. Recognition by the Assemblies of God USA

Henry M. Turney registered the Assemblies of God in South Africa with the Department of Interior in 1917.²⁸¹ It is plausible to assume that whatever communication happened

²⁷⁹ *Combined Minutes of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands, 1914-1917*, 39-40. Miss James (unless it is a different person) is wrongly placed as a missionary in China but it is well known that she lived and worked with the Turney family; see also the *Combined Minutes of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands, 1914-1920*.

²⁸⁰ See article by C Carmichael, “South Africa,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, September 15, 1968, 19.

²⁸¹ D Smith, *Freedom’s distant shores: American Protestants and post-colonial alliances* (Waco TX, Baylor University Press, 2006), 174-175.

between AGUSA and Doornkop involved the Turneys and Miss Hannah James. After all, they were now recognised as official missionaries of the AGUSA in South Africa. Some suggest that a letter was written to Springfield, Missouri, in 1917 by the Turneys and Hannah James requesting recognition from the AGUSA, but there wasn't much in the AGUSA archives to suggest a move in that direction.

1917 was not a good year financially for Turney's work at Doornkop. In a letter to his donors in the USA he decried lack of funds, and the impediment it had become to furthering the work of his mission station. He mentioned a request by the Bapedi Paramount Chief whose name he did not mention,

The paramount Chief of Sekhukhuneland has sent to me twice to come and establish a station on his territory, and another chief from that district has called on me personally to ask that a school and a church might be opened on his village.²⁸²

According to a government report the Bapedi Paramount Chief at the time was Malekutu III who ascended the throne in 1905 and died in 1958.²⁸³ Missionaries were well advised to report on interesting matters in foreign countries and reporting on African Chiefs was common.²⁸⁴

Turney died on 16 January, 1920, and was buried in Doornkop, leaving his wife and Miss James to continue with the work.²⁸⁵ Doornkop, and the few outstations were now recognised as work of the Assemblies of God in South Africa. Thus the Turney group of missionaries in Doornkop legitimately laid the foundations for the beginning of the Assemblies of God in South Africa (AGSA). What is not clear however, is the extent to

²⁸² H Turney, 'Tests, Trials, and Triumphs in Africa,' *Weekly Evangel*, February 10, 1917, 12.

²⁸³ "Determination on Bapedi Paramountcy," <http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Determination%20on%20%20Bapedi%20paramountcy.pdf>

²⁸⁴ "A Word of Suggestion to the Missionaries," *The Weekly Evangel*, February 12, 1916, 12.

²⁸⁵ HA. James, "Brother Henry M. Turney Called Home," *The Bridegroom Messenger*, March, 1920, 3.

which the same work could be claimed by the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, there is reason to believe that the Turneys and Miss Hannah James played a foxtrot dance between the two organisations.

Chapter 5

5. The competition for scarce resources: The Pentecostal missionaries join the AGSA

In 1917 the Assemblies of God in South Africa (AGSA) was recognised by the AGUSA and registered by Henry M. Turney with the Department of Interior as a denomination in South Africa. It was legally bound by the constitution of the American ‘mother church,’ at least that was what the resolutions of the ‘General Councils’ implied in 1914 and beyond. The General Council of the AGUSA considered itself to be the custodian of all work under its auspices in the “USA, Canada and Foreign lands.”²⁸⁶

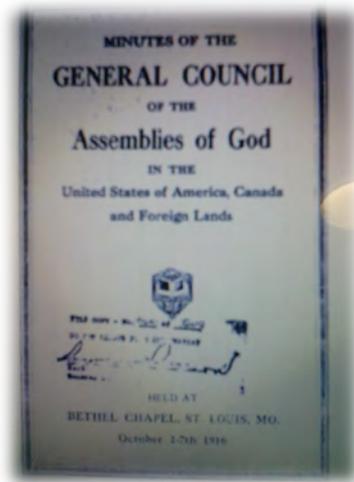


Figure 2: An example of the covering page of AGUSA minutes in 1916 (Flower Heritage Centre)

With the shift from Doornfontein to Doornkop, the recognition of Mr and Mrs Turney and Miss Hannah James, also meant that the AGUSA now had its ‘official’ missionaries in South Africa. It also meant that the issue of ‘control’ of the missionaries and their

²⁸⁶ See *Combined minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands, 1914-1920*. The caption at least suggested that whatever resolutions arrived at were considered binding to the church in the USA, Canada and in “foreign lands.”

work would be easier to handle than in the past. However, the task proved to be more formidable when the AGSA started attracting other expatriate missionaries who were not affiliated to the AGUSA.

The period 1917-1932 introduced deviations from AGUSA policy on two levels; firstly, the AGSA was joined by other missionaries, already in South Africa, who were accountable to other agencies abroad. They were from Canada, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and other European countries. Secondly, the AGUSA started sending in its own missionaries; men like Ralph Riggs, who later became General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God; and John Phillips, whose father died of Malaria in Swaziland in 1915, were among the first 'official' AGUSA missionaries to arrive in the 1920s. When Turney died in 1920, the AGSA had become a conglomerate of expatriate missionaries, with a rank-and-file membership that was predominantly African.²⁸⁷

The attempt to bring together the work of different Pentecostal missionaries in South Africa was not new. According to Rollin Grams, something similar happened in 1912.²⁸⁸ Pentecostal missionaries from Canada, Ireland, Great Britain, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland tried to come together, but the attempts fell through. If this is true then the attempts to form the Assemblies of God in South Africa began around the same time as in the USA.²⁸⁹ How everybody came to use the name 'Assemblies of God,' is not clear.

This fusion of missionaries, after 1917, would later prove to be a complex challenge for the AGUSA in South Africa. The fact that everybody fell under one umbrella, created problems of financial support. AGUSA missionaries, sent as per General Council

²⁸⁷ The Assemblies of God in South Africa, "Missionary Beginnings," <http://www.agfbrakpan.co.za/aog-in-sa.aspx>.

²⁸⁸ RG. Grams, *Stewards of Grace: A Reflective Biography of Eugene and Phyllis Grams, 1951-1962* (Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock, 2010) 44.

²⁸⁹ EL Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, Illinois University Press, 1993), 116.

stipulations, would naturally be expected to share their resources with others; especially with regard to funding their programmes and supporting missionaries in South Africa.

5.1. The challenge in the AGUSA and AGSA relationship

Notwithstanding the incongruities, the AGSA was recognised as the “South African District Council” of the AGUSA in 1925. The AGSA—totally African—was formed with expatriate missionaries in leadership. The relationship did not last long; in 1932 the AGUSA withdrew from its relationship with the AGSA. Christine Carmichael refers to the withdrawal in the *Pentecostal Evangel*,

The Assemblies of God in the Republic traces its beginning to 1910 when R.M. Turney and Hannah James located in Doornkop in the Eastern Transvaal and established the first Pentecostal mission station. In 1917 the American Assemblies obtained recognition in South Africa. Some 15 years later, by mutual agreement, the South African District Council became a separate organisation.²⁹⁰

As mentioned earlier, the Pentecostal mission station in Doornkop was not started by Henry M. Turney, it probably began with a certain W.M. Elliot, of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) in 1910. Another missionary who came before Turney was E.T. Slaybaugh, also of the IPHC. In a letter to ‘Sister Sexton,’ editor of *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*, he reported on other missionaries present in the area.²⁹¹ It also seemed strange that people in Doornkop remembered Mr and Mrs Turney as belonging to the IPHC and not the AGUSA. In a discussion with a ninety-year old woman, she recalled being in Mrs Turney’s IPHC Sunday school classes when she was about ten years old.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ C Carmichael, “Progress of Pentecost in South Africa,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 31, 1964, 7-8.

²⁹¹ See, E.T. Slaybaugh, “Twenty-Four Days Trip Up Transvaal, South Africa,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*, July 15, 1910.

²⁹² On February 19, 2015, I visited Doornkop in Mpumalanga to find out if people remembered anything about H.M. Turney and the Assemblies of God in the area. I did not expect to find anybody who remembered anything, to my surprise there was an old lady, ninety years, who remembered her days in

This Chapter will discuss the events surrounding the deviations of the AGSA from AGUSA General Council resolutions regarding missionaries; and the possible implications for the ‘separation’ of the AGUSA missionaries from the AGSA in 1932. While missionaries were in South Africa to convert the ‘native,’ money, or lack thereof, was a big part of it. They conducted their work in the context of acute rural and urban poverty. These conditions often provided them with information to create adverse and vivid panoramas of their situation among the ‘natives;’ despite the fact that they did not live with the people among whom they professed to minister.

Funds were limited and the AGSA, with its hodgepodge of missionaries, was not ideal to the AGUSA taking over financial responsibility for the work of all the missionaries. The AGSA’s affiliation with the AGUSA implied that scarce resources from the USA should be stretched among all missionaries. AGUSA missionaries, in particular, seemed to be on the losing end. Judging from Turney’s letter to the *Weekly Evangel*, money was hard to come by.²⁹³ This chapter will show how “Money’ may have led to the withdrawal of the AGUSA missionaries from the AGSA in 1932.

5.2. The influx of AGUSA missionaries into South Africa after 1917

The period after 1917 saw a steady inflow of AGUSA accredited missionaries trickle into South Africa. These new missionaries found a variety of fellow expatriates on the

Mrs Turney’s Sunday school in the 1930s. She even sang a song that she remembered from those days. At the time of the visit, Doornkop was in a state of tension between the descendants of the original occupants of the land who had escaped from Botshabelo, a Lutheran Mission Station under Alexander Merensky, and Amandebele. The community was once relocated to other places in the apartheid homelands but returned to the land in 1994. The dispute between the Bapedi and the Amandebele was about the land; the Bapedi insisted on their ownership and disputed the Amandebele’s presence in the land of their forefathers. I therefore could not ask for the old woman’s name or surname without raising suspicions. The interview was however held in the presence of one Bishop Mandla Khumalo who is a prominent civic leader in Middelburg.

²⁹³ Turney’s call for financial support was common among missionaries; this article may also speak to the dire financial straits they found themselves in during World War I (1914-1918). See HM Turney, ‘Tests, Trials and Triumphs in Africa,’ *Weekly Evangel*, February 10, 1917, 12.

ground who were already working under the auspices of the AGUSA; an arrangement they had not been part of.

Mr and Mrs John Richards were reported to have arrived in the 1920's in the Northern Transvaal (Limpopo today).²⁹⁴ Ralph Riggs, who later became General Superintendent, in 1922 reported from Kroonstad in the Free State.²⁹⁵ Earlier he worked from Venda in Limpopo, and named his daughter Venda because of his love for the place.²⁹⁶ Fred Burke arrived in 1921;²⁹⁷ he later played an important role in the biblical education of leaders of the African Independent Churches. The current leader of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Bishop Ramarumo Lekganyane, studied for three years via a correspondence course from Burke's 'All Africa School of Theology' in Witbank.²⁹⁸

Edgar Pettenger arrived in 1921 and stayed for 45 years in South Africa. He determined—almost singlehandedly—the subtle and unwritten philosophy that guided AGUSA missionary activities in South Africa. Edgar and Mabel Pettenger retired in the early 1960's.

5.3. Edgar and Mabel Pettenger: A strategic centre for Pentecostal missionaries

²⁹⁴ Carmichael, "Progress of Pentecost in South Africa," 7.

²⁹⁵ R Riggs, *The Latter Rain Evangel*, April, 1922, 23.

²⁹⁶ See article by G Gohr, "Whatever Happened to Lillian Riggs," *Assemblies of God Heritage* (Springfield, MO, Spring, 1988) 7, 18. See also, Rollin G. Grams, *Stewards of Grace, A Reflective, Mission Biography of Eugene and Phyllis Grams in South Africa, 1951-1962* (Eugen OR, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 108.

²⁹⁷ RB Rill, "Blessings and Hardships: Experiences of the Fred Burke Family in Africa," *Assemblies of God Heritage* (Springfield, MO, Winter, 1993-94) 4.

²⁹⁸ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals, The Charismatic Movements in the Churches* (Minneapolis MN, Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 150. Bishop Ramarumo Lekganyane studied for his ministerial certificate with Fred Burke in a three-year correspondence course offered at the 'All Africa School of Theology' after the ABTI relocated to Rustenburg.



Figure 3: Edgar and Mabel Pettenger (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center).

AGUSA and other Pentecostal missionaries were spread all over the then Transvaal. One particular area of interest was the ‘gold fields’ in the Witwatersrand. Since the discovery of gold in 1886 and the subsequent recruitment of thousands of migrant labourers from different parts of Southern Africa, Johannesburg became a hive of economic activity. Cecil John Rhodes was the imperial muscle behind the mining drive that would last for more than a 100 years. The huge initiative to mine deep gold deposits required cheap labour, and that need was met through a massive recruitment network in South Africa and neighbouring countries. The well-financed system spread as far as Nyasaland (Malawi). African migrant workers were enlisted 6 to 18 months in the mines after which they would return to the impoverished conditions of their rural origins.²⁹⁹

Pentecostal missionaries who first arrived in 1908 in Johannesburg made frequent references to the situation in the mines. They were not the first ones; other missionary agencies were already well established in the area. Like their protestant counterparts, they also identified an unmatched opportunity to present the gospel to thousands of “heathens” at any given time. Here gathered Africans from different parts of Southern Africa.

These Pentecostal missionaries focused their activities largely on the city and other areas west of Johannesburg. Edgar and Mabel Pettenger chose to focus on townships east of Johannesburg. Pettenger was 22 years old when he first landed in Africa, he was in the company of Fred Burke, who later became principal of an Assemblies of God Bible School in Witbank, the African Bible Training Institute (ABTI).

²⁹⁹ See different articles on Cecil John Rhodes and his mining initiatives in Johannesburg, compiled by S.F. Malan, *South Africa in the Nineteenth Century* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 1987), especially 276-302.

Edgar and Mabel Pettenger operated from Springs, Brakpan, and Benoni, on the East Rand. They were first sent out by what was popularly known as the Bethel Board; the same agency that sponsored Ralph Riggs during his brief missionary stay in South Africa. Riggs later became the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God USA (1953-59). As we shall see later, he was the man who later sought the assistance and counsel of the African evangelist Nicholas Bhengu in trying to resolve the “Negro problem” in the AGUSA, in the mid 1950’s.

The board was financed by a few rich people and made some money from a trust fund. It however folded in 1929 after it was negatively impacted by the Great Depression³⁰⁰.

5.4. The “Stone Church” in Chicago

After Edgar and Mabel Pettenger received their last cheque from the Bethel Board they moved to the General Council of the AGUSA.³⁰¹ They also regularly received financial support from the Stone Church in Chicago. While the Stone Church was part of the General Council of the AGUSA, it facilitated its own robust missionary budget.

William Hamner Pipe, had been one of John Alexander Dowie’s prominent assistants before he started the church in 1906.³⁰² In May 15-19, 1910 the church hosted the World Missions Convention. This was a gathering of Pentecostal believers who were thoroughly impassioned with the call for world missions. They believed that the message of Christ was not about “civilising heathen nations,” the more urgent call was to “Christianize” them.³⁰³ Chicago was “a humble affair” compared to the World

³⁰⁰ GB McGee, “Missions Overseas (N. American Pentecostal)”, in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess & Eduard Van Der Maas, eds (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2003), 891-892.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² EL Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 79.

³⁰³ HD. Curtis, “Pentecostal Missions and the Changing Character of Global Missions,” *Assemblies of God Heritage* (Springfield MO, Volume 33, 2013), 63-68, 75.

Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, but the commitment was undeniable.³⁰⁴

The Stone Church was also the location where the second General Council of the AGUSA was held in November, 1914. In that church, leaders of the newly formed AGUSA committed themselves to evangelise the world on a scale never witnessed before. The church was also strategically placed for conventions and missionary rallies,

Because of its central location in Chicago, the church often hosted conventions and missionary rallies. In a day when many people travelling across America changed trains in Chicago, the Stone Church opened its pulpit to innumerable evangelists, missionaries and pastors and hosted large missionary conventions.³⁰⁵

Edgar and Mabel Pettenger had strong ties with the church, and featured regularly in their resourcefulness to promote missionary work around the world. In fact, Mrs Pettenger's parents had been part of the early days at the Stone Church. At one time she was asked to hold the fort for six months in the absence of its pastor.³⁰⁶ While on furlough in 1928 they were given the opportunity to present their missionary vision for South Africa.

³⁰⁴Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 80.

³⁰⁶ J Cole Rous, "What Motivated the Early Pentecostal Missionaries," <http://globalchristiancenter.com/the-history-of-world-missions/32076-what-motivated-the-early-pentecostal-missionaries>.

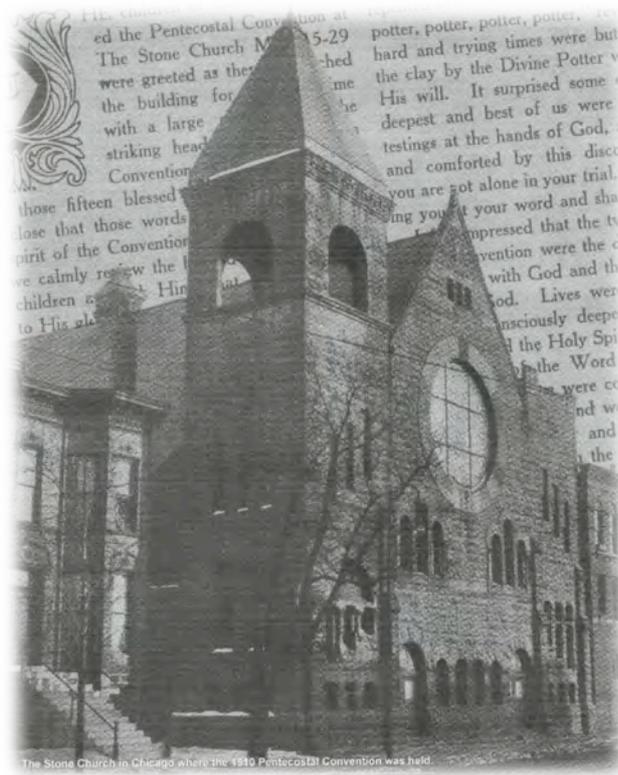


Figure 4: The Stone Church in Chicago (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre).

5.5. Edgar Pettenger defines his “Strategic Centre for mission work in South Africa”

On February 26, 1928, Edgar Pettenger fervently unfolded his vision for South Africa at the Stone Church. His knowledge of the country was now more realistic than when he first arrived in 1921. He spoke of the mines in South Africa, and painted a vivid picture of the housing conditions of ‘natives’ in the compounds,

They are housed in large brick-buildings called compounds. A compound is a huge building covering many acres of ground, built in a great square so as to form a court in the centre. Some compounds house 7, 000 men, others less, depending on the size of the building. ... There are about 250 000 men in these compounds besides thousands in the various locations where men, women and children live. They come pouring in from Portuguese East Africa, Swaziland,

Vendaland, Zululand, Gazaland, Basutoland, and other native territories to help the white man dig his gold.³⁰⁷

“The gold fields have been likened to the hub of a wheel,” he continued, “As the spokes reach to all parts of the wheel so there is that vital connection to all parts of the country from the Rand.”³⁰⁸ According to him, there was no other place in Africa where “raw heathens” gathered in such great numbers. If the gospel was preached in the compounds, many would take “a measure of the Saviour’s love with them” when they returned to their “heathen kraals.”³⁰⁹

Pettenger’s language was not different from that of the missionaries before him. These demeaning descriptions were common among missionaries, in 1916 a certain Sister Bertha Sutley reported on “savages in Swaziland,”

Sister Leidy and I have been alone in the work here... We find it very uphill among these savage people, this being considered the hardest tribe in all South Africa, and we sincerely desire your earnest prayers.³¹⁰

These descriptive terms were perfectly normal for missionaries as they told their different stories in Africa. Most of them just took it for granted that African cultures were of an inferior stock. Pettenger and his wife were not an exception.

He was totally cut off from the reality of the social, political and economic needs of the people he ministered to. The East Rand in particular exploded with economic and political insurrection all around him. In 1922 there was a major strike in the East Rand mines; both black and white people died in a situation that proved to be a sore thumb for

³⁰⁷ E Pettenger, “The Most Strategic Centre for Mission Work in South Africa,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*, April, 1928, 17-20.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ B Sutley, “Work among the savages in South Africa,” *The Weekly Evangel*, March 18, 1916, 12.

General J.C. Smuts. Such striking social and political events hardly ever got mentioned in his reports.

For Pettenger, the thousands of Africans in the mines were there to “help the white man dig his gold.” He described the mines in the East Rand as the largest and richest, yet he was totally unmoved by the poverty and oppression around him.

He took his audience on an imaginary tour of a compound,

In this compound are housed about 5 000 men. It is divided up into many rooms, each room accommodating from twenty-five to fifty men. The room is divided into cement bunks just long enough for a man to sleep on. The native men throw their blankets or anything else they might possess on these bunks and here they make their homes for a few months.³¹¹

While Edgar was busy in the compounds his wife Mabel was knocking on doors in the African townships, Brakpan Old Location was her favourite. Life in the suburbs was totally different from the townships; poverty was the order of the day, just as noticeable as in the compounds. The women did not always welcome her, but against all odds, she was making inroads. Some threw the door in her face, but ultimately a few would surrender to the message of Christ.³¹²

The situation in the townships was near-accurately described by Glenn Saxon. He wrote,

In Johannesburg itself one is impressed by an air of rush and bustle, the modern buildings, the varying paces of business and commercial activity—and by natives dressed in a little more than rags. A visit to Native sections of the city reveals fantastically crowded and impoverished conditions which must be seen to be believed. These are some of the contradictions on which not only South Africa but gold mining is based.³¹³

³¹¹ E Pettenger, *The Most Strategic Centre*, 18.

³¹² M Pettenger tells of one such incident in Springs, see Mabel Pettenger, “Here and there on the Mission Field, *The Latter Rain Evangel*, January, 1930, 18.

³¹³ OG Saxon Jr., “Gold Mining in South Africa,” *The Analyst Journal*, Volume 9, No 5 (November, 1953), 61-63.

5.6. “Enemies of the cross:” The “isms” in the compounds and black locations

Missionaries were not the only ones on the scene, there were also radical forces inspired mostly by African nationalism, and Communism at work in these locations of poverty and oppression. The African National Congress (ANC) and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) were already active in recruiting and spreading the propaganda of their causes. The South African Communist Party (SACP) had a lot of activity going on among African, and Coloured farm, and migrant workers. In 1928 they were actively spreading their propaganda through their night-schools. In a document issued in 1928 the SACP stated,

South Africa is dominated politically by the white exploiting class. Despite the conflict of interests between the Dutch bourgeoisie and the English imperialists, the basic characteristic of the political situation in South Africa is the developing united front between the Dutch bourgeoisie and the British imperialists against the native population. No political party in South Africa with the exception of the Communist Party advocates measures that would be of real benefit to the oppressed native population, the ruling political parties never go beyond empty and meaningless liberal phrases. The Communist Party of South Africa is the only Party of native and white workers that fights for the complete abolition of race and national exploitation that can head the revolutionary movement of the black masses for liberation. Consequently, if the Communist Party correctly understands its political tasks it will and must become the leader of the national agrarian revolutionary movement of the native masses.³¹⁴

Edgar Pettenger saw these as diabolical forces that made the need to preach the gospel even more urgent. He told his audience at the Stone Church,

The enemies of the cross of Christ all realise [the urgent need of the gospel] and they are not losing anytime in spreading their false doctrines. Bolshevism, Socialism, and other isms are spreading thru the compounds and various locations.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ “The South African Question,” *South African Communist Party Documents 1928*, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/1928/comintern.htm>

³¹⁵ E Pettenger, “The Most Strategic Centre,” 18.

Pettenger arrived in the aftermath of World War I (1914-1918); this period included imprisonment, death and industrial strikes in the mines.³¹⁶ But Pettenger and other Pentecostal missionaries were immune to these. If anything, they did not consider it their duty to speak out against political and economic imbalances of the time. A typical excuse was that they would be deported if they spoke out, and this would have jeopardised, their mission. Ironically, they agreed with the socio-political situation where it moved their missionary cause forward.

Pettenger conceded that evangelising these thousands of “natives” was not an easy task, except for occasional breakthroughs of “forty or fifty [who] will raise their hands during the cause of a service and desire to serve the Lord.”³¹⁷ Sometimes, there were more isolated and smaller numerical gains, like one Mabuza who set weeping through a sermon, and later returned to Gazaland to “radiate the joy of a new-found salvation to a people who still sit in the darkness of heathenism.”³¹⁸ Another, was a man from Swaziland named Joseph, he was converted under the ministry of “native minister,” Tandukubona. Joseph later died of a mine related illness. However, the prize was in receiving a card from a fellow missionary in Swaziland, who confirmed that Joseph was faithful to the end. The cause of his death was not the point; it was good enough that he “died in the Lord.” Preoccupation with the “soul” and life after death was a glaring feature of the Pentecostal missionary message.

Missionaries were engrossed with the paternal and condescending attitude of “my native evangelist.” Pettenger was no exception; as we shall see later it brought him into fierce

³¹⁶ Walshe gives a brief description of the aftermath of WWI and its implications for black people. The townships were anything but calm, and many people opposed the white systems of oppression or sought for relevant answers elsewhere. These radical movements often provided an outlet for venting political and economic frustrations. See P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Cape Town: AD Donker Publishers, 1987), 71-85. Pentecostal missionaries wanted to eat their cake and have it too. They lived in the affluence of white South Africa and practiced ministry in the squalor of the townships and villages.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

confrontation with African leaders in the AGSA, especially the well-known evangelist Nicholas Bhengu.

After 16 months on furlough, the Pettengers and their son Vernon were ready to return on a second term to the “Dark African continent.”³¹⁹ He bade America goodbye in a very depressing article in the *Latter Rain Evangel*,

We go to a people who sit in gross darkness, who love their witchcraft, their heathen beer, their dances and all allurements of the devil. We go to a country where climatic conditions are most trying and enervating, where fevers, sleeping sickness and others diseases peculiar to Africa abound on every hand, where poisonous miasma and blighting pestilence lurks in the darkness.³²⁰

The poverty of the townships caused many people to devise schemes of making a living. Often women ‘cooked’ African beer to sell to customers after a hard day’s work in the mines. They were always in trouble with the law, and explored various ways to avoid being caught, including digging holes in the ground to hide their intoxicating concoctions. Missionaries took pictures to show how desperate the situation was; it reinforced the need for their presence and continued support.

Missionaries were affected by all sorts of sickness; even death. Mrs Austin Chawner, speaking at the Stone Church reported of 17 missionaries who died of the dreaded “Black-Water-Fever.” She wrote from Mozambique, the same place where missionaries died, and where she sought to revive their work. She almost paid with her life, but survived the ordeal.³²¹ Africans died too, but their stories were hardly ever told; evocative and adventurous narratives about missionaries were sure to catch the attention of sponsors abroad.

³¹⁹ E Pettenger, “Back to South Africa,” *The Latter Rain Evangel*, May, 1929, 20.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Mrs CA Chawner, “The Door that God Opened,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, November, 1936, 18.

Pentecostal supporters abroad depended on their missionaries for information regarding Africa. The darker, one-sided, and more intense the picture the missionaries painted, the more likely a positive response they would receive for financial appeals. In 1928, Johannesburg was a thriving city with numerous high-rise buildings, but such a picture would have been typical of American cities and not likely to stimulate financial support.

5.7. Mammon and Missions: The competition for scarce resources

Money was important for missionaries; there are many who returned home when the support funds dried up. Ralph Riggs—for instance—did not return to South Africa after the ‘Bethel Board’ folded in 1929. It wasn’t only a sensitive issue but it often created tensions among the missionaries themselves. John G. Lake who was leader of the 1908 missionary entourage was often implicated in financial scandals.³²² Robeck refers to tensions among missionaries that may have led to Henry M. Turney’s resignation in Johannesburg as treasurer of the AFM. Apparently he was under the influence of George Bowie and Archibald Cooper. It was these tensions, presumably around money, that finally led to Tom Hezmalchalch’s returning to the USA and leaving John G. Lake to take over leadership of the AFM in Johannesburg.³²³

When the AGUSA was formed in 1914 it planned among other things to streamline missionary finances and to demand more accountability. The period beyond 1917 proved more problematic for the AGUSA because this new terrain in South Africa included missionaries from other countries abroad. Notable among these was one H.C. Phillips who started a printing press in Nelspruit, another was a Canadian Austin Chawner who had a flourishing work among Mozambican migrant workers who had

³²²An article appeared in the *Confidence* reflecting concerns regarding funds in South Africa. John G. Lake was at the centre Alex Boddy (ed), “South Africa,” *Confidence*, September, 1909, 209.

³²³ George Bowie, Archibald Cooper and Henry M. Turney were some of the American missionaries who arrived in Johannesburg between 1908 and 1910. They were not part of the original Lake entourage that started the revivals in and around Johannesburg. See, Cecil M. Robeck, JR., *Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville TN, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2006), 279.

returned home from the mines. Phillips (British) and Chawner (Canadian) worked together at Shingwedzi, near Mozambique, and the Emmanuel Printing Press in Nelspruit.

This mix of expatriate missionaries was a problem with regard to funding. While the non-AGUSA missionaries sourced some funding from the USA, they were also funded by their sending agencies. Accredited AGUSA missionaries looked only to their home church. It seems they were the hardest hit by insufficient funding. Between March and April 1925 Mr and Mrs Pettenger received only \$10 from the Stone Church,³²⁴ while a certain E.M. Scurrah received \$3.³²⁵ The Missionary Secretary reported on the dire situation in South Africa,

The enlargement of the work in South Africa with 6 missionaries is handicapped for lack of funds and recruits.³²⁶

5.7.1. The tensions surrounding financial resources

Austin Chawner's story and work is important because it may point to the precise area of conflict between the AGUSA and other expatriate missionaries who formed part of the AGSA. He was a Canadian, sent by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC); this group formed a "Canadian District Council," until 1925.³²⁷ This was the year the AGSA was granted a similar status. The PAOC withdrew from the AGUSA relationship to form an independent Canadian organisation. It had become, in its own right, a

³²⁴ The Pettengers may have received funding from other sources, but the sum of \$10 received from the Stone Church shows how AGUSA missionaries were working on a tight budget.

³²⁵ "Missionary Disbursements," *The Latter Rain Evangel*, May, 1925, 12.

³²⁶ *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States and Foreign Lands, 1914-1925*, 49.

³²⁷ The Constitution of the AGUSA recommended that "District" or "State" Councils in foreign lands could be organised in harmony with the stipulations of the General Council. See, "*Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands—1914-1920*", 8.

missionary sending organisation and by 1927 it operated a healthy missionary budget. According to Stout, it withdrew from the AGUSA “primarily because of differences over the missionary policy.”³²⁸ It is this difference, among others, that led to the ‘mutual agreement’ to separate.

In its very first publication of the *Pentecostal Testimony* in 1920 the PAOC announced,

Missionary money should be sent to the head office for distribution. The Head office is always in touch with distribution centres in Canada and the United States, it is also in touch with all foreign lands, and is in a position to know the best and the safest way of sending out money to the foreign land.³²⁹

The PAOC expressed the need to administer its own missionary funds, but as a “District Council” it had a constitutional obligation to support AGUSA missionary initiatives. Thus in 1925 it pushed for independence based on an “amicable agreement.”³³⁰ That agreement implied that missionaries like Chawner could receive funds without declaring them to the wider AGSA. It practically meant that some missionaries were being financed from the AGUSA, and their home agencies at the same time. AGUSA missionaries could only look to the USA for their needs.

Austin Chawner was ordained in 1925 at a conference of the PAOC in London, Ontario. According to PAOC records, “he was only six years old when he first went to Africa in 1909.”³³¹ A year earlier in 1908, his father had set out by faith for Zululand at the prompting of a voice and the vision of a sea of black faces around him. The following year senior Chawner returned to Canada to fetch his children and his wife Emma. Austin

³²⁸ B.M. Stout, “Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada,” in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess, ed. (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 962.

³²⁹ “Missionary,” *The Pentecostal Testimony*, December, 1920, 3.

³³⁰ Stout, ‘Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada,’ 962.

³³¹ “C. Austin Chawner and the Miracle of Mozambique,” *World Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC): Featured Story*, <http://www.paoc.org/about/archives/featured-story> Alternatively, see history of the Immanuel Press in Nelspruit, <http://emmanuelpress.org/History>

was the little boy who aspired to be a businessman but ultimately surrendered to the call to go to Mozambique.³³²

By 1925 the PAOC had already begun to support its own missionaries around the world. Austin's work in present day Mpumalanga is still being told with pride and passion today.³³³ In 1927 he worked among the "Tsonga" people in the Transvaal because the authorities in Mozambique refused him entry. He began a Bible School in the "Tsonga" language and also did a lot of translation work into a number of Mozambican languages. Later he purchased a mission station at Shingwedzi not far from the Mozambican border. It is from this mission station that a lot of gospel literature was printed and sent into Mozambique.³³⁴

The AGUSA on the other hand was running into dire financial straits. In 1921 the missionary budget was tight; J. Roswell Flower, the Missionary Treasurer drew a gloomy picture of a budget pressed by "special projects,"³³⁵

During the last four months these special projects have hindered regular missionary giving, so that we have only been able to send an average of from \$20 to \$25 per month to each missionary, a sum far too small to meet the needs of personal support, employment of native preachers, and the many needs of the mission stations.³³⁶

The question of "special projects" had a dual negative impact in South Africa. Not only did it squeeze individual missionary support but it also meant that money received for the projects had to be spread across AGSA projects like the printing press in Nelspruit

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ "Special projects" would have meant any physical project on the foreign field such as purchasing of land or building churches. Some donors seem to have given money to these projects which ought to have been given to individual missionaries.

³³⁶ JR Flower, "Where the Money Goes," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, April 30, 1921, 12.

that were not directly AGUSA missionary projects. As a “District Council,” the AGSA qualified for US support. To their own detriment, AGUSA missionaries usually reported on all projects as if they fell under their domain. In 1928 a report appeared in the *Pentecostal Evangel*,

Brother and Sister Chawner are establishing a mission station farther east, near the Shingwedzi River where the country is thickly populated. They have been holding evangelistic services among the villagers up to the present. Please continue to pray for this needy field, and for the brothers and their wives.³³⁷

The printing press in Shingwedzi for instance was more PAOC than AGUSA; it is PAOC to this day. The report was thorough and gave an overview of what was happening in South Africa. It is such reports that determined whether support for a particular “field” was justifiable or not.

All Canadian missionaries were removed from the AGUSA list between 1925 and 1933. PAOC missionaries in South Africa now received support direct from Canada. Reporting on the Transvaal (South Africa) also lessened as the region received nominal attention.³³⁸ By the end of 1935 there was very little missionary reporting going through to the AGUSA.

5.7.2. The tough times beyond “The Great Depression” of 1929

The Great Depression of 1929 and beyond did not only force the Bethel Board to fold but it impacted negatively on the missionary offerings in American churches. On April 1, 1932 Noel Perkins, Missionary Secretary of the AGUSA Foreign Missions Department, reported on the desperate situation in which his department found itself,

³³⁷ “A Report of the South African District Council of the Assemblies of God,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 5, 1928, 11.

³³⁸ Other African countries such as the Gold Coast began to receive AGUSA attention. See *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, 1933, 57-58.

An alarming situation confronts us...The messenger is delayed...It may be necessary to withdraw workers...We do not believe we need to retrench...We cannot lose by giving more...This last month we suffered a shortage of \$7 000 and were obliged to make a serious reduction in our missionary offerings...Send your offering without delay...The need is urgent.³³⁹

The following table shows how missionary offering specifically designated for South Africa were dropping. According to the minutes of the General Council in 1929, there were six AGUSA accredited missionaries in South Africa. That means each missionary received on average \$ 1 244. 20 (not considering the “projects problem” mentioned above) for the year.

MISSIONARY OFFERINGS IN DOLLARS ACCORDING TO GENERAL COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE RESPECTIVE YEARS	
1925	4 569, 75
1929	7 975, 02
1931	7 465, 25
1933	5 571, 11

Christine Carmichael, in 1968, reported that the AGUSA and the AGSA— “in a mutual agreement”—decided, in 1932, that the latter should become a separate organisation. A similar decision had been made earlier in relation to the PAOC in 1925. Carmichael does not discuss the reasons leading to the AGUSA/AGSA separation, except to say it was a “mutual agreement.” However, a separation would not have been necessary if there were no areas of conflict. In a meeting at Shingwedzi in 1932 an all-encompassing resolution was arrived at,

Whereas the Councils at Springfield, US America, and London, Ontario, Canada, have sanctioned the dissolving of the Joint Field Council and the forming of a self-governing Field Organisation, subject to the conditions attached hereto; and, whereas the Joint Field Council had been dissolved in order to form the new body; therefore, be it resolved, that we, a body of Pentecostal Missionaries representing the Overseas Councils at Springfield, Missouri, US America; London, England; Zurich, Switzerland; and London, Ontario, Canada; and our co-workers here in South Africa, recognize ourselves as a cooperative

³³⁹ N Perkins, “Shall We Be Disobedient to the Heavenly Vision.” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, April 16, 1932, 11.

fellowship of Missionaries, Christian workers and believers from the local assemblies, to be known as the ‘South African Council of the Assemblies of God’ whose purpose is to work in complete harmony, cooperation and fellowship with the councils of the Assemblies of God in other lands, for the promulgation of the Whole Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Southern territories of Africa, and for the promoting of Scriptural methods, unity and fellowship in the work established throughout these territories; and be it further resolved that this field Organisation take over the entire constituency and work as well as the properties, rights and privileges of the Joint Field Council, which has been dissolved. Dated at Shingwedzi Mission Station, Zoutpansberg District, North Eastern Transvaal, this third day October 1932.³⁴⁰

That resolution sealed the withdrawal of the AGUSA as the umbrella body of the work in South Africa; however, they continued within the AGSA on the same basis as the other members of the conglomerate. In this way, the AGUSA missionaries would be able to control whatever limited funds were available, and not take financial responsibility for the AGSA as a whole.

While the missionaries had a common interest in terms of evangelising the ‘native,’ accountability with regard to financial resources was not transparent. None of the other members disclosed their income, and yet the AGUSA had to take overall responsibility for everyone. Differences among the missionaries were far from being doctrinal, despite the fact that they came from different countries; the issue was money; and the same trend of conflict repeated itself when black leaders were introduced into the leadership of the AGSA.

Africans—though in the majority—had no say in the matter, the AGSA leadership was white and made up of expatriate missionaries only. This situation was set to change with the introduction of Nicholas Bhengu and other African leaders into the AGSA fold in 1938.

³⁴⁰ Quote in Daniel Simon Billy Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy: A Study of the Life and Work of One of Africa’s Greatest Pioneers* (PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2010), 167.

Chapter 6

6. The struggle for space in rural and urban African locations in South Africa

This chapter will discuss the period 1938-1945. We have seen previously how the AGUSA was a struggling missionary initiative with minimal impact on the African communities. We have seen how money was a problem for the few that were already here, and how American interests in South Africa shifted from Doornfontein to Doornkop. Those trying days were salvaged by the innovative and new thinking introduced by Nicholas Bhengu, James and Fred Mullan, the formidable trio that joined the AGSA conglomerate in 1938. The Mullan brothers were Irish missionaries who, from the very beginning, wanted to evangelise among white South Africans and Bhengu wanted to go into the African townships and villages. The compatibility of their strategy, which they called the 'Peter-Paul' agreement, became the groundwork on which a vibrant AGSA was built beyond 1938.

The AGUSA missionaries, despite their fledgling initiatives and minimal impact in African locations, were not keen to play along with the 'new thinking.' White missionaries focusing on white people in South Africa was in conflict with their mandate. While this 'mandate' was largely unwritten, we will see how some AGUSA missionaries got heavily reprimanded every time they crossed the line. This chapter will show how the incongruity between Bhengu and missionary strategies developed into a serious area of conflict.

6.1. An overview of Pentecostalism in South Africa

Pentecostal missionary initiatives in South Africa, of the Azusa sort, had their booming days during the times of John G. Lake and his entourage in Johannesburg in the years

1908-1913.³⁴¹ They received moral and financial support from compatriots abroad who shared their vision, all were still whirling in the ‘Spirit’ euphoria of Azusa Street. Funds came in from Indianapolis, the United Kingdom and a variety of other Pentecostal centres that patronised the cause of world missions.

Reports in Pentecostal periodicals show how the revival that broke out in Doornfontein attracted a lot of attention abroad. Many independent missionaries arrived in an area that was already saturated with migrant workers and other missionary societies. There were Methodists, Anglicans, Catholics and others. The American Zulu Mission (AZM) was particularly important to Pentecostalism because it provided its launching pad. It was Mrs Goodenough, of the AZM, who gave Lake and his entourage their first home in Johannesburg—free of charge. It was also from an AZM Church in Doornfontein that the Pentecostal revival began and spread across South Africa.³⁴² It was again the AZM that spread the ‘tent’ concept that was later adopted by Pentecostal missionaries in their evangelistic initiatives across South Africa. In fact, some of the first people to have ‘spoken in tongues’ came from AZM churches in rural KwaZulu-Natal, even long before Azusa Street in Los Angeles. Elder George Weaver, who worked with the AZM, who in 1896, first proclaimed the ‘Pentecostal’ message in South Africa. According to Houle,

³⁴¹ What became AGUSA in 1914 was made up of Pentecostal ministers who previously belonged to the Apostolic Faith Movement and to various other churches that used the name “Churches of God in Christ.” John G. Lake and his entourage were from the Apostolic Faith Movement in Indianapolis. His trusted friend J.R. Flower later became Secretary of the AGUSA after the amalgamation of various Pentecostal groupings that convened in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914.

³⁴² It is important to note that “Revivals” were not a new phenomenon in South Africa, as most Pentecostal periodicals seem to depict. There were revivals earlier, perhaps a well-known situation happened in the senior Andrew Murray’s church in Worcester, in 1860. According to Robert Houle, other “Great Revivals” took place in Natal under the auspices of the AZM in the years 1895-1905. Lake’s first hosts in Johannesburg, Mr and Mrs Goodenough had originally been sent to Johannesburg from Natal. See, Robert Houle, *Becoming Amakholwa: Revival and the Formation of Group Identity on Stations of the American Zulu Mission, 1890-1910* (UND History and African Studies Seminar), 1-19. See also the AZM report prepared by Mrs C.N. Ransom for their American principals, *The American Zulu Mission Annual*, June, 1904-June, 1905, p.17. Philippe Denis deals with the financial aspects of AICs, and throws helpful insight on the AZM, ‘Financial Resources and Economic Agency in the Early History of the African Independent Churches,’ *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, September 2011, 37(2), 13-15.

he “forcefully proclaimed the message of Acts 1:8”³⁴³ When Lake arrived in 1908, he rode on a wave that had already been created by HD Goodenough of the AZM; and John Alexander Dowie.

Lake preached in many parts of South Africa, including Dowie’s Zionist communities. The zenith of this work was the formation of the AFM which ultimately fell into the hands of Afrikaners. The racial prejudice, discrimination, and racism that ensued in the AFM was a catalyst of unrelenting formations of African Independent Churches (AICs). In 1910 Daniel Nkonyane, one of the African prophets in Wakkerstroom, triggered the development of the AIC movement which durably changed the face of African Christianity.³⁴⁴

6.2. The decline in support of Doornfontein

In 1914, when the AGUSA formed in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the people who supported Lake and other missionaries in South Africa, demanded more control and accountability on the part of independent missionaries; in fact, they sought to discourage being independent at all costs. Missionaries were required to subscribe to the doctrinal and constitutional tenets of the General Council of the AGUSA, or forfeit support. It was a tough call for some who were opposed to the organising of missionary work along denominational lines. For some members of the 1908 entourage, like J.O. Lehman, Arkansas 1914 was not an appealing idea at all, thus they chose to remain independent.³⁴⁵ Lake himself did not continue with the AGUSA despite his presence in Arkansas.

³⁴³ RJ Houle, *Becoming Amakholwa: Revival and the Formation of Group Identity on the Stations of the American Zulu Mission* (UND History and African Studies Seminar), 10.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ See article by EL Wick, ‘South Africa,’ *Weekly Evangel*, August 21, 4. J.O. Lehman may have joined the IPHC at a later stage, however in 1915, he was reported as working independently.

On the surface, Doornkop suggested that the AGUSA could effectively implement new directions in missionary strategy. The move was intended to facilitate resolutions arrived at in the 1914, and subsequent General Council meetings, with regard to missionaries in foreign lands. At the centre of these resolutions were the questions of missionary funding and accountability. However, the period beyond 1917, also saw a few accredited missionaries trickle into South Africa.³⁴⁶

This trickle of accredited missionaries introduced a strain to funds already under pressure. Funds received from the AGUSA were spread across the various missionary projects. While other missionaries in the conglomerate received funding from their agencies, Americans looked only to their sponsors back home. This status was however withdrawn in 1932 and the Assemblies of God in South Africa (AGSA) became an independent organisation. Whatever minimal funds, received by the AGUSA missionaries, could now be disbursed among them.

Thus in 1932 the AGSA was faced, as before then, with the problem of declining financial support. The situation was aggravated by the 'Great Depression' of 1929 even though no AGUSA missionaries were recalled.

6.3. The AGSA hodgepodge and the nightmare it became

The missionaries in South Africa continued to create good impressions abroad but often did not have much to write home about. One missionary even reported on Shembe of the *Amanazaretha* who had very little to do with AGUSA work in South Africa.³⁴⁷

After 1932 missionaries like, John S, Richards, Edgar Pettenger, and C. Austin Chawner³⁴⁸ were still making a case in churches abroad for the continuation of American

³⁴⁶ These were missionaries sent by the new AGUSA as opposed to others who were already on the ground and came from various Pentecostal agencies abroad such as the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

³⁴⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 20, 1933, 3.

missionaries in South Africa.³⁴⁹ In 1933 Richards reported on pioneering work in *Bolobedu* (Duiwelskloof).³⁵⁰ He sent a picture home to reinforce his request.



Figure 5: John Richards with "Native Evangelists."³⁵¹ (Flower Heritage Centre).

The picture spoke a ‘thousand words’ more than what the missionary could say regarding his work in South Africa. American sponsors wanted to see what was happening on the ground. As we shall see later, the taking of pictures in the attempt to raise funds by missionaries soon began to develop ‘anti-missionary’ sentiments among some Africans. Money was often raised in their name abroad but they saw very little of it, except by way of building projects.³⁵²

³⁴⁸ Chawner was indeed of the PAOC but in South Africa they all belonged to the AGSA and sometimes soliciting funds from the same sources.

³⁴⁹ All three missionaries worked with the AGSA in South Africa under the auspices of the loose structure discussed earlier. They however belonged to different missionary agencies abroad. Chawner for instance belonged to the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

³⁵⁰ John S Richards, “Pioneering for God in the Northern Transvaal,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 14, 1933.

³⁵¹ This picture appears in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 14, 1933, 6.

³⁵² Personal Interview, Rev Saul Marobela, July 17, 2015.

In May, 1936, Mr and Mrs Pettenger were back at the Stone Church, repeating stories similar to the ones they told on their last visit in 1928; always scoring one soul here, two over there, and a few more beyond. Like the pioneer missionaries before him, Pettenger was called to Africa at some point while in prayer. He saw “dark-skinned people of Africa with arms stretched out and a bright light shining above their heads,”³⁵³ and naturally, he was the light-bearer. That picture stayed with him, and in 1921, unmarried and aged 21 he landed in the “dark African continent” bringing the message of salvation to “raw heathens.”³⁵⁴

At the Stone Church he told the story of Daniel “the big Zulu” who was willing to preach for nothing. Another was Moleko, the teacher-turned-preacher, and Robinson from Barotseland, who took the gospel back to his own people in the far north. He spoke of Frank the “Shangaan who weighed two hundred pounds,” and how he unexpectedly met him in a game reserve far away and many years later from where he was converted. Even more interesting, was the salvation of the “witchdoctor who wanted to murder her own son-in-law,”³⁵⁵ and how she ultimately found the Lord. There was however nothing new, it was the same old tantalising stories of small victories retold over and over again.

Mrs Mabel Pettenger also told her part of the stories on the mission field. She encouraged the people in her home church that the ‘Great Depression’ of the 1930s should not dim their vision for missions. She did all in her power to encourage the audience through troubled financial times:

I do not think it necessary to make an appeal for funds, for when we have the “go” in our hearts the funds will take care of themselves. If we have the vision in our hearts and upon our lives the money is a secondary matter. If we lose the

³⁵³ Edgar Pettenger, “Doing Business for God,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, June, 1936, 8.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

vision, if we allow the depression to become an obstacle to giving we will lose the Shekinah glory and God will give it to another for He will have people who will spread the Gospel far and wide.³⁵⁶

She told the story of an old woman in Brakpan Location who took five years to understand baptism. “Things move slowly in Africa,” she explained. At one time she was bold enough to confront “Lizzie’s” father who initially demanded five cows for “*Lobola*,” but had since raised the bride-dowry to eight cows. Lizzie’s father agreed to revert back to the original five, but was found to be a liar. Mrs Pettenger advised the young bride-to-be to go against her father’s wishes and to go ahead and register her marriage with the local Magistrate.³⁵⁷ Totally oblivious of the tension she was creating between father and daughter; she usurped paternal authority in a culture that thrived on it. These were the moral and cultural challenges she faced in helping young girls avoid the temptation of prostitution in the mines and African townships. She taught them about the “sanctity of marriage,” and in the process she won “Lizzie,” but lost her father.

The stories were true and captivating, but they did not make mission work any easier. In November, 1936, again at the Stone Church, Austin Chawner and his wife told the people that “missionary life was not a bed of roses.”³⁵⁸ The Chawners were Canadian missionaries who were also part of the AGSA conglomerate; they were refused entry into Mozambique and started a printing press at Shingwedzi on the South African side of the border. They did a lot of translation work into Tsonga which carried their message across the border to Mozambique. They conceded, that half the time they were preaching to an indifferent audience; only their calling, and the sacrifice that came with

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁵⁸ Mrs A Chawner, “The Door that God opened,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, November, 1938, 18-21.

it, was powerful enough to keep them there.³⁵⁹ The thousands of “dark skinned people” Austin’s father saw in a vision earlier in 1908 only came in one or two at a time.³⁶⁰

By the end of 1936, the picture of South Africa as a difficult field was perfectly drawn. The funds were too little and very few people were coming in. It was clear that even though there were thousands of ‘heathens’ to reach, the reality on the ground was not congruent with the dreams and visions that inspired missionary adventures. Even worse, the expatriate missionaries still had to deal with the difficulties of cultural confrontations as in the case of Mabel Pettenger and “Lizzie.”

The missionaries depended on African assistants as evangelist and interpreters and whatever growth of the work itself could largely be credited to the ‘Africans workers.’ That was common across missionary history in South Africa. The AGSA was not an exception; until 1938, no one questioned the *status quo*. While some may not have agreed with the racial polarities of the situation; they exploited it to their advantage. They conveniently assimilated into white-privilege as determined by the political and economic conditions of the day. Perhaps they were a lesser form of evil.

The AGSA was largely made up of black people, but there were none in the leadership structures of the organisation. It wasn’t until the advent of Nicholas Bhengu, an African revivalist from KwaZulu-Natal, that the situation began to be probed. Black pastors and evangelists began asking questions and demanding change from within; till then, Africans in the wider religious context would secede from missionary structures, as in the case of the Ethiopian movement and the Zulu Zionists.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Austin Chawner’s father, Charles Chawner, arrived in South Africa from Canada in 1908. He claimed to have seen hundreds of “dark-skinned” people around him, and God calling him to Africa. As a ‘Faith’ missionary he left without support, but received some help from the Hebden Pentecostal Mission to reach his destination. Hebden was a Canadian version of Azusa Street. See, P.D. Hocken, ‘Hebden, James and Ellen K,’ in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess, & Eduard M. Van Der Maas, eds (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), 711-712.

Bhengu introduced an unprecedented era in Classical Pentecostalism, he challenged the missionary religious systems from within instead of seceding to start his own thing. 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.

6.3.1. Hubert C. Phillips, Bhengu and James Mullan join the AGSA conglomerate

Hubert C. Phillips, an English missionary in Nelspruit, joined the AGSA conglomerate in 1938.³⁶¹ He pioneered the Emmanuel Mission in Nelspruit in 1925. He was a superintendent of African Schools in the Nelspruit area, and an engineer by qualification. He advertised for the teacher position that brought him into contact with Bhengu; Bhengu was however employed as an evangelist after his graduation from the Union Bible Institute in Pietermaritzburg in 1937.³⁶² When Phillips joined the AGSA fold in 1938, he brought with him two individuals who would later impact the history of the church in challenging ways. Nicholas Bhengu and James Mullan formed a friendship in Nelspruit that catapulted the AGSA into celebrated historical moments since its inception in 1917.³⁶³

John Bond wrote,

³⁶¹ There is not much biographical information on Phillips. According to Lephoko; Phillips’ son disclosed that his father did not leave any information behind. He did not want people to write about him because that would steal the glory that must be accorded only to Jesus. That sentiment was very common among early leaders in the AGSA.

³⁶² DSB Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 44.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

Their effect [Bhengu-Mullan] was to change the Assemblies of God from a struggling missionary body to a thriving indigenous South African church consisting of Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians, one of the most significant denominations in the land.³⁶⁴

According to Bond, it was Phillips who proposed the “independent-dependent” structure that attracted everyone to the AGSA.³⁶⁵ Around 1936 he advertised a teacher’s job in a periodical *Ubaqa*.³⁶⁶ Bhengu applied and secured the position, not as a teacher, but as an evangelist.

6.3.2. A brief biography of Nicholas Bhengu³⁶⁷

Bhengu was born in 1909 at the Lutheran Entumeni mission station near Eshowe, in KwaZulu-Natal.³⁶⁸ In September 1955, he told the story of his childhood to a group of missionaries and African pastors in a conference held in Witbank:

³⁶⁴ J Bond, “Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu, *For the Record, Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Nicholas%20Bhengu.html>

³⁶⁵ J Bond, *For the Record*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/H.%20C.%20Phillips.html>

³⁶⁶ This was an American Zulu Mission periodical that had ceased to exist in 1883. Perhaps some work in reviving it took place because Bhengu saw the Nelspruit advert in 1936. See the *American Zulu Mission Annual (1902-1903)*, 43. See also, DSB Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 44.

³⁶⁷ The scholars who have written on Bhengu are mostly agreed on his biography information. Each writer lays emphasis on a particular aspect of his personality that ultimately portrays a fuller picture and the greater impact Bhengu made in the church in South Africa. Probably the first person to write on Bhengu was Katessa Schlosser, *Eingeborenenkirchen in Süd- und Südwestafrikain, ihre Geschichte und Sozialstruktur. Erlebnisse einer völkerkundlichen Studienreise*. Mühlau: Walter, 1953. 355 pp. Hollenweger quotes extensively from this work in, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 126-136. Hollenweger is strong on Bhengu’s theology and the doctrinal deviations he had with the American Assemblies of God. Peter Watt, an AGSA historian, focuses on the history of the AGSA itself and naturally a significant emphasis is placed on Nicholas Bhengu’s early years in KwaZulu-Natal; see, *From Africa’s Soil: The Story of the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, Struik Books, 1992). Daniel Lephoko in his work at the University of Pretoria, has probably done more work on Bhengu’s biography than any other person. In his doctoral dissertation he traces Bhengu’s birth lineage and family background, see Dan Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy: A Study of One of Africa’s Greatest Pioneers* (PhD Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2010). John Bond, an AGSA insider and close associate of Bhengu, wrote an extensive memoir that also touches on Bhengu’s early beginnings in the Assemblies of God, and later his relationship with American missionaries. This document is found on, *For the Record, Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Nicholas%20Bhengu.html>

I am personally indebted to missionaries who brought about the conversion of my grandmother, whose husband, my grandfather had died. He was a chief in the Pomeroy area and had many wives. My father was brought up by the missionaries and finally became a worker for the mission and crossed with the Norwegian Lutheran missionaries into Zululand. Thus we were born in the mission station, and brought up and educated and disciplined by the Norwegians as their own children.³⁶⁹

Information regarding his education is very hazy as scholars from Walter Hollenweger to Daniel Lephoko vary and disagree on a variety of pertinent details. Bhengu though credited his basic education to the Norwegian Lutherans. What is sure is that he trained for the ministry at the Union Bible Institute (Kwa Dumisa) in Pietermaritzburg (1934-1936).³⁷⁰ He later disclosed in 1949, that he could not continue his studies at Taylor University, Fort Wayne, Indiana, because “my wife and children took ill, so I had to go back home.”³⁷¹ His intellectual acumen however could not be disputed as shown by the invitation, as a visiting scholar, by Professor Hollenweger at the Selly Oaks Colleges, Birmingham³⁷²

Bond confirmed:

Professor Hollenweger...actually invited Bhengu to be visiting lecturer at “Selly Oaks College’ in England. ...Bhengu spent a year as a lecturer there, an accolade one might say, for the young man who wanted in his lifetime an education.³⁷³

³⁶⁸ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 48.

³⁶⁹ N Bhengu, ‘The National Church, Thesis Presented by N Bhengu at the Assemblies of God Conference in Witbank,’ October 10, 1955. See also, DSB Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy: A Study of One of Africa’s Pioneers* (PhD Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2010), 54.

³⁷⁰ D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 9

³⁷¹ N Bhengu, ‘Taking South Africa for God: The Story of the Great Revival in South Africa,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 06, 1955.

³⁷² D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 10.

³⁷³ J Bond, *Reflections*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Bhengu%20and%20Education.html>

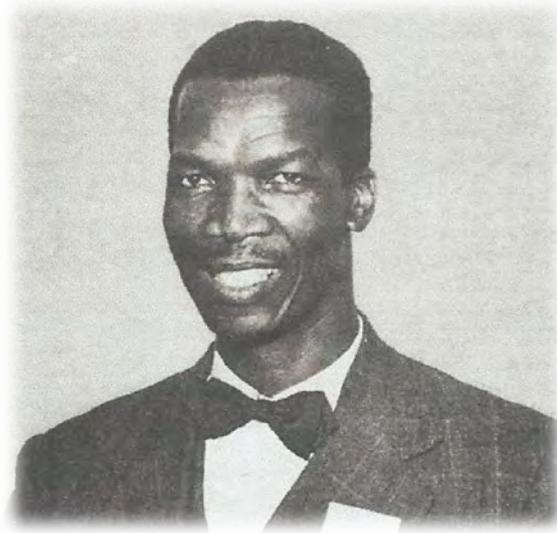


Figure 6: The Rev. N.B.H. Bhengu (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre)

According to Hollenweger, he was once a member of AWG Champion's ICU *yaseNatal*, and later joined the Communist party in the Kimberley mines. He was converted to Pentecostal-evangelicalism at age 20 under the ministry of two American Full Gospel Church Missionaries. He returned to Durban and was mentored by Job Chiliza, a fiery revivalist, who was a member of the Full Gospel Church.³⁷⁴

After completing his Bible school training in Pietermaritzburg; he joined the Emmanuel mission station in Nelspruit. It was in Nelspruit, where he met James Mullan, and the two formed the formidable pair that turned the history of a struggling AGSA around. More will be said with regard to their 'Peter-Paul' agreement, and the impact it had on the AGSA.

³⁷⁴ WJ Hollenweger in *The Pentecostals*, 126-136.

6.3.3. A brief biography of James Mullan³⁷⁵

James Mullan was converted in 1923, in Belfast, Ireland. In 1925 he was sent as an Elim Church missionary to the Belgian Congo to work with William Burton. Burton was originally from the United Kingdom and began as a missionary in Johannesburg. He was also leader of the original team sent out from Johannesburg to pioneer missionary work in the Congo in 1915.³⁷⁶ James and Mary Mullan left the Congo in 1935 to join Hubert Phillips in Nelspruit.³⁷⁷

In Nelspruit, Mullan and his wife were sent to Tzaneen. They spent 9 years there and established churches in the area and in Pietersburg (known as Polokwane today). It was at the Emmanuel Mission that two streams of strategic thought came together in agreement. Mullan and Bhengu agreed that the former would preach in the white suburbs and the latter in the African locations. That agreement had been made between the two men even before they joined the AGSA; it was therefore not binding to other members of the conglomerate. They called it the 'Peter-Paul' agreement; modelled after the apostles Peter preaching to the Jews and Paul preaching to the Gentiles. As they joined the AGSA, this model, though unwritten, was enshrined in their subconscious mind. It guided, from that point on, how Bhengu would do ministry with his white counterparts in the AGSA.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ As far as I could determine no biography on Jim Mullan has been written. According to Lephoko, 'neither Bhengu nor his associates ever wrote books or articles about themselves. Some of these early pioneers were openly against anything being written on them. John Bond, in his memoirs, refers to him and gives a brief description of his background. Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 2, 122. Little snippets are written in the history of some local churches that were pioneered by James and Fred Mullan. See article on history of the Assemblies of God Fellowship in Brakpan, www.agfbrakpan.co.za/aog-in-sa.aspx. See also the Coastal Assemblies of God, <http://www.caog.org.za/our-history>.

³⁷⁶ See article by WF Dugmore, 'The Lord Blesses in So. Africa: Council Fosters Unity Among All the Missionaries and Missions, in the *Weekly Evangel*, October 30, 1915. 4.

³⁷⁷ See article on history of the Coastal Assemblies of God, <http://www.caog.org.za/our-history>

³⁷⁸ Ibid

6.4. The 'Peter-Paul' Agreement:' Bhengu and Mullan turning the history of the AGSA around³⁷⁹

On December 14, 1938 the decision to grant autonomy to the different bodies within the AGSA was endorsed by members of the different bodies that made up the loosely structured conglomerate.³⁸⁰ The decision included complete sovereignty of its affiliates and the right to own property. It was in the context of this decision that Bhengu and Mullan made the "Peter-Paul" agreement and the main reason they were attracted to the AGSA. The 'Peter-Paul' agreement with Jim Mullan was not a binding agreement on all members of the AGSA conglomerate, yet Bhengu sought to impose it on the American missionaries and the indigenous pastors they worked with. The Mullan brothers escaped Bhengu's wrath because he had no interest in the white areas of South Africa. Indeed, he expressed that sentiment on more than one occasion. His people were his concern and he wanted to take the lead. The American missionary mandate of 'white-to-native' evangelism has been discussed elsewhere in this document, and it was in conflict with what Bhengu envisaged for the townships

Bhengu was convinced that such an agreement was workable. White people ought to reach out to other white people and leave the townships to African pastors and evangelists. Such an agreement was not new on his part; earlier he had agreed with Chiliza to focus on 'educated' Africans, while his mentor reached out to the 'uneducated.'³⁸¹ Bhengu and Mullan believed the principle was thoroughly Pauline, and therefore biblical; they were determined to reach out into areas previously untouched with the gospel.

³⁷⁹ The 'Peter-Paul' agreement considered more of the principle than the designation of 'who's who.' Both black and white people were 'Gentiles' and the principle had very little to do with discriminating ministry along racial line. The hermeneutic was flawed because both Peter and Paul were Jewish (if they thought separating ministry along racial lines was justified on this basis), while Bhengu and Mullan were both 'gentiles.' But then such hermeneutical caricatures were prevalent in early Pentecostalism.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ A Kathide, *What a Giant of Faith* (Johannesburg, Gospel Publishers, 1993), 10.

The American missionaries met the 'Peter-Paul' Agreement with derision. Usually they did very little work themselves, but reported heavily on work done by African evangelists and pastors. Bhengu resisted that, especially the taking of photographs on work done by African pastors and evangelists.³⁸² The missionaries were not the leaders in the African locations, despite the fact that they portrayed themselves as such, and as far as Bhengu was concerned, they had to adhere to African stipulations of ministry.

Missionary models and strategies revolved around preaching to 'natives.' Irish missionaries James and Fred Mullan were the only ones with a different perspective; from the beginning, they reached out to white communities in South Africa.

We shall see later, how the 'Agreement' met with resistance from American missionaries and some African pastors and evangelists despite its earlier success in Nelspruit. Mullan and Bhengu implemented this idea with tremendous success, especially in the Eastern Cape.

When Mullan relocated from Nelspruit to the Port Elizabeth he invited Bhengu to join him. In 1945, Bhengu left a church he had pioneered in Benoni, and went to the Eastern Cape. They kept to the same 'Peter-Paul' principle, with Bhengu in the townships and Mullan in the white suburbs. The revivals that followed as a result will be discussed later. Suffice it to say, their strategy met with a huge success; the revivals in the Eastern Cape made a huge impact locally and abroad. The same American missionaries who ridiculed the 'Peter-Paul' agreement wanted to take monetary advantage of it. They reported on the revivals, and claimed Bhengu as their own, despite their disdain with the strategy.

Records, on AGUSA missionaries in South Africa, show that they were not keen on evangelising other white people. This will be clearer as we look into their activities in the townships at a later stage. This reluctance, on their part, presented a challenge for

³⁸² Personal Interview, Maurice Ngakane, 31 July, 2015.

Bhengu; effectively introduced a vigorous contest for space that sometimes bordered on physical confrontations. For him it wasn't only about the 'soul,' it was also the liberating space in which the African people around him were empowered to lift themselves out of the poverty of their time. Missionaries on the other hand exploited the debilitating situation with a form of malevolent benevolence. They financed the evangelistic campaigns in the townships and built churches in African locations. In some instances, they 'supported' African pastors who helped further their intentions. While their 'benevolence' was appreciated in some quarters, it had an incapacitating effect on people's ability to do things for themselves. We shall see later, how this seemed to work against the principles of the 'Indigenous Church' for which missionaries were known.

We will see in the next chapter how Bhengu's vision stretched beyond the townships and villages of South Africa into the rest of the African continent bedevilled with western and eastern imperial ideologies. He was no stranger to these, given his background in the unions and the Communist Party of South Africa. He was however convinced, as he repeated often locally and abroad, that "Jesus is the answer" to the socio-political problems of his time.

6.5. Possible ideological influences on Nicholas Bhengu

Bhengu's vision had was driven by a resilient sense of an 'African-Consciousness' ideology. It would not be farfetched to assume that he was influenced by the prevailing radical political beliefs of his time. It was that aspect of his ministry that rendered him different from the earlier Pentecostal leaders who broke away from the AFM.

Whatever minimal education he had, seemed to create an acute awareness of the physical conditions around him and a deeper hunger to respond in a religious and pragmatic ways. Indeed, evangelism was his first priority, but the flip-side of it was a perceptiveness in social responsibility. Bhengu understood, the often elusive, difference between philanthropy and people-development. While philanthropy seeks to do a benevolent act, he enabled people to ultimately take charge of their own destinies through education, self-help, skills-development, and other projects. It was these traces of the Marxist

philosophy that would later be clearly identifiable in his ministry. Hollenweger confirms the influence of ideologies in Bhengu's youth:

He was attracted to the trade union movement and was employed in the office of the Durban leader, Mr Champion. He became suspicious of the extreme course the union was following. He 'ran away' to Kimberly, 'where there will be neither my people nor my companions who influence me to sin and lethargy.' He joined the Communist Party, and by his own account became 'one of the leading noise-makers and demagogues.'³⁸³

He grew up in a mission station, worked with the trade union in the Durban metropolis, joined the Communist Party of South Africa in Kimberley, and finally converted to 'Holiness-Pentecostalism.' Very few preachers, within that religious tradition, boasted that kind of background. While others chose to either assimilate or secede from religious traditions characterised by racial superiority; he wanted to change the situation in the AGSA from within. Eventually, it was the missionaries who seceded from the AGSA to form their own independent organisations. According to Lephoko, at least three missionary secessions took place, the AGUSA in 1964, English missionaries of the Elim churches in the United Kingdom in 1977, followed by missionaries of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada in 1981.³⁸⁴ Perhaps it could all be blamed on the ideological influences early in his life, long before he converted to the 'Holiness-Pentecostal'³⁸⁵ movement.

6.5.1. African-American influences on life in the townships

It is difficult to understand Bhengu's thinking without a brief reconstruction of the ideological and theological forces that influenced his perceptions. He was fairly well-read and could not have escaped the theological and ideological influences of his time.

³⁸³ WJ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 126.

³⁸⁴ D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 10.

³⁸⁵ This has very little to do with the church that called itself the 'International Pentecostal Holiness Church,' it refers instead to the religious tradition of the 'holiness' trend within Pentecostalism.

Bhengu's ministry was widespread in the early days, stretching from KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, parts of the Free State, and the Eastern Cape. In a sense, he had a well-rounded picture of what Africans in the townships and villages were going through in a segregated and racially polarised South Africa.

Historians, like Peter Walshe, are widely agreed that political radicalism, in South Africa, after World War I had strands of African-American "Garveyism." Marcus Garvey was known for his 'Africa-for-Africans' slogan; to be sure, a 'Pan-African' spirit was sweeping across the African-diaspora, and the African continent. Much of it swept in from the USA and the Caribbean.³⁸⁶ Black South Africans were open to anything, especially in the townships, and tended to embrace any ideology that promised liberation from imperial and racial oppression. Men like D.D.T. Jabavu, S.M. Molema, S. Plaatje and P. Seme had been exposed to "Pan-Africanism" at one level or another abroad; and returned home to shape the political direction in African townships.³⁸⁷ Some of these men were trained in prestigious institutions such as Oxford, Yale, Northwestern, and Cornell Universities overseas. Many of these men were his parallel contemporaries in the social and political arena. While Bhengu had no university education, it was a strong emphasis in his ministry. Hundreds of young people in his church were given bursaries to study at various universities across the country.

According to Walshe, 'Garveyism' did not thrive in the townships, but significant trends of it were certainly prevalent. There is nothing to suggest that Bhengu had connections with 'Pan Africanism,' locally or abroad, but traces of it are definitely traceable in his thought patterns. We will see later, that 'Africa' was a strong and central passion in his ministry; indeed he bandied the slogan, "Africa-Back-to-God." It is plausible therefore to infer that his ministry was rooted deeply in the 'African Consciousness' of his time.

³⁸⁶ P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism*, 70-85.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-106.

6.5.2. The ICU *yaseNatal* (Industrial and Commercial Workers Union)

According to Walter Hollenweger, Bhengu, at some point in Durban, was a member of the ICU *yaseNatal*. That trade union in Durban was led by AWG Champion after breaking from the Kadalie-ICU.³⁸⁸ It is not clear what role Bhengu played in the organisation. If Bhengu was a member of Champion's ICU, then it was somewhere before he was twenty years old. It is difficult to see how he could not have been impacted by a man of Champion's stature and influence; a man sixteen years his senior, largely self-taught and particularly well-read. According to Wonga Tabata, Champion was not an ideologue, he pursued practical ways of struggle for the upliftment of the African people. Among other things he was involved in the initiatives that culminated in the establishment of a township in Claremont. He worked on the idea of a "Zulu National Fund," which was discouraged by white government and finally turned into a "Bursary Fund."³⁸⁹ That trait of fostering independence in people stands out all the way in Bhengu's ministry.

After his stay in Durban, he went to the Kimberley mines where he joined the Communist Party of South Africa. Against that background, it is safe to assume that Bhengu, at least, had a working knowledge of the trade union movement, Communist party politics, the rising tide of African nationalism, and all that they stood for. As we study his practice in ministry, and the philosophy that guided his relationship with missionaries, it is clear that he was not determined to be relegated to the status of being a 'missionary's evangelist.' All throughout his ministry he insisted on being treated as an equal by his white counterparts.

³⁸⁸ WJ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 126-136.

³⁸⁹ WFT Tabata, *AWG Champion: Zulu Nationalism & Separate Development in South Africa* (MA Thesis, University of South Africa, 2006), 44.

6.6. Possible theological influences on Nicholas Bhengu

Bhengu disclosed on various occasions that he was influenced by Norwegian Lutheran missionaries at Entumeni. He looked back at their education with admiration; and admitted that he could never have become what he was had it not been for their strong-hand of the missionaries in bringing him up. However, there were other forces of influence on Bhengu's thinking after he left the mission as a teenager.

6.6.1. The *Amakholwa* culture in 20th Century Natal

The paths of American missionaries and African evangelists seemed to cross endlessly, for better or worse, since the 'Great Revivals' of Elders Weaver and Mbiya Khuzwayo of the American Zulu Mission (AZM) in Natal in the late 1800s.³⁹⁰ Norman Etherington's works on the Natal *Amakholwa* shows how members of Zulu communities ended up resident in mission stations, either as outcasts of their own societies or merely in search of better living.³⁹¹ It was the mission stations that first yielded what Houle called "The Natal Intelligentsia."³⁹² Converts of AZM mission stations boasted the likes of John Dube, who later became pastor of the AZM church at Inanda, and later national president of the African National Congress.

Bhengu grew up at a Lutheran mission station at Entumeni, near Eshowe. He credited the Lutheran missionaries with his basic education at least; it is not clear when he left for

³⁹⁰ RJ Houle, *Becoming Amakholwa: Revival and the Formation of Group Identity on the Stations of the American Zulu Mission* (UND History and African Studies Seminar), 13-14.

³⁹¹ N Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in Southeast Africa* (London, 1978). Chapter 5 is especially relevant.

³⁹² RJ Houle, *Becoming Amakholwa*, 5.

Durban, safe to say it was in his mid-teens. Born in 1909, he was only twenty when he was converted to ‘Holiness-Pentecostalism’³⁹³ in Kimberley.

Amakholwa were a conspicuous feature of mission stations; while it is not clear how Entumeni influenced Bhengu’s political and theological ideals, he must have known about John Dube and Albert Luthuli, who had foundational connections with the AZM, suffice it to say, he demonstrated a questioning character that was characteristic of many ‘products’ of mission-station-sponsored education. The fact that the AZM revivals were a product of a ‘Holiness’ movement, the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association,³⁹⁴ could mean that Bhengu had some knowledge of American missionaries and how they worked. At least, he was not dealing with missionaries for the first time.

6.6.2. ‘Holiness-Pentecostalism’ in the Kimberley mines

According to Hollenweger, in Kimberley, Bhengu was going around his usual business of politicking and womanising, until he was attracted to a Full Gospel Church meeting run by two American missionaries.³⁹⁵ It was this Kimberley-encounter that turned his

³⁹³ The ‘Spirit’ phenomenon of ‘speaking in tongues’ only became popular as a doctrine after Charles Parham’s insistent teaching in the Southern States of the USA. It was an added element to another ‘Holiness’ teaching based of Wesleyan ‘human perfection. While adherents to the ‘Azusa experience’ emphasised the Parham-teaching, they also believed very strongly in a life of ‘Holiness,’ what Edith Blumhoffer calls, “Come-outism.” Adherents were advised to come out of the world and live Godly lives. Holiness-Pentecostals developed their own ‘identity’ that separated them from the ‘World,’ with a heavy emphasis on eschatological aspects of the Christianity. See, E Blumhoffer, *Restoring the Faith*, especially Chapter 5.

³⁹⁴ According to R Houle, the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association was established in 1893 in Tabor, Iowa. It dedicated itself to foreign missions and established a training school for missionaries. Members of Hephzibah were sent to Japan, India, China and Africa in 1895. These missionaries were also sent out by ‘Faith,’ with no guarantees for support. John G. Lake and his entourage, as ‘Faith missionaries,’ were emulating an established pattern in American holiness missionary initiatives. Thus, they were not the first to come out to Africa, and other African continents, on a ‘Trusting-God’ basis, Robert J. Houle, *Becoming Amakholwa*: 10.

³⁹⁵ W J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 126-136. In Kimberly, Bhengu was involved with the CPSA. When he was converted, he was reluctant to respond to the ‘Altar call’ because he was afraid of losing his girlfriend. Elsewhere Bhengu confesses to being a playboy (*udlalani*) before his conversion. These submissions have no implications for the superior moral ethic that Bhengu adhered to after his conversion.

world right-side-up. His moral compass was immediately thrust into position; beyond that, he was enthused by the missionaries' verse-by-verse exposition of Isaiah 53.

He found, it seemed, in their evangelical message something he missed in the political and economic philosophies of his day. The whole situation had a moral impact on him that drove him into the ministry. Some scholars of Pentecostalism, like Allan Anderson, interpret that as a form of being apolitical on his part; but the Kimberley-encounter changed his perceptions and line of attack towards dealing with the socio-political situation in South Africa.³⁹⁶ He devised his own ways in helping the spiritual and social transformation of people around him.

Between the years 1929-1933, he sought a spiritual home and met with rejection on every turn. He was turned away from Entumeni, his home mission; and that stayed with him till his dying days. He could not "understand why his Lutheran mother church did not accept his testimony."³⁹⁷ According to Bond, he was later rejected by the Full Gospel Church over a minor difference on the Parham-Teaching; he was not one to accept any teaching without question.³⁹⁸ In the process, he had a short-lived relationship with Job Chiliza, a former AZM revivalist turned Full Gospel evangelist.

6.6.3. The Union Bible Institute in Pietermaritzburg (1934-1937)

Attending the Union Bible Institute (UBI) was undoubtedly the highlight of Bhengu's ministry in the years 1934-1937. It demonstrated his commitment to trained leadership, and he led by example. He registered for his theological training at the 'South African General Mission (later called the Union Bible Institute).³⁹⁹ In 1938 he joined the

³⁹⁶ A Anderson, "Pentecostals and Apartheid in South Africa During Ninety Years, 1908-1998, *CyberJournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj9/anderson.html>

³⁹⁷ WJ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 128.

³⁹⁸ J Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Nicholas%20Bhengu.html>.

³⁹⁹ A Dubb, *Community of the Saved* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1976), 9.

Emmanuel Mission in Nelspruit. He went to ‘Bible-School’ as an independent, not sent by any church, and raised his own financial support. His principal was a certain Rev Fred Suter, who believed very strongly in the principle of the ‘Indigenous Church.’ It was at the UBI that Bhengu sharpened his theological ideas.

He stood somewhere between the ‘Ethiopian’ and the ‘Zionist’ of the 19th and 20th century. The former broke away from mission churches, but continued their teachings and liturgy; the latter, while maintaining certain elements of ‘Spirit’ teachings, continued to assimilate elements of African culture. Kanyane Napo’s “African Church” still maintains elements of ‘Episcopalism’ to this day. “It is our heritage,” one of their pastors in Benoni, said with a dose of pride. According to this man (probably 4th generation member), “Napo disliked how African ministers were being treated by the white Episcopal Mission in Pretoria.”⁴⁰⁰ It is well known that ‘Ethiopianism’ in South Africa was inspired by a form of “African-Consciousness’ that sought to express itself outside the mission churches.

While ‘Zionism’ in Wakkerstroom began with a rejection of traditional healing, medical drugs, and other African rituals; they soon incorporated ‘prophetic’ practices that did not resonate with Dowie- Zionism. That was partly why many of them broke away from the AFM after it seceded from Dowie’s Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, after 1908. The secretary of the AFM, WF Dugmore, wrote in 1916, “The natives are able preachers, and though they sometimes err in doctrine, they are mighty in faith.”⁴⁰¹ Some secessions had already taken place in the AFM before 1916; African leaders broke away

⁴⁰⁰ Rev Bucs Ntshabele, Personal Interview, June 19, 2015. Mr Ntshabele’s maternal grandparents were second-generation members of the ‘African Church.’ He recalled how his grandmother would narrate stories of how the African Church, was a church of ‘the people,’ the only space in which Africans could express themselves with regard to church matters and life in the townships and villages. It was in these meetings were people, women in particular, would improvise ways of helping each other raise money for personal and church projects.

⁴⁰¹ WF Dugmore, ‘Missionary Work and the Natives,’ *The Weekly Evangel*, February 12, 13.

to form ‘Zionist’ and ‘Apostolic’ churches; what later became known as ‘African Independent Churches.’

Bhengu differed on several aspects, first he did not break his connection with missionaries, but insisted on his own ‘identity’ within the structures. Secondly, he identified strongly with ‘Holiness-Pentecostalism’ of the Euro-American sort, but siphoned what he considered to be irrelevant to his context. Thirdly, while some ‘Ethiopian’ ministers became part of the structures for political and economic liberation in South Africa, Bhengu managed to maintain a middle-of-the-way approach, towards both government and radical elements of his day. He chose not to be a part of the liberation movements, but designed sustainable ways in which people could lift themselves out of the oppression of their day. “He taught us how to catch fish,” one female veteran member of his church said, “we worked with our own hands to support ourselves and our families, and to advance *‘Hamba Vangeli.’*”⁴⁰²

The late John Bond, an associate of Bhengu and executive member of the Assemblies of God, read this “attitude” to be the first signs of “Black-Consciousness” before Steve Biko. “One wonders,” he wrote, “where Nicholas Bhengu picked up his philosophy of ministry? Was it from Mr Suter at the Dumisa Bible School? Or was it already an attitude prevalent in the townships?”⁴⁰³

In Bhengu, ‘Holiness-Pentecostalism,’ African nationalism, and the culture of the *Amakholwa* found a meeting place of expression in the context of life in the township. Joel Cabrita in her ‘Draft of work-in-progress,’ rightly argues that not much has been

⁴⁰² Julia Tshabalala, Personal Interview, June 18, 2015. Ms. Tshabalala, Eighty-four years old, was an early member of the first church that Nicholas Bhengu established in Benoni in 1940 (or thereabout). ‘Hamba Vangeli’ was a programme designed to raise funds for advancing the preaching of the gospel, across Africa, and South African townships where it had not been preached. The women in Bhengu’s church are known to raise millions of Rands in this regard. This is still true to this day, in their annual meetings in Thaba’Nchu, Free State.

⁴⁰³ J Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Nicholas%20Bhengu.html>.

said on the role of the “dissenting” Zionist preacher in the urban setting, especially 20th century industrialised Johannesburg.⁴⁰⁴ She argues that the Zionist “dissenters” provided empowering ways for township dwellers to navigate through the frustrations of political and economic oppression. Cabrita however, is strong on Zion-holiness leaders, especially of the Dowie-sort; yet there were small departures from the norm, like Nicholas Bhengu, who sought to work within the structures to effect change.

Sometimes the line of difference was too thin, as Dowie-Zionism evolved into the ‘Parham-teaching’ introduced by John G. Lake. Bhengu was closer to the ‘Parham-teaching,’ even though he differed significantly in how it should be taught. Yet, all seemed to derive inspiration from a form of ‘Wesleyan-Holiness,’ that motivated, not only moral human-perfection, but excellence in whatever their hands found to do.

It was this motivation that found expression in the ‘Peter-Paul’ agreement. While Bhengu obviously had a mind of his own in many matters, he cherished the AGSA structure because it created space for the actualisation of his calling; for him, that space was in the African locations, both urban and rural; but it also created many areas of conflict between him and expatriate missionaries.

⁴⁰⁴ J Cabrita, “*Revisiting ‘Christian Independency’: Urban Moderns and the Pursuit of Self-Perfection in Early Twentieth-Century Johannesburg*,” This is a work in progress and is cited with the author’s permission, J Cabrita, University of Cambridge, jmc67@cam.ac.uk. I’m indebted to Dr Cathy Burns at WISER, for exposing me to this article.

Chapter 7

7. The Indigenous Church: working against the things we are most passionate about

When the Assemblies of God in the USA (AGUSA) was organised in 1914, one of its founding principles revolved around a robust missionary programme to ‘heathens.’ Inspired by the ideas of a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating church, the ‘Indigenous Church’ became the philosophy that governed AGUSA missionary initiatives around the world. From Henry Venn to David Bosch the notion of the ‘Indigenous Church’ has been stretched in many directions. However, it was the Anglo-American Alice Luce, an Anglican-Turned-Pentecostal, and a former missionary to India, who introduced the concept of the ‘Indigenous Church’ in the Assemblies of God in the USA.⁴⁰⁵

In 1921, she wrote 3 articles for the *Pentecostal Evangel* focused on the Apostle Paul’s missionary methods. These articles may have been the first written articulation of the ‘Indigenous Church’ in the AGUSA, at least according to AGUSA historian, G.B. McGee.⁴⁰⁶ In the same year the General Council of the AGUSA committed itself to the cause of establishing ‘Indigenous Churches’ around the world, what they called self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing churches.⁴⁰⁷

When the first AGUSA accredited missionaries arrived in South Africa in the 1920’s they were armed with the knowledge but the situation on the ground was different. In

⁴⁰⁵ G.B. McGee, “Luce, Alice Eveline” in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess & Eduard M. Van Der Maas, Eds (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 844-845; See also, World Assemblies of God article, http://www.ag.org/pentecostal-evangel/Articles2008/4908_Pioneers.cfm.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

the context of the social and racial tensions of the time, some indigenous leaders had their own ideas of what Pentecostal forms the 'Indigenous Church' would take. African Independent Churches, with North American Pentecostal and Holiness origins, were already on the rise since Daniel Nkonyane broke away from the AFM in 1910. Nkonyane was a leading prophet in Wakkerstroom; he broke away from Pieter le Roux, after he (le Roux) joined John G. Lake's AFM in Johannesburg in 1908.

This chapter will reflect on Rev Nicholas Bhengu's notion of the 'Indigenous Church,' especially as espoused in what he called the 'Thesis;' a paper he delivered in an AGSA conference in Witbank. It will contrast how AGUSA missionaries understood and practiced their version of it. Essentially it will cover the period 1938-1955.

They were all part of a loosely structured conglomerate called the Assemblies of God in South Africa (AGSA). Each member of the conglomerate was accountable to its sending agency and only cooperated with other members on questions of mutual interest.

Nicholas Bhengu joined the AGSA in 1938. His understanding of the 'Indigenous Church' was fundamentally not different from the core of what missionaries knew about it; the area of conflict arose on how the notion of the 'Indigenous church' should be implemented on the ground. It was Bhengu's radical approach to ministry, especially in the townships and villages, which became an area of serious tensions between him and AGUSA missionaries.

The chapter will introduce the Rev Phillip Molefe; a revivalist arguably on the same level as Bhengu, who joined the AGSA in 1951. Molefe and Bhengu became two extremes with a common mission. While Bhengu had limits in dealing with missionaries, Molefe opened up to them almost unreservedly.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ Maurice Ngakane, Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.

Finally, it will discuss two statements made by Bhengu, one in 1954 at the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA),⁴⁰⁹ and another in an AGSA conference held in Witbank in 1955. He was an advocate of the ‘Indigenous Church’ at home and abroad; his clash with missionaries was not around ‘What’ should happen, but ‘How’ it would happen. While Bhengu wasn’t open to being told ‘How’ to conduct his ministry, he sought to impose directions for ministry on other members of the AGSA conglomerate, especially in the African townships and villages.

As we shall see later, historians of the AGSA, Peter Watt and Daniel Lephoko,⁴¹⁰ argue that it was the tensions and contradictions of the ‘What’ and ‘How,’ which led to the split in 1964. This chapter will capture how those tensions and contradictions rolled out in the contest for power, space, and resources in the townships and villages of South Africa.

7.1. AGUSA’s attitude to South Africa as a ‘mission field’

As 1938 drew to a close South Africa as a field received minimal attention from AGUSA Headquarters in Springfield, Missouri. AGUSA missionaries were not alone, there were other Pentecostal agencies who were already playing a significant role in evangelising the “native.” The International Pentecostal Holiness Church, also from the USA, had covered much of the Rustenburg area in the Northwest Province. While the AFM had administratively become white, they still regarded black people as a mission field. For this and other reasons, South Africa was no longer an urgent field for the AGUSA Headquarters in Springfield, Missouri.

The southern Congo and central Africa began to generate more and more interest for the AGUSA. Noel Perkin and J Roswell Flower, two foremost officials in foreign missions,

⁴⁰⁹ W.E. Warner, “Pentecostal Fellowship of North America in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Eds, Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard . Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 968-969.

⁴¹⁰ See D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Rev Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*., 10; P Watt, *From Africa’s Soil: The Story of the Assemblies of God in South Africa* (Cape Town, Struik, 1992), 1-21.

visited the Congo in 1938, on an exploratory mission of other missionary possibilities in southern Congo and Central Africa.⁴¹¹ The area was gaining more and more popularity since the arrival of WPF Burton and his team in the region in 1915.⁴¹² South Africa was not abandoned but it no longer received the attention lavished on it during the John G. Lake revivals in 1908. There were other pressing political issues, like World War II, unfolding on the international political horizon.

7.2. World War II and AGUSA's fears of European totalitarianism

The War began at different times for different regions. For Americans it began on December 17, 1941. For the Chinese it began 10 years earlier when Japan invaded north-eastern China. In Europe the War was marked by Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. These events in Europe and the Far East proved to be very unsettling for the AGUSA at head office in Springfield.

On September 30, 1940, J Roswell Flower, General Secretary of the AGUSA, sent a pastoral letter to fellow ministers commending open doors around the world for the "glorious last day message of Pentecost."⁴¹³ According to him, the Pentecostal message was making good progress, especially in South Africa and South America. Thousands were being touched by the message of "Restoration,"⁴¹⁴ and that made the missionary cause worth the while.

⁴¹¹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 26, 1938, 7.

⁴¹² WPF Burton reported on the work in the Belgian Congo in 1917. By this time he and his colleagues had established one mission station and were working on a second one. See, W.P.F. Burton, "Encouraging Report from the Belgian Congo," *The Weekly Evangel*, October 27, 1917, 4.

⁴¹³ J Roswell Flower, *Minister's Letter*, September 30, 1940.

⁴¹⁴ Pentecostals believed that they had been entrusted with the message of "Restoration." They were convinced that, through the movement, God was restoring the church to its original spiritual status. See E Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 203-219.

He raised the alarm that European totalitarianism was increasingly becoming a problem and Mussolini was expelling missionaries from Ethiopia. Hitler was not only marching across Europe to annihilate Jewry, he was against the Christianisation of Africa.⁴¹⁵ In Flower's thinking, South Africa was not under threat and Pentecostalism was well established. Missionary reports were still filtering through to America, like the missionary who wanted to pray Mahatma Ghandi out of Hinduism.⁴¹⁶

In 1942 there was yet another article in the *Pentecostal Evangel* capturing the troubling question of war, "Has the War Ended Missions?"⁴¹⁷ The author cited the appointment to foreign fields of 17 new missionaries in 1941 and 1942. He mentioned 264 others who had returned to their posts abroad after furlough and exclaimed, "...our fields remain open to gospel work."⁴¹⁸

Such optimism at headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, overlooked problems on the ground that had a potential to disrupt their ambitious missionary initiatives in South Africa. There were two areas in which that was possible; on the one hand, there were serious problems of relationship brewing between AGUSA missionaries and what they called 'Nationals.' At times missionaries fuelled divisions between these nationals, as we shall see later in the case of Nicholas Bhengu and Phillip Molefe. On the other, the AFM, in an undefined relationship with the AGUSA, undermined the work and existence of the AGSA. They relentlessly made written and verbal submissions to the AGUSA

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ The missionary's name is not given in this article, it appears in a small corner of reports and prayer requests from around the world. See, *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 29, 1940, 7.

⁴¹⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 14, 1942, 8.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

presenting themselves as the *bona fide* ‘sister’ church in South Africa.⁴¹⁹ This chapter will however, focus on the problem between Bhengu and missionaries.

7.3. The “Somlandela” Revivals: Following Jesus wherever he goes

Bhengu probably started preaching soon after he was converted in 1929, especially during his short stint with Job Chiliza. Chiliza was his mentor earlier in the Full Gospel Church. In 1936 a missionary of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) reported him preaching in a “Revival” in Pietermaritzburg. Joel Jones wrote,

Just at the beginning of June we arranged for the revival and healing campaign under the conductorship of our brother Nicholas Bhengu. I have just come from Maritzburg where I had put this brother and the campaign began July 23rd until 30th ...It is a great pity the campaign had to break for the brother had to return to school for the completion of his lessons.⁴²⁰

Daniel Lephoko, in his dissertation, places Bhengu in the Rustenburg area as per invitation KEM Spooner, an African-American missionary of the IPHC in Phokeng, Rustenburg.⁴²¹ Spooner died in February 1937,⁴²² which means Rev Bhengu was in Rustenburg earlier that year, or late in 1936. He had graduated from the Union Bible

⁴¹⁹ David J. du Plessis made a moving appeal to students at the Central Bible Institute in 1938, reminding the future Assemblies of God pastors, missionaries and evangelists that the AFM was in “Fellowship” with the AGUSA, Great Britain, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. These denominations already had missionaries in South Africa; and it was those missionaries who made up the AGSA conglomerate. He mentioned that the AFM was “not connected with apostles and prophets and the apostolic movement in the USA, or other countries.” The AGSA included people like James Mullan who believed in the ‘Apostolic’ ministry and not elected leadership in the church. Du Plessis was aware of those doctrinal differences and sought to exploit them. He spoke strongly on the Lake revivals in Johannesburg, but neglected to mention that leaders of that revival did not become part of the AGUSA after its inception in 1914. Du Plessis later became the champion of ecumenical initiatives within Pentecostalism. He contributed immensely in establishing relations between Pentecostals, the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church. See article, *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 30, 1938, 2-4.

⁴²⁰ Moses Ndaba reporting to Rev. Joel E. Rhodes, “God is doing wonders,” *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, October 29, 1936.

⁴²¹ See D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 64

⁴²² K.E.M. Spooner was the first Pentecostal African-American to arrive in South Africa in 1915. See various tributes to K.E.M. Spooner, *The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, June 17, 1937.

Institute in 1936. It was at this time that Bhengu's firstborn daughter died. Nomvuselelo fell sick as they were driving to Phokeng and Bhengu buried her on a farmer's property and proceeded to the place where the evangelistic campaign was held. According to Lephoko, her grave is where the hotel Huntersrest is situated today.⁴²³ That story is told over and over again in the AGSA as a sign of Bhengu's dedication to God's work.

According to Bhengu, his ministry began in earnest in the Johannesburg area in 1938.⁴²⁴ As he, and others started preaching in the townships of Johannesburg and surrounding areas. The revivals were dubbed "Somlandela." People were often heard singing happily, dancing and walking through the dark nights after long services that often dragged into early hours of the morning. They sang the Zulu version of an American chorus; thanks to Fred Burke, an American missionary who arrived in 1921, who translated many of the American songs from English to Zulu and Venda. The people sang,

Ngom'landela, ngom'landel' uJesu. Ngom'landela yonke indawo.
Ngom'landela, ngom'landel' uJesu, lapho eyakhona ngomlamdela.⁴²⁵

(I will follow, we will follow Jesus. I will follow wherever he goes. I will follow, I will follow Jesus, and wherever he goes I will follow.)

Burke poetically described one such situation in the then Southern Transvaal,

Listen to the deep-throated harmony of hundreds of African voices. Here they come! They are marching in military formation with measured thread (sic), a great procession of men young and old. Note their erect bearing and joyous faces. They are coming toward us, up the main highway of a vast African

⁴²³ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 64.

⁴²⁴ Rev Bhengu shared this in a PFNA Conference; Nicholas Rev Bhengu, "Taking South Africa for God: The Story of the Great Revival in South Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 6, 1955, 2-3, 11.

⁴²⁵ *Pentecostal Evangel*, n.d., This article was probably published at the height of Phillip Molefe's revivals in Sharpeville between 1954 and 1960. Zion as used here had no implications or relationship with the Dowie movement. Pentecostals in the area usually sang from a Sesotho Hymnal called 'Lifela Tsa Sione,' interpreted as 'Songs of Zion.'

township. With inimitable rhythm they keep time to their martial tread by singing one of the songs of Zion.⁴²⁶

Mr and Mrs Bennet, AGUSA missionaries stationed in Zeerust, reported on Bhengu's evangelism activities in Nelspruit and Johannesburg in the same year.⁴²⁷ In 1941 he planted a church in Benoni Old Location at 4th Street and 4th Avenue.⁴²⁸ The African township was popularly known as 'Etwatwa,' so-dubbed because of the sound of gunfire very common in the dark alleys of its early days.⁴²⁹

This was the first church Bhengu planted in the Johannesburg area. By this time he was not taking kindly to missionaries "causing havoc in the townships."⁴³⁰ Perhaps the suspicions were well founded because Edgar Pettenger reported on the work in Benoni pioneered by Bhengu the "well educated Zulu evangelist."⁴³¹ He asked Americans to pray because "Brother Bhengu has been called away and a good native pastor is now a definite need for this location."⁴³² Anyone reading the article in the USA would have thought Pettenger had something to do with the church in Benoni. To be sure, he had very little to do with who became pastor after Bhengu's departure. Bhengu himself appointed his own pastors in churches that he pioneered. This may have been the first instance of missionary interference in the work of Bhengu.

⁴²⁶ Ibid. Note that 'Threat' should probably read 'tread.'

⁴²⁷ Mr and Mrs C. Bennet, "God Heals African Natives," *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 8, 1938, 8.

⁴²⁸ *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 17, 1940, 9.

⁴²⁹ Ms. Julia Tshabalala, Personal Interview, June 18, 2015. Tshabalala was one of the early converts at 4th Street and 4th Avenue. She was born and bred in Benoni Old Location. This information is confirmed by various other sources including Lephoko in his dissertation.

⁴³⁰ D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Rev Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 61.

⁴³¹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 17, 1940.

⁴³² Ibid.

It was from the Benoni church that Bhengu relocated to Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape, in 1945, at the invitation of James Mullan.⁴³³ The two had a long-time standing friendship going back to their days in Nelspruit and Tzaneen. Bhengu directly appointed, without missionary consultation, Alfred Gumede as pastor for the Benoni church. Gumede was a trusted friend and associate from early days in ministry. Later the church was pastored by Gideon Buthelezi, another early Bhengu associate and friend with Alfred Gumede. When Buthelezi left, a certain Rev. Mcanyane took over, and then another Daniel Masondo; all men were from Natal. The church folded in 1966 when the township was forcefully removed by the Apartheid regime to Daveyton. Some members in neighbouring Wattville later started another church in place of 4th Street and 4th Avenue. They bought a house on Dube Street, owned by a local medical practitioner, Dr Ephraim Nene, and opened another house-church.⁴³⁴

Bhengu spent some years itinerating in Johannesburg and surrounding areas with some results. “If I made a hundred converts in a campaign,” he told his story to the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA), “I thought that was a mighty revival.”⁴³⁵ Things however took an unprecedented turn when he went to Port Elizabeth, and East London in 1945.⁴³⁶ People in their thousands in the African townships flocked to his revival meetings, literally hundreds were being converted and baptised. Hundreds more were turning in their weapons of law-breaking and becoming an undeniable part of the spiritual and moral revolution that was sweeping through the area. It was in the Eastern Cape where his ministry was propelled to international proportions.

⁴³³ D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 61.

⁴³⁴ Rev Saul Marobela, Personal Interview, July 17, 2015. Marobela was one of the first students to be sent to Union Bible Institute in Pietermaritzburg by Nicholas Rev Bhengu. He was a member of the first church started by Rev Bhengu in Benoni. On completion of his studies, he was posted in Sharpeville where Phillip Molefe had previously been pastor.

⁴³⁵ Rev Bhengu, “*Taking South Africa for God*,” 3.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

7.4. The AGSA and white leadership

One of Bhengu's problems, after joining the conglomerate in 1938, was an AGSA dominated by white and expatriate leadership. He insisted, "Leadership is our task."



Figure 7: AGSA leadership in 1940. Austin Chawner on the extreme left, and Edgar Pettenger on the extreme right (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre).

Edgar Pettenger, a member of the AGSA Executive, returned from furlough in 1939 after three years of trying to convince American churches to continue support for missionaries in South Africa. Despite the pressures of the Great Depression and World War II, the AGUSA was still sending out missionaries to South Africa. Pettenger was in the company of a new missionary, Daniel Wilcox.⁴³⁷

In 1941 he reported of an AGSA Executive Committee made up of H.C. Phillips, Austin Chawner, James Mullan, Edgar Pettenger and one Morrison.⁴³⁸ The AGSA was predominantly black in its membership and by 1941 competent men like Nicholas

⁴³⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 30, 1939, 8.

⁴³⁸ *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 11, 1941.

Bhengu, and two of his very close associates, Alfred Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi were already members of the church. However, none of them was in the leadership. Gumede was a teacher, and Bhengu a former court interpreter among other vocations. In 1942 the executive was still white as all the 1941 officials were returned to their previous positions.⁴³⁹

The missionaries spoke of the ‘Indigenous Church,’ but it took a while before they could recognise leadership potential among the indigenous people. By and large Africans were seen as a ‘mission field.’ In 1944, Pettenger still reported on what was going on in the mines. Sixteen “natives” had been baptised and would soon be under the supervision of Austin Chawner in Mozambique.⁴⁴⁰ ‘Natives’ were often reported on as being under the direct command of a missionary. Ida Reitz, a single AGUSA missionary lady, reported of her “workers,” a certain Shadrack and his wife who were faithful in her mission station in Duiwelskloof.⁴⁴¹ She would soon be sending them to Mozambique to continue with the work of the Lord. She was the missionary and the ‘natives’ were her ‘workers.’ Missionaries were inescapably called to minister to the ‘native.’ The ‘native’ was inexorably “heathen” and merited white and western missionary intervention.

Missionaries were fond of taking pictures in the villages and African Townships to send to their sponsors abroad.⁴⁴² Bhengu did not like it, and where he was concerned the exercise was forbidden. Taking pictures was always connected to raising funds, and the problem was, and missionaries were not accountable to anyone with regard to the monies they received. The loose structure of the AGSA was also not helpful in this regard.

⁴³⁹ Edgar Pettenger, “Brethren Pray for Us,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 14, 1942.

⁴⁴⁰ *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 15, 1944. 10.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 31, 1941, 14.

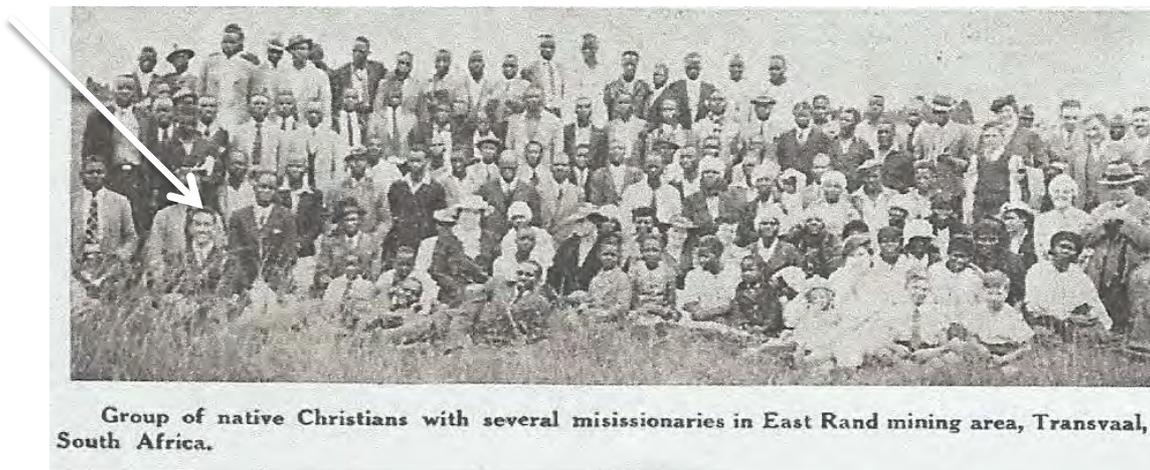


Figure 8: Evangelism work in the mines east of Johannesburg. Edgar Pettenger arrowed kneeling in the front row (Flower Heritage Centre).

In a 1945 biennial AGSA conference in Nelspruit missionaries were still trying to make good impressions abroad. According to Pettenger, there were ‘native’ pastors and evangelists who participated in the conference, but the picture he sent home showed only white people some of whom were friends in South Africa.

He reported that some missionaries ministered to white people, but those were few, the rest focused solely on ministry to the “dark-skinned” people of South Africa. That was an important note to make; AGUSA missionaries did not “come to Africa for white people.”⁴⁴³ In passing, he mentioned the revival in the Eastern Cape reported by the “Zulu Brethren.”⁴⁴⁴ There were other African ethnic groups that formed part of the AGSA, but being “Zulu” had a spell that seemed to mesmerise American white Pentecostals.

⁴⁴³ Everett Phillips, Secretary for Africa in the Division of Foreign Missions, spelled that ethos out to one Eugene Grams who was pastoring a white Afrikaans church in Welkom. The missionary ethos was not written but it was known. See, RG. Grams, *Stewards of Grace: A Reflective, Mission Biography of Eugene and Phyllis Grams in South Africa, 1951-1952* (Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 138.

⁴⁴⁴ *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 26, 1946, 11.



Figure 9: Missionaries and friends at a biennial meeting in Nelspruit in 1945 (Flower Heritage Centre).

In the 1945 conference a missionary-only meeting was called which excluded black pastors and evangelists. According to John Bond, it was that meeting in Nelspruit that introduced a shift in race relations in the AGSA.⁴⁴⁵ He wrote,

The white ministers of the Assemblies of God have had to take many instances of sharpness from their black confreres. The first such instance I recall actually happened at that Nelspruit conference in 1945. There were not many white missionaries in the Assemblies of God in those days and almost none from South Africa. Most were expatriates, far from home, labouring in trying circumstances. Perhaps some were homesick. In any event, somebody suggested having a meeting for whites only in Mr and Mrs Phillips' lounge, while the Africans had their meeting in the church. Old Daddy Chawner (Austin Chawner's father) spoke. He was in his eighties, a mellow, richly anointed old brother, who moved one to tears as he spoke of "Father" and his relationship with "Father". The meeting indeed was richly blessed but it had repercussions. Soon the African leaders asked to meet with the missionaries. They said, in effect, "Tell us now, before we go any further, is this going to be a segregated conference like the other Pentecostal churches, or is it not? We want your answer now." Of course they were right! They understood the issues as the whites had failed to do, but it was a shock for the white missionaries. To their credit, the missionaries accepted the challenge which was in fact a severe rebuke. They resolved never again to have segregated meetings at the Assemblies of God conferences. That event in 1945 set a seal on our church. It was decisive in making the Assemblies of God

⁴⁴⁵ See J Bond, *For the Record, Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/My%20First%20General%20Conference.htm>

what it became through the ensuing years. It set the tone for a definite equality of black and white leadership in the affairs of the whole movement. The official relationship between black and white would never afterwards be that of the white missionary and his black evangelist. Blacks and whites were officially equals.⁴⁴⁶

That event suggested the introduction of a different mind-set in Pentecostalism in South Africa. Black Pentecostal leaders in the AGSA, were no longer content with being a “missionary’s evangelist,”⁴⁴⁷ they demanded equal treatment with their white counterparts. It was clear after that meeting that it was no longer going to be business as usual in the AGSA. After the biennial conference in Nelspruit the face of leadership in the AGSA changed, it now included Nicholas Bhengu and other black leaders.



Figure 10: Assemblies of God Leadership after 1945 (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre).

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

7.5. Revivals in the Eastern Cape

In 1948 a certain evangelist Leroy Sanders gave a report back in America regarding his eleven months trip to Europe and South Africa. His report was fairly balanced because it referred to both black and white sections of the AGSA. He reported also on the indigenous work among the “white folk,”⁴⁴⁸ the AFM and the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa. He was enthused to reconnect with Stephen van der Merwe who was the first white South African to be sent back to South Africa as a missionary in 1932.⁴⁴⁹ Van der Merwe took up American citizenship and was once Superintendent of the AGUSA Mississippi District Council. In 1939 “Brother Van,” as he came to be called, gave a sermon in Afrikaans in the USA with his wife as interpreter. He reported the “joy of seeing two thousand souls saved.”⁴⁵⁰ It is not clear when, and where that happened; he only arrived in South Africa in 1932 and no major revival was reported in the period 1932-1939.

Sanders spoke well of the missionary work in the mines, where Pettenger was involved. He commended Fred Burke’s Bible School in Witbank, Chawner’s printing press at the border of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique), the white work in Johannesburg under Fred Mullan (James Mullan’s brother); and said nothing about the Eastern Cape.⁴⁵¹ Revivals under Bhengu in the Eastern Cape were already on as early as 1945.

It wasn’t long before Americans caught the powerful echoes of the revivals in the Eastern Cape. Bhengu was doing it all by himself without missionary involvement; totally in charge of space and resources. The only exception was Jim Mullan, his partner in the “Peter-Paul” agreement. Bhengu focused on the townships and Jim Mullan

⁴⁴⁸ *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 28, 1932, 10.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 30, 1939, 2-3.

⁴⁵¹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 25, 1948, 11-12.

evangelised the white suburbs. It worked well for a while; apparently it didn't last very long.⁴⁵²

Merlin Lund—an American missionary in Nelspruit—reported about the Eastern Cape as late as 1950. Something dramatic was finally happening within Classical Pentecostalism in South Africa since the times of John G. Lake and Elias Letwaba (the African evangelist who worked with Lake in the AFM). Lund immediately took up the opportunity to write home about it:

I can report a revival in and around East London, South Africa. God is using a Bantu man named Bhengu in the salvation of souls and the healing of the sick around the coastal city. Pastor Bhengu is one of the Bantu leaders of the Assemblies of God in South Africa.⁴⁵³

In 1950 Rev Bhengu launched what he called the “Back-to God Crusade” in Duncan Village, East London.⁴⁵⁴ This movement concentrated solely on evangelism; for the most part it was the church planting wing of the African component of the AGSA. He sought to ensure total control of his work from those he claimed “caused havoc in township churches.”⁴⁵⁵ This was in total agreement with the loose structuring that the AGSA was. He could form his own movement and still be a member of the bigger conglomerate. “Back-to-God” was his territory, and he and his team determined its direction.

⁴⁵² According to Bond, Mullan had assisted Bhengu in organising the ‘Revivals’ in Port Elizabeth and East London. The relationship ended when Mullan’s wife questioned Bhengu on money matters in relation to the evangelistic campaigns. See Bond’s memoirs, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, ‘Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu,’ <http://nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Nicholas%20Bhengu.html>

⁴⁵³ M Lund, “Revival in South Africa,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 28, 1951, 9.

⁴⁵⁴ D Lephoko, *Nicholas Rev Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 115. Some in the AGSA would argue that the ‘Back-to-God’ crusade was started in Port Elizabeth in 1945. Rev Steve Msiza, an active member in the AGSA in Daveyton, indicated in an interview that the church was preparing to celebrate seventy years since the launch of the Back-to-God Crusade in Port Elizabeth and East London. Personal Interview, May 14, 2015.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

In 1952 Edgar Pettenger reported on the work in Piet Retief, Mpumalanga, with an accompanying picture; but spoke heavily, without however mentioning Bhengu's name, of the revival in East London:

A religious renaissance among East London Africans, which has induced at least 2, 000 to embrace Christianity and abandon evil ways and undesirable habits has resulted in a flood of stolen property, dangerous weapons and symbols of sin being surrendered to the church, the South African Police and the owners of the property.⁴⁵⁶

Neither Edgar Pettenger nor his son Vernon had been to the Eastern Cape revivals in 1952, the invitation only came in 1953. Much of their reporting was therefore hearsay, perhaps from Jim Mullan who happened to be the only missionary in closer proximity to what was happening. Nonetheless they did send reports through that would create an impression abroad that they were part of what was going on. Merlin Lund's earlier report was also hearsay; he got his information from a reliable source in the person of Jim Mullan.

The impact of the revivals in the Eastern Cape had already caught the attention of Assemblies of God officials in the USA. Bhengu's name was mentioned for the first time at the first Pentecostal World Conference in 1947 in Switzerland.⁴⁵⁷ H.B. Garlock told the thousands that gathered of his experience in East London. It is not clear if Rev Bhengu attended this meeting or the next one in Paris (1949). He did however attend the 3rd World Pentecostal Conference in London (1952). H.B. Garlock, Field Secretary for Africa in the AGUSA Foreign Missions Division, proudly reported:

I have recently returned from Africa. At one baptismal service in South Africa, 1400 were immersed under the ministry of the national evangelist, Brother Bhengu and his associates.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ E Pettenger, "Newspaper Tells of Many Converts Making Restitution in Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, April 27, 1952, 8.

⁴⁵⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 25, 1947.

⁴⁵⁸ H.B. Garlock, "Evangelising our Generation," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 9, 1952, 7.

In the London conference an opinion was expressed regarding missionaries in foreign lands. It was bandied around that at least they should not be in these far-away fields for more than ten years. A report states that Bhengu gave considerable help in discussing that problem.⁴⁵⁹ It is not clear what contribution he made, but given his sentiments he must have been in favour of the 10 year-proposal.

Gerrie Wessels, Vice-President of the AFM in South Africa, was also present at that conference. He preached a Ten-Minute sermon in Afrikaans on, “The Church Behind Closed Doors.”⁴⁶⁰ In the USA, Wessels was embraced and churches were encouraged to invite him to speak. Bhengu and Wessels were a frequent feature in these Pentecostal World Conferences. They also represented the irony of Pentecostalism in South Africa; their ‘Brotherhood’ was the Pentecostal irony on international platforms that contradicted real life at home.

Wessels was not only a pastor and Vice-President of the AFM, but he had unequivocally shown his support for apartheid. According to Nico Horn, a group of leaders, known as “The New Order,” wrote to Prime Minister J.G. Strydom in 1956 asking him to appoint Wessels as Senator. Indeed he was appointed as a Senator in the apartheid government. Before then, White Pentecostals had adopted an apolitical stance, the likes of Wessels and others within the AFM sought to



Figure 11: Rev Nicholas Bhengu at the 3rd Pentecostal World Conference in London, in 1952 (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre).

⁴⁵⁹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 3, 1952, 12.

⁴⁶⁰ G Wessels, ‘The Church Behind Closed Doors,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 5, 1954, 5.

convince the apartheid government that they were back into the mainstream of Afrikaner Nationalism.⁴⁶¹

Edgar Pettenger and his son invited to the Eastern Cape

In December 1953 Bhengu invited Edgar Pettenger to a Christmas convention in Port Elizabeth. The situation measured far beyond his wildest expectations. In a report to his sponsors he wrote;

A marvellous sense of the presence of God could be felt in the meeting. I thought we had heard Africans sing before but never quite like they sang at this convention. The sound of a thousand voices anointed by the Spirit of God lifted our hearts literally out of this world. Vernon said it was the closest to heaven he expected to be until the rapture takes place.⁴⁶²

In 1954 Bhengu repeated another invitation to Vernon Pettenger, Edgar's son, to come and preach at the Easter Convention in East London. The baptismal service was an awesome sight that could not escape his camera.⁴⁶³ The crowds were far more than what his father attracted since his arrival in South Africa.

⁴⁶¹ NH Horn, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, Vol XXXII, No 3 (December, 2006), 6. For a thorough analysis of the notion of "Afrikaner Nationalism," see T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1975).

⁴⁶² E Pettenger, "Glorious Convention in South Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 14, 1954, 8.

⁴⁶³ V Pettenger, "Hundreds Converted in South Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 20, 1954, 6.



Figure 12: A baptismal service in East London conducted by the Rev Nicholas Bhengu⁴⁶⁴ (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre)

7.6. Revivals in the Vaal and Orange Free State

As the Bhengu revivals were reaching their pinnacle in the Eastern Cape and parts of the Transvaal; another wave was rising in the southern Transvaal and the Free State. Rev Phillip Molefe, a convert of Bhengu's ministry in Benoni, was at the centre of it all.

Rev Molefe was born on March 30, 1928 in Marabastad, Pretoria. He was converted in 1949, in Eastwood, Pretoria, under the ministry of the Rev Alfred Dube. As a "petty thief," he "was saved from a life of stealing and gambling."⁴⁶⁵ After release from prison he found his way to an Assemblies of God revival where Dube was preaching and got converted to Christ. Dube was a businessman in Benoni converted under the ministry of Nicholas Bhengu.⁴⁶⁶ According to the Rev Steve Msiza, Molefe regarded the Benoni house-church as his spiritual birthplace, and the people regarded him as their spiritual

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ This story is told by V Pettenger, "Revival Accompanies Building of Church," *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 22, 6.

⁴⁶⁶ Rev Steve Msiza, Personal Interview, May 14, 2015. Msiza is Rev Dube's son-in-law. His information derives from shared moments with the old man as he narrated his experiences in ministry. This information was also confirmed with Rev Saul Marobela, Personal Interview, July 17, 2015.

son.⁴⁶⁷ It is plausible that Bhengu saw him in the same light since he was a convert of one of his converts

Molefe attended the African Bible Training Institute (ABTI) for one year in 1950, at Spring Valley in Witbank. ABTI was founded by Fred Burke, who arrived with Edgar Pettenger in 1921. His ministry focused on teaching and evangelism.

If Bhengu could be described as an ‘apostle to the AmaXhosa’ of the Eastern Cape, then Molefe became an ‘apostle to the Basotho’ of the Vaal and the Free State. He was 20 years younger than Bhengu when he went to minister in Sharpeville near Vereeniging in 1951. He was 23 years old and the less educated of the two. Almost immediately his ministry was accompanied by miracles and hundreds of conversions. Young men turned their lives to God and gave up their weapons of criminality. Tons and tons of stolen goods were produced at the revivals, either to be burnt up or taken to the police. These stories were similar to what earlier characterised the Bhengu revivals in the Eastern Cape. A rival in the revivals was now gradually on the rise in a territory Bhengu had dominated since 1938.

From the beginning of his ministry Molefe did not share Bhengu’s sentiments with regard to missionaries. He was closer to Pettenger and even named one of his sons Vernon, after Edgar’s son.⁴⁶⁸ Molefe’s ministry introduced a relief to the perimeters imposed by Bhengu in the townships and villages of South Africa with regard to missionaries. The American missionaries reported extensively on his work, especially Vernon Pettenger and Eugene Grams.

They started flooding the AGUSA periodical, *The Pentecostal Evangel*, with stories of revivals in some townships around the Witwatersrand, the Vaal and the Orange Free

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ This information was confirmed in a telephonic discussion with Mpho Molefe, Vernon’s brother, who lives in Johannesburg.

State. They had more liberty in Molefe's territory than they did with Bhengu in the Eastern Cape. They invested on evangelism equipment and erected church buildings wherever Molefe had planted new churches.

In 1954 there were two articles written by Vernon Pettenger, accompanied by pictures, in the same issue of the *Pentecostal Evangel*.⁴⁶⁹ He told the story of the revivals under Molefe, but always with a qualification of missionary involvement in the events.⁴⁷⁰ Rev Stanford Majola confirmed the fact that many people in the Vaal and the Free State areas knew Molefe more than Bhengu. "He was considered to be the bishop," he said.⁴⁷¹ Majola's late wife Juliet was an early convert of the Molefe revivals. Bhengu and Molefe became the household names that formed the epicentre of revivals in the AGSA. There were others involved but the situation revolved around these two men. That popularity also bred territorial rivalry between the two men that had far-reaching consequences.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁹ V Pettenger, "Revival Accompanies Building of New Church," *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 22, 1954, 6. Vernon was Edgar Pettenger's son who was born and virtually grew up in South Africa watching his parents do missionary work. He now followed in their footsteps.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁷¹ Rev. Stanford Majola, Personal Interview, May 12, 2015.

⁴⁷² Maurice Ngakane, Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.



Figure 13: Rev Phillip Molefe baptizing converts in Vereeniging (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre).

As Molefe was rising in the AGSA Bhengu's power base was shaken. Easter and Christmas conventions were a big thing in the AGSA, and for Bhengu's followers all roads led to East London. When Molefe came into the picture, other Christmas and Easter conventions were held in the Vereeniging area. Missionary participation was strong compared to the Eastern Cape. Bhengu's permission was neither sought, nor was it required; It was a principle agree upon in the loose structure of the AGSA.

Vereeniging was not only the introduction of a shift in powerbase it also created space for missionaries to ignore and overstep Bhengu's perimeters. In Vereeniging they could take the pictures they wanted without restriction and solicit funds from abroad without any form of local accountability. In one report Vernon Pettenger wrote:

Due to the revival, there was an urgency to complete the building and we had to get a loan for the purpose. We are also in need of seats to accommodate the crowds. Anyone wishing to contribute to this worthy cause should send offerings...⁴⁷³

⁴⁷³ *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 22, 1954, 6.

Molefe was in charge but Vernon reported about him as though he was the missionary-in-charge “encouraging the native evangelist to lead” the services.⁴⁷⁴ That presented the problem in understanding the principle of the ‘Indigenous Church.’ When and where exactly were the lines drawn? Was the church ‘Indigenous’ when missionaries were present and stood at a distance, or was it when they pulled out altogether and let the ‘Indigenous Church’ define itself in phrases and idioms it understood best?

7.7. Nicholas Bhengu making his mark abroad

In 1954 Bhengu attended at least two international conferences in the USA. He was at the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA), in Springfield, Missouri, October 26-28.⁴⁷⁵ He was also part of the “First National Evangelism Convention” of the AGUSA held in Kansas City, Missouri, December 15-17, 1954.⁴⁷⁶ His presence was a cause for publicity:⁴⁷⁷

African Evangelist to Attend Evangelism Convention

Nichols Bhengu, Whose Ministry Is Accompanied
by Mighty Miracles, To Be a Featured Speaker

⁴⁷⁴ *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 22, 1954, 7.

⁴⁷⁵ *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 12, 1954, 9-10.

⁴⁷⁶ *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 9, 1955, 4-5.

⁴⁷⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 21, 1954, 12.

The PFNA at the time was structured along racial lines, and African-American Pentecostals were not part of it.⁴⁷⁸ It was here, where he first made his sentiments on missionaries known. He told the crowd:

We will always need missionaries. We need them to train our young people for the ministry. We need them to publish gospel literature, we need them to show us the best methods of Sunday school organisation, youth work and how to use modern devices such as radio to evangelise our people.⁴⁷⁹

At the PFNA Bhengu shared how he had wanted to stage a revival in East London and had no money for it. In “answer to prayer,” a gift of \$1 000 was received from Canada. The revival was promoted in colourful pamphlets over a number of days and conducted successfully.⁴⁸⁰ Nobody knew who the Canadian was, nor did the individual ever claim their part in the Eastern Cape revivals. That \$1 000, from an unknown donor, may have financed the beginning of a great revival in the Eastern Cape.

In the PFNA meeting Bhengu threw some light on his notion of the ‘Indigenous Church.’ He spoke of his overarching burden for the evangelisation of Africa. His training and recruitment methods had been developed during his time in the mines, and as a member of the Communist Party of South Africa. He told the meeting that African churches in the AGSA were taught to be ‘Indigenous,’

Our churches are at the very beginning taught to be self-supporting. They are founded on indigenous principles like the early apostolic church. Not a penny from outside sources comes to support any of our churches. Within six-months, every assembly becomes self-supporting.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁸ W.E. Warner, “Pentecostal Fellowship of North America in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard Van Der Maas, Ed (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 968-969.

⁴⁷⁹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 12, 1954, 9-10.

⁴⁸⁰ N Bhengu, “Taking South Africa for God: The Story of the Great Revival in South Africa,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 6, 1955, 3-4, 11.

⁴⁸¹ Bhengu, “Taking South Africa for God, 3. While Bhengu spoke of churches being ‘indigenous,’ he did not shun any form of assistance from international donors, but it had to come with no strings attached.

He had the Eastern Cape in mind because some churches in the Transvaal and Free State were receiving financial support from missionaries; but these were not under his direct control. It was the indigenous people in Port Elizabeth, and East London, who had built two colossal auditoriums, without any assistance from outside.



Noel Perkin, Executive Director of Foreign Missions for the Assemblies of God, shakes hands with Nicholas Bhengu, South African evangelist.

Figure 14: Nicholas Bhengu with Noel Perkin at the PFNA meeting. (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre).

It is clear that Bhengu was trying to rally international support around his vision for Africa. Perhaps he was successful; until AGUSA missionaries on the ground sabotaged the mission. Later, we will see how Bhengu returned from the USA with pockets full of monetary promises, only to be left empty-handed when the money arrived.

Back in the PFNA Conference, Bhengu's vision was clearly drawn, the ideal was the heartbeat of his

very existence. In the final analysis; he concluded, "There is a great pressure on me. The pressure is not for money; not for a place to live; not for a salary—it is a great compassion in my heart for the lost of my own people."⁴⁸²

Two months after the PFNA meeting he attended the "First National Evangelism Convention" of AGUSA evangelists held in Kansas, Missouri, December 15-17, 1954.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ These meetings show how the AGUSA itself was struggling with issues of race and culture at home. They had a connection with Africans which seemed not to find expression at home. See report in *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 9, 1955.

This was again, a whites-only affair of AGUSA evangelists. At the time, the AGUSA itself, was struggling with race and cultural matters they did not know what to do with; they called it the “Negro problem.”⁴⁸⁴ For some or other reason they were open and sympathetic to Africans, even accepting them in their conferences and colleges.⁴⁸⁵

The acceptance of Africans on American platforms may have been a matter of strategy rather than ethic. It was one way to advertise the cause of missionaries in foreign lands and the good work they were doing. Bhengu was always referred to as the ‘educated Zulu,’ and son of a ‘Zulu chief,’ and a host of other captivating descriptive phrases. He was a strong departure from the idea of a ‘naked’ African sprinting across the hills with shield and assegai; and perhaps it helped white Pentecostal Americans to realise that they were not investing in a lost cause. They demonstrated a similar attitude with African-Americans who seemed to be ‘different from the rest.’ Bob Harrison, a popular musician and evangelist, wrote about this attitude; after being rejected as a minister in the AGUSA, he was later lured back, especially because he now had become very popular and worked with Billy Graham. He writes about how some white Pentecostals always gave him this ‘different from the rest’ attitude. As if to say, ‘the only problem with you is that you are black, otherwise you are very good.’⁴⁸⁶

The “National Convention” provided another platform on which Bhengu shared his sentiments on the ‘Indigenous Church’; he envisaged self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches. It was exactly what the AGUSA stood for; but what was

⁴⁸⁴ E Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 246-250.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Harrison’ story is told in his book, B Harrison, *When God was Black* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1971). Why Africans were more acceptable than African-Americans on AGUSA platforms can only be assumed. This describes my own theory. I find it interesting that Meriam Webster’s dictionary associates ‘Assegai’ with South Africa, which to me exposes a lot regarding American perceptions of the Zulu in particular. However Harrison’s case shows how a similar attitude was demonstrated with African-Americans of ‘note’ in the AGUSA. His book is a harrowing masterpiece on hypocrisy in the history of race relations in the AGUSA.

happening on the ground was very different. The missionaries demonstrated subtle tactics that made their continued presence necessary.

The notion of ‘Indigenous Church’ was the ethos driving missionary initiatives around the world. It was indeed Alice Luce who wrote the first articles for the AGUSA in the 1920s on the subject—long before Melvin Hodges. Hodges was an AGUSA missionary in South America who published a celebrated book, *The Indigenous Church*, in 1953. Essentially, he wasn’t saying anything new, except to ‘baptise’ Henry Venn’s theory ‘in the Holy Spirit,’ and repeat Rolland Allen’s submissions on missions. Rolland Allen placed noteworthy importance on the role of the Holy Spirit in missions. Indeed, Hodges’ missiological insights were informed by Allen’s writings.⁴⁸⁷

AGUSA missionaries in South Africa had a different understanding of the notion; they were willing to extend their connection and ‘allow native’ preachers to do the work; but they were always there, creating the impression that they led the work. More often than not they played a financial role, they paid the piper and called the tune. With the conditions of poverty in the African locations, that benevolent gesture was more than welcome. It however developed into a latch that turned some African pastors and evangelists into missionary-poodles.

⁴⁸⁷ See article, GB McGee, ‘Hodges, Melvin Lyle,’ in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, SM. Burgess and E Van Der Maas, Ed (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 723-724. Pentecostals sometimes portray a picture of the role of the Holy Spirit as an exclusive domain to their theology, and sometimes in a sectarian manner; as if the ‘Holy Spirit’ was not known until the advent of Pentecostalism. Lamin Sanneh, shows how Christianity shifted even from Jewish demarcations to embrace all nations. The Spirit of God, as the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago reflected, cannot be limited by dogmatic tones and sacramental systems; “God’s love and mercy go beyond any code or system.” See endnote 6, *Disciples of all Nations* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2008), 289. Allen Anderson concurs, the work of the Spirit did not begin with Azusa Street. There are many instances, like Edward Irving in London, who, as early as 1822, emphasized charismatic gifts, including prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues. Pentecostalism just brought them into focus. See *To the Ends of the Earth* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.



Figure 15: Nicholas Bhengu (arrowed) attending the "First National Convention" of AGUSA Evangelists in the USA in 1954. (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre)

7.8. The “Thesis” on the “National Church” presented in Witbank⁴⁸⁸

On Wednesday, October 10, 1955, Bhengu ascended the stage in an AGSA biennial conference in Witbank, Mpumalanga. He had only one objective in mind, to clear the “fog:”

This is a unique privilege for me to present to the Assemblies of God conference my whole vision and commission. I have been greatly misunderstood and grossly misinterpreted, sad to say mostly by my own African people who in turn misinformed the missionaries whose labours of love and self-denial have made me what I am. After hearing what I am going to say, I am sure every fog which has been created by such unscrupulous workers who delight in breaking up all the efforts we are making for the unity of the work of God and mutual understanding between White and Non-White Christians will be eliminated or reduced to a minimum. I am naturally not an ambiguous man and desire to be an open book to all. What I am about to say is my entire soul, the very bowels of my entire being. Write down therefore, and any informant who will after this report to you anything to the contrary, you must know that man or woman is a

⁴⁸⁸ The “Thesis” was a paper Rev Bhengu presented at an AGSA Conference in 1955. It is available as an appendix in John Bond, *For the Record, Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/APPENDIX%202.html>.

liar and a servant of the devil sowing the evil seed of dissension, born of the spirit of self-seeking. Mark that man well.⁴⁸⁹

The tone of the paper called a “Thesis on the National Church,” suggests that Rev Bhengu was responding to something. It was a heavy and scathing précis directed at both missionaries and black pastors and evangelists. He was already an international figure and acknowledged as a spiritual leader in many townships and villages. It is safe to assume that he regarded himself to be the leading evangelist among African people in the AGSA; after all, he had dominated the scene of evangelism in the African locations for thirteen years in the period 1938-1951.

Africa as a continent was the heartbeat of Bhengu’s passionate presentation. The paper was delivered at a time when African nationalism was at its peak.⁴⁹⁰ In June 1955, black and white people of different political persuasions gathered in Kliptown, Soweto, to openly oppose apartheid and map out a political ideal for all South Africans. That meeting gave birth to a document popularly known as ‘The Freedom Charter.’ It embodied the aspirations of its representatives, even though it may have been drawn by a few leading individuals. Bhengu empathised with the sentiments of the oppressed, but had a different and tangent approach to the situation. In the same year he presented his own ‘ideal’ to a gathering in Witbank; it was his own ‘Dream’ of the future. In some ways, Witbank was intended to galvanise support around it, especially from missionaries.

He submitted in his paper that Africa was a continent “plunged into gross darkness, superstition and ignorance.”⁴⁹¹ He was “convinced that Africa was once peopled by a

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ See P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Craighall, AD. Donker Publisher, 1987), 413-421.

⁴⁹¹ N Bhengu, *The National Church: Thesis Presented by N Bhengu at the Assemblies of God Conference, Witbank on Wednesday, October 10, 1955*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/APPENDIX%202.html>

civilised people, a religious people where Christianity once flourished.”⁴⁹² He spoke of Israel surrounded by the influence of Egypt and her thriving civilisation. He referred to the African Queen of Sheba and how she was influenced by the wisdom of King Solomon. All this went to show that Africans were once a civilised people but “lost out completely as a result of a catastrophe”⁴⁹³ that could not yet be explained. He mentioned Simon of Cyrene and the possibility of his being African; it was that African who helped Jesus carry his Cross. He insisted that the day of Pentecost included “proselytes” from Africa who had been influenced by Mosaic religion and the culture of the Jews. He argued that Jesus himself, “drank water, milk and ate food in Africa as a baby.”⁴⁹⁴ Finally, Phillip the apostle led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. That African in the book of Acts was the “first man to bring the glad tidings” to the African continent.⁴⁹⁵ He reckoned, on the basis of this lengthy treatise that Africa was not new to a biblical religion.

The atmosphere was thick with radicals presenting one form or another about Africa; perhaps that explains why the movement he started in 1950 was called, “Africa Back-to-God!” At least the prologue of the “Thesis” confirmed Bhengu’s passion for the evangelism of Africa. It grew clearer as it unfolded; for him the task of effective evangelism in Africa had to ultimately lie with the Africans themselves, “We want to lead our people into the promised land of the Holy Ghost,” he said.⁴⁹⁶ The challenges for Africa were numerous; he mentioned, “Communism, Nationalism and Islam.” The urgent task was to “evangelise before these threatening powers of darkness swallow the

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

sub-African continent.”⁴⁹⁷ This big task required a united church effort; but this was unimaginable given loose fragments that made up the AGSA conglomerate.

Dividing the work in African locations, as American missionaries seemed to pursue, was tantamount to delivering Africa into the hands of ‘diabolical’ forces. While Americans may have been sympathetic to the situation in the townships, they lacked the socio-political empathy that drove indigenous pastors. They were in the situation, but they were not of it; for Bhengu, that was a serious moral deficit.

In 1955 the Eastern Cape was already Bhengu’s flagship and he pointed to the successes in the area because the people were united. “We have pooled our manpower and financial and spiritual resources and we have churches and farms and money to help our men.”⁴⁹⁸ He made it clear that, “Any missionary who desires leadership in Africa will be greatly disappointed in the future because of the political set up of the Union of South Africa.”⁴⁹⁹

At the time many African countries were fighting for liberation from colonial occupation and oppression. Africa was invaded by a variety of ideologies from other oppressed communities around the world such as Latin America, the Caribbean, and black people in America. Political radicals across were asking penetrating questions where their oppression was concerned; and South Africa stood-out as a sore thumb. Missionary history, despite its benevolence, was already under suspicion, especially its facilitation of the occupation of African land in the name of ‘God.’ It was very common in the townships to hear someone say, ‘they gave us the bible, and took our land.’

Bhengu made it abundantly clear that he was not against missionaries; they could become part of the strategy to evangelise the townships and villages in many ways. He

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

made the same submission he presented at the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America and the National Convention of Evangelists in the USA in 1954. The need was great for Bible teachers, Sunday school promoters, Camp leaders and other specialised fields in missions. As far as he was concerned, there was a permanent scope for missionaries, “We shall always need them,” he said. Ultimately, he visualised a “National Church” where the assemblies would take charge of their own work. That was not far-fetched, his work in the Eastern Cape spoke for itself. But his deep and penetrating psychological journey into the future was solo, some of his African counterparts shared very little of his sentiments; those who conjured understanding were also struggling to see the future through his eyes; at best they were willing to follow the Bhengu’s orders.⁵⁰⁰

7.9. Bhengu’s vision had “I’s”

The “Thesis” was clear, but not everybody agreed with it. While it had a role for everyone to play, it revolved around the person of ‘Bhengu.’ He embraced other African leaders, but placed himself at the centre and rudder of the African work. His presentation was frequently punctuated with “I’s:”

I want to help my people to achieve this task, I want to teach our men to raise funds and finance the programs themselves, I want to bring into one association all men with an evangelistic ministry to form one crusade and attack one city after another together.⁵⁰¹

He openly admitted his lack of interest in the white areas of South Africa, but the townships and villages were his unquestionable passion and self-endowed domain. While some men among the African evangelists were comfortable with assimilating into

⁵⁰⁰ I asked the Rev Saul Marobela, a former pastor in the AGSA, who was sent to Sharpeville after graduating from the Union Bible Institute in Pietermaritzburg in the 1960s, what his opinion was regarding being posted in a church without making his opinion known. He was perfectly at home with such decisions, “Moruti Bhengu was the apostle, so we went where we were sent,” he said. Personal interview, July 17, 2015.

⁵⁰¹ J Bond, *For the Record, Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/APPENDIX%202.html>

his imposing demands, others struggled when he insisted should revolve around him.⁵⁰² They were not in the AGSA to serve Bhengu; they believed that they too, in their own right, were called by God. Their visions may not have stretched “from Cape to Cairo,” but in small and big ways, they too had made an impact in the townships. Men like Dube in Benoni, Molefe in the Vaal, Masondo in Brakpan, and Nebe in Kwa-Thema; Timothy Olifants, and others were making serious inroads into the townships. But Bhengu called them names; they were ‘unscrupulous,’ ‘useless,’ ‘liars,’ ‘servants of the devil,’ ‘worthless missionary friends;’ and one more curse that did not cross his mind. It was these men that Bhengu disparaged that American missionaries used against him.⁵⁰³

In his paper Bhengu presented himself as the highest point of the work in the townships and villages. The “Thesis” was unsettling for both nationals and missionaries, particularly Americans. John Bond, a member of the AGSA executive, did not see any reasons for apprehension. Bhengu had expressed no interest in the ‘white work;’ it was only fair that white missionaries should not be involved with the ‘native work,’ except where invited. But nobody stopped him from reaching out to the white community in South Africa, except that the racial polarities of the country would make it almost impossible. But then Bond was not American; most non-Americans did not have a problem with Bhengu’s ‘Thesis.’ His biggest compatriots were the Mullan brothers, James and Fred, whose strategies of reaching out to white people in South Africa were totally compatible with what Bhengu envisaged.

⁵⁰² Rev. Saul Marobela was once a pastor under the Rev Bhengu and he did not have a problem with working with him and receiving instructions for ministry from his overseer, “Personal Interview,” July 17, 2015. Steve Msiza recalled how his father-in-law, the Rev Dube often stated how some pastors had problems with embracing Bhengu’s vision *in lieu* of their own. Rev Steve Msiza, Personal Interview, May 14, 2015. Maurice Ngakane, Rev Masondo’s son-in-law, described how Masondo did not have a good relationship with Bhengu for reasons outside the focus of this paper; Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

7.10. Why AGUSA missionaries could not agree with Bhengu

Ironically, some missionaries did not have problems with Bhengu's "Thesis," their churches even supported him financially. It was churches pioneered by the Irish missionaries demonstrated moral and financial support, and that with no strings attached. They were willing to send him to 'Timbuktu' if the need arose, Bond later wrote in his memoirs.⁵⁰⁴ Americans were apprehensive because their 'mandate' was to evangelise the "native." We will see later how an AGUSA missionary, Eugene Grams, was rebuked by his Field-Secretary for pastoring a white church in Welkom. There was a sentiment expressed against working among white people as early as 1914. One Francis Taylor, an early missionary, complained:

Several of the missionaries here feel that Brother Turney's article in the *Evangel* of March 14th shows a misunderstanding of the missionary work in South Africa, as to the conditions and needs of the country. Reference was also made to those working among natives as being more genuinely missionary than those working among the English speaking people. I am one of those working among the natives, right in the heart of the deepest heathenism, having worked among them for many years. Therefore, I may be permitted to speak a word with appropriateness in behalf of those working among the English speaking people—also the Dutch. Dear brethren, may I ask why are the white people of the States, and Canada, the British Isles, the African continent of Australia etc., [allowed] to have the full Pentecostal gospel proclaimed to them and not the white people of South Africa? Why should we proclaim this Latter Rain message to the natives alone in South Africa?⁵⁰⁵

A rebuttal of Francis Taylor's concerns was posted immediately below her article:

Miss Taylor in her above remarks misses entirely the thought intended to be conveyed in our discussion in the *Evangel* of May 14th. The contrast is not so much between missionaries as it is what missionaries most need financial help. It is not a question at all of whether white people in South Africa should receive the gospel or not...Our point was that those labouring among the well-to-do

⁵⁰⁴ J Bond, *For the Record, Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/APPENDIX%202.html>

⁵⁰⁵ See an article by F Taylor in, *The Christian Evangel*, August 15, 1914, 4.

white people in South Africa are situated very similarly to those in North America.⁵⁰⁶

American donors were more generous and sympathetic to ministry among the ‘natives.’ What seemed plausible is that, if missionaries stayed away from the townships then their purse would be affected; especially because it now showed signs of recuperation after ‘The Great Depression’ and World War II.

7.11. The controversy of taking pictures and money

The question of sponsoring ‘native’ evangelists was a sensitive one, not so much for the evangelists themselves as it was for white Pentecostal leaders in the AGUSA and their missionaries. WF Dugmore, first secretary of the AFM in South Africa, had as early as 1916, painted a bad picture with regard to ‘native-incompetence’ and the management of money.⁵⁰⁷ The AGUSA itself was not in favour of supporting ‘natives’ directly; whatever support was intended for them had to be channelled through a missionary. They were so strong on it, a clause in the constitution was ratified and endorsed in every General Council after 1914.

In Bhengu’s notion of the ‘Indigenous Church,’ any money raised in the name of the work in the townships had to be administered by those who work, and live in the townships. That was totally incompatible with AGUSA constitutional stipulations. Thus his discomfort with missionaries who took pictures among the ‘natives,’ and were not accountable to anybody in that regard. African pastors and evangelists were often captured on camera, but had no way of knowing how the money was administered in relation to their work. Many of them were poor, while the missionaries lived on ‘American’ standards. This notion had been endorsed by Melvin Hodges in his book *The*

⁵⁰⁶ Editors of *The Christian Evangel* (J Roswel Flower and his wife) responded to the article and closed it for further discussion. See article below Taylor’s submission. *The Christian Evangel*, August 15, 1914, 4.

⁵⁰⁷ See an article written by WF Dugmore, ‘Missionary Work and the Natives,’ *The Weekly Evangel*, February 12, 1916, 16.

Indigenous Church. Missionaries lived in affluent white suburbs, and drove above-average automobiles; thanks to ‘Speed-the-Light,’ an AGUSA programme that financed these projects. A pastor recalled how one missionary innocently spoke about having more than one toilet in his house. It struck a chord with the pastor; as a bible-teacher in an Assemblies of God school he had to struggle for sanitation in a house built with one toilet. His family had to wait turns before using the facility.⁵⁰⁸ While the point may seem petty, it exposes the sensitivity of relations in the polarised environment in which both missionaries and indigenous pastors had to work. The things they took for granted indigenous pastors took seriously.

Some African pastors and evangelists saw this as a form of exploitation, an abuse of African poverty and ignorance. Most Pentecostal pastors and evangelists either had no education, or very little of it.⁵⁰⁹ Missionary education did not encourage excellence; as a matter of fact, many of their students were below acceptable levels of literacy and numeracy. There were those who were given a meagre stipend as ‘missionary evangelists,’ just enough to sustain missionary programs and intentions.⁵¹⁰ Another pastor recalled how a missionary could not pay him and his colleague a ‘living wage,’ because it was against the laws of the country.⁵¹¹

The socio-economic context of the time prompted many black radicals to question their economic conditions, and many believed that their poverty was designed by white people. Cecil John Rhodes’ capital machinery in the mines was sustained by cheap

⁵⁰⁸ Maurice Ngakane, Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.

⁵⁰⁹ Maurice Ngakane, who joined the International Assemblies of God in the early 60s observed that most Pentecostal pastors and evangelists lacked the kind of education that could make them question the status quo. Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.

⁵¹⁰ Rev. Pedro-Nehru Raboroko, a member of the International Assemblies of God, was given a sum of R20.00 a month for his services. The amounts would vary among black pastors and evangelists depending on the missionary’s generosity. Personal Interview, April 12, 2015.

⁵¹¹ This discussion was held on *Facebook*, July 25, 2015, with Rev Michael Nomtoto, a pastor in the Eastern Cape.

African labour. That notion was emulated in the religious setting; it was the white missionary who seemed to get richer while the ‘native evangelist’ laboured but remained poor. Bhengu, given his background in the Unions and the South African Communist Party, was well aware of this political context and totally opposed to it.

With the Eastern Cape as his flagship, Bhengu proved that the problem wasn’t the money, but the paternalist sentiments that came with it. With the right motivation, black people were able to do things for themselves. Why was it possible for the AGUSA to sponsor white South African missionaries, like Dugmore and G Booyesen,⁵¹² and could not do the same for black evangelists like Elias Letwaba? Why were they so willing to sponsor their own missionaries when they could sponsor a black pastor, or evangelist at a fraction of the total cost? Such questions, if carried to their logical conclusions, implied missionary redundancy.

These and similar questions were fermenting in the mind of most pastors and evangelists, but very few, if at all, were open about it, except among themselves. “They could not bite the hand that fed them,” one old pastor’s wife tearfully reminisced about her husband working with AGUSA missionaries.⁵¹³ “When we asked about the money, missionaries would send us back to our poor churches,” another veteran in the township disclosed.⁵¹⁴ A pastor’s wife asked, “But would their churches finance them if they were not telling our story?”⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² WF Dugmore was the First secretary of the Faith Mission Church in Johannesburg who ridiculed the financial support of black evangelists. G Booyesen was an Afrikaner missionary of the same church who often reported on his work in Zimbabwe and Louis Trichardt in Limpopo; See article by WF Dugmore, “From Johannesburg,” *The Weekly Evangel*, July 29, 1916, 13; see also, “Prospering Work in South Africa,” *The Weekly Evangel*, November 11, 1916.

⁵¹³ Mrs S. Mononyane, Personal Interview, June 20, 2015.

⁵¹⁴ Rev Steve Msiza told the story of how his father-in-law owned a little ‘General Dealer’ to make ends meet in Benoni, while missionaries raised money at his expense and that of his converts. Dube was the preacher when Phillip Molefe was converted in Eastwood, Pretoria. Personal Interview, May 14, 2015.

⁵¹⁵ Mrs. Mononyane, June 20, 2015.

7.12. Working against the things we are most passionate about

As the AGUSA grew more and more sophisticated in its organisation since 1914, especially with regard to what they called ‘Foreign Missions,’ the demand for a more robust management structure increased. The world was divided into regions each with its ‘Field-Secretary.’ Henry Bruce Garlock, a veteran missionary in West and East Africa, became the first ‘Field-Secretary for Africa,’ in the AGUSA Division of Foreign Missions, in the years 1943-1953.⁵¹⁶

Garlock was the missionary in Liberia who survived being eaten by cannibals.⁵¹⁷ Of all missionary officials, he was perhaps the one who confronted the issues of race and culture most vociferously. In 1948 he delivered an address to students at Central Bible Institute. He spoke of a long trip across Africa:

We toured the African continent, traveling approximately 50 000 miles, visiting sixteen of our African mission fields. We had the privilege of visiting every one of the Assemblies of God mission stations in Africa (except Egypt) as well as about 100 mission stations of other denominations. In all we have visited twenty-four countries.⁵¹⁸

Garlock presented a scathing attack of Pentecostal missions in Africa. He based his talk on the experiences of Simon the Cyrene, Luke 23:36; and spoke of the ‘African’ as the exploited ‘burden-bearer’ of the white man. “Africa and burden bearing go together,”⁵¹⁹ he said,

⁵¹⁶ D.D. Bundy, “Garlock Henry Bruce” in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard . Van Der Maas, Ed (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 659.

⁵¹⁷ H.B. Garlock, ‘Before we Kill You and Eat You,’ *Assemblies of God Heritage*, Vol 4, No 2 (Summer), 1984, 3-4.

⁵¹⁸ H.B. Garlock, “Africa and Her People,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1948, 2-3; 12-14.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The African for centuries has been a compelled worker, a forced laborer. Bishop Newell Booth estimates that between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries no less than 15 000 000 Africans were torn from their homes by slave raiders and sold like cattle to the white man.⁵²⁰

In the context of the AGUSA of his time, that was a bold step, especially because it was presented at the bastion of AGUSA-intellectualism. Central Bible Institute was the first school sponsored by the General Council of the AGUSA, it was also the benchmark against which every other school had to be measured.⁵²¹ Whatever he said would be known by his principals, especially because it was finally published in the widely distributed *Pentecostal Evangel*.

He went on to describe how the African had been abused in different ways:

The African is segregated. He is an outcast from society. There is no place for him; he is only a black man. But friends, he is God's creation, he was created in the image and the likeness of God, the same as a white man.⁵²²

During his trip through Africa he visited Rev Bhengu's work in the Eastern Cape; from that time on he spoke of him at every available opportunity. It was that visit that left an indelible impression on him with regard to the 'Indigenous Church.' He concluded his lengthy speech by saying,

The time has come when we must advance the indigenous church, and we must recognize that not only in Africa, but throughout the world the key to the missionary problem, as Andrew Murray has said, is the native ministry. Where the African ministry has been encouraged and confidence has been placed in the African, God has blessed in a remarkable way.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ E Blumhofer, 'Assemblies of God,' in *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M Van Der Maas, Eds (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 335.

⁵²² H.B. Garlock, "Africa and Her People," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1948, 3.

⁵²³ Ibid.

Garlock voiced a well-known principle of missions within the Assemblies of God. Why then was there so much “havoc” in the townships? On the surface, Bhengu and the missionaries believed in the same thing, they all wanted to build the ‘Indigenous Church,’ but for some, or other reason they could not work together. If anything, the “Thesis” in Witbank evoked more animosity and tensions than cooperation.

That much is clear as we consider how it happened in the next chapter. Sometimes the situation bordered on the brinks of physical fights; African fighting African with missionaries standing on the side lines. Rev Majola recalled a day, when he almost strangled a fellow-pastor in Mohlakeng, Randfontein, just west of Johannesburg. A group of ministers had been assigned to go and evict a ‘dissident’ who could not agree with the ‘District Council.’ A missionary, Vernon Pettenger, looked on from a distance, waiting with locksmith and all. That night, the evicted pastor, his wife and little girl, did not have a place to sleep.⁵²⁴

As 1955 was winding down, it was clear that the missionary’s draw to South Africa was more than evangelising the ‘native.’ They were opposed to anything that even suggested that their presence was obsolete. The question of money, was closely connected to their presence here, and as one former pastor said, “black people were the bait to fish money out of American churches.”⁵²⁵

The period beyond 1955 was all set for suspicious minds among missionaries and their African counterparts. When one missionary was asked, “What were the levels of trust between missionaries and national workers?” He responded, “We certainly trusted our African brothers, but we always knew, they did not altogether trust us.”⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Stanford Majola, Personal Interview, May 12, 2015.

⁵²⁵ Maurice Ngakane, Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.

⁵²⁶ James (Jim) Grams. He was an AGUSA missionary in South Africa, and taught at the Southern Africa School of Theology in Rustenburg. A ‘Chat’ was held with him on *Facebook*.

Chapter 8

8. Missionaries or ‘Mercenaries:’ Suspicions, Lies, Truths, Half-Truths, and Rumours in the AGSA

We have seen in the last chapter that, in 1955, Nicholas Bhengu tried to assure missionaries, within the AGSA conglomerate, that they had nothing to fear. He wanted to work with them; but the African pastor and evangelist had to determine the terms of reference and operation, especially in African locations. He made strong submissions of his commitment to their cause, and expressed deep appreciation of the missionary enterprise in general; especially, with regard to his own education and upbringing at the Lutheran Mission Station at Entumeni.

The “Thesis,” as he called his 1955 presentation in Witbank, was sparked off by a series of events; in particular, missionary involvement in the African townships and villages, especially in the period 1951-1955. AGUSA missionaries were heavily involved, and Bhengu was not in favour of it. This ‘dilemma’ reached its peak when another evangelist was introduced into the AGSA. In 1951, Phillip Molefe’s ministry took on ‘miraculous’ proportions in the Southern Transvaal, parts of the Witwatersrand, and the Orange Free State. Up till then, Bhengu had no rival as the foremost revivalist in the AGSA.

Missionaries, who so far had been kept out of the African locations by Bhengu, immediately rallied around the new evangelist. He was easier to deal with, and perhaps readily accessible. In Bhengu’s thinking, and in the context of a racially polarised South Africa, white people were better-off evangelising their own. That trend of thought was exposed very early in Bhengu’s ministry when he relocated from Benoni to Port

Elizabeth in the 1940s. He hand-picked Alfred Gumede, a close associate, and warned him of missionaries “causing havoc in the townships.”⁵²⁷

Some havoc did take place in the Benoni Assembly after Bhengu’s departure. A large group of youth broke-away to start a new church in a school-classroom nearby.⁵²⁸ Ring-leaders included, Harold Mononyane and Hosea Motsepe. Mononyane later resurfaced in Mamelodi, near Pretoria, and Motsepe was appointed as a teacher in Rustenburg after the ABTI had relocated from Witbank.⁵²⁹ Both men were now in the International Assemblies of God. Edgar Pettenger had been involved with the church and reported many stories about it. At one stage, when Bhengu relocated to Port Elizabeth, he asked Americans to pray for a new pastor because Bhengu had been called away. This must have been a vibrant church; otherwise it would not have solicited so much concern and attention.

In the conference in Witbank, Bhengu tried to galvanise missionary support around his ‘vision,’ but the efforts fell through. Even worse, he ostracised, and vilified some African pastors whose cooperation he needed in the attempt to keep missionaries out of the African locations. Bhengu abhorred apartheid but he used its strictures to advance his evangelistic aspirations. Occasionally, he preached in white and coloured areas; and always as per invitation. He insisted on the same for African locations.

The ‘Thesis’ in Witbank was intended to clear the ‘fog,’ but it created more ‘fog.’ Missionaries could not see their way forward; and they set out to create their own paths. To be sure, Bhengu bestowed on himself the right to draw perimeters of ministry around

⁵²⁷ D Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Rev Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 63.

⁵²⁸ Personal Interview, Mrs S Mononyane, June 20, 2015. This information was confirmed in another personal interview, Rev Saul Marobela, in a personal interview, July 17, 2015.

⁵²⁹ In 1959, Fred Burke reported that the ABTI will have to be relocated according to a decision by the apartheid regime. The school was given until June 1961, to find an alternative location for the Bible School. A suitable location was finally found on the outskirts of town in Rustenburg; see *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 27, 1959.

their mission, and that of other ‘nationals.’ That was not in line with the founding principles of the AGSA; non-interference in the other’s territory was the deal; every member of the loose structured conglomerate was accountable only to his principals.

This loose structure was not easy to implement, as both Bhengu and the missionaries found out. The more he sought to keep missionaries out; the more they defied his philosophical stance. The missionaries built an African garrison around them from a number of emerging black evangelists; many of whom were graduates of the African Bible Training Institute (ABTI) in Witbank. Fred Burke, an AGUSA missionary, was principal of the school. The loose structure of the AGSA conglomerate; could neither hold Bhengu nor the missionaries accountable; every part of the whole was at liberty to determine its own direction.

What missionaries did, with regard to their mission, was not a problem; how they did it was what made Bhengu uncomfortable. On the other hand, missionaries had a problem with Bhengu’s ‘Thesis;’ it was not compatible with the ethos of their missionary mandate. Their mission was to evangelise ‘natives;’ and these were found in their thousands in African locations and mining compounds. That incompatibility, with regard to evangelising the African locations, became a fierce battle ground between Bhengu and AGUSA missionaries following the year 1955.

This chapter will discuss selected themes emerging in archival research and interviews conducted with participants in the developments beyond 1955. It will show how an atmosphere of mistrust developed between Bhengu, AGUSA missionaries, and indigenous pastors and evangelists. It was a suspicious environment peppered with lies, truths, half-truths, and scathing rumours. This sensitive environment may have involved some of the highest officials in the security wing of the apartheid government. It will also show how money was a central factor in the debacle between Bhengu and missionaries; not so much for Bhengu, as it was for the missionaries.

8.1. Bhengu and the apartheid Government

In the context of an apartheid culture that thrived on suspicion, it is plausible to assume that the government of the day had a secret, and up-to-date dossier on Bhengu.

Apartheid had always been threatened by African preachers who seemed to resist white control. The *Amakholwa* culture, for instance, gave apartheid, and the authorities before it, an uneasy feeling. The same was true with African Zionists who later broke-away from the AFM. Resistance to white-control raised many suspicions. John Bond, a onetime member of the executive in the AGSA, wrote the following in his memoirs about Bhengu,

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 up with an official written apology.⁵³⁰

There is no record of that meeting; but that Bhengu even secured the appointment spoke much regarding the apartheid regime's attitude towards him. Perhaps they saw in him one who could advance their cause in terms of calming the townships. Indeed, many white officials in the townships encouraged his campaigns; especially with the impact they had in the reduction of crime. According to Bond, on one occasion he was recruited to work for the government; however, he declined the offer which could have ensured a monthly-stipend by the department of Native Affairs.⁵³¹

The apartheid regime was very sensitive with regard to what people said about South Africa abroad, with the likes of Senator Gerrie Wessels participating in Pentecostal World Conferences; they must have known that Bhengu, or the conference itself was not a threat to the political *status quo* in South Africa. Wessels, was the Vice-President of the AFM, and a Senator in the apartheid government.

⁵³⁰ J Bond, "Bhengu-Government and Politics," <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Government%20and%20Politics.html>

⁵³¹ Ibid.

Bhengu, despite his earlier connections with Communism and African nationalism, had reservations with regard to the spread of these ideologies in the African locations. He was also worried about the spread of Islam in Africa;⁵³² to that extent he shared a common sentiment with Pentecostals at home and abroad.

Pentecostals had a deep detestation, if not fear, of Communism; and often thought they had their finger on its pulse. A report appearing in the *Pentecostal Evangel* read,

In two to four years from now the Western world is likely to be surprised by a new and very vocal crop of young leaders in Africa talking in Marxist phrases and shouting the praises of the Soviet Union, reports *Freedom's Facts*. The reason is that today, and for the past several years, the Reds have been conducting a major propaganda and agitation effort in secondary schools and colleges in that African continent. An observant educator who made a tour of Africa in 1952 reported six Communist organizations with substantial student membership in Egypt. Among colleges in other parts of Africa there were reports of "professional students," those attending school for the sole purpose of spreading Communist propaganda. A church representative just back from a tour of African missions reported that the amount of such propaganda directed at secondary schools in Africa is tremendous.⁵³³

American periodicals often reported on Bhengu as a converted "Communist;"⁵³⁴ perhaps that allayed the fears of a government that probed and curtailed the movement of influential black people. His stance of political non-involvement, much to the chagrin of township radicals, was well known. He did not challenge apartheid, but he was not its poodle either. As far as the gospel is concerned, Bhengu's mind was made up; and he was not going to be used as an ideological pawn, either by the apartheid regime, American missionaries, or the political radicals of his day. He was his own man in an environment that posed many challenges for a philosophical hermit of his sort.

⁵³² Nicholas Bhengu, *The National Church, Thesis Presented by N Bhengu at the Assemblies of God Conference*, Witbank 0n Wednesday, October 15, 1955, 5.

⁵³³ "Communists Active in Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 6, 1957, 10.

⁵³⁴ *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 30, 1958, 22.

8.2. Nicholas Bhengu and Gerrie Wessels; united abroad but divided at home

Nicholas Bhengu attended the 4th Pentecostal World Conference in Stockholm, in 1955. Gerrie Wessels, was also present in this meeting.⁵³⁵ In 1955, Wessels, a popular pastor of the AFM in Johannesburg, was appointed Senator by the National Party government.⁵³⁶ In an era where Pentecostals did not ‘mix’ church with politics the move was controversial and it caused a split in the AFM.⁵³⁷ Wessels was a vehement opponent of Communism and agitated by the so-called ‘swart-gevaar’ (the danger posed by radical black people to white people in South Africa). The pastor of a flagship church; Wessels was accepted and known as a champion of Afrikanerdom within white Pentecostalism.

Bhengu and Wessels were regular and active participants in these international Pentecostal triennial meetings. The Pentecostal World Conference, was probably the only platform where Pentecostals from around the world could come together with no consideration for race, colour or creed. They were both elected as members of the committee that would organise the next conference in Toronto, Canada, in 1958.⁵³⁸ They were brothers in the ‘Spirit’ on international platforms and divided at home by a Pentecostalism that legitimated apartheid. That irony haunted South African Evangelicals and Pentecostals right through the apartheid era.

⁵³⁵ See, ‘Thousands of Delegates Attend World Pentecostal Conference,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 17, 1955, 2-3.

⁵³⁶ See *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 17, 1955, 2-3. Also, J Mostert, “White Cultural Identity Development in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Personal Narrative,” *Journal of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity*, 4 (2013), 44-60.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ R Riggs, ‘Thousands of Delegates Attend World Pentecostal Conference,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 17, 1955, 2.

On September 14-21, 1958, they met again at the 5th Pentecostal World Conference in Toronto, Canada.⁵³⁹ David du Plessis—a South African ‘naturalised’ as American—was another former AFM pastor of influence internationally. He played a high-profile role in organising these conferences. He worked tirelessly to reconcile Pentecostalism with the ecumenical world, especially Roman Catholicism;⁵⁴⁰ and yet patronised its racial division at home. Toronto, and other conferences like it, exposed the racial conundrum inherent in South African Pentecostalism. Robert C. Cunningham of the *Foursquare Magazine* noted with some degree of curiosity:

Blacks and whites sat side by side in the congregation while senator Gerald R. Wessels of South Africa introduced and embraced Rev Bhengu before the Zulu evangelist preached at the Wednesday night service. Both men stayed at the same headquarters hotel and shared the same dining room.⁵⁴¹

It wouldn't have mattered, except that it was a political misnomer for South Africans. Wessels, was part of what Nico Horn called “The New Order.” A group of young ministers in the AFM in South Africa, probably third generation, who introduced politics into white Pentecostalism.⁵⁴² One of them was Justus Du Plessis, David's younger brother; top on their agenda was to reintroduce white Pentecostalism into mainstream Afrikaner nationalism; the same nationalism that gave birth to apartheid.⁵⁴³

⁵³⁹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 30, 1958, 22.

⁵⁴⁰ R.P. Spittler, “Du Plessis, David Johannes,” in *International Dictionary Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, S M Burgess and EM Van Der Maas, eds (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 589-593.

⁵⁴¹ RC Cunningham, “Culled from the Conference...,” *Foursquare Magazine*, November 1958, 11.

⁵⁴² N Horn, “Power and Empowerment in the Political Context of Some Afrikaans-Speaking Pentecostals in South Africa,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, December 2006, Vol XXXII. No 3, 6.

⁵⁴³ D Moodie in his ground breaking work on *Afrikanerdom* has demonstrated how deep apartheid was influenced by civil religion. “The New Order” was disturbed by a number of features in early Pentecostalism, including the noisy diversions that made them immune to social and political life. They still cherished the sophistication of the Dutch Reformed Church and wanted to reintroduce that into a Pentecostalism that was mainly made up of poor and uneducated Afrikaners. Essentially they wanted to render the AFM into a “Dutch Reformed Church speaking in tongues.” See T D Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1975), 52-72.

The racial enigma black and white Pentecostals exposed a racial dilemma that Pentecostalism in South Africa could not balance. On international platforms, South Africans ‘played’ normal behaviour in terms of race relations; only to return home to an ‘abnormal’ society polarised by race and cultural prejudice. That was true not only for Bhengu and Wessels, but other AGSA leaders such as Austin Chawner.

The American missionaries, whether Canadian or USA, had a different problem; while they appeared to embrace the ‘natives,’ they also played along with apartheid when it was convenient. We will see later, how those ‘conveniences’ presented an area of



Figure 16: Bhengu and other leaders at the Pentecostal World Conference in Canada (Flower Pentecostal Heritage Centre).

concern for those who lived and experienced the frustrations of African locations on a daily basis.⁵⁴⁴

The work of the AGSA only began to catch world attention when Bhengu began the revivals in the Eastern Cape in 1945. Those revivals created an indelible impact on Pentecostal leaders around the world since John G. Lake. While American missionaries in South Africa sought to treat him as a ‘native evangelist,’ he was already rubbing shoulders with high ranking officials in the Pentecostal fraternity.

Bhengu’s philosophical aspirations for the evangelisation of Africa were known to missionaries since the Witbank conference, in 1955. He was practically ignored, and it

⁵⁴⁴ Missionaries, across the board, lived in white suburbs and enjoyed ‘white privilege’ in South Africa; so the AGUSA missionaries were not unique in that regard. The problem was that it was the poverty of the people in the African locations that supported their affluence in the suburbs. Essentially, their exploitation of the African communities was economic. All religious communities in South Africa, spoke or did not speak against apartheid while the ‘Reformed’ churches were openly for it. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission did show that, at one level or another, the house of Faith in South Africa was either oppressive or facilitated oppression. See PJG Meiring, ‘Truth & Reconciliation in Southern Africa: The Role of Faith Communities,’ *VERBUB ET ECCLESIA*, 2005, Vol 1 No 26, 146-143.

brewed serious conflicts for space. Missionaries went ahead, with the cooperation of some ‘nationals,’ and invaded African locations ‘in the name of Jesus.’

8.3. Invading the townships ‘In the name of Jesus’

A “Sunday School Convention” was held in the Brakpan Old Location in the autumn of 1955. “A missionary” reported,

It was the first venture of its kind in South Africa, and missionaries and national workers wondered just how it would be accepted. They were more than repaid for their efforts by the eagerness on the part of those who attended.⁵⁴⁵

A second “venture” was held in Pimville, Soweto, in 1956; and a third one in Sharpeville. Mrs Masondo, a pastor’s wife in Brakpan Old Location, spoke in one of the meetings. Missionaries were however the ‘specialists’ who featured frequently as speakers or teachers. One missionary reported how Sharpeville transported “a busload of happy folk” to Pimville.⁵⁴⁶ In Sharpeville, where Molefe was the pastor-in-charge, Mrs Hunter, of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, was invited, she “introduced some new choruses,” and Rev Kast, a Swiss Assemblies of God missionary, gave the closing sermon. Kast challenged the audience, “He that winneth souls is wise.”⁵⁴⁷ It was such ‘invitations’ that Bhengu perceived as an attempt to deflate his vision.

The missionary’s involvement in the African townships continued unabated, despite Bhengu’s aggressive appeal in Witbank. His vision of the ‘Indigenous Church,’ built with little or no missionary interference, was slowly being punctured. The ‘Indigenous Church,’ was the AGUSA missionary’s blueprint for missions; yet in significant ways, their mental models of ‘Indigenous’ were incompatible. The unintended consequences of the ‘loose structure’ that the AGSA was, were beginning to haunt the situation.

⁵⁴⁵ *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 31, 1957, 15.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

While the ‘white-work,’ led by Irish brothers Jim and Fred Mullan, went on undisturbed; two centres of influence were emerging in the African locations; one in East London, and the other in Sharpeville; with Bhengu, and Molefe as respective leaders. That situation was totally unacceptable to Bhengu, who considered himself the leader of the work in the African townships.

8.3.1. Training the “National Missionary:’ Education or Indoctrination?

Sometime in 1957, Fred Burke, principal of the “African Bible Training Institute” in Witbank wrote an article for the *Pentecostal Evangel*. Its caption read, “This is the day of the National Missionary.” He told the story of Aaron Mnisi, a “National Missionary” to a remote village in Sekhukhuneland called Phokoane (Limpopo). Burke told his American donors that Mnisi, was the right man for the job;

His home will be of mud and grass like the other homes. He will eat the same food, speak the same language. There is no difference in color nor economic standing. He is a “son of the soil, a “man of Africa” ...African missionaries can go where we cannot. Doors that are closed to the white missionaries are open to them. Herein is the secret of winning Africa.”⁵⁴⁸

Perhaps this was the answer to a question raised by H.B. Garlock at the American citadel of AGUSA theology, the Central Bible Institute; in 1948, he asked:

The question arises in your minds as to whether or not we need missionaries for Africa and the kind of missionaries we need. I will say yes, Africa needs missionaries with a touch of God upon their lives, spiritual missionaries. We have no place for hirelings or globe-trotters who want to travel the world enriching their ministry.⁵⁴⁹

Garlock raised that question after he received a good report about Bhengu in Toronto, and made a personal visit to the revivals in the Eastern Cape.⁵⁵⁰ It was a question the AGUSA wrestled with since 1914, but did not want to confront head-on.

⁵⁴⁸ F Burke, “This is the Day of the National Missionary,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 19, 1958, 16.

⁵⁴⁹ H.B. Garlock, “Africa and Her People,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1948; 2-3, 12-14.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

In 1957 Fred Burke, principal of the ABTI, made a similar submission. He wrote home about the ‘day of the national missionary.’⁵⁵¹ He sent two “national missionaries” to Bethal, in Mpumalanga; what he called a “den of iniquity.” To this place he dispatched Petrus Sindani and Enos Nyatlo; “on their own initiative they hired a small hall...and people began to flock to the meetings.” At one time Nicholas Bhengu joined the pair for a weekend, and the campaign was a resounding success. It is not clear, whether Bhengu called in support of the initiative, or he was on a fact-finding mission. Perhaps he wanted first-hand observation of what the missionaries and their students were doing in the townships. These crusades were being conducted independent of his ‘Back-to God’ plans.

The article that Burke wrote was not a call for a ‘missionary moratorium.’ On the contrary, it was soliciting funds to train more “national missionaries.” The flagship of Burke’s African Bible Training Institute in Witbank was none other than Phillip Molefe; he attended the institution for a year in 1950, and went on to impact the Vaal and the Free State in the years following. In 1958 Burke was still reporting on him,

A young man came to the Bible School who, unknown to us at the time, had a criminal record. After a year of training he returned to his home in Pretoria, then felt a call to Vereeniging. His ministry is well known—how criminals surrendered their weapons, how thieves brought back stolen goods, and how in one year he baptised over 800 converts.⁵⁵²

In his article, he concluded,

In view of the urgency of the need, and the hunger for Bible teaching evidenced by our Africans, and the fact that the African Bible Training Institute is the recognised Institute for training spirit-filled workers for so much of South Africa, we are appealing to God’s people everywhere to unite with us in prayer and faith that God will show His salvation and that a great army of African missionaries may still be trained and sent forth into the whitened harvest fields.

⁵⁵¹ F Burke, “This is the Day of the National Missionary,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 19, 1958, 16.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

Send offerings for the school to “Witbank Bible School” c/o Foreign Missions Department.⁵⁵³

Burke’s call for the “National missionary” was not different from the core of Bhengu’s “Thesis” presented in Witbank, in 1955. There was only one difference, Burke’s education had a link to Burke that was not easy to break. on his students. Some students, who did not have fees, were sponsored by the school, and often with the qualification, “Only if you work with us.”⁵⁵⁴ Many of these students developed an emotional and psychological connection to missionaries; and subsequently facilitated their access into the black locations. Sponsoring students, developed into another dimension in subverting Bhengu’s strategy into the African locations. These ABTI students were not part of his ‘Back-to-God’ movement, they were working with the American missionaries within the AGSA conglomerate.

Earlier in 1950, Bhengu had tried to open his own ‘Pilgrim Bible School’ in Port Elizabeth; when that didn’t work, he sent his students to his *alma mater*, the Union Bible Institute in Pietermaritzburg. Levels of trust were taking a dip, and he could no longer trust missionaries with the training of his pastors and evangelists. His churches were advised to boycott the ABTI in Witbank.⁵⁵⁵

8.3.2. The contest for space in the African location continues...

Sometimes in 1957, Edgar Pettenger reported of a ‘biennial’ conference with an attendance of about 1500 people. It had representatives from Kenya, Belgian Congo, Rhodesia, and Mozambique. He sent home a picture of a new “European” church for

⁵⁵³ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁵⁴ Many former students at the ABTI disclosed how they went through three year of Bible-Training. Working with missionaries did not pose a problem because some did not really come from established churches, they were products of the evangelistic campaigns that were going on at the time. Maurice Ngakane, for instance, was paid for by the missionaries, and later joined the faculty as a teacher. Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.

⁵⁵⁵ Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 158.

white people in Welkom, in the Orange Free State. That church got Eugene Grams into trouble with Everett Phillips, the Field Director for Africa, for reaching out to a white community; it went against AGUSA missionary policy. Pettenger also reported on the work of Johnson Nebe, in Kwa-Thema, Springs; and continued to make statements implying the need for a new church.⁵⁵⁶

As the revivals unfolded in the Rand, and the Orange Free State, Bhengu and the missionaries were obviously moving in parallel paths towards the same goal. In Molefe, and ABTI students, missionaries were challenging the freeze around their ministry. Bhengu took it personally, even threatened to disrupt some of the meetings carried out against his wish.⁵⁵⁷

Picture after picture in the periodical, *The Pentecostal Evangel* showed Vernon Pettenger, and other missionaries actively involved in Vereeniging, Welkom, Virginia, Odendaalsrus and other townships in the Witwatersrand.

In one picture, Vernon Pettenger appeared with Phillip Molefe and a certain Bethuel Mofokeng inspecting a “.32 Luger pistol.”⁵⁵⁸ The weapon was submitted by a “Tsotsi” in one of Molefe’s meetings. Another picture showed Edgar’s wife, Mabel Pettenger “opening” a new church structure in Kwa-Thema; that was the church her husband reported on earlier in 1957.⁵⁵⁹ At some point before the dedication a long overnight debate ensued over whose name was to appear on the cornerstone of the church, was it

⁵⁵⁶ See article by E Pettenger, ‘1500 Attend Conference in South Africa,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 26, 1958, 16.

⁵⁵⁷ Personal Interview, P-N Raboroko tells the story of how Bhengu wanted to disrupt a ‘Tent-Meeting’ in Soweto. He was denied space, and asked to pitch his tent in another part of town. Rev Steve Msiza, also told the story of his father-in-law, Rev Dube, received a call from Bhengu, threatening to shut down Phillip Molefe’s work. Rev Steve Msiza, Personal Interview, May 14, 2015. Msiza is Dube’s son-in-law. His information derives from shared moments with the old man as he narrated his experiences in ministry.

⁵⁵⁸ *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 27, 1959, 6.

⁵⁵⁹ Edgar Pettenger, “New Kwa-Thema Assembly Opened on the Rand,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 21, 1959, 10.

Bhengu or Nebe?⁵⁶⁰ The appearance of Pettenger's name was not questioned; after all, he raised the money towards the building of the church.

Bhengu was present at that opening in 1959; according to Edgar Pettenger he challenged the people to give towards the building, and they responded "out of their poverty" with over 100 pounds sterling.⁵⁶¹ Pettenger did not miss the opportunity to ask for more funds from abroad, this time, he was more forthright,

Will you continue to pray and give toward the final completion of this gospel centre at Kwa-Thema? Funds are needed to provide seats and lights. Send all contribution to the Foreign Missions Department, designated "E. Pettenger for church building (Kwa-Thema assembly.)"⁵⁶²

8.3.3. The subtle 'malevolence' hidden in missionary 'benevolence'

AGUSA missionary benevolence did not even come close to what Elphick called the "benevolent empire." The question, for them, was not how the 'native' could be integrated in the rest of society but how their subjugation could promote their mission. While missionaries in the traditional mission-churches contributed in a diverse range of social responsibility initiatives, including education for the 'native,' AGUSA missionaries focused largely on building churches. Empowering the 'native' was not their priority. Even their theological education was accessible with very low levels of literacy and numeracy. While the 'benevolent empire' was far from ideal, it was a lesser form of evil.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶⁰ This information was disclosed by Rev Steve Msiza. Steve Msiza, Personal Interview, May 14, 2015. Msiza was Rev Dube's son-in-law. His information derives from shared moments with the old man as he narrated his experiences in ministry within the AGSA.

⁵⁶¹ South Africa, at the time, under British colonial rule, and the pound sterling was the official currency.

⁵⁶² E Pettenger, "New Kwa-Thema Assembly Opened on the Rand," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 21, 1959, 10.

⁵⁶³ Elphick's 'Benevolent Empire' relates to the various ways in which missionary agencies engaged in social responsibility initiatives such as schools, hospitals and skills development. Pentecostal missionaries had very little to do with that except a few cases of literacy classes where people would be taught how to

For Bhengu, projects like Kwa-Thema, were disabling, not empowering; it was a subtle twist in a paradox that created many areas of conflict. Helping with the building of churches in the townships, was seen by some as a benevolent act on the missionary's part. As one pastor said, "*Ba re thusa,*" (they are helping us). Still others saw it as an abuse of conditions of poverty and ignorance. For Bhengu, it was the malevolent act, hidden in a form of benevolence, which nurtured a crippling long-term sense of dependence.

If missionaries built churches for people; then, the people would never be able to build churches for themselves. The subjugation was not only political, it was psychological too. He didn't only have negative sentiments about it; he had built two major auditoriums in the Eastern Cape; thus showing that Africans, with the right motivation, could build their own churches.

The problem with Bhengu's 'Thesis,' was that, if carried to its logical conclusion, it would render missionaries redundant. Was that not the ultimate objective in building the 'Indigenous Church?' That tension raised the question of timing, 'How long must missionaries last in a foreign land?' AGUSA missionaries were not ready to respond to that question, even though it was a natural corollary of their missionary intentions; and neither were their principals at headquarters, in Springfield, Missouri.

There was a growing support for the missionary's benevolence, provoked in part by Bhengu's imposing and authoritarian style of leadership. He was sympathetic to missionaries, but 'ruthless' to African pastors and evangelists who did not cooperate with him, even calling them "instruments of the devil." It is against such, that missionaries were warned, "...mark such men well."

read the Bible. Their benevolence extended often in kind gestures of monetary rewards to pastors and evangelists. This study has argued that it was in that kind of benevolence that their malevolence was hidden. They were less interested in fostering a sense of independence in their converts because that would work against their intentions. R Elphick, *The Equality of all Believers, Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 2012), see especially Chapter 7 & 9.

In 1955, he and Molefe, were no longer the only influential evangelists in the AGSA. Others later followed such as Sebastian Malamb, Timothy Olyphant, John Konkobe, and others.⁵⁶⁴ None of them operated at the level of these two men; nevertheless, they were worth recognising. These evangelists, and other pastors with missionary connections, had little or no contact with Bhengu's "Back-to God" movement. According to Raboroko, other pastors, like Malamb, had other connections in the USA, like T.L. Osborn, a world-renowned evangelist, who showed interest in supporting indigenous evangelists.⁵⁶⁵

In a loosely-structured AGSA, anything was possible. They were all part of a conglomerate that created space for the aspirations of others. To be sure, that was how "Back-to-God" started in 1950. Ironically, Bhengu approved of the 'dependent-independence' the AGSA accorded to its members, but not as far as African locations were concerned. He envisaged African pastors and evangelists rallying behind his vision, and invading Africa, "from Cape to Cairo." However, the "Thesis" presented in Witbank, later showed that not all African pastors subscribed to his personal aspirations.

The two streams developing in evangelism in the African locations were precisely the problem Bhengu tried to avert in Witbank, in 1955. His call obviously went unheeded; the townships were no longer his self-proclaimed territory. However, the picture was totally different in the Eastern Cape, where his agreement with Jim Mullan was thriving; there was no missionary interference, except by way of 'stolen reports.'⁵⁶⁶ Some missionaries reported on Bhengu's work, even without his permission. Overall, everything was under 'Back-to-God' control.

⁵⁶⁴ "South African Digest," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 1962.

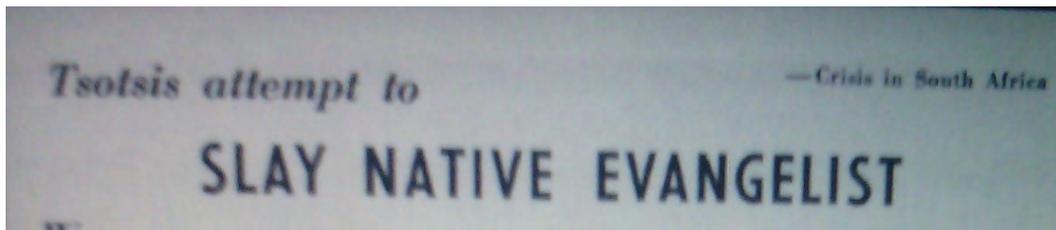
⁵⁶⁵ PN is an International Assemblies of God Pastor in Soweto. Personal Interview, April 12, 2015.

⁵⁶⁶ The story of the success of the 'Peter-Paul' agreement is told in Chapter 7.

8.3.4. “Tsotsis Attempt to Slay Native Evangelist”

The line distinguishing missions, apartheid and anticommunism was very thin, and Pentecostal missionaries sometimes floundered in trying to maintain a balance. For the most part, those who opposed apartheid were branded, either communist inspired, or instruments of unknown forces; the chief suspect was of course the Soviet Union. Apartheid was a challenge for everybody, and responses differed widely, American missionaries for the most part were indifferent. Sometimes they dared the political volatility of the townships with their message thus putting the lives of African pastors and evangelists at risk.

Vereeniging was a vigorous test ground of how they responded to social and political injustices of the time. In September 1956 the *Pentecostal Evangel* reported,⁵⁶⁷



It was in Vereeniging where a “Peace Treaty” was signed in 1902 between Boer and Briton for the cessation of the Anglo-Boer-War.⁵⁶⁸ In this little town, South of Johannesburg, white people agreed on the terms to end a vicious war, and practically ignored the social and political aspirations of the black majority. Insurrection in the townships usually sprung from the tensions of that oversight in history.

Vernon Pettenger (son to Edgar Pettenger) wrote about an attempt by ‘Botsotsi’ (township hooligans) to kill the Rev Phillip Molefe in Evaton near Vereeniging. The black evangelist, and missionaries ran an evangelistic campaign during a bus boycott in

⁵⁶⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 9, 1956, 11

⁵⁶⁸ TRH. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (London, Macmillan, 1991), 201-228.

the area. They tried to set him alight, and shot him nine times, miraculously he survived the ordeal.⁵⁶⁹ Evaton, like most black townships, was politically volatile, and uprising was perceived as the only way to express political frustration. Local radicals believed that the religious campaign had something to do with trying to stop the boycott. Pettenger however assured his principals:

We have no interest in the bus boycott or in politics.⁵⁷⁰

The report presented another opportunity to solicit funds:

Pray for the safeguarding of the Christians of this area. Pray also that the amount still owing on the portable tabernacle will be paid off. The brethren plan to use the tabernacle for the next campaign.⁵⁷¹

That report exposes a state of total insensitivity to the political surroundings in which missionaries ministered. Black radicals were known to hit back on individuals or groups that appeared not to be in solidarity with the socio-political ambitions of the people. There probably was a criminal element in the rowdy crowds but boycotting buses would have ranked very low on their list of mischief. The motivation was larger, and in the context of rising African nationalism sweeping the country and the African continent at the time.⁵⁷² Bhengu was once threatened in the Eastern Cape when radicals promised to boil him in oil.⁵⁷³ That drift, of threats and attacks, was widespread; going against the

⁵⁶⁹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 9, 1956. 11

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷² P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Craighall JHB, A.D. Donker Publisher, 1987), 327-371.

⁵⁷³ J Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadim.co.za/Bond%20Book/Government%20and%20Politics.html>

will of the people was *anathema*. In the words of Everett L. Phillips, “South Africa was a smouldering political volcano.”⁵⁷⁴

In 1955, hundreds of black and white South Africans gathered in Kliptown, Soweto, in what was known as, “The Congress of the People.” Apartheid was top of the agenda, and it was in this meeting that ‘The Freedom Charter’ was born. In 1956, the famous ‘Treason Trial’ of Nelson Mandela and others was underway. In the same year, hundreds of South African women of all races, marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria protesting against pass laws.

Political insurrection was not limited to the townships, there were outbreaks of violence in rural South Africa too. In Sekhukhuneland (Limpopo and parts of Mpumalanga), it was sparked by the deportation, in April 1957, of two Bapedi councillors, Phetedi Thulare and Godfrey Sekhukhune. They opposed the deposition of paramount Chief Moroamoche Sekhukhune who opposed apartheid interference with traditional authority.⁵⁷⁵ The same was true for villages in the Eastern Cape, when Chief Botha Sigcawu was appointed as an agent of the new Bantu Authorities Act which sought to replace legitimate traditional leaders with government sympathisers.⁵⁷⁶ Unrest was sporadic and unpredictable in any part of the country.

The AGUSA missionaries were unmoved by the political situation and sometimes pushed their spirituality to dangerous limits. Rollin Grams, tells how his father Eugene Grams, and one Ervin E. Schaffer (both AGUSA missionaries), pushed their missionary zeal through the dangerous legal impositions of a State of Emergency in the Eastern

⁵⁷⁴ EL Phillips wrote to, Field Secretary for Africa, wrote an article for the *Pentecostal Evangel* soliciting funds for missions, see “Opportunities Unlimited: Dollars Given to Speed-The-Light Will Enable Our Missionaries to Seize the Opportunity,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 10, 1954.

⁵⁷⁵ TRH. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (London, Macmillan Press, 1991), 347.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

Cape to preach in a local township called Douglas.⁵⁷⁷ A State of Emergency was not declared, unless the apartheid regime was convinced that the townships were dangerously out of control.

On arrival, they approached the police station and requested to hold a meeting in the township. The police refused permission but Eugene Grams insisted; “We believe God wants us to do this.”⁵⁷⁸ For Pentecostals, God often spoke in ‘mysterious ways.’ The authorities capitulated, and sent them through in the company of twenty-five officers.⁵⁷⁹ They accomplished their mission, in the shadow of lurking danger, and left the township unharmed.

In another situation, a picture taken by Vernon Pettenger shows Rev. Phillip Molefe leading hundreds of his followers through the township past the spot where the “Sharpeville Massacre” took place on March 21, 1960.⁵⁸⁰ The march took place three months after the incident, Sharpeville was still bleeding from the hurt of that gruesome act of apartheid. Pettenger exaggerated his place in this dangerous situation, “In one place, I was the only white person in that township of 40 000.”⁵⁸¹

A state of emergency was on and even the smallest gatherings were deemed illegal, let alone a march of hundreds. Pentecostals had a free pass, they were allowed by the apartheid government to hold services with hundreds of people attending.⁵⁸² That may

⁵⁷⁷ RG Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 178.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ V Pettenger, “Before Sharpeville,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1960.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. A question that arises is, “How did Pettenger know he was the only white person in that massive location of 40 000?” Exaggerations were very common in missionary reports.

⁵⁸² V Pettenger, “Before the Sharpeville Massacre,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1960, 15.

have been a ‘miracle,’ but the message received by political radicals of the time was negative. Pettenger later reported,

Our preachers have been challenged and threatened by extremists. One preacher nearly had his house burnt down. Our African preachers need your prayers in these days. With feelings and tensions running high, life is cheap. Yet these days have challenged us as never before.⁵⁸³

He may have used the word “us” but missionaries were often tucked away in the safety of white suburbia. Nicholas Bhengu, who lived among the people, gave his followers some advice on matters relating to political unrest,

If they force you by intimidation to join their marches, then march because you have to, but don’t get involved.⁵⁸⁴

He did not encourage people to pursue unwarranted martyrdom, he knew how dangerous the situation in the townships could be. In 1954 he told Americans at the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America Conference, the story of a Catholic Nun who was burnt alive in the Eastern Cape,

There have been riots in our part of the country. In a recent uprising the native people overturned the car of a Catholic nun, a medical missionary. They set the car afire and left her in it to burn to death. Then they ate her roasted flesh.⁵⁸⁵

AGUSA missionaries chose the hotspots of insurrection; they were in the Witwatersrand, Sekhukhuneland, the Vaal (South Gauteng), the Orange Free State, and the Eastern Cape

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ J Bond, *For the Record*,
<http://www.nuparadim.co.za/Bond%20Book/Government%20and%20Politics.html>

⁵⁸⁵ N Bhengu, “Taking South Africa for God: The Story of the Great Revival in South Africa,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 06, 1955, 3. I’m indebted to my promoter, Prof P Denis, for giving me the name of this nun. She was known as Dr Elsie Quinlan, a medical doctor and graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand. Her story is well known in Duncan Village and shows how volatile life in the township was in those early years of apartheid, for an account of this harrowing incident see, A Mager & G Minkley, ‘*Reaping the whirlwind: East London Riots of 1952*,’ History Workshop paper at University of the Witwatersrand, 6-10 February, 1990, <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/7909/HWS-257.pdf?sequence=1>.

‘witnessing’ for Jesus. It was a noble task, or a perilous act of ignorance; and it always put the lives of African pastors and evangelists in danger.⁵⁸⁶

8.3.5. ‘Demons with an American accent’ in Ga-Mashashane, Limpopo

Eugene Grams must have been present in Witbank, he arrived in South Africa in 1951 and settled in what was then known as Pietersburg (Polokwane today). In 1959, he ended up ministering in a village called Ga-Mashashane. A strange phenomenon occurred while he was there, an unschooled woman “Witchdoctor,” possessed by “fifty demons,” and speaking in an American accent confronted him,⁵⁸⁷

You go back to America, this is no place for you to be. I do not want to see you here. We are going to the mountains to get reinforcement. We will kill you.⁵⁸⁸

Demons that ‘inhabit’ a person, Pentecostals believe, often use the individual’s voice to ‘speak,’ but it is not the person speaking. Grams, and his co-evangelist Johannes Mukwevho, whose ethnic language was Tshivenda, immediately started praying for the woman, and casting the demons out ‘in the mighty name of Jesus.’⁵⁸⁹ She was set free from the “evil spirits” over a number of days. It was discovered later, that she could speak neither English nor Tshivenda, it was the “spirits” in her that spoke. She had fluently and violently spoken in both languages in the confrontation, before she was delivered. Similar incidents were all too common in Pentecostal meetings. Their credibility is however, the subject of another discipline.

Ga-Mashashane exposed the “rural” dimension of the ministry of AGUSA missionaries in South Africa. Bhengu’s challenges were not only in the townships, but in much of

⁵⁸⁶ *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 9, 1956, 11.

⁵⁸⁷ Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 164-165.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

rural South Africa too, especially Sekhukhuneland. The Northern Transvaal (current day Limpopo) had long been an area of interest to American missionaries.⁵⁹⁰ Try as he might have to stop them, they were making serious inroads into the forbidden areas.

In the Nebo district of Sekhukhuneland, Grams could not be granted a site to pitch his tent, before he prayed for Chief Maserumule's eleven wives, one by one.⁵⁹¹ The Chief's son, Reuben Maserumule ended up in Witbank, at the ABTI, and became a pastor and teacher when the school relocated to Rustenburg.

Fred Burke, the bible-teacher, also reported on "Nebo Land," and how the "heathen" of that place had never heard the gospel until he arrived. Nebo was the place where Reuben Maserumule's father was chief. The chief was so impressed with Burke that he introduced him to another Chief Masemola in the area. Burke seemed to enjoy some comfort in the midst of widespread poverty, he wrote:

"I am staying in a Speed-the-Light trailer given by the Oklahoma C.A.'s for the missionaries. It is so cosy and comfortable."⁵⁹²

Burke's report revealed at least two things; first, reports were often exaggerated, Nebo in Sekhukhuneland, for instance, had been introduced to the gospel long before Burke and Grams came along. Lutheran missionaries were part of Sekhukhuneland since the 1800's, but that was the sort of sensation American donors were vulnerable to. Secondly it exposed the insensitivity of American missionaries to the conditions of poverty around them. "Speed-The-Light" projects, were intended to make missionaries feel comfortable in what were unbearable conditions, while "National Missionaries," like Aaron Mnisi, had to live in "mud and grass homes." Pictures, would later be taken of his work, and sent to America.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 152-155.

⁵⁹² F Burke, "Letter from Nebo Land, Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 20, 1956, 13.

Grams had a way of raising financial support for African pastors with his contacts abroad;⁵⁹³ it was the thin line between benevolence and malevolence that grew increasingly blurry. Rollin Grams makes reference to a letter in the *Pentecostal Evangel* of August 17, 1959 to that effect,

The letter went on to mention that several African co-workers were supported by persons in North America, and then Gene and Phyllis asked others to consider if they would contribute as well. “Brother and Sister Phillip Frey of Windsor, Ontario” were paying the salary of co-evangelist and interpreter Abram Ramalebana. “Sister Marion Arnold of Richmond, Virginia” supported various Africans preachers, including Christopher PHEME’s family.⁵⁹⁴

Supporting “natives” was not new, Henry M. Turney wrote as early as 1916 about a Canadian lady who supported an African “worker.” The hiccup was that the money came through missionaries.⁵⁹⁵ We will see later how this monetary connection contributed to some African pastors taking the missionary’s side in the split in the AGSA that occurred in 1964.

8.3.6. The Challenge of the Coloured and Indian work in South Africa

Apartheid had divided residential areas along colour lines but Bhengu’s ministry was not limited to the African townships. Occasionally he ventured into the coloured areas. In 1959 E.E. Shaffer wrote about a “New Church Dedicated in Kimberley,” and according to him, the church began as a result of the Bhengu revivals.⁵⁹⁶ It was dedicated by W.F. Creamer who was a ‘Coloured’ member of the AGSA executive. Bhengu went into these areas and withdrew to let the ‘Coloured’ pastors continue with their situation.

⁵⁹³ RG Grams, *Stewards of Grace: A Reflective, Mission Biography of Eugene and Phyllis Grams in South Africa* (Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock, 2010), 166.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ HM Turney, “What a picture did for Africa,” *Weekly Evangel*,” June 3, 1916, 11.

⁵⁹⁶ E.E. Shaffer, “New Church Dedicated in Kimberley,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 21, 1959, 11.

“Brother Jacobs” pastored the church since 1956 and consolidated it into an “Indigenous Church.”

Shaffer conceded that “The Colored and Indian work in South Africa presented a real challenge for missionaries.” Building a Bible School was the best solution to the problem. Going into these areas was not as easy as going into the African townships, but he did not miss the opportunity to raise funds,

The *Evangel* reader may not go as a missionary, but he can contribute funds to build this Bible School for the training of others that they might go to their own people. Please send your contributions to the Foreign Missions Department.⁵⁹⁷

While missionaries didn’t report much on the “Coloured” work, there was a popular name circulating in the late 50’s—Timothy Oliphant. Oliphant was Bhengu’s convert and preached often in the East Rand and the Vaal, he later surfaced in the USA, pastoring a “Teen-Challenge.”⁵⁹⁸ group in Brooklyn, New York.⁵⁹⁹

Timothy Olyphant from South Africa has become burdened to assist in this work in Brooklyn. This young man was formerly a leader of the "Cosmopolitan" teen gang in South Africa and was saved through Nicholas Bhengu's ministry. He is now filled with the Holy Spirit and is attending Bible school in Rhode Island. Timothy has been asked to pastor this unusual gang church sponsored by Teen-Age Evangelism.⁶⁰⁰

8.3.7. “A Flame of Fire in Basutoland”

Hilda Olsen and Margaret “Peggy” Anderson were single AGUSA missionary women in Lesotho. In 1959 they reported on “A Flame in Basutoland.” A Mosotho evangelist

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Teen Challenge was a youth ministry connected to David Wilkerson, an AGUSA pastor who led Nicky Cruz and other gangsters in New York to their conversion. The ministry focused on Gangs in the Cities of America and Timothy Oliphant apparently got involved given his own experience with gangs in South Africa.

⁵⁹⁹ R Lyon, “A New Dimension in Home Missions Activity,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1960, 18.

⁶⁰⁰ R Lyon, “A New Dimension in Home Missions Activity,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1960, 18.

known as Charles Chakela was preaching and praying for the sick. Chakela was a member of the Assemblies of God in Lesotho. His healing ministry attracted people far and wide in the mountain kingdom. They came in busloads and waited for hours on end before the services could even start. At one time hundreds lined up along a road to see him being driven by; and if fortunate enough be touched by his hand in passing. As the two missionary women described the events; they warned their readers regarding the article in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, “it will read like something out of the Acts of the Apostles.”⁶⁰¹

Fred Burke was immediately on the scene, reporting on the revivals in “Basutoland;” doing more of the work of a journalist than an evangelist. Reports in *The Pentecostal Evangel* show that AGUSA missionaries were always waiting to ambush African initiatives; and that strategy was common right across Africa. Burke reported on activities as far away as Nyasaland (Malawi); he had been instrumental in the conversion of a certain Rev Kalambule, who had come to work in the mines of South Africa. After that, he didn’t let him go; always reporting on his work as though he was part of it.⁶⁰²

8.3.8. In memory of ‘Lorraine’: A Temple and the ‘devil’s’ money

Phillip Molefe conducted a “tent revival” in Virginia, Orange Free State, when people responded in what had become a trade mark of his ministry. They surrendered “Uncut diamonds, household goods, furniture, tools, and building materials,” as they received the message to convert to Christ. There were tons of these stolen goods and they had to be surrendered to the police. Eugene Grams, the missionary working with Phillip Molefe, asked to see a local chief of police, a certain General Hendrik van den Bergh. He was the senior official with the security police in the Orange Free State at the time.

⁶⁰¹ H Olsen and P Anderson, “Former Catholic Now Used Mightily in Healing Ministry,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 31, 1959, 3. Fred Burke’s story is shown right alongside that of the two missionary women.

⁶⁰² See Burke’s story, as told by his daughter, R Burke Rill, ‘Blessings and Hardships: Experiences of the Fred Burke Family in South Africa,’ *Assemblies of God Heritage* Vol 13, No 4 (Winter, 1993-94), 4.

When Grams finally went through, he told the general his story; from that moment on, they struck a long-lasting relationship.⁶⁰³ The general had just lost a daughter and Grams helped comfort him through his sorrow. It was he who helped build the “Lorraine Memorial Temple” in Thabong, Welkom, at the cost of \$15 000.⁶⁰⁴ The church was built in memory of “Lorraine,” the general’s deceased daughter.⁶⁰⁵ Van den Bergh raised the money for the building but wanted the matter kept a secret. It is the ‘secrecy’ that is concerning; why did the general insist on the matter being kept secret unless he was using apartheid money to build God’s temple. That is not farfetched; General Eugene de Kock, apartheid’s killer machine in the 1980s, revealed in his book how possible it was to use government money for sinister activities.⁶⁰⁶ What was in it for van den Bergh? He already had a file on Grams and no one knows who else.⁶⁰⁷ Such stories were building up; and always with Eugene Grams spinning somewhere in the whirlwind of suspicion.

In the Orange Free State, Grams facilitated the erection of several buildings besides the “Lorraine Memorial.” In Virginia the “Loenser Ebenezer Temple” was dedicated as a “brilliant sunshine shed its radiance on 700 Africans.”⁶⁰⁸ It was named after a certain C.W. Loenser, who was the superintendent of the German district of the AGUSA. Other missionaries were present on this occasion, Edgar Pettenger and another Lewis Wilson participated in the dedication. At least two government officials were also present, one

⁶⁰³ E Grams, ‘Welcome Gift for Welkom,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 18, 1962, 11.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 184-186.

⁶⁰⁶ E de Kock, *A Long Night’s Damage* (Saxonworld, Contra Press, 1998).

⁶⁰⁷ This story is told by R Grams in a book he wrote about his parents, *Stewards of Grace: A Reflective, Missions Biography of Eugene and Phyllis Grams in South Africa, 1951-1962* (Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 176-186.

⁶⁰⁸ F Burke, “South Africa Digest/Virginia,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, November, 1962, 24.

of them was the “Mr. Smit” who used to call Eugene Grams “*Kaffir boetie*”⁶⁰⁹ Grams had come too close to Africans for his liking. Rev Phillip Molefe cut the ribbon and the church was opened to the sound of “blessed” music.

Another church was built in Winburg, Orange Free State. David Pinda, a former graduate of the ABTI, was the pastor. According to Edgar Pettenger, the African settlement was about an hour from town with “dirty and dusty streets.”⁶¹⁰ It was a shanty little settlement with a variety of houses. The “streets,” obviously did not measure up to what he knew in America, but they were ‘paved with gold.’ It was from taking pictures of such places that missionaries reinforced their fundraising initiatives.

Missionaries erected another church in Odendaalsrus. Everret Phillips, Field Secretary for Africa, cut the ribbon, and Rev Molefe’s choir thrilled people with the “Hallelujah Chorus.”⁶¹¹ Odendaalsrus must have presented the opportunity for missionaries to showcase their “work;” especially after Phillips had warned Grams to stay away from working with a white church. The Goldfields Assembly of God, had asked him (Grams) to be their pastor, after their man went to work in the mines.

8.3.9. Lucas Mangope, the Chief Who Circumvented Circumcision School

In the villages, missionaries frequently came into contact with the local chiefs. One such person was Chief Lucas Manyane Mangope, of the Bahurutshe-bo-Manyane, at Motswedi, in Zeerust. A teacher by profession, the chief later became president of Bophuthatswana, one of the bantustans that sought ‘independence’ from apartheid South

⁶⁰⁹ R Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 136. This may be an equivalent of what white supremacists in the USA called “Nigger-Lover.”

⁶¹⁰ “South Africa Digest,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, November, 1962, 24.

⁶¹¹ “Odendaalsrus,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 18, 1962, 24.

Africa. He was a member of the AGSA; and actually turned it into a state church after ‘Independence.’

E.E. Shaffer, another AGUSA missionary reported Mangope’s story of conversion in an article he wrote for the *Pentecostal Evangel*.⁶¹² Mangope, for one reason or another was fascinated by stories of missionaries like David Livingstone, at least according to Shaffer. His biggest problem was the circumcision school, and the “witchcraft” that came with it. Every boy in the village went, but Lucas had serious reservations and his father seemed to side with him. After a long and whirling dispute around his beliefs, he was led to his conversion by Rev Samuel Makhaola. He was saved the peril of circumcision school by becoming a Christian.

After Makhaola ran some evangelistic campaigns in the village, missionaries did what they did best—they built a church, and the Chief laid the cornerstone; and wrote a story home to tell about it. The problem was not the story, it was the story behind the story. Achievements like that assured their home agencies that they were busy; and it guaranteed more funds. Makhaola would not know about the money, it wasn’t how missionaries worked. He later went to Botswana and pastored a church in Gaborone.

Around 1959 Chief Lucas Mangope replaced Chief Moiloa as leader of the Bahurutshe, in Zeerust, Northwest. Moiloa was deposed because he refused to cooperate with apartheid’s ‘Bantu Authorities Act.’⁶¹³ While AGUSA missionaries were not ‘interested’ in politics, they took advantage of the opportunities apartheid created, in accessing African villages and townships.

These ‘village politics’ played an important role in the struggle for the liberation in South Africa; and exposed another dimension in missionary attitudes towards issues of

⁶¹² E.E. Shaffer, “Chief Lucas Attains his Goal,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 24, 1963, 6-7.

⁶¹³ THR Davenport, *South Africa*, 348.

race and culture. Zeerust was a political ‘hotbed,’ and AGUSA missionaries were there, always on the wrong side of history.

8.4. Suspicions, lies, truth, and rumours in the AGSA

While some missionaries may have attributed their manoeuvres in volatile political situations to “miracles,” it sometimes raised questions. “Were they involved with the apartheid system?” “How did they manage to get away with so much when everybody else was under some sort of pressure?” The only white people in the townships were the Communists with their night schools; and those were infamously on the ‘wrong’ side of the law. Questions were raging in the minds of township radicals, “Who were these white people in the townships and who were their friends?” “We could deal with Negroes in our midst,” said a 90-year old, former shoe repairer who was resident in Benoni Old Location. “The only white people we knew were either Boers, or Communists.”⁶¹⁴ The old man was among of the first converts of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in ‘Etwatwa.’ The AMEC was appealing, because it had roots in dissent African-American Methodism; and the townships were about dissent and opposition to apartheid. AGUSA missionaries made many submissions to township and village authorities; but had no access to the radical movements of their day.

Missionary converts, of the Pentecostal sort, did not often take part in civic matters. If you had been a township radical, or rascal your perspectives changed if you ran into them or some of their converts. Bhengu himself had changed perspectives, through the preaching of Full Gospel Church missionaries, with regard to political ideologies and behaviour in the mines.

There were more questions than answers, and it left people guessing; unverified stories, lies, truth and unsubstantiated rumours started spreading like wild fire. One story was

⁶¹⁴ Mr. Raphuti, is 90 years old, and probably the only remaining of his peers in Benoni Old Location. He was among the ‘Elite’ of the township, and still runs his shoe-repairing business to this day. Personal Interview, July 24, 2015.

told of how missionaries set the ‘Special Branch,’⁶¹⁵ on one Pastor Shongwe in Soweto. He had just returned from a trip abroad, and the police picked him up from the airport. He was beaten to a pulp, no reasons given, thrown out of a car, and left to crawl to a nearby hospital in Soweto.⁶¹⁶ Someone sympathetic within the security police later disclosed to him that they were given his name by Eugene Grams and a national pastor, Rev Phakamile Mavi.⁶¹⁷ Mavi and Grams had a close relationship that resulted in the building of a church in Tembisa, on the East Rand.⁶¹⁸ Shongwe subsequently resigned from the church. That too was not farfetched, Eugene Grams did have very close contacts with General van den Bergh, who had now been promoted to a more senior national post in Pretoria.⁶¹⁹

The political situation was a tight rope to walk for missionaries and their African counterparts; in any case, it exposed the tensions inherent in their relationship. Some wanted to work with them, others felt they were not transparent enough. They could not be placed, in the context of the socio-political situation in South Africa, because they often blew hot and cold. Some appeared to sympathise with the plight of the oppressed, but always with a disclaimer, “If we said anything against apartheid we will be deported

⁶¹⁵ A branch of the South African Police, at the time, which dealt specifically with opponents of apartheid.

⁶¹⁶ This story was confirmed by two reliable sources, who spoke to Rev Shongwe. Unfortunately, I could not verify the information with Shongwe. Such “rumours” were however dangerous because they would often be treated as truth, even without adequate verification. Rev. P-N Raboroko and Dr. Frans Kekana, Personal Interview, April 16, 2015.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Rev June Charles Moyo, Personal Interview, 20 May, 2015. Moyo is a former member of the International Assemblies of God in Tembisa.

⁶¹⁹ RG Grams tells the story of his father with a high ranking official in the “Special Branch” in the Free State, and later in Pretoria. The said official is said to have contributed immensely in the building of AGSA churches in the Free State. Eugene Grams was always warned never to reveal the name of the person who built the church. See, Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 184-186.

immediately.”⁶²⁰ It was easier to side with apartheid, than to oppose it; the more ‘political-chameleon’ they played, the more questions they raised.

8.5. The paradox of AGUSA missions in South Africa

While missionary activities were unfolding in South Africa, the AGUSA had a paradoxical, if not contradicting challenge. The question of race and culture seemed to speak in ‘diverse and incongruent tongues’ with regard to race and culture. They responded with enthusiasm to evangelising in many parts of Africa but neglected the African-American in their own backyard.⁶²¹ Whenever questions of race and culture surfaced in early AGUSA history, leaders proposed to refer them to Bishop Mason’s predominantly African-American Church of God in Christ. Mason was the black bishop side lined in Arkansas, when the AGUSA was launched along racial lines in 1914.⁶²² The AGUSA was unreservedly white and, for the most part, indifferent to the ‘Negro problem;’ yet in Africa they chose to focus on the African as their ‘mission field.’ How were black “souls” in Africa and America different?

There was another irony to this conundrum; AGUSA churches were determined to reach out to white people in the USA and other European countries but had strong reservations in reaching out to white people in South Africa. That problem raised questions for the perceptive; why exactly were the missionaries here, and to what extent was it connected to money? In all probability, there was more money in missions to the ‘native’ than

⁶²⁰ Dr. F Kekana recalled a classroom situation where a missionary was asked regarding their stand for or against apartheid. James Stewart, principal of the AGUSA School, gave him that response. Personal Interview, May 29, 2015.

⁶²¹ The Assemblies of God, during and before Ralph Riggs’ tenure as General Superintendent struggled with race and cultural issues in the AGUSA. While they acknowledged what they called “The negro problem,” they could not do anything about it for fear of loss of white membership. They preferred instead to wait until the political and social environment was conducive to such changes. See EL Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 248.

⁶²² Ibid.

there was in reaching out to other white people in foreign lands. AGUSA officials it seemed, placed more emphasis on evangelism among a people where it had the potential to attract more funds. It wasn't a question of how 'lost' they were but how much money they brought in.

Reaching out to the "heathen" was the noble sacrifice many donors abroad were willing to make. The AGUSA missionaries seemed to exploit the vulnerability imposed on these donors by distance and cultural ignorance. The men and women in American churches who poured in millions of dollars in moral and financial support of missionaries were also vulnerable because they depended on missionaries to tell them the stories of the 'heathen' in foreign lands. More often than not, they were fed what missionaries thought they needed to hear. Most donors didn't have a clue of what was happening beyond their borders, and depended heavily on reports in the *Pentecostal Evangel*.

People like Molefe were always the best bet in drawing more funds,

The sum of \$150 will be needed at once in order that Brother Grams will be able to fulfil his plans to launch similar revival meetings in the needy reserves of the North Transvaal where millions have never heard the gospel.⁶²³

Did the money come? Nobody knew except Grams, and the loose structure of the AGSA could not hold him accountable. Those 'nationals' who benefitted from the system could not ask questions either, lest they bit the hand that fed them. The missionary's presence was felt more in the area of building churches, but the spade work was always done by the African evangelists. As one pastor put it, "We had the ministry and they enjoyed the money."⁶²⁴

⁶²³ *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 29, 1959, 10. See also E Grams, "Revival in the Orange Free State," *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 16, 1960.

⁶²⁴ Rev Steve Msiza, Personal Interview, May 14, 2015. Msiza recalled discussions with his father-in-law, the Rev Alfred Dube, and why he did not want to join AGUSA missionaries.

The AGUSA enshrined in their 1914 constitution that no ‘native’ was to be supported directly. A “Section 10” in “Article IX” of their constitution read:

No offering for the support of native workers shall be sent direct to the native, but to the missionary representatives of the General Council.⁶²⁵

For Bhengu, money was not the problem, he had already demonstrated that Africans, given the right motivation and skills, were capable of raising their own funds. His problem was the exploitation of conditions of poverty and ignorance in the townships, and the paternal sentiments that accompanied the funding of work where African pastors and evangelists were concerned.

In 1959, according to Bond, Americans already showed signs of dissatisfaction. Their attempts to clone the AGSA were increasingly proving futile. Some attempts were successful in the southern Transvaal (southern Gauteng) and the East Rand; but Bhengu proved to be their biggest stumbling block. As the 60s were introduced, AGUSA missionaries grew more and more vociferous and demanding. In a sense they were now exerting pressure on the AGSA to conform to certain of their demands; and other members were not taking kindly to being pressured into decisions they were not comfortable with.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁵ This ‘clause’ was part of the Constitution of the AGUSA in 1939; it had been part of their ‘Foreign Missions’ policy since inception in 1914.

⁶²⁶ J Bond, *Reflections on the Assemblies of God*,
<http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/Nicholas%20Bhengu.html>

Chapter 9

9. The AGUSA and the Challenges that Led to the Split with the AGSA in 1964

The 1960s were politically riotous in both South Africa and the USA, and the question of race was central. The Civil Rights Movement challenged the American white churches to revisit their perceptions on matters of race and culture. In South Africa, the Cottesloe Consultation at University of the Witwatersrand was calling on white Christians in South Africa to re-examine apartheid race models and to explore practical ways to bridge the racial chasm prevailing in the country. The African National Congress (ANC), and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), revisited their non-violent approach to apartheid and opted instead to adopt the armed struggle. 1960, was also the year of the scandalous Rivonia Trial that sent Nelson Mandela and others to prison for life. The socio-political tensions were glaring and often expressed in insurrection and protests in the black locations around the country.

As Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, Prime Minister of South Africa, pushed through his apartheid policies, a man dressed as a messenger walked up to him stabbed him to death. It was the second attempt on his life and it was successful where the first one had failed. As apartheid in South Africa played out on the socio-political terrain, a similar policy, known as 'Jim Crow' was a hefty part of American society.⁶²⁷

Assemblies of God USA (AGUSA) missionaries in South Africa were caught in the middle of apartheid but it was nothing new. With their restorationist, other-worldly and urgent eschatology, they insisted on not being of this 'world.' They were the good

⁶²⁷ 'Jim Crow' was not a person as in Dr H. Verwoerd. Apartheid was personified in Verwoerd; apparently, 'Jim Crow' was a popular 19th century song that came to personify an apartheid-like system of government approved racial oppression and segregation in the USA, especially south of what was called the 'Mason-Dixon Line;' an imaginary line that separated north and southern states.

soldiers that did not want to get entangled in civilian matters. That was a difficult act to balance in South Africa, especially as they insisted on working among ‘natives’ in black locations.

Whether ‘in the world’ or ‘out of the world,’ the AGUSA itself was struggling with its own race and cultural problems. Racial prejudice and discrimination were a big part of the denomination’s unfolding history since its founding in 1914. It was mentioned earlier, how they invested millions of dollars in missionary work around the world sending missionaries to save the ‘Negro’ in Africa. In the process they ignored the plight of the ‘Negro’ in their own backyard. That irony raised a lot of suspicions in the townships of South Africa.⁶²⁸

This chapter will discuss how the missionaries of the AGUSA, given their background in racial prejudice and discrimination, faced a challenge in a polarised South Africa. While they insisted on working in African locations, they were totally numb to the socio-political situation that oppressed their converts. Half- the-time they were preoccupied with petty church politics and confrontational engagements with their African counterparts that threatened the survival of the very work they were supposed to build. Overall, they were willing to shut down even the most progressive of indigenous ministers, if they were not in charge of it. The chapter will show how they promoted an apolitical stance with their converts to avoid confrontations with the government of the day; perhaps, even colluding with the regime of the day to advance their cause.

In 1964, the AGUSA missionaries withdrew from the Assemblies of God in South Africa (AGSA) and formed the International Assemblies of God (IAG). The new church was partly made up of young and semi-educated hopefuls armed with basic literacy and

⁶²⁸ EL Blumhoffer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and the American Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 246-250. As we saw in the Chapter 2, this was the same reason that John Alexander Dowie condemned the missionary enterprise of his day. White Pentecostals were willing to worship God during the day and lynch black people at night. They even patronised laws of segregation; yet they joined the missionary rush to Africa, to save the very ‘negro’ they murdered at home.

numeracy. The missionaries themselves were not different, nurtured in a religious culture that undermined education, very few had an accredited university qualification. They were drilled in the tradition of ‘Bible Schools,’ and their greatest aspiration was to ‘preach Christ, and him crucified.’ That academic weakness showed in their ‘Bible School’ curriculums; the schools had no entrance qualification of any sort, one had to be armed only with the ‘calling of God.’ As one of them said, “We are not here to breed African intellectuals but to prepare men and women who will reach Africa with the gospel.”⁶²⁹

9.1. A brief background on the AGUSA and the ‘Colored Problem’

According to Blumhofer, the Assemblies of God USA, in the 1960s, with new leadership and all, got a “new opportunity to reassess denominational priorities.”⁶³⁰ Thomas Zimmerman, the new General Superintendent, sought to inject new life and commitment into evangelism. His priority was America, but he maintained the “aggressive foreign missions” initiatives the AGUSA had always been known for.⁶³¹ His first trip abroad was to, “spend two months on a survey of Assemblies of God missionary activities throughout Africa.”⁶³²

One of Zimmerman’s inherited challenges would be the ‘Colored problem.’ The church had struggled with the problem in the 40s and 50s, and every attempt to resolve it fell through. In the 1960s, the AGUSA still didn’t know what to do with black people within its fold, or in the inner cities of America. A well know example was that of Bob

⁶²⁹ Rev. Michael Nomtoto, District Superintendent of the International Assemblies of God in the Eastern Cape, recalled the statement made by Bill Younger, an AGUSA missionary in a Youth Camp, in Rustenburg. *Facebook*, October 21, 2015.

⁶³⁰ EL Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 243.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

⁶³² B Webb, ‘Impressions from the Field,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 27, 1960, 4.

Harrison, a gifted African-American evangelist, musician, and Billy Graham's associate. He was ordained in the AGUSA in 1962 after his first application for ordination had been rejected eleven years earlier. When that happened, a district official of the AGUSA, 'looked him square in the eye' and said:

I'm sorry my brother, but it is not the policy of our denomination to grant credentials to Negroes...you can step into the office and get your fee back; we're sorry.⁶³³

This was the northern California and Nevada District, one of the strongest in the AGUSA in the 1950s, with more than 400 churches.⁶³⁴ California in the west was considered more liberal and accepting of 'coloreds' than the southern states; yet it was here where Harrison was dealt a heavy racial blow that stayed with him for many years to come.

While a sprinkling of African-Americans were ordained at scattered times across the country before Harrison, there was always the "Colored problem." It brewed decades of debates and arguments at high administration levels, as if an 'alien' species were under consideration for ordination. A certain Ellsworth S. Thomas, whose description in the ordination list was followed by the word "Colored," was ordained in 1915, just one year after the AGUSA was established. In 1920, Isaac and Martha Neely, were the first AGUSA African-American missionaries sent to Liberia. According to Robeck, there was a Lee Hawkins who was dismissed for some or other unpardonable 'sin.'⁶³⁵

The question of 'color' in the AGUSA was uneasy from the word go. Blumhofer notes that, "Assemblies of God adherents mirrored the racial attitudes of white Americans of

⁶³³ B Harrison, With J Montgomery, *When God was Black* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1971), 15. The book is the story of Bob Harrison and his experiences as a black minister in the Assemblies of God. He was rejected for ordination by the AGUSA, but went on to become an influential figure in music and evangelism.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ See paper by CM Robeck, *The Past, Historical Roots of Racial Disunity & Division in American Pentecostalism*, 37-38, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/robeck.html> .

similar social class and educational background.”⁶³⁶ The leadership and membership was made up of white men, a big proportion of whom were American southerners. The ‘Deep South’ was notorious in those days in its disturbing dealings with African-Americans. Missionaries perceptions of the ‘native’ had been shaped by the race and cultural forces that undermined black people in their own land, even as they landed in South Africa. Even worse, they considered the ‘native’ as being of a lesser stock than the American ‘negro.’

The attitude, of not wanting to associate with African-Americans was demonstrated as early as 1914. It was glaring in Arkansas when the African-American bishop, Charles Mason, was relegated to observer status. Thereafter, the question of the ordination of “Coloreds” surfaced on different levels and forums, and at different times, but always as the thorny issue that merited careful consideration.

AGUSA leaders were careful not to step out of line, always making decisions in the context of the prevailing culture of the time. There were others, like W.F. Carothers, who believed that ‘segregation’ was divinely instituted.⁶³⁷ He was a leader in the AGUSA who, at some point, had working relations with Charles Parham; a known sympathiser with the Ku Klux Klan.

According to Howard Kenyon, who has written extensively on the ‘Colored question’ in the AGUSA, in 1939, considerations were already underway for the establishment of a “Colored Branch.” A recommendation from very high ecclesiastical opinion-makers was made:

...that when those of the Colored race apply for ministerial recognition, licence [a level lower than ordination] to preach only be granted to them with

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 246.

⁶³⁷ W.F. Carothers, “Attitudes of Pentecostal Whites to the Colored Brethren in the South,” *The Weekly Evangel*, August 14, 1915, 2.

instructions that they operate within the bounds of the District in which they are licenced, and if they desire ordination, refer them to Colored organisations.⁶³⁸

Interestingly, the ‘Colored organisation’ mostly considered was that of Charles Mason, the same African-American bishop who was side lined in Arkansas. The move to refer ‘Coloreds’ to ‘Colored organisations’ was not motivated by a desire to boost those organisations, but more as a strategy to rid the AGUSA of an annoying problem; Mason was the appropriate dumping ground because he was ‘Colored.’

Robeck writes that in 1945, a General Council of the AGUSA resolved to start a ‘Colored Branch,’ but always with the qualification, “Assemblies of God-Colored Branch,” whenever, and wherever displayed. The “Colored Branch” would be considered as a separate entity, and under the supervision of the “Home Missions Department.”⁶³⁹ Effectively, the branch would be accorded the same status as missionary projects in foreign lands. The Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa had made a similar decision with regard to the ‘native.’ Black people in the AFM were not accorded equal membership with white people until 1996; after more than eighty-eight years in existence.

It is clear that, even as the AGUSA tried to move forward on this issue, equality with the ‘Colored brethren’ was not the issue under consideration. Racial prejudice and discrimination were deliberate, and as Carothers argued, established and sanctioned of God. In 1949, J. Roswell Flower, the AGUSA General Secretary and mastermind behind foreign missions policy, displayed a serious degree of indifference with the ‘Colored’ question. He suggested that, if the matter was to receive consideration at all, then

⁶³⁸ See quote in CM Robeck, “*The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism*,” <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/robeck.html>. This paper was presented by Dr. Robeck in 1994, at a conference of what was formerly known as the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America. The movement had previously been a ‘whites-only’ affair, and in 1994 it disbanded and a new one was formed, which included African-American Pentecostals.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

someone must “get a burden for some type of evangelistic or philanthropic work, and devote themselves to it.”⁶⁴⁰

Evangelism was an urgent matter, but “Philanthropy” was not the question at all. “Colored people” were yearning for integration and equality in American society. The fact that he saw them as objects of “Philanthropy” betrays a sense of paternalism that characterised missionary initiatives abroad. Indeed, it reflected how he perceived others who were not of his racial stock. This was the man who went out of his way to raise millions of dollars for missionary work in Africa and other continents; yet, his racial outlook towards African-Americans left much to be desired.

The Council resolution in 1945 didn’t go a long way, in 1954, the AGUSA was still struggling with the ‘Colored problem.’ Ralph Riggs, General Superintendent at the time, conceded that all races needed Christ, including the ‘Colored Brethren.’ The only thing in question was how best the AGUSA could reach out to them.⁶⁴¹ That submission lacked the urgency that drove him to Africa as a missionary. Like his general secretary, JR Flower, he showed no fervour in addressing the problem.

Riggs was a former missionary to South Africa, and somewhere in his adventures of leadership, he met Nicholas Bhengu. Bhengu leaders of the AGUSA and other international Pentecostal leaders at the Pentecostal World Conferences. It was in one such conference that Riggs met Nicholas Bhengu. The two struck a relationship deep enough for Riggs to consult Bhengu on the ‘colored problem’ in the USA.

Riggs, as he struggled with the ‘Colored problem,’ decided to consult Bhengu on the matter. He wanted Bhengu to facilitate some contact between the AGUSA and bishop Mason. Mason also attended the Pentecostal World Conferences but it is not clear if he

⁶⁴⁰ See, Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 247.

⁶⁴¹ See CM Robeck, “*The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism*,” <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/robeck.html> .

and Bhengu had a relationship. The South African advised Riggs away from Mason and suggested the possibility of starting a ‘colored wing’ of the AGUSA.⁶⁴² For reasons that are not entirely clear; Bhengu voiced a desire to establish a ‘Colored’ wing of the AGUSA. He stated in a letter that he had received ‘delegations of Coloured people all over the States’ who were interested in such an initiative.⁶⁴³ He wrote:

Some Coloured people all over the States sent delegations to me with a view of influencing me to inaugurate and operate a coloured branch of the Assemblies of God. I strongly feel that a coloured wing of our work in the States would be part of an answer to parts of Africa where Nationalism is gaining ground, and there is no doubt that where Africans have been granted self-government or a Republic the white missionaries will have very little consideration. In that case we could make use of Negro well trained missionaries.⁶⁴⁴

Riggs was somewhat taken up with this proposal and he responded to Bhengu:

What you say about establishing a Colored Branch of the Assemblies of God is of great interest to us. It, however, would be a revolutionary move in connection with our work here. You are aware of the race prejudice which exists, especially in the southland. This would deter a rapid assimilation of the colored group with other branches of the Assemblies of God.⁶⁴⁵

Bhengu insisted:

It is also my opinion that any scheme to integrate the Negro Church and the White will be disastrous...Any integration policy should be put out of the question and it will come in its own time—a gradual process.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴² Ibid., 49.

⁶⁴³ The story of the correspondence between Riggs and Bhengu is captured by BL Hamilton, see, *Crossing the Color Line: The Church of God in Christ, The Assemblies of God and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Mth Thesis, Brite Divinity School, 2008), 29-30.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

It is not clear whether or not Bhengu was aware that the initiative he now proposed had failed in 1945. His advice was not different from what he envisaged for South Africa, and ultimately Africa. There was a clear desire on his part to take the ‘Peter-Paul’ principle to the USA; but was it what African-Americans wanted for themselves? Bob Harrison, in his book, implies otherwise. The point, for African-Americans, was not to divide the AGUSA along racial lines, but to be recognised as equal to their white counterparts in the AGUSA.⁶⁴⁷ Yet, again, there could have been others, like the ‘delegation’ sent to Bhengu, who thought otherwise.

Bhengu’s proposal was rejected. What he missed was the thin line of difference in the socio-political dynamics at play in the USA and in South Africa. Riggs wrote to Bhengu and closed the matter:

I regret to advise you that the brethren of our General Presbytery did not consider it wise for us to proceed at this time to the organization of a colored church here in America. You yourself have said that “any scheme to integrate the Negro church to the white will be disastrous.” This is exactly what our brethren felt. On the other hand, to build up a separate church for our colored brethren would likewise run counter to the present trend in American life. As you know, our Supreme Court has ruled in favor of integration. If we therefore build a church according to the segregation pattern, that would look as if we were defying the present trend in American life. So, rather than run into either of these difficulties, we feel it would be better for us to maintain the status quo at the present time.⁶⁴⁸

The challenge for Riggs and his colleagues was to be politically correct. What Bhengu missed was that the struggle in South Africa, in the context of the African continent, was about liberation from colonial powers, not integration or assimilation into colonial society. The struggle for liberation was more than the demands for equality that marked

⁶⁴⁷ The AGUSA ordained Bob Harrison in 1962 after he had a successful association with Billy Graham. He had become the force to reckon with the AGUSA could no longer ignore.

⁶⁴⁸ Hamilton, *Crossing the Color Line*, 30.

the Civil Rights Movement. His proposal was considered but found to be ill-timed for the American context.⁶⁴⁹

Blumhofer mentions a report entitled “Segregation Versus Integration” which was considered by the General Presbytery of the AGUSA in 1956. Instead of addressing the problem, the report was intended to be used as a shield against those who thought the organisation was not doing enough about the “Colored problem.” The officials could at least thrust the report in the faces of their accusers and show that some study was underway in the attempt to resolve the issue. The consideration was more strategic than moral and lacked the eschatological urgency enjoyed by their missionary programmes. The deliberations of the meeting, regarding the “Colored problem,” were later deleted from the minutes, according to Riggs:

We could not afford to go on record as favouring integration...neither did we want it known that we were in favor of desegregation.⁶⁵⁰

Both Riggs and Flower were convinced that “Integration” was “disastrous” and had serious implications for “loss of membership.”⁶⁵¹ As the problem continued to be raised on various political and ecclesiastical platforms, the AGUSA expressed its willingness to “mark time,” and only take positive steps when the cultural environment was conducive.⁶⁵² They were willing to drag their feet on the matter, just as the rest of American society was doing; especially in the Deep South.⁶⁵³ As the 1950s drew to a close the outgoing Riggs administration still had not made significant moves on the question of race relations in the AGUSA. Riggs, Flower and Noel Perkins all retired in 1959.

⁶⁴⁹ Robeck, *The Past*, 49.

⁶⁵⁰ Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 247.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

⁶⁵³ Robeck, *The Past*, 46.

9.2. The challenge for AGUSA missionaries in South Africa

As the 1960s were ushered in a new administration under Thomas Zimmerman took over. Noel Perkins, the director for Foreign Missions, was replaced by J. Phillip Hogan, and Everett Phillips was replaced by Morris Williams as field director for Africa.

The situation in South Africa remained the same, except that veterans like Edgar Pettenger were also approaching retirement; he had been in Africa for thirty-nine years. The political situation in both the USA and South Africa was volatile; as in America the AGUSA missionaries were often on the wrong side of history, drawing strongly on the background back home.

9.2.1. The AGUSA missionaries and the ‘Sharpeville Massacre’

A little over a month after British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan’s ‘Wind of Change’ speech in the South African parliament, the township of Sharpeville erupted. On March 21, 1960, the South African police shot sixty-nine people in an anti-pass protest. Events that took place on that day changed the course of history in South Africa. The political fiasco was widely publicised locally and overseas. In South Africa, the events in Sharpeville, and Langa in Cape Town ultimately forced the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) to resort to violence against the apartheid regime.

As Sharpeville lay bleeding and mourning the events of March 21, missionaries and their evangelists were holding revivals on a daily basis. In 1960, Vernon Pettenger reported on the situation in Sharpeville,

A State of Emergency has been declared in South Africa. All meetings, except religious meetings have been banned. We have every liberty to hold gospel services, and God has given us some great evangelistic rallies. Before the

Sharpeville Massacre, in which scores of Africans were killed, God sent revival to this native community.⁶⁵⁴

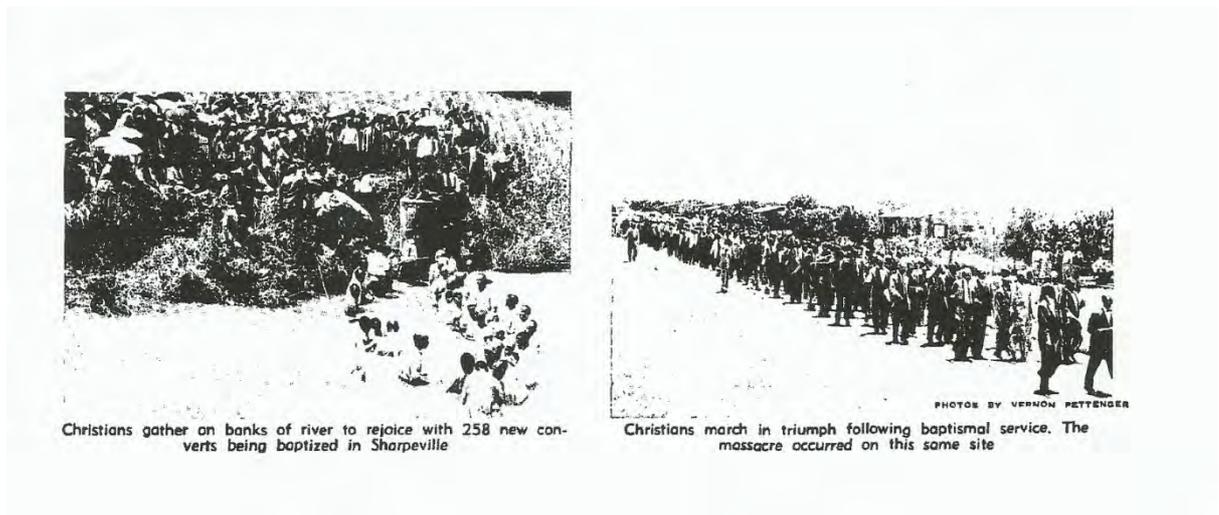


Figure 17: Picture of Pentecostal Christians marching past the spot where the massacre occurred (Flower Heritage Center).

These ‘revivals’ had an anaesthetic effect on the converts, they often lulled the ‘national consciousness’ articulated by British Prime Minister Macmillan to the South African parliament. Yet, there were AGUSA officials who were aware of the rising tide of ‘African Nationalism’ spreading throughout the African continent. One C.C. Grace, a Tennessee District Superintendent, on a trip through Africa wrote,

The whole atmosphere is filled with the keen sense that these people are seeking their independence from all outside sources. The band of colonialism is gone; they are determined to win sovereignty. The Africans seek a new career; they are united for victory. Through this new uprising for independence the white man in Africa is being replaced by the national. In every available government position, where the African has been trained and qualifies, the white man has been replaced. Frankly, they are ready to tell us, “We want to be on our own. The white man is only here to help our physically ill, to educate our young, or give financial assistance.” The newspaper, the radio, and the man on the street are

⁶⁵⁴ V Pettenger, ‘Before the Sharpeville Massacre,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1960, 15.

ever alert to this united nationalistic trend. Long have they slept, but now they have awakened like a giant from his slumber.⁶⁵⁵

While AGUSA missionaries in South Africa were talking of the 'Indigenous Church,' they had a way of stalling the processes on the ground. Some reports mentioned indigenous pastors and evangelists as being at the centre of revivals in African locations; but missionaries always suppressed any possibility of their absence or total withdrawal from the scene. As Edgar Pettenger approached retirement, his son, Vernon, took over the missionary baton and ran with it another 40 years.

In 1961, J. Phillip Hogan, the new executive director of Foreign Missions, reported on the uneasy political situation in South Africa,

South Africa presents another pressure area, for in this country there are one million white people who arbitrarily control the lives and destiny of eleven million Negroid Africans. Outbreaks of racial violence have occurred, but in spite of these problems a great spirit of revival prevails.⁶⁵⁶

Even as high ranking officials of the AGUSA spoke of "racial violence," often in patronising and paternal tones, they could not find ways to speak directly to the apartheid situation. Instead, missionary reports tended to demonise insurrection in black locations. Given their own background in racial relations, it is unlikely that they would have responded differently. They were sympathetic to the cause of white people and in many ways it worked to their own advantage. They enjoyed the privileges entitled by apartheid, and then came to the townships under the protection of the same forces that oppressed and killed their converts. They tried to live in a 'fiery furnace' without getting burnt; even worse, they were threatened by indigenous leaders who were suspected to be working against them as in the case of Nicholas Bhengu.

⁶⁵⁵ C.C. Grace, 'Africa as I Saw It,' *Pentecostal Evangel*, April 24, 1960, 3. Grace was the District Superintendent of the Tennessee District of the AGUSA. He was part of a high-powered delegation of representatives visiting many parts of Africa. The delegation included Stephen van der Merwe, who was the first white South African to return home, in 1932, as a 'naturalised' American.

⁶⁵⁶ J. P Hogan, 'Missions Review,' *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 24, 1961, 8.

9.3. Signs of dissatisfaction begin to emerge in the AGSA

Signs of dissatisfaction with Nicholas Bhengu and Jim Mullan by AGUSA missionaries had begun to emerge as early as 1946. John Bond, a former executive member of the AGSA in the 1980s, notes that both these individuals were targeted by Edgar Pettenger for isolation. He recalled a meeting held at the Fairview Assembly, in Johannesburg, with the sole intention of exercising discipline on Bhengu. The charge was that he refused to use the name “Assemblies of God” on his letterheads.⁶⁵⁷ Edgar Pettenger was the force behind the proposal. It was another hint of how Pettenger wanted to turn the AGSA into an AGUSA clone.⁶⁵⁸ Bhengu and the Mullan brothers were his biggest challenges, if not stumbling-blocks. To be sure, the work of the AGSA revolved around these men and Pettenger had very little to show in comparison.

As the years wore on, AGUSA missionaries grew more and more convinced that the AGSA structure was not conducive to their intentions. In 1959, as Bond put it, “The American missionaries grew more and more vociferous in their demands and complaints, even though they had little right to do so.”⁶⁵⁹ Their “overriding” demand, was that the AGSA should have a constitution. There was a constitution, a ‘7-point’ document that facilitated working with the government of the day. The AGUSA missionaries were not happy with that; it did however, serve the purpose facilitating business with the government. For people like James Mullan and others who did not believe in ‘Constitutions’ the document was fine. The AGUSA missionaries, in a condescending tone of derision, dubbed it the “Bikini Constitution.”⁶⁶⁰ The ‘Constitution’ was rewritten

⁶⁵⁷ J Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/The%20American%20Missionaries.html>

⁶⁵⁸ We will see later how AGUSA programmes were introduced almost immediately after the formation of the International Assemblies of God.

⁶⁵⁹ J Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/The%20American%20Missionaries.html>

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

but the Americans were still not happy, they wanted something similar to their home model. This was a conglomerate; why did the AGUSA missionaries insist on their demands unless there was something in it for them. Why did they impose on other members of the conglomerate except if they wanted to create tension?

Bond is convinced that the AGUSA missionaries wanted something that would confine Bhengu and Mullan to the Eastern Cape.⁶⁶¹ The missionaries envisaged a 'Constitution' that would divide the work of the AGSA into districts led by a Superintendent (probably a missionary). It would also entrench, in no uncertain terms, that pastors and evangelists licenced or ordained by the AGSA must operate within the demarcations of their districts unless given permission otherwise.⁶⁶² It was the only way they could manage Bhengu's interference in their invasion of African residential areas. Something similar was prescribed by the AGUSA for 'Colored' workers in the USA who required ordination in the 50s.

The white section of the AGSA, led by Irishmen Jim and Fred Mullan, rejected the proposal made by the American missionaries. They committed themselves to sending Bhengu, in particular, to 'Timbuktu' should the need arise.⁶⁶³ Indeed, white churches in the AGSA raised money for Bhengu's 'Back-to-God' in various ways but never with strings attached. The American missionaries on the other hand, used money as leverage to access African work in the townships.

Bhengu and James Mullan agreed on many things, including what they called the "Ascended Christ Ministries" model of leadership. This was another area of conflict with the Americans. Bhengu and Mullan emphasised what others have come to call 'The five-fold ministry,' based on Ephesians 4:11. They argued, among other things, that

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

local churches must be governed by ‘elders and deacons’ who were ultimately accountable to the “Apostle” founder of the church. Both men had pioneered local churches and insisted on overarching pastoral responsibilities of the situations. They appointed ministers and relocated and dispatched them at their own discretion. Arguably, this pattern of leadership was modelled on a Pauline model. Their argument was that, Paul sent ministers to different churches in the New Testament to continue his teachings as he had moved on to explore new territory.⁶⁶⁴

That model of leadership was not acceptable to the American missionaries. Fred Mullan, James’ brother and Chairman of the AGSA Executive, was not comfortable with it either. He argued that leadership in the local church must rest with the local people; they had the right to choose their “elders and deacons,” and to appoint their own “minister.” Fred also believed that the ministry of “Apostles” ceased with the twelve apostles.⁶⁶⁵ The American Missionaries believed in the devolution of power and elected leadership.

The differences between the two Mullan brothers divided the white section of the AGSA into two; those working with James were called “The Group,” while those led by Fred were known as the “Independent Assemblies” (later named Fellowship of Independent Assemblies).⁶⁶⁶ The two brothers remained within the AGSA conglomerate despite their differences. That was the complex nature of the conglomerate; they could differ and yet still work together on matters of mutual interest. The American missionaries wanted to override the independence of members of the conglomerate and give direction to the whole situation and it created deep cuts and fuelled conflict.

Somewhere in its founding days, the AGSA agreed that their platform was intended to facilitate communications with a government that was increasingly growing hostile to

⁶⁶⁴ This article is written by Coastal Assemblies of God, who at one time were part of the AGSA, <http://caog.org.za/16-2/our-history/>

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶⁶ *The History of the Assemblies of God in South Africa*, <http://www.agfbrakpan.co.za>

working with a multitude of independent missionary structures. It was a loose structure, made up of several missionary groups that encouraged some form of 'independence' within a 'dependence' that fostered mutual interest. In the final analysis, that structural arrangement had its own difficulties as each member insisted and pursued his own direction.

As the AGSA developed, it was structurally divided along racial lines, with each race electing its own leadership. There was also a 'General Executive' that incorporated and brought all the smaller executives under one umbrella. The 'General Executive' would meet under 'official' circumstances but this opportunity was almost impossible to exercise with membership on the ground. The separation along racial lines, AGSA historians like Lephoko, was not in support of apartheid, rather, it was imposed by apartheid.⁶⁶⁷ The social dynamics of a polarised society did not encourage the exercise of normal human relations. While the AGSA sought to circumvent apartheid, it also had to operate within its strictures.

Bhengu was leader of the African group, Colin la Foy led the Coloureds, and the Mullan brothers (Jim and Fred) led the White groups. The Mullans were the Irish missionaries who, from the beginning, worked among white people in South Africa. Perhaps for this reason, there were few skirmishes between Bhengu and the Mullan brothers. It was between Bhengu and James Mullan that the 'Peter-Paul' agreement was developed; and it had proven successful. The extent of the size of the work among Indians was minimal, and some inroads had been made into Coloured areas. By and large, the American missionaries did not report much on them.

9.4. AGUSA missionaries and the challenge to go home

This study has belaboured the point that the AGUSA missionaries fitted into the complex AGSA structure through the work of Phillip Molefe and other African evangelists. They

⁶⁶⁷ D Lephoko, *Nicholas, Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 37.

played a ‘financial’ role in the township evangelistic initiatives. As discussed in Chapter 5, their initial plan of preaching in the mines seemed to have run out of steam. Thus, the townships became an alternative to the ‘Mine Strategy’ announced by Edgar Pettenger at the Stone Church, in Chicago, in 1928.

On the whole, the American missionaries rode on the back of African evangelists. They drove into the townships in above-average automobiles, took pictures of what was going on and sent them home to reinforce their desperate need for funds; and then rode back into the safe cover of white suburbia. According to Maurice Ngakane, “The poverty between their ‘richness’ and the poverty of their converts was glaring; and in many instances created a missionary-convert dependency that was not easy to break.”⁶⁶⁸

For Bhengu the problem, among others, revolved around financial accountability. Missionaries were not accountable to anybody within the AGSA conglomerate with regard to the monies they received from abroad and the loose structure allowed for it. They lived in relative comfort in relation to the converts in whose poverty the monies were raised. That “free-ride,” one pastor said, “was what Bhengu had problems with; and he was quiet open about it.”⁶⁶⁹

The situation increasingly grew hostile and confrontational as Bhengu insisted on keeping missionaries out of African locations. While he sought to protect his ‘self-declared’ territory from missionary intrusion; Bhengu demonised the work of fellow African evangelists within the AGSA. As the 1960s unfolded, the American missionaries already had a good number of African pastors and evangelists working with them. Most of these men and women were graduates of Fred Burke’s African Bible Training Institute in Witbank. They allowed the American missionaries into their space

⁶⁶⁸ Maurice Ngakane, Personal Interview, July 13, 2015.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

and thus punctured Bhengu's desire to keep the missionaries out of African locations. He did not take that lightly.

The Rev. Jeremiah Motsatse, a pioneer of some churches in the then Orange Free State, narrated the story of how he lost a tent in Bothaville, Free State. He felt led to go and preach in Bothaville and a businessman offered to buy him a tent. Bhengu heard about it and ordered the relocation of a 'Revival Meeting' he did not organise. The tent was later stolen and Motsatse lost his tent.⁶⁷⁰ Another, Rev Mahlong, a former pastor in the AGSA, remembered how Bhengu wanted to manhandle him when he was thought to be causing confusion in a local church. While Bhengu stood up to missionaries, he abhorred the fact that some of his own people were being used against him. That was the heart of his "Thesis" in Witbank in 1955. His appeal obviously fell on deaf ears.

In the period beyond 1961, Bhengu's popularity with white American Pentecostals took a plunge. The positive reporting made by the AGUSA officials in international meetings was no longer noticeable. It is not clear, for instance, whether or not he attended the World Pentecostal Conferences in Israel (1961), Helsinki (1964), or the one following in Rio de Janeiro (1967).⁶⁷¹ His ministry and its 'non-acceptance' of American missionaries threw a dark cloud over his relationship with the AGUSA in particular.

In 1960, T.F. Zimmerman, newly elected General Superintendent of AGUSA, made his first assignment to visit foreign missionary fields. He made a stop in many parts of Africa and must have been aware of the situation of conflict going on in the southern tip

⁶⁷⁰ PN Raboroko, Personal Interview, April 12, 2015. This information was disclosed to the interviewee by the two pastors when he conducted research for a book on the history of the International Assemblies of God.

⁶⁷¹ 'Pentecost in Jerusalem,' *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 9, 1961, 4. No mention of Bhengu is made in this report as was customary since 1947. Either he was ignored, given the 'negative' reporting that missionaries made about him, or he did not attend the conference, despite his being in the 'Organising Committee.' Bond suspects, that certain missionaries were now reporting negatively about him, particularly in the USA.

of the African continent.⁶⁷² Zimmerman must have met Bhengu personally when he was Assistant General Superintendent to Ralph Riggs.

Somewhere in 1962, Morris Williams, AGUSA Field Director for Africa, arrived from Nyasaland with a set of ‘Non-negotiables’ for the AGSA.⁶⁷³ He obviously came as an envoy of the AGUSA in Springfield, Missouri. It is not clear what information he had been fed; what was clear was that he came with his mind made up. His proposals were presented to the AGSA executive and they spent two years discussing the ‘heavy-handed’ demands. When they could not come up with a satisfactory solution the AGUSA missionaries, in 1964, withdrew from the AGSA.

I asked James H. Stewart, a retired missionary now deceased, what the missionary side of the story was:

The missionaries of the AG-USA separating from the AG of South Africa was not a spur of the moment decision. It took some years of agonizing prayer and negotiations that finally led to this step. There were many factors that entered in, but the basic problem was that the AGSA had concluded by 1960 that it was a “fellowship” not an organisation. Within the Fellowship were groups each acting independently. This meant a diversity of doctrines and practices. For example, in some of the groups “apostles” appointed pastors. They did not believe in Bible Schools, pastors were to be trained in the local assembly. There was no written constitution for such things as property ownership. Some of the leaders held to fundamental doctrines that missionaries credentialed by the USA-AG could not accept...One thing often misunderstood was that it was not a split, in 1964 the missionaries decided to start all over again as a separate body, leaving the AGSA with properties etc.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷² R Riggs, former missionary to South Africa and outgoing General Superintendent, wrote to members of the General Council, among others, he introduced the relatively young Zimmerman who was taking over from him in 1960. He mentioned a trip already undertaken to foreign fields. Riggs was in very close contact with what was happening in South Africa, and worked very closely with his successor before he handed over the reins to Zimmerman. See to *Christmas Letter to General Council* signed by J Roswell Flower and J Riggs, December 1, 1959.

⁶⁷³ J Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God*, <http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/The%20American%20Missionaries.html>.

⁶⁷⁴ JH Stewart, e-mail, July 29, 2013. James, now deceased, was Principal of the AGUSA Southern Africa School of Theology in Rustenburg. This school was the former ABTI in Witbank that had now relocated to Rustenburg under apartheid pressure.

Rollin Grams gave his father's side of the story regarding the split:

The disputes were over doctrine, church governance and worship practices. The American Assemblies of God Foreign Missions Department had already decided to close South Africa as a field. The Grams family was going to be posted to Tanzania. But during the discussions, the missionaries appealed to remain. So they withdrew from the South African Assemblies of God and formed the International Assemblies of God. Morris Williams and Gene Grams rewrote the constitution of the new denomination and registered it with the government. The denomination was divided however because of apartheid, and so Gene had to type the constitution four times under four names for each race. The Assemblies of God International for whites, the International Assemblies of God for Africans, the International Assemblies of God for the Coloureds, and the International Assemblies of God for Asians.⁶⁷⁵

There was obviously more than the doctrinal disputes in question; missionaries were being called back home. The AGUSA was aware of the problems going on in South Africa and Morris Williams was sent to come and resolve the crisis. He was under instructions to explore other alternatives or call the missionaries back home. According to Raboroko, Eugene Grams discussed the matter with some of the pastors he was sponsoring and they were not comfortable with it.⁶⁷⁶ These former graduates of the ABTI immediately formed a group of 'Concerned-Pastors' and made submissions to Williams with regard to the closure of South Africa as a mission field. They wanted missionaries to continue in South Africa; and there was only one way out—a split from the AGSA.

The missionaries moved swiftly to write a Constitution of the International Assemblies of God and to take over leadership of the new church. There were four versions of the same document in agreement with the demands of the Group Areas Act. The International Assemblies of God was divided into districts, each headed by an AGUSA missionary. At the official launch of the IAG in Witbank in 1967, Morris Williams became the first General Superintendent, while Eugene Grams was the General

⁶⁷⁵ See footnote in, RG Grams, *Stewards of Grace: A Reflective, Mission Biography of Eugene and Phyllis Grams in South Africa, 1951-1962* (Portland OR, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 146.

⁶⁷⁶ PN Raboroko, Personal Interview, April 12, 2015.

Secretary-Treasurer. The church was launched with “56 congregations and 56 pastors,” including “9 ordained ministers, 28 licenced, and 19 exhorters.”⁶⁷⁷ 1967 was forty-six years since the AGUSA missionaries first arrived in 1921 and on their terms no one qualified among the indigenous pastors and evangelists to lead the IAG.

The IAG confirmed Bond’s fears regarding the demarcation of the AGSA and the desire of the American missionaries to clone the AGSA into an AGUSA version in South Africa. It was Bond’s version of events regarding the split that was confirmed after the split. While the AGUSA missionaries pointed to doctrinal differences; it is obvious that they wanted to establish a ministry platform in which they were totally in charge albeit covered with a few indigenous faces.

After all, that pattern was common wherever AGUSA missionaries were found. Their mandate, written or otherwise, was to extend their denominational boundaries abroad. Every missionary initiative in Africa sought to give birth to a replica of the ‘mother-body’ abroad. The prompt actions missionaries took after the split signify the real reasons why they had to break away. Pentecostalism, in both South Africa and the USA, already had a track record of rejecting black leadership and perhaps Bhengu proved too hard to handle.

John Bond credits the split to the overwhelming presence and stern leadership of Nicholas Bhengu. He was not only tough with white missionaries but with anybody who posed a threat to the African work within the AGSA. Since the confrontation in a meeting in Nelspruit held in 1945, where black leaders challenged missionaries against holding racially separate meetings, missionaries were kept on tenterhooks. That confrontation ensured black and white relations in the AGSA would never again be that of a ‘white missionary and his black evangelist.’⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁷ ‘First General Council Held by South Africa International A/G,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 18, 1967.

⁶⁷⁸ J Bond, *For the Record*,
<http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/My%20First%20General%20Conference.html>

The International Assemblies of God presented new opportunities for pastors who could not be actualised within the austerity of Nicholas Bhengu's leadership. Phillip Molefe completely fell off the picture; after 1964 he lost favour with his converts and missionaries. There were other effective evangelists and pastors who left the AGSA but did not join the IAG. Rev Sebastian Malambe, a former witchdoctor, formed his own church, 'The Gospel Pilots.' Timothy Olyphant, a hard-core criminal converted under Bhengu's ministry, surfaced somewhere in Brooklyn, New York, pastoring a "teen-age gang church."⁶⁷⁹ While Phillip Molefe did not join the IAG, many of his followers became part of the new church.

John Bond describes how the AGSA was able to move forward after the AGUSA dropped a bombshell on them in 1964:

In 1964 the Americans split away, taking a number of black churches with them out of the Assemblies of God. In all, 15 missionary couples left us and two single ladies, a total of 32 missionaries. I was surprised to see how small the American contingent was for they were so dynamic, vociferous and influential. I felt the work would fall apart without them, so did they and they boasted of that possibility. In any event, it turned out to be a blessing in the long run. After the traumatic period that followed their departure, our work took on an increasingly indigenous character, churches grew, stabilised and were blessed. Ministries from South Africa came to the fore. We found we did not need the Americans after all. We could manage quite well without them.⁶⁸⁰

Bond described how the AGSA went on to achieve more without the AGUSA missionaries than with them. He did not undermine the important part they played in the AGSA conglomerate but highlighted an unintended consequence in the situation. When the missionaries pulled out, the AGSA "took on an increasingly indigenous character." Bhengu had been right all along, their presence among the 'natives' had over stayed its welcome. Just as soon as they left, the AGSA demonstrated phenomenal growth in all three spheres of the 'Indigenous Church.'

⁶⁷⁹ *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1960, 19.

⁶⁸⁰ See Bond, *For the Record*,
<http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/The%20American%20Missionaries.html>.

The reluctance of missionaries to go back home leaves much to be desired. Why did they insist on staying on South Africa? To be sure, the work in South Africa was indigenous as early as 1913 when John G. Lake returned to the USA. In 1964, there were three strong 'Indigenous' Classical Pentecostal churches in South Africa, the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Full Gospel Church of God and the Assemblies of God in South Africa. All three could, on one level or another, relate their existence to the Pentecostal missionaries who arrived in 1908. The next chapter will not only conclude the study, but it will present an evaluation of the International Assemblies of God as a new missionary experiment after 1964. It will show that in the IAG, the missionaries wanted to do what proved difficult or impossible to effectuate in the other three churches. It was a costly experiment with very little results.

Chapter 10

10. Epilogue

While this study focused largely on the AGSA, Nicholas Bhengu, the AGUSA missionaries and the founding of the IAG; an attempt was made to place the dissertation in its American and South African historical context. By and large, the mission churches were influenced by mission agencies like the London Missionary Society, American Board of Commissioners in Foreign Lands (American Zulu Mission), and the Berlin Missionary Society. Classical Pentecostalism was the initiative of American missionaries; especially the Apostolic Faith entourage led by John G. Lake in 1908, and later the AGUSA and the IPHC. John Alexander Dowie was an important forerunner introduced by his periodical, *Leaves of Healing*, Johannes Büchler, and later represented by his emissary Daniel Bryant.

10.1. The ‘Demon’ in Pentecostalism

Dowie’s ambitions were transparent from the very beginning, South Africa was an extension of his religious ideal to spread ‘Zion’ around the world. In 1904, he had done an admirable job on the extension of his religious ‘empire.’ Zion was found in many major cities in America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the Far East. You either accepted that or, like Johannes Büchler, faced being demonised or dismissed.

Perhaps it is in Dowie that we begin to see the emergence of a trend of the ‘demonization’ of others in Pentecostalism. This was very common with those who endowed upon themselves the right to monopolise religious territory, or even exclusive access to God by his Spirit. Dowie demonised others and was later given a taste of his own medicine by those who sang his praises. A similar tendency later surfaced among the Apostolic Faith missionaries in Johannesburg. Some leaders reported negatively on John G. Lake to sponsors in the UK and the USA. Others, like HM Turney resigned from Doornfontein and surfaced in Doornkop. The extent to which Turney influenced the shift from Doornfontein to Doornkop is not clear, but he did have a role to play in it.

The study has shown how the same ‘demon’ later surfaced in the relationship between the AGSA, Nicholas Bhengu, the American missionaries and black pastors in the IAG. The American missionaries ‘demonised’ Bhengu, Bhengu ‘demonised’ Molefe, Molefe ‘demonised’ Timothy Oliphant and others.

That disturbing trend is however not unique to Pentecostalism, it is characteristic of leadership everywhere. It is often the absoluteness of power that corrupts absolutely. We see that often in the political arena where leaders ‘demonise’ each other because they cannot see themselves outside of the leadership positions they hold. Some political leaders in Africa are notorious known for that.

10.2. The problem of ‘Good doctrine.’

It was WF Dugmore, the first South African secretary of the AFM, who first complained about good ‘Native’ preachers who ‘erred in doctrine.’⁶⁸¹ ‘Native preachers’ were good with their own people precisely at the point where their doctrine was considered to be in ‘error.’ They introduced an ‘African’ perspective to Pentecostalism not acceptable to white Pentecostals in the AFM.

That ‘native preachers’ were good with their own people was precisely Bhengu’s point. It makes a lot of sense in the context of what missionaries called the ‘Indigenous Church;’ however, it was met with derision by its very proponents. History has vindicated the submission that ‘natives are good with their own people.’ Today, the AGSA holds its unique place in the history of Pentecostalism in South Africa because one man dared to defy missionary paternalism. A similar argument is plausible with regard to the AIC’s. The Zion Christian Church (ZCC) under Bishop Ramarumo Lekganyane has grown relentlessly since the religious family dynasty was introduced in the mid-1920s.

⁶⁸¹ WF Dugmore, ‘Missionary Work among the Natives,’ *The Weekly Evangel*, February 12, 1916, 13.

While Dugmore worried about ‘error in doctrine,’ he said very little on the question of race relations in the AFM. The same is true for the AGUSA; with a history marked by prejudice and racism. This study has shown how leaders like Warren Faye Carothers defended the separation of races, forbade the ordination of women and even found a biblical basis for race and bigotry based on gender.⁶⁸² While the ‘Spirit’ spoke in many and various ways, it is very difficult to determine if the ‘Spirit’ ever said anything about prejudice, discrimination and racism among white Pentecostals, both in the USA and in South Africa.

We have seen how conflict areas in the AGSA arguably revolved around ‘doctrine.’ Missionaries who were close to the secessions in 1964 and 1981 (as we shall see later) agree that ‘doctrine’ was the core of the conflicts that resulted in the withdrawal of missionaries in indigenous work. But who determines ‘good doctrine?’ What criteria is used and why? According to Hollenweger, Bhengu spoke in tongues but did not encourage it as a public extravaganza. In fact, he did not strike Katessa Schlosser as one who was capable of ecstasy.⁶⁸³ It is plausible that American missionaries may have had a problem with that attitude. It is however interesting to note that the American missionaries steered clear of associating their split from the AGSA with Nicholas Bhengu.

The doctrine of ‘speaking in tongues,’ as ‘good doctrine,’ was carved in a Bible school that did not allow for any other text except the bible.⁶⁸⁴ The students were encouraged to study the book of the ‘Acts of the apostles’ and to pray. Charles Parham, principal of the school, was also known for weird doctrines that promoted white supremacy.⁶⁸⁵ If in fact, ‘speaking in tongues’ was an impetus for evangelism as AGUSA missionaries insisted;

⁶⁸² EL Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 172.

⁶⁸³ WJ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 132.

⁶⁸⁴ Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 50.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

why was Bhengu more effective than all 32 of them put together? Perhaps the missionaries were more romantic about the ‘doctrine’ than they were truthful.

The AGUSA still holds on to this teaching and, like its AFM counterpart, has not allowed for indigenous expressions and redefinitions of the faith. In South Africa, their presence still ensures that the IAG should not deviate from the religious tenets of the American church. The objectives of the founding missionaries are still closely and jealously guarded. They are enshrined into the constitution; in a sense, it is still the AGUSA that determines the perimeters of ‘Good doctrine.’ While the IAG claims to be ‘independent’ from its ‘mother church’ it continues to show unquestioning loyalty to the Americans. To be sure, the IAG continues to be nothing more than a ‘mission church’ to the AGUSA; after 50 years of existence it has shown very little growth and independence. That much was clear in its 50 year celebrations held in Rustenburg in 2014.

10.3. Why couldn’t ‘Natives’ be trusted with money?

This study has demonstrated throughout that money was a dire problem for Pentecostal missionaries in the early 20th century in South Africa. That situation only changed after World War II. The AGUSA had in the meantime determined, as early as the beginning of World War I, in 1914, that ‘natives’ could not be supported, except through an American missionary. The reluctance to support indigenous pastors and evangelists; and the determination to have their own missionaries on the ground has proved to be costlier than otherwise. The AGUSA will however not confront the reality that it is more cost effective to support indigenous pastors than to keep missionaries on the ground who have very little to show for their presence.

While the American missionaries ascribe the split in 1964 to ‘doctrinal’ differences and ‘apostles’ in the AGSA, some, like John Bond, believe that Bhengu’s overwhelming

*isithunzi*⁶⁸⁶ was their concern. One area of conflict between Bhengu and the missionaries revolved around methods of raising money in American churches for the ‘native work.’ Missionaries were enthused with taking pictures in churches in the villages and townships even though they often had very little to do with what was going on there. Bhengu did not allow that where he was concerned. The missionaries had no option but to abuse the situation, sometimes taking pictures and writing stories without his permission. It was the only way they could justify their presence and stay in Africa.

An allusion has already been made to the fact that the non-support of ‘native’ preachers was more a question of racial prejudice than it was a question of trust. It showed even when the Africans themselves had been abroad to raise support for their work. In the 1950s Bhengu had access to American Pentecostal conferences, like the PFNA in 1954, where he received pledges to help the revival in South Africa. Some leading officials of the AGUSA had been to East London and personally witnessed what was going on there. When the monies came, the missionaries took control of it, and did not use it for the purpose for which it was intended. A similar story can be repeated with Harold Mononyane in the IAG.⁶⁸⁷

Bhengu however proved that the paternalistic notion that ‘natives cannot be trusted with money’ was baseless. In fact, his clash with missionaries revolved around accountability. He insisted that missionaries should account for the money they raised in the name of the people in the African locations. He himself accounted for the millions of Rands collected by women in the AGSA for furthering of the gospel. Professionals in the accounting field were brought in to count the money, take it to the bank and later present an audited report to the faithful thousands that gathered for Easter conferences, first in East London and later in Thabanchu. Thus, trust was not the issue in supporting

⁶⁸⁶ J Bond describes Bhengu as a man of overwhelming stature (*isithunzi*). A word used for anyone whose presence is awed with a form of integrity that demands respect.

⁶⁸⁷ PN Raboroko, Personal Interview, April 16, 2015.

indigenous pastors directly; the problem was the racial prejudice and paternalism that characterised the founding of the AGUSA.

It is therefore plausible to argue that some missionaries were in it, not so much for the mission as it was for the money. They were poorer at home than they were in the field, especially the cabal in South Africa who spent the rest of their active lives ‘causing havoc in the townships.’⁶⁸⁸

10.4. The ‘Indigenous Church.’ The tensions of theory and practice

The AGUSA in its missionary ethos has always emphasised the notion of the ‘Indigenous Church.’ Effectively, they anticipated a day when missionaries would be recalled or posted elsewhere. At the ABTI in Rustenburg, Melvin Hodges’ book, *The Indigenous Church*, formed part of the curriculum. Why did it take so long for some missionaries to go home; or be posted elsewhere? Why was it so difficult for the Americans to practice what they taught? The split in 1964 may provide the answers to these perplexing questions; and they have very little to do with what the missionaries suggested were the reasons for the split.

10.4.1. The AGSA in 1964 was already ‘Indigenous’

Since the arrival of the Apostolic Faith missionaries in Johannesburg in 1908, work in South Africa had become independent in various ways. When Daniel Nkonyane broke away from the AFM in 1910, the work in Wakkerstroom and surrounding areas took on an increasingly indigenous nature, all connections with Dowie and the AFM were cut. Later on in 1913, John G. Lake returned home, exactly five years since he first arrived,

⁶⁸⁸ While other missionary families came and lasted for their first session (usually 4 years), there were others who formed the core of missionary work in South Africa, like the Edgar and Vernon Pettenger, Eugene Grams, and JH Stewart. Rollin Grams has confirmed that life was not easy for his father in the USA until he was sent to South Africa after a violation of protocol by Ralph Riggs. See, RG Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 107. The split in 1964 confirmed Bhengu’s fears of missionaries ‘causing havoc in the townships.’ We will see later, how another split occurred in 1981, again at the instigation of the missionaries.

and left behind an independent church wholly in the hands of white Pentecostals. This would suggest that the Pentecostal church in South Africa became 'indigenous' as early as 1910 or 1913 (If we should accommodate the argument of classical Pentecostals that Zulu Zionists are not Pentecostal). Why did the missionaries stay on?

If the argument is that the 'Indigenous Church' after 1913 was predominantly white, which was not in line with the mandate for the missionaries, that picture changed in 1917 with the shift in focus from Doornfontein to Doornkop. HM Turney's exaggerated reports suggested that the AGUSA could once again focus on the 'native' after Doornfontein had been taken over by white Pentecostals in the AFM and a host of other missionaries who had been attracted to the area since 1908. Perhaps that merited a continued presence of AGUSA missionaries in South Africa. Doornkop however fell off the picture after the introduction of a certain 'Maruta' Law. With the arrival of Edgar Pettenger and Fred Burke in the 1920s there was a strong emphasis on the mines in the East Rand. Indigenous leaders could not stay long because they had to return home to their rural origins. Again, that may have justified a continued presence of the missionaries, especially because they had easy access into the compounds and offices of the mines by virtue of the colour of their skin. It was easier to access the compounds as a white missionary than it would have been as an African pastor or evangelist. If the mines justified their stay that picture changed when Bhengu was introduced into the AGSA in 1938.

The townships, or locations as they were known, introduced another angle to the question of the 'Indigenous Church.' These congested squalor and squatter camps attracted many who either did not return home after their time in the mines, or had hope of finding a job in the mushrooming little towns around the mines. Women were also attracted to these places in large numbers for possible employment in the 'Kitchens.'⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁹ Women, often from rural areas, who came to look for work in the mining areas were usually employed as 'Maids' by white women in the segregated residential areas around the mines. This was popularly known as working in the 'Kitchens.'

Those who could not find employment resorted to other means of raising money, like the concoction of African beer.

If the mines had easy access, then the townships were a complex and totally different story for the American missionaries. The article by Joel Cabrita offers some valuable insights with regard to early Zionist-evangelical dissenters and the complexity of life in the townships.⁶⁹⁰ She mentions how ‘Zionist-evangelicalism’ has always been marked by dissent, not only in South Africa but around the world. More importantly she makes the observation:

Yet largely absent from many of these histories of the South African urban experience is a detailed examination of the role of an evangelical, Holiness inspired Protestantism that compelled its adherents to pursue ever-greater heights of spiritual purity and perfection, resonant with, and building upon, the ethos of self-improvement that characterized many urban migrants’ experience.⁶⁹¹

While Bhengu resisted breaking away from the over-arching connection he had with the AGSA, he insisted on maintaining an ‘independent’ role with regard to his work in the African townships. Connected to a pursuit of ‘spiritual purity and perfection’ in his teachings was the ‘ethos of self-improvement’ that his followers became known for. The American missionaries did not, and could not, identify with the latter part of his aspirations. Perhaps they could sympathise but it was impossible to experience what life in the township felt like.

When Bhengu joined the AGSA in 1938, he already had an agenda, and it was not different from what was going on in the townships with regard to religious leaders who had broken away from missionary connections. While evangelism was at the core of his work there was the dimension of empowerment that the missionaries could not bounce back. When people in the townships sent a sound of poverty they returned an echo of

⁶⁹⁰ J Cabrita, “Revisiting ‘Christian Independency’: Urban Moderns and the Pursuit of Self-Perfection in Early Twentieth-Century Johannesburg.”

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

affluence. As pointed out in an earlier chapter, for Bhengu that was a serious moral deficit. The 'Peter-Paul' agreement tended to accommodate that concern.

But whether or not that was true is not the point; the point is there was an 'indigenous' leader who was competent enough to move the work forward in the townships. His impact was unquestionable. Why did the missionaries insist on invading the townships even when there was competent leadership around them? The 1950s in particular saw many individuals born within the AGSA situation rise up to take influential positions of leadership in evangelism. The period 1938-1960 in many ways suggested that missionaries either had to return home or move on to other parts of Africa that required their services. The work had reached the 'indigenous' levels they set out to build; the period however exposed a sinister motive on the part of the missionaries which betrayed the ethos that drove AGUSA missionary initiatives.

By 1960, the AGUSA was convinced that its missionaries should either be recalled or posted in other areas in Africa. Eugene Grams, for instance, would have been sent to East Africa.⁶⁹² The missionaries instead connived with some African pastors and broke away from the AGSA to form the IAG. JH Stewart said the missionaries needed to start something new; but was that the mandate? The AGSA had already proven to be 'indigenous' in every sense of how they understood it. With the immediate formation of the IAG it was clear that the AGUSA missionaries wanted to stay on in South Africa; and it had to be on their terms. It is also difficult to imagine, given the affluent standards of living the missionaries had become accustomed to, how money did not have anything to do with the scheming behind the AGSA's back. South Africa was, in all probability, the closest experience to the USA than most countries in Africa. The possibility was also great for the AGSA to be destroyed had it not been for Bhengu's stern leadership qualities. Why was it so convenient for the missionaries to risk the destruction of a work they had been part of for so many years?

⁶⁹² See footnote 2, RG Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 146.

The period beyond the 1960's however proved otherwise; women in the AGSA were trained to raise millions of money worth. As in most situations where missionaries did not participate, according to Bond, the AGSA became stronger than ever before; "and we found," he said, "we did not need them after all."⁶⁹³

10.5. Nicholas Bhengu, the Pentecostal maverick

There is no doubt that Bhengu was a maverick. Up till then, his competence as an indigenous Pentecostal leader within Classical Pentecostalism was indisputable. There were many influences to his style of leadership as inferred in this study. The atmosphere was thick with the achievements of Ethiopianism in the 1800s, he himself stood in the tradition of Zulu Zionists that broke away from the AFM even though he did not approve of some of their teachings. He had been involved in the trade union movement and was a member of the Communist Party of South Africa. Trends of these influences could clearly be identified in his ministry and relationship with all the missionaries in the AGSA.

It is unlikely that missionaries would have appreciated his approach towards ministry given their race and cultural background. It was rather unfortunate that his fellow Africans, as he decried in 1955, seemed totally bewildered by his leadership style. They all had a common and overarching goals in ministry, yet differed drastically with regard to how those goals were to be achieved. Everyone believed that his way of doing things was the right way.

It cannot be denied that Bhengu had dominated the scene, at least until the advent of Phillip Molefe. At one level or another some of the evangelists could trace their conversion to his ministry. These men were his spiritual children. Phillip Molefe, for instance, was a convert of Bhengu's convert; it was this paternal attitude that failed to appreciate the contributions that others have made to the work of the AGSA. That was

⁶⁹³ See footnote 679.

the loophole that the American missionaries exploited, for better or worse, they created space for these gifts to flourish.

At a very crucial point, Bhengu isolated those he needed to bring within his fold. After 1955, the battle lines were drawn and the American missionaries were openly defiant to the 'Thesis.' It would not have been possible without the ABTI contingent that was recruited from the Bible School. As pointed out earlier, if taken to its logical conclusions, the 'Thesis' suggested a moratorium, except where missionaries had been invited to render a service the African people could not do. The dissatisfactions that ensued beyond 1955 must have weighed very heavily on the 'Thesis,' Bhengu's thinking was no longer 'ambiguous' but his feelings towards missionaries and those who worked with them were now in the open. If the 'Thesis' was intended to correct his relationship with the missionaries, it only made matters worse.

While Molefe was a force to be reckoned with in his own right, it is not certain what direction an attempt to resolve the conflict between him and Bhengu would have taken. Molefe later fell of the picture because of a moral misdemeanour that almost obliterated his ministry. He told PN Raboroko and Dr F Kekana in an interview, that the missionaries did not even tell him when the IAG was established.

10.6. The International Assemblies of God as a new experiment of the AGUSA missionaries

For the first time in the history of missionaries and their converts in South Africa, it was the missionaries who seceded from a work they had been part of as they stood challenged by resolute African leadership. In a traumatic display of financial power and rejection of African leadership the American missionaries withdrew from the AGSA and formed the International Assemblies of God in 1964.

In justifying the move to start a new church Morris Williams, the new AGUSA field director for Africa, reported the following to his principals:

...in recent years it became evident that African churches needed and wanted a better basis on which to build their work. Consequently, the International Assemblies of God was born.⁶⁹⁴

This was only four years after Williams had taken over from Everett Phillips as the AGUSA Field Director for Africa in 1960. Phillips was the man who rebuked Eugene Grams for building a church for Afrikaners in Welkom. Thomas Zimmerman, the new general superintendent, and his administration were introduced in the 1960's, and had little information and almost no consultation with the African leaders on the ground in South Africa. Whatever information the decision-makers worked on was what was fed to them by the missionaries. That was what Williams' suggested by imposing 'non-negotiables' on the AGSA.⁶⁹⁵ He came as an AGUSA envoy to solve the problems in the AGSA but his mind was already made up.

As a new missionary in Malawi, Williams didn't know first-hand what was happening in South Africa. He split the church in 1964 with only one side of the story in mind. To be sure, Williams had no clue of the early beginnings of the AGSA; and key participants, like Edgar Pettenger were now retired or retiring. There were one or two overlaps, like Eugene Grams and Vernon Pettenger who had been protégés of the missionary old guard that was now phasing out. According to James H. Stewart, it was these new hopefuls that pushed for a new beginning in 1964.⁶⁹⁶ That group included aspirants on both sides, indigenous pastors and missionaries who were keen to test their own ideas in the ministry and the missionary field.

⁶⁹⁴ 'First General Council Held by South Africa International A/G, *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 18, 1967, 28.

⁶⁹⁵ J Bond, *For the Record*,
<http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/My%20First%20General%20Conference.html>

⁶⁹⁶ JH Stewart, e-mail, July 29, 2013.

I conclude that the American missionaries did not succeed in measuring up to the demands of the 'Indigenous Church.' Instead they established a pattern of secession every time the 'indigenous' situation did not measure up to their expectations. They manipulated a situation of conflict in the AGSA and festered their dissatisfactions for economic reasons. The split had very little to do with what indigenous leaders "needed and wanted," it revolved very much around the missionaries and what they 'needed and wanted.' The indigenous leaders who became part of the IAG were merely a convenient front of more sinister intentions by the missionaries.

As the missionaries pushed for structures that ensured their hold on control in the IAG, it demonstrated how Burke's training and development programme at the ABTI was more of indoctrination than education. After the relocation of the ABTI to Rustenburg Burke resorted to training ministers, largely of the AIC's, by correspondence through the All Africa School of Theology, thereby losing the control he previously exercised over his students.

In raising funds for the school over the years Burke's priority was developing the 'African missionary;' yet in 1964, the Americans still believed that indigenous pastors and evangelists were not ready to lead their own church. It took four years before the first African general superintendent, Harold Mononyane, could be elected into office. Spring Valley in Witbank (old home of the ABTI) continued to play a role with older graduates, even providing the location for the launch of the IAG in 1964. That role was soon taken over by the new school in Rustenburg.

As mentioned earlier, in 1960, the ABTI in Witbank, after tremendous pressure from the apartheid government, relocated to Rustenburg.⁶⁹⁷ Vernon Pettenger continued to raise funds for "training young people for the ministry." He challenged the donors back home:

⁶⁹⁷ F Burke, 'South Africa,' *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 27, 1959, 15.

Would you like to have a part in training South African young people for the ministry? You may do so by paying for a well which was recently drilled at the school as a result of the worst drought in 30 years. The alternatives were either to drill a well or to close the school. The faculty and staff of the ABTI chose to go ahead with the well even though there were no funds to cover the costs.⁶⁹⁸

The ‘strategy’ to recruit pastors through the bible school was obviously continuing. That trend of reporting, over many years, created the impression that the missionaries were indeed building the ‘indigenous church.’ Yet the split in 1964, and the formation of the International Assemblies of God proved otherwise. Consciously or otherwise, there was an element of deceit going on in the missionary reports, and Springfield was not picking it up, or it was flowing along with it.

The ‘Constitution’ of the International Assemblies of God was presented at the ‘First General Council’ held in Witbank in 1966.⁶⁹⁹ In that meeting, Morris Williams, the Field Director for Africa, was ‘elected’ as the general superintendent of the International Assemblies of God and Harold Mononyane, an African pastor in Mamelodi, became his assistant. Eugene Grams was ‘elected’ as the secretary-treasurer.⁷⁰⁰ This ‘election’ was held two years after the split in 1964. The results of the election implied that the indigenous pastors and evangelists were not competent enough to take over key positions of leadership in the church.⁷⁰¹

According to the new constitution, the church was to be divided into ‘organised districts.’ Perhaps the proposal made administrative sense but was it a demand that the AGUSA missionaries could impose on the AGSA as a whole? To be sure, it confirmed Bond’s fears that the AGUSA missionaries wanted a structure that could define

⁶⁹⁸ V Pettenger, ‘Life at ABTI,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 23, 1964, 8-9.

⁶⁹⁹ According to PN Raboroko, the first General Council was held in December of 1966, even though reported in the USA in 1967. Personal Interview, April 12, 2015.

⁷⁰⁰ ‘First General Council Held by South Africa International AG,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 18, 1967, 28-29.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*

geographical perimeters for individual ministry.⁷⁰² It was how the American church worked and they wanted to impose that structure on the AGSA.

The American missionaries were already introducing ‘American’ programmes in some townships where they had unhindered access. In 1962 they announced the formation of a ‘Women’s Missionary Council’ in Phillip Molefe’s church in Sharpeville. The ‘WMC’ was a South African version of a similar programme for women in the USA. Such moves were an example of how the missionaries had already begun making inroads into cloning the AGSA into an AGUSA version in South Africa.⁷⁰³

Nicholas Bhengu resisted those cloning attempts, and his work demonstrated his own programmes and designs of leadership; he even had his own constitution for the ‘Back-to-God Crusade.’ If the AGSA had agreed to district demarcations, it effectively meant that Bhengu and Mullan would be restricted to operate in the Eastern Cape. Why did the AGUSA missionaries want to limit a ministry with international proportions to a small geographical area of South Africa? Why did they think it was the right thing to do in a conglomerate of independent members; unless of course they believed everything revolved around them? Bond alludes to how they boasted about the work falling apart after they pulled out of the AGSA in 1964.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰² See Bond, *For the Record*,
<http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/The%20American%20Missionaries.html>.

⁷⁰³ ‘WMC Launched in South Africa,’ *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 25, 1962.

⁷⁰⁴ See J Bond, *For the Record*,
<http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20Book/The%20American%20Missionaries.html>.



Figure 18: Left to right-D Seale, M Williams and R Mazibuko: Rand District Officers of the IAG, 1969-70 (Courtesy of the family of the late Rev Piet Magosi)

Harold Mononyane was ‘elected’ as the first African general superintendent in 1968, four years after the split, and Vernon Pettenger became his assistant. Some districts still showed the American missionaries in leadership. Ironically, it was Morris Williams who became the superintendent of the most influential district in the IAG—the Rand District.

In 1964, Morris Williams was a missionary to Malawi, field director for Africa, general superintendent of the IAG, and in 1969 he was superintendent of the Rand District. Somehow he managed to juggle responsibilities around and still manage the contingent of American missionaries spread all over Africa.⁷⁰⁵

The picture above (Figure 18) suggests that even as the IAG was approaching ten years of existence the AGUSA missionaries were at the helm of leadership. While the

⁷⁰⁵ See *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 20, 1964, 11.

situation changed in the years following and indigenous pastors took over leadership, the AGUSA missionaries still held an *ex officio* presence in all meetings. It is that presence that still ensures that indigenous leaders do not divert from the original intentions of the American missionaries.⁷⁰⁶

If indeed the missionary ethos was to ‘work themselves out of a job,’ why were they so threatened by Nicholas Bhengu whose proven competence was compatible with their goals? He was recognised around the world as a competent leader, even by the AGUSA at the highest levels of administration. Yet the missionaries were involved more in a contest for power than ‘working themselves out of job.’

A glaring feature in the early history of Pentecostalism, both in the USA and in South Africa, was the refusal by white Pentecostals to accept African or African-American leadership. White Pentecostals in the USA from William Seymour at Azusa Street and formed their own churches along racial lines. Charles Mason was relegated to observer status when the AGUSA was founded in 1914. In South Africa, Elias Letwaba was not recognised as a leader in the AFM except as a superintendent of the ‘native’ work he had pioneered. Chapter 2 has shown how the founding leaders of the AIC’s seceded from the AFM because of the paternal and condescending manner in which they were treated by their white counterparts

In pulling out of the AGSA, the AGUSA missionaries were effectively rejecting indigenous leadership despite the fact that they claimed to promote indigenous leadership. They agreed with it only on terms that they had calculated. When they immediately took over leadership of the IAG, even if it was in the interim, they still displayed a lack of confidence in their own trainees. South Africa became the conducive

⁷⁰⁶ See IAG Constitution, <http://iagsa.co.za/index.php/home/constitution> Article 3 point 11. Under ‘Definitions and Interpretations,’ the clause reads, “Missionary Field Fellowship—Missionaries assigned to work with the IAG.” That statement implies that, even in 2015, the AGUSA missionaries are still a big part of the IAG. In many areas the constitution accommodates the objectives of the founding missionaries in 1964.

environment in which their home-grown prejudices could be expressed. In the IAG they could exercise the control that eluded them in the AGSA.

This study has shown that the missionaries did not miss the slightest opportunity to mention the need for money for one project or another. Unlike the early years of financial struggle, the years beyond World War II saw a growing and financially stable missionary enterprise in the AGUSA. We have seen how programmes like ‘Speed-the-Light’ supported missionaries on the ground with above-average automobiles and other requirements. Fred Burke was happy to be housed in a splendid ‘trailer’ among poverty stricken people who lived in mud-huts in ‘Nebo-Land.’ “I am staying in a Speed-the-light trailer given by the Oklahoma C.A.’s. It is so cozy and comfortable—not like camping outside,” he reported back home.⁷⁰⁷ The poverty that surrounded him didn’t seem to mean anything. Melvin Hodges supported the lavish lifestyle that missionaries enjoyed among the poor ‘natives’ they evangelised. Hodges was the AGUSA’s greatest proponent of the ‘Indigenous Church,’ yet in his blockbuster book on the subject he wrote:

Whether the national recognizes it or not, it would be almost a physical impossibility for the missionary, with his wife and children, to adjust to native food and housing conditions...The man of average constitution finds it necessary either to live on a higher scale than the nationals, or to discontinue missionary work. Furthermore, it is only fair to the missionary’s children to rear them in an atmosphere that will familiarise them a bit with American culture, so that when they return to the homeland they will not be misfits.⁷⁰⁸

Hodges repeated a paternalistic sentiment that was made by John G. Lake earlier in 1908. Lake, as he struggled with insufficient funds, complained to his American donors about ‘native’ food; even suggesting that the Americans would die if they ate the food that ‘natives’ were eating.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁷ F Burke, “Letter from Nebo Land, South Africa,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 20, 1956, 13.

⁷⁰⁸ M Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield MO, Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 121-122.

⁷⁰⁹ *The Pentecost*, August, 1908. 6.

What Hodges did not realise is that missionary affluence, particularly in South Africa, was often associated with the exploitation of black people by white people. Indeed, the missionaries exploited the poverty and ignorance of their converts to nurture their own affluence. Such affluence would not have been possible unless missionaries made inroads into the race and cultural prejudices of their time. That attitude was nurtured and protected by the very political system they claimed not to support.

Information is now readily available to demonstrate the fact that the missionaries could not afford the lavish lifestyle they lived in South Africa in their homeland. Eugene Grams is an example of one who struggled; for example, he did not qualify for missionary appointment because he did not have the required pastoral experience. His appointment was pushed through by Ralph Riggs because of his 'love' for South Africa. Riggs simply overrode a constitutional requirement and approved the application through Noel Perkins, the director of the AGUSA Division of Foreign Missions. During his stay in America, as he awaited the approval of his second term application to come to South Africa, Grams worked at a 'Motor Products' company inspecting windscreens.⁷¹⁰ That was a far cry from the lavish lifestyle he would later live in South Africa as a missionary.

The American missionaries were anaesthetised to the poverty and oppression around them. They came in the name of the poor and, more often than not, could not relate the poverty of their converts to the socio-economic conditions of the day. Even worse, they were covered by the safety of apartheid laws against black people even as they worked among black people.

The assumption regarding money is plausible because the same missionaries who raised money in the name of the 'native' did not want American churches to support the 'natives' directly, even if it was what those churches wanted. That clause was enshrined into the AGUSA constitution as early as 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Dr Amos Mokopi, a former assistant general superintendent in the IAG, was directly supported by

⁷¹⁰ RG Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 107.

a church in California; when the missionaries heard about it they campaigned for the cancellation of that support. The minister ignored them; unfortunately, he died and the missionaries took up the opportunity to influence the new pastor against Dr Mokopi. His support was withdrawn.⁷¹¹

The problem of money among missionaries and the indigenous pastors has always been going on. It was, among other reasons, the cause of the schisms in the mainline churches that led to the formation of the 'Ethiopian' movement in South Africa in the 1800s. Denis has argued that the problem was not the incompetency of indigenous pastors in handling funds. Rather it was motivated by missionary paternal tendencies, despite the fact that missionaries themselves often abused the money sent by their agencies for the 'native' work.⁷¹² Strangely, Bhengu caused a lot of missionary apprehension, not for abusing funds but precisely because he demanded accountability, even from the missionaries themselves.

After the missionaries withdrew from the AGSA in 1964, their absence was felt but the work did not fall apart; instead the AGSA grew beyond expectations. The phenomenal growth of the AGSA highlighted an aspect of self-governance, sustenance, and propagation long demonstrated by the AIC's. The AIC's, especially those who had missionary connections earlier in their history, have demonstrated that the withdrawal of missionaries from these churches did in fact contribute to their growth.

⁷¹¹ Dr Amos Mokopi, Personal Interview, August 18, 2015. Mokopi lost his house and virtually had to start building his life from scratch. Apparently Bhengu, after an episode of disappointment in Brooklyn, determined never again to raise funds in America. He trained women in the Back-to-God movement to raise funds, and they have been raising millions ever since the 1960s. See Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's lasting Legacy*, 134. Harold Mononyane's story was told by Mrs S. Mononyane. Vernon Pettenger had advised her husband to resign from pastoring and focus on evangelism, they moved out of the pastorate and secured another house through a bank loan. Mononyane was sent to America, on his return missionaries did not follow through on their promise. He was subsequently thrown out of the house and his furniture and car repossessed. With no income and a place to live the situation weighed heavily him and his family broke apart. Mononyane was the 1st general superintendent of the IAG after 1964. Personal Interview, June 20, 2015.

⁷¹² P Denis, 'Financial resources and economic agency in the early history of the African Independent Churches, *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae*, September 2011, 37 (2), 29-49.

Bond alluded to the pain that was felt when the AGUSA missionaries withdrew from the AGSA, but he also highlighted the unintended consequences that were the result of that traumatic experience. The AGSA has grown beyond expectations and has gone on to become the 'Indigenous Church' Nicholas Bhengu aspired for it to be. The IAG on the other hand, seems not to have gone past the dependency-syndrome it demonstrated in 1964. Indeed, there are isolated examples of success like the church in Mamelodi, Pretoria, but many other smaller churches within the situation still depend on missionaries, especially in building churches.

According to Raboroko, almost seventy-four former ABTI graduates gathered in Witbank in 1966 to launch the IAG.⁷¹³ The euphoria of new beginnings later subsided as the new situation picked up its own problems. The missionaries started all over again to assert their presence and the imposition of unreasonable demands. Some of the original seventy-four fell off along the way, returned to the AGSA, started their own churches, or joined existing ones.

10.7. The split in 1981 within the IAG

In 1981, a split occurred within the IAG itself. JH Stewart had this to say about the matter,

The major problem was that a group wanted to ordain ministers who did not meet conditions of IAG the constitution. The missionaries would not accept this. Those who sided with the missionaries were labelled "missionary boys." Of course this is very abbreviated report.⁷¹⁴

1964 had already set a pattern, when the AGUSA missionaries did not agree with the indigenous leadership, they broke away. In the process they would connive with a few African pastors to start something new. After 1981 the IAG had two groups dubbed,

⁷¹³ PN Raboroko, Personal Interview, April 16, 2015.

⁷¹⁴ JH Stewart, Facebook/Messenger, November 1, 2013.

‘missionary boys’ and the ‘Pretoria group.’ Again, there were those African pastors who could not see their way forward without the involvement of the American missionaries.

10.8. J. Phillip Hogan and the Assemblies of God World Fellowship in 1988

In a strange twist of events, the American missionaries were now making inroads into reconciling with the AGSA from whom they split in 1964. In 1985, Eugene Grams, out of guilt or goodwill, visited Nicholas Bhengu who now lay ill at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. According to Rollin Grams, the two reminisced on the old times in ministry.⁷¹⁵ It is not clear which times because Grams worked more with Phillip Molefe than with Bhengu. Perhaps on one or two occasions Bhengu featured in the revivals in Vereeniging, but he participated as little as possible where missionaries were concerned.

Again, I asked JH Stewart why the missionaries had such a sudden change of heart.

Why were they now interested in reconciling with the AGSA? He responded:

As I was personally involved in this act of reconciliation, I can give some input. During the charismatic move in the 70s, all kinds of denominations were meeting and reconciling. As we saw Catholics and DRC hugging one another we felt constrained to approach our likeminded brethren and work to treat each other with Christian love. It was not organisational, as we still held very different views on doctrine and church government, but a gesture of fellowship.⁷¹⁶

John Bond later wrote about this ‘gesture of fellowship:’

Some years later a group of them [the American missionaries] sought me out to apologise for what they had done to us. They confessed that they had been influenced in their attitude by certain recalcitrant black Assemblies of God members and ministers. To quote their own colloquial expression, they said to me, “The very people who led us up the garden path kicked us in the pants and we parted company.” Latterly, moves have been afoot to heal the past. The

⁷¹⁵ RG Grams, *Stewards of Grace*, 158.

⁷¹⁶ JH Stewart, *Facebook*, August 11, 2013.

Assemblies of God and the International Assemblies of God have jointly signed a declaration of co-operative fellowship, but nothing very practical has come out of it as yet.⁷¹⁷

In this study I make the assumption that the AGUSA missionaries tried to reconcile the work in South Africa because J. Phillip Hogan, the Director for Foreign Missions in the AGUSA, issued a call for the gathering of leaders of all Assemblies of God related churches around the world in the USA in 1988. It was not only to be a moment of fellowship but an opportunity to showcase and evaluate the work of the AGUSA missionaries around the world. The missionaries in South Africa, after a presence of many years and a track record of dividing the church, did not have much to show. In some way, they sought to leverage on the very work that they wanted to destroy earlier in 1964. This kind of underhandedness was very typical of AGUSA missionaries in South Africa.

In moving forward, the AGUSA, must revisit and revise its tired models of ‘sending’ missionaries to ‘receiving’ nations. It must recognise that many countries have long passed the stage of being ‘children’ and develop missionary strategies that learn from the situation on the ground. In the 21st century, the world has become much smaller than it was when John G. Lake first arrived in Johannesburg in 1908 and missionary work is no longer a prerogative of western nations alone. Indeed, if we all take the ‘Great Commission’ seriously, then we must admit that the wave of Pentecostalism sweeping across the world will continue to overlap at one level or another. It is these overlaps that need to be exploited in moving our own situations forward. The missionary can no longer land in foreign nations with a luggage full of western solutions without raising suspicions. More importantly, the AGUSA must play ‘open cards’ in dealing with their brothers and sisters in other nations. The worldwide Assemblies of God family must confront the demons of its past and exorcise them for better and healthier relationships into the future. While the AGUSA has acknowledged the sin of racism in its past, it has

⁷¹⁷ J Bond, *For the Record*,
<http://www.nuparadigm.co.za/Bond%20B00k/The%20American%20Missionaries.html>.

done very little to apologise for the sins committed by its missionaries in nations around the world.

Bhengu argued for the perpetual need for missionaries; he also emphasised the importance of responding to the needs on the ground. Missionaries must not be sent top-down; they must be a response or request from the indigenous people themselves. What would be the point of sending a missionary into a country where the indigenous people are already competent to do what the missionary is sent to do? That challenge called for a continued identification of response-areas to which the Assemblies of God family can feed into each other.

Perhaps the Assemblies of God World Fellowship is responding to that call; but it must however be a platform of equal partners around the world. Equality is not always measured in monetary terms; some countries will always be needier or richer than others. Churches in the so-called majority world will appeal to richer nations for financial assistance for the same reasons that their political leaders go cap in hand around the world touting investments for their countries.

Nicholas Bhengu was right; accountability is an important feature of investment. Those who ask for help must account for how the funds they asked for are used. In pulling its human resources together around the world, the AGUSA must acknowledge that it cannot be everywhere every time, neither does it need to be. It is still true that the indigenous people can reach out to their own people more effectively than any person from outside the situation. Sharing resources, whether human or financial, is simply good stewardship of the gifts God has endowed upon each one of us in any part of the world.

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Rev Bucs Ntshabele	Personal interview	July 19,2015
Ms Julia Tshabalala	Personal interview	June 18, 2015
Rev Steve Msiza	Personal interview	May 14, 2015
Rev Mpho Molefe	Telephonic discussion	June 25, 2015
Rev Stanford Majola	Personal interview	May 12, 2015
Rev Maurice Ngakane	Personal interview	July 13, 2015
Rev P-N Raboroko	Personal interview	April 12, 2015
Chaplain M Nomtoto	Facebook	October 21, 2015
Ms S Mononyane	Personal interview	June 20, 2015
Rev Jim Grams	Facebook (Missionary)	June 30, 2015
Rev Charles Moyo	Personal interview	June 6, 2015
Dr Amos Mokopi	Personal interview	August 18, 2015
Mr J Raphuti	Personal Interview	July 24, 2015

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