



Assessing Nicholas Bhengu's Unity Talk and Its Theological Implications for the Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

For the first time since the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) failed to obtain a majority vote to govern (50% plus 1 seat) in the outcome of the 2024 elections. Consequently, the ANC had to form a government of national unity (GNU) and, to some extent, a government of provincial unity (GPU) in highly contested provinces such as Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. However, a historical contextualisation of GNU and a literature review in qualitative research demonstrate that this was not the first time the ANC governed through this model, as it was also used in 1994. The contribution of this article is the theological reflections on the GNU through the unity paradigms of Nicholas Bhengu. The purpose is to demonstrate that the theological principles of unity, using a theological analysis, are applicable in the context of the GNU in South Africa. The finding is that Bhengu's principles of unity, such as preaching the gospel of love and forgiveness, unity beyond the names of churches and denominations, nation-building, support for leaders, and modelling peace, unity, and prosperity, are relevant for the success of the 2024 GNU.

Keywords: Nicholas Bhengu's Unity Talk, Government of National Unity, Theology, Public Governance, African National Congress

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INTRODUCTION

The African National Congress has received a majority vote in all previous democratic elections since 1994.¹ In 1994, under Nelson Mandela, the party received 62.65%, about 4% away from a two-thirds majority.² Under Thabo Mbeki, the ANC received 66.35% in 1999 and about 69.69% in 2004.³ Under Jacob Zuma, the ANC dropped those votes and received only 65.90% in 2009 due to the Congress of the People (Cope) factor and 62.15% due to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) factor.⁴ Under Cyril Ramaphosa, the ANC went down even further to 57.50% in 2019,⁵ and for the first time in the 2024 elections, the ANC did not reach a majority and only obtained 40.18%. Various reasons led to

¹ Karen E. Ferree, *Framing the Race in South Africa: The Political Origins of Racial Census Elections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

² Christopher Isike and Hakeem Onapajo, "The Decline of a Dominant Political Party: The case and the Future of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC)," *Politeia* (02568845) 36, no. 2 (2017).

³ Bheki Richard Mngomezulu, "Does the Party Manifesto Determine the Outcome of an Election? Lessons from South Africa," *Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa (JGIDA)* 4, no. 1_2 (2015): 71–98.

⁴ Ulf Engel, "South Africa: The 2014 National and Provincial Elections," *Africa Spectrum* 49, no. 2 (2014): 79–89.

⁵ Lebogang Legodi, "Including the excluded: an Afrocentric reflection on violent Protests prior 2019 South African General Elections." *Journal of Nation-Building and Policy Studies* 2020, no. si1 (2020): 67.

this decline, including the birth of a new political baby, the Mkhonto we Sizwe Party (MKP), which received 14,58% of the vote. This became a challenge to both the ANC and the EFF. It appears to me that each time there is a breakaway from the ANC, the party loses its vote by large percentages. This is evident from the election outcomes under the leadership of Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa. But the ANC factional battles started long before that, as there were already signs of tensions under the leadership of Thabo Mbeki, leading up to the elective conference in 2007. Nonetheless, Mbeki will be remembered in history as the only ANC president who led the party to a two-thirds majority. Other reasons for the decline of the ANC include the unfulfilled promises that the ANC made to black people regarding the provisioning of basic needs such as water, electricity, and housing.⁶ This, coupled with the lack of service delivery in many local municipalities, contributed to the demise of the ANC.⁷ The same also contributed to voter apathy, particularly during the 2019 elections, where the turnout was only 66%.⁸ President Mbeki, during his renewal workshops, also pointed to the lack of quality when it comes to the membership and leadership of the ANC as one of the factors leading to the decline of the party in election outcomes.⁹ But while this might be a political crisis for the ANC on one hand, it is also a sign of political maturity among voters on the other because people are now aware that the ANC is not the only option on the ballot paper.

Due to the failure to become the majority party in the last elections (May 2024), the ANC opted for the Government of National Unity (GNU) and invited different parties to form such a government together. How do we reflect on these developments theologically? This is a valid research question that this article seeks to answer here. This article uses the unity principles derived from the teachings and practices of Nicholas Bhengu to reflect on the GNU from a theological perspective. This will be done by first unpacking the model of a GNU to understand its framework and application in the South African context. The article will also look at how the model was used in the first place in 1994 and most recently in the 2024 elections. The principles of unity from the teachings and practices of Bhengu are outlined in detail. The main section of this article also looks at the application of the Bhengu principles of unity to the GNU government in South Africa. The article will also look at the prospects of the GNU in a way of wrapping up.

METHODOLOGY

The model of governance known as the Government of National Unity (GNU) is approached from a historical contextualisation by considering the use of this model in the past, particularly in the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, and how it can be understood in the 21st century, that is, the 2024 elections. This historical contextualisation is important to understand the dynamics of the past GNU and how they affect the present GNU model. The article also uses a theological analysis, particularly the key theological concepts used by Bhengu, such as unity, love, and forgiveness, and their relevance to the current GNU model. However, a profiling of Bhengu's life and ministry is also important as it serves as an important background for the understanding of his theological positions on unity, love, and forgiveness. It is important to understand how Bhengu entered ministry and how he embraced concepts of development among the poor and the marginalised in demonstration of his love for the people. The theological principles of unity from Bhengu are then applied to the current GNU to offer some projections on the future of the 2024 GNU in the South African context. The sources were selected by looking at the key concepts in the study, including the 1994 GNU, the 2024 GNU, and the literature on the life and ministry of Bhengu. A literature analysis in qualitative research was used to interpret the data collected on the above-mentioned themes. In the end, a visual model

⁶ Kgalalelo Mathaga Moloko, "An Analysis of the Role of the ANC in Building a Political Culture That Is Conducive to Democracy in South Africa" (North-West University (South Africa), 2024).

⁷ Mathebedi. F. Kgarose and Magatane. T. Mashilo, "Deterioration of ANC Support: Conceptual Analysis of Rural-Urban Voters Patterns in South African Elections," *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 6, no. 8 (n.d.): 207–19.

⁸ Thulani Andrew Chauke, "Youth Apathy in an Electoral Democracy: A Critical Discourse on Civil Participation in South Africa," *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development* 9, no. 3 (2020): 35.

⁹ Thabiso Goba, "Renewal Process of ANC Must Include an Audit of Its Membership' – Mbeki," 2024, <https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/09/05/renewal-process-of-anc-must-include-an-audit-of-its-membership-mbeki>.

representing all five principles of Bhengu on unity shall be sketched as a model of unity for future studies.

A Government of National Unity in South Africa: a historical contextualisation

GNU is a democratic governance model whereby different political parties come together to agree to govern, particularly in cases where there is no single political party with a majority (50% and 1 seat).¹⁰ In some instances, the major political parties come together to form a political pact. This might include opposition parties or even rivals working together towards national unity. However, we cannot underestimate the possibility of other smaller parties playing a role in such a political pact. GNU is also about power sharing, as has been seen in South Africa, where cabinet posts have been shared between different political parties. The sharing of power also necessitates the creation of new ministries to accommodate different political parties. Thus, a GNU can result in a bloated cabinet. Nonetheless, this has been a democratic governance model followed by different countries, including Zimbabwe, Kenya, Libya, and others. In Greece, the GNU was uniquely called an ecumenical government.

In the South African context, in 1994, the ANC formed a GNU as a democratic governance model, not because it did not have a majority to govern, but rather to work together with parties like the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party emanating from what can be called a transitional or interim government from 1991 until 1994.¹¹ The transitional government can be defined as the government that negotiated the end of apartheid, marked by the National Peace Accord in 1991 and the two series of the multi-party Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).¹² In CODESA 1, which was held on 20-21 December 1991, different political parties agreed that South Africa would be a united, democratic, and non-racial state.¹³ In CODESA 2, held on 15 May 1992, there were disagreements on constitutionalism where parties such as the NP and IFP swayed towards the federal state, while the ANC leaned towards a centralised government. The 1994 GNU was also necessary to ensure inclusivity emanating from the transitional government.¹⁴ The 1994 GNU was important, leading up to the adoption of the interim constitution in parliament, since the ANC did not have a two-thirds majority for the same. It was therefore agreed that the GNU would run the country until the adoption of the new constitution, which only happened in 1996.¹⁵ However, the deadlock of CODESA 2 on constitutionalism started to manifest in the 1994 GNU, where the IFP and NP continued to push for a federal state and power sharing. Another cause of disagreement was the position of the 1994 GNU when it came to foreign policy in geopolitics, given the history of South Africa concerning other nations in the global context.¹⁶ The credibility of South Africa in the global community had been compromised by apartheid policies from 1948 until the early 1990s.¹⁷ Thus, restoring the confidence of the international community in South Africa was one of the challenges of the 1994 GNU in terms of the policy they had to adopt for the same. Given these challenges, the NP finally withdrew from the 1994 GNU and occupied the opposition rank within that democratic government model. Therefore, the failure of different political parties to unite amid policy differences remains an important challenge that requires a theological reflection, particularly considering the current GNU.

In the outcome of the May 2024 elections, the ANC's support declined, and it lost its position as the majority party. This necessitated the adoption of a democratic model of government, such as a

¹⁰ Jephias Mapuva, "Governments of National Unity (GNUs) and the Preponderance of the Incumbency: Case of Kenya and Zimbabwe," *International Journal of Political Science and Development* 1, no. 3 (2013): 105–16.

¹¹ Jonathan Bafana Mpanza, "A Critical Study of the Impact of the Government of National Unity in South Africa, 1994-1999" (University of Zululand, 2014).

¹² Dirk Kotzé, "Constitutionalism and Democratic Transitions: Lessons from South Africa," *Constitutionalism and Democratic Transitions: Lessons from South Africa.-(Monografie. Scienze Sociali; 13)*, 2006, 1000–1028.

¹³ John C Eby and Fred Morton, *The Collapse of Apartheid and the Dawn of Democracy in South Africa, 1993* (UNC Press Books, 2017).

¹⁴ Derick A. Becker, *Neoliberalism and the State of Belonging in South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

¹⁵ Dirk Kotzé, "The New (Final) South African Constitution," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 8, no. 2 (1996): 133–57.

¹⁶ Graham Evans, "South Africa in Remission: The Foreign Policy of an Altered State," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34, no. 2 (1996): 249–69.

¹⁷ James, Barber and John Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy: The Search for Status and Security, 1945-1988* (Cambridge: CUP Archive, 1990).

GNU. On 14 June 2024, the ANC, as the largest party, joined forces with the Democratic Alliance (DA), IFP, and the Patriotic Alliance (PA) to form a GNU. Later, other political parties, including the GOOD party, Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), Freedom Front Plus (FFP), United Democratic Movement (UDM), Rise Mzansi, and Al Jama-ah, joined the four parties to make it a GNU of 10 parties with a total of 273 of the 400 seats in the National Assembly. In a letter dated 16 September 2024, shared by South African News Agency (2024), the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, said:

I am convinced that the GNU will not only survive but that it will thrive. South Africans expect the GNU to succeed, and we will not let them down. For a few Ministers and Deputy Ministers, being in the Executive is a new experience, and for some, it has been quite an adjustment. But with the support of their departments, they have all hit the ground running. Across all parties, Ministers and Deputy Ministers are making headway in confronting the challenges the country faces. What is significant and most welcome is that the members of the Executive have undertaken their work as part of a Cabinet collective. Although they are drawn from different parties, they have pursued the common GNU programme. They have worked in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration as Cabinet colleagues to serve the interests of the South African people.¹⁸

The president's optimism is informed by growing criticism of the GNU, with some within the tripartite alliance, specifically the general secretary of the South African Communist Party, Solly Mapaila, who called it a "sell-out" move.¹⁹ And some who did not join the GNU, such as the EFF leader, Julius Malema, who called the GNU "*Mmusho wa dinonyana*," translated as the Government of the Birds.²⁰ But the research question remains – how do we reflect on the current GNU theologically? This study thus uses Nicholas Bhengu's framework of unity to reflect on the 2024 GNU, but it is necessary to first introduce this giant of faith in Africa.

A biographical analysis of Nicholas Bhengu's life, calling, and social development

Nicholas Bhenkinkosi Hepworth Bhengu, an African gospel pioneer, missionary, visionary leader, evangelist, and church planter, was born on September 5, 1909, at eNtumeni Mission Station, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.²¹ His parents were Josiah Khanda and Yele Bhengu, who were also Christians. Yele Bhengu was an evangelist of the Lutheran Church. The conversion of Bhengu happened under the ministry of American missionaries from the Full Gospel Church in 1930. He only joined the Assemblies of God in 1937. Clark points out that "Bhengu, together with his co-workers Alfred Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi, left the Full Gospel Church to work under the AOG umbrella—again with the understanding that he would enjoy complete autonomy over his affairs."²² However, Bhengu continued to be mentored by the Full Gospel evangelist, Job Chiliza. It is important to point out that Job Chiliza was once part of the American Zulu Mission (AZM), which produced John Langalibalele Dube, the founder and president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), which became the ANC in 1923.²³ Bhengu is known for planting thousands of churches in South Africa and nearby countries in the same region.²⁴ Hence, Bhengu is known as the Billy Graham of Africa. The mission strategy of Bhengu, according to Lephoko, was based on four principles, namely, "evangelism, instruction, training of leaders, and planting churches."²⁵ These are the same

¹⁸ South African News Agency, "Government of National Unity Will Thrive, Says President," 2024, <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/government-national-unity-will-thrive-says-president>.

¹⁹ African Insider, "ANC 'Sold out' – Mapaila Slams GNU," 2024, [africaninsider.com](https://www.africaninsider.com).

²⁰ My Africa, "Julius Malema Hitting Back At Ramaphosa - 'Tit For Tat' on Waar Was Jy?," 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7xJopbf_xc.

²¹ Daniel Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy: World's Best Black Soul Crusader* (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2018).

²² Matthew Clark, "Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa: The Apostolic Faith Mission and the Assemblies of God," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8, no. 1 (2005): 143–61.

²³ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 86.

²⁴ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 86.

²⁵ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy*, 3.

mission strategies that have caused the Pentecostal movement to grow in the global south and, more particularly, in Africa. Hence, the Pentecostal movement is strong in soul-winning and attracting people to their ranks. Therefore, Bhengu has modelled the winning of souls not only for the Assemblies of God but also for the Pentecostal tradition.

The “Back to God crusade” is considered Bhengu’s major contribution to the Assemblies of God.²⁶ This came as a result of the vision which Bhengu had in 1949. In the vision, Bhengu saw the nation of Africa being called to return to their God; this encouraged him to start the crusade.²⁷ It is common in the Pentecostal tradition for Pentecostal pastors or even missionaries to receive their calling through visions. Pentecostals believe that God speaks through visions, dreams, and voices, which can translate into real-life experiences.²⁸ Visions and dreams are a clear means of communication between the divine and human beings. Similarly, from Bhengu’s vision, it was very clear that he had to preach the gospel and call the people of God to transform their lives and return to Him. Although the crusade started within the Assemblies of God, it reached people beyond this church and also those from other denominations. However, it is still important to point out that the Assemblies of God remained the major beneficiary of Bhengu’s ministry. In addition, the “Back to God crusade” was founded on the principle of reaching out to communities in their different localities. Hence, this crusade became popular in southern Africa in countries such as Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho, and Mozambique. In addition, according to Lephoko, “Bhengu was also well-traveled. He preached around the world and spoke at numerous international conferences, which exposed him to many leaders in business, politics, and diverse Christian circles.”²⁹ The crusade was supported by sponsors from different countries outside the African continent. It is for the same reason, according to Lephoko, that “Bhengu registered the BTG Crusade as a Section 21 company (Companies Act No. 61, of 1973: Registration No 21/76/22) to be able to raise funds from individuals, groups of people or organisations.”³⁰

For some scholars, such as Clark, the “Back to God crusade” made the demarcations between the black and white churches very clear in the Assemblies of God.³¹ However, it was not the intention of Bhengu to divide the church along racial lines but to minister relevantly to black people. It is important to reiterate the point that the crusade was never a splinter group of the Assemblies of God and was never started to divide the church or move people away from the church. It was never Bhengu’s intention to call people out of the Assemblies of God, but rather to call them back to God as per his vision.³² It was started with the intent to win souls for Christ, and consequently benefited church growth within the Assemblies of God and beyond. Thus, the crusade can be regarded as a unifying factor for the church rather than a dividing mechanism. Therefore, the fact that the crusade found resonance with many black people in the Assemblies of God should not be interpreted as a dividing factor when looking at issues of unity in the church. Lephoko points out that, “It was obvious that the Back to God group would dominate the Africa section of the work and eventually gain recognition as the main evangelistic arm of that section of the Assemblies of God.”³³ In addition, given the challenges of racial segregation at that time, it was obvious that a crusade like “Back to God” led by a black missionary would appeal to many black people. The crusade continued beyond the life of Bhengu, but it was never the same as when Bhengu was still alive.³⁴

Bhengu not only calls people back to God but also works hard to develop people in their communities. He particularly focused on social development. Lephoko points out that:

²⁶ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy, 3 cf Kelebogile Resane, From small country churches to explosion into megachurches: A modern Pentecostal cultural fit for the Assemblies of God in South Africa. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 43 no.1 (2022): 1-10.

²⁷ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 134

²⁸ Allan Anderson, “Structures and Patterns in Pentecostal Mission,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 32, no. 2 (2004): 233–49.

²⁹ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 78

³⁰ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 282

³¹ Clark. Two contrasting models of missions in South Africa.

³² Kelebogile Thomas Resane, “Moving against the Tide-Assemblies of God Polity at the Loggerhead with South African Socio-and Theo-Cultural Reality,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 46, no. 1 (2018): 36–55.

³³ Lephoko, *Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu’s Lasting Legacy*, 197.

³⁴ Anthony Balcomb, “Nicholas Bhengu—The Impact of an African Pentecostal on South African Society,” *Exchange* 34, no. 4 (2005): 337–48.

Bhengu initiated development projects for his people, education bursaries for young people to enter tertiary institutions to prepare them to be leaders in politics and business when liberation was achieved, and imparted skills for women so that they could earn money for themselves to feed their families and educate their children, and run small businesses.³⁵

Bhengu's contribution to social development also inspired many Pentecostal pastors in the 21st century who are engaged in social development projects. However, when it comes to politics, most scholars, such as Lephoko and Balcomb, agree that Bhengu did not involve himself in the politics of the day but rather envisaged working objectively with different political groups to reach the liberation of the people.³⁶ Balcomb points out that "Bhengu eschewed direct political involvement; he directed his attention to specific areas of social concern that he considered crucial."³⁷ Bhengu, according to Lephoko, maintained a neutral position that allowed him to reach out to different groups of people in the preaching of the gospel.³⁸ This is important for clergy to encourage unity among different political parties as opposed to taking sides. Generally, most Pentecostals adopted a conservative and pacifist approach where politics was concerned in early Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 20th century.³⁹ This conservative and pacifist approach to politics is not only perceived as apolitical but also as being non-confrontational to political oppressions. The point made here is that Bhengu's approach to politics is relevant to the unity talks, particularly in the context of the current GNU.

Bhengu was very strong on the teachings of the Holy Spirit, particularly the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is one of the hallmarks of the Pentecostal movement. In his farewell message, Bhengu warned the Assemblies of God never to leave the Holy Spirit because the day they do, they will become an ordinary denomination. He said, "Some have a big church (sic) and everything, but the Holy Spirit is gone."⁴⁰ What is the difference? He said, "We need to remember that it was the Holy Spirit that gathered the people in the first place. But why do we now want to keep him out of the church?"⁴¹ He warned against people who discouraged the move of the Holy Spirit and other pneumatic experiences. He said some would do so because they have not been baptised in the Holy Spirit themselves. Bhengu said that the church cannot hinder the move of the Holy Spirit because he works differently in different people.⁴² He warned against leaders in the church who suppressed the work of the Holy Spirit. In the end, these churches die because the Holy Spirit is not given a place in the church. At the same time, Bhengu, in his farewell message, warned the church about those who speak in tongues but are not baptised in the Holy Spirit. He said that this was common among Pentecostals, that they would be taught how to speak in tongues, but without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as much as there is an emphasis on the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, it is clear from Bhengu's farewell message that not everyone who speaks in tongues has been baptised in the Holy Spirit.

A Theological Analysis of Bhengu's unity principles in the context of GNU

There are five principles that Bhengu shared in his farewell message that apply to the 2024 GNU in the South African context. The first principle is the gospel of love and forgiveness, where Bhengu emphasised that unity is not possible without the principles of love and forgiveness. For South Africa to move forward beyond racial polarisation, there is a dire need to heed Bhengu's call to preach the gospel of love and forgiveness. However, there is a need to move beyond the epistemology of love and forgiveness or even the theology of love and forgiveness to the actions of love and forgiveness. This reminds me of the actions of Adriaan Vlok (a former South African Minister of Law and Order under the National Party), who not only theologized about forgiveness but demonstrated it in the washing of

³⁵ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy, 17.

³⁶ Balcomb, "Nicholas Bhengu"340. Cf Lephoko, Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy, 17.

³⁷ Balcomb, "Nicholas Bhengu"340

³⁸ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy, 164

³⁹ Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁰ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengu, Last sermon of Nicholas Bhengu.

⁴¹ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengu, Last sermon of Nicholas Bhengu.

⁴² Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengu, Last sermon of Nicholas Bhengu.

the feet of Frank Chikane.⁴³ On the other hand, Chikane also allowed Vlok to wash his feet as an act of forgiveness to someone who presided over his poisoning as a political assassination for his (Chikane's) political activism.⁴⁴ Therefore, in heeding Bhengu's call for love and forgiveness, both perpetrator and victim need to be engaged in the same actions. The 2024 GNU need more of these demonstrations of love and forgiveness for political parties with different policies and ideas to be able to work together in delivering services to the people. Love and forgiveness are important principles for the 2024 GNU so that different political parties are not backward in their approach, but rather move forward in uniting the people of South Africa. This only happens when the wrongdoings of the past are forgiven in the current democratic dispensation. However, for this to happen, justice should be added to the principles of love and forgiveness, whereby the injustices of the past are corrected to move forward as a country. Issues of expropriation of the land should not be perceived negatively by other parties but rather as steps to correct the injustices of the past. But the point made here is that love and forgiveness, as proposed in Bhengu's farewell message, are a relevant starting point and relevant for the 2024 GNU.

Bhengu also highlighted the importance of unity beyond the names of churches and denominations, which is also an important principle for the 2024 GNU.⁴⁵ Lephoko, in his book on Bhengu, quoted his farewell message where Bhengu said, "The names of our Churches are our inventions and not God's! Let the Christians come together as God's children."⁴⁶ Bhengu saw the possibility of the church coming together beyond the names of churches, which is also a relevant message in the 21st century, where there is a proliferation of Pentecostal churches with so many different names. In addition, Bhengu saw a unity of different church organisations where the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ became more important than the names of these denominations. This principle calls for the possibility of the 2024 GNU political parties coming together and working together regardless of the different names of their parties and political policies in support of the Constitution. As discussed previously, each time the different political parties pushed their agenda, the 1994 GNU suffered divisions and withdrawals of parties like the NP. This means that there is a need to put aside party political policies to achieve the common goal. This is what Bhengu was calling for when he asked the church to unite beyond the names of the churches. This implies that the GNU political party's agenda needs to be put aside to help all South Africans regardless of race, colour, and ethnicity. The challenges of South Africans are common; they need electricity, water, and jobs. South Africans want the crime to stop regardless of their political party affiliations. Therefore, the GNU parties must put aside their agendas and concentrate specifically on service delivery issues. Matebese, Mkhwanazi, and Losi explain:

The GNU must ensure that political agendas do not interfere with efforts to promote economic growth in South Africa: Ministers should work collaboratively to create and implement policies that stimulate growth, attract investment, and improve economic conditions for all citizens. Economic growth should be a priority for the GNU, with all parties committed to policies that foster development. Political agendas and party interests must be secondary to the collective goal of enhancing the economy.⁴⁷

The third principle in Bhengu's framework of unity is nation-building. Lephoko quotes Bhengu in his farewell message as saying to all of us that we should "Build the Nation when [we] are remembering that [we] are part of that nation, and [we] are in for a specific purpose for God."⁴⁸

Nation-building, or nation-rebuilding rebuilding as some choose to refer to it, if the collapsed state-owned enterprises and other state organisations that need to be rebuilt are taken into

⁴³ Yasmin Sooka, "Can an Apology Ever Be Enough for Crimes of the Past?," in *Unsettling Apologies* (Bristol University Press, 2022), 29–52.

⁴⁴ Yasmin Sooka, "Can an Apology Ever Be Enough for Crimes of the Past?."

⁴⁵ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengu, Last sermon of Nicholas Bhengu.

⁴⁶ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy, 268.

⁴⁷ Hlalele Matebese, Thato Mkhwanazi, and Chumani Losi, "Analysing the Policy and Governance of the Government of National Unity in South Africa by Assessing the Ministerial Expediency Concerning Educational Credentials and Experience: Drawing Insights from Global Comparative Perspectives," *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration* 12, no. 2 (2024): 63–91.

⁴⁸ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy, 268.

consideration, is also important for the 2024 GNU. Bhengu was adamant that the church is an institution that is relevant in nation-building, as this cannot be the responsibility of the politicians alone.⁴⁹ Bhengu's nation-building is calling for civil society, churches, and communities to engage in the rebuilding of the nation. To rebuild a nation, there is a need for a common vision in addition to the Constitution. Bold questions need to be asked, such as what do we stand for as a nation? What is it that unites us beyond political party names and colours? Answers to these questions will help rebuild the nation. Knowing the common factor that unites the nation will help achieve social cohesion and social compact, which are all necessary for nation-building. Social cohesion is important to bring together members of the 2024 GNU from their different political parties.⁵⁰ It is important to bring about the values enshrined in the South African Constitution, even if the parties in the GNU have different political policies. The social compact becomes the foundation from which political parties – even though they differ in their political approaches – can agree to work together.⁵¹

The fourth principle of this unity is the support for government leaders, where Bhengu, in his farewell message, called upon the church to pray and support the government leaders. Again, Lephoko quotes Bhengu, who said in his farewell message, "Pray for all leaders in Africa, support leaders of your Nation, and present Christ to them by all means."⁵² Since citizens can criticise the leaders of the 2024 GNU government, there is also a need to pray for them as a theological pursuit for unity. 1 Timothy 2:1-6 states:

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed at the proper time.

However, not only do citizens have to support the leaders of the 2024 GNU, but also critique their performance. This calls for active citizenry across the length and breadth of South Africa. There is a need to celebrate the good achievements, but also to lament the wrongs of the GNU government. The days of always singing praises to politicians are over, as there is a need to call for accountability in government. However, Bhengu's call to support leaders is not a call for blind loyalty; it is also an intimation that we should level criticism when necessary. Therefore, citizens are not only expected to pray for their leaders but also to speak out when things go wrong.

The last principle shared by Bhengu is for the church to model peace, unity, and prosperity. Bhengu, in his farewell message, called upon the church to be a custodian of unity and not to plant seeds of division. Lephoko says, "The Church is the light of the world. The Church is the salt of the earth, and the Church should lead the Nation to Peace, Unity, and Prosperity."⁵³ This means that peace, unity, and prosperity should not just be rhetoric but also be modelled by leaders. However, Bhengu's call for modelling prosperity should not be misunderstood as a call to steal but also to live a life of simplicity as opposed to a life of greed. In his farewell message, Bhengu said something very touching: "[I] have never taken from the poor, when I want a shirt, I pray for one, but if I can't get it, I wash the one I have." This is nothing but a life of simplicity that, if adopted by the GNU cabinet ministers, our country can prosper. The life of simplicity is also demonstrated in the words of Bhengu when he said, "When you bury me, you will be sinning if you buy an expensive coffin. Just bury me, do not put flowers, "a ngiwafuni," translated I don't want them". In the same sermon, Bhengu sang the hymn:

Siyo bonana ezwulini thina
Siyo bonana kona, kona
Siyo bonan kona

⁴⁹ Bhengu, Last sermon of Nicholas Bhengu.

⁵⁰ Ayabulela Dlakavu, "South African Electoral Trends: Prospects for Coalition Governance at National and Provincial Spheres in 2024," *Politikon* 49, no. 4 (2022): 476–90.

⁵¹ Naomi Zack, *Reviving the Social Compact: Inclusive Citizenship in an Age of Extreme Politics* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

⁵² Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy, 268.

⁵³ Lephoko, Nicholas Bhengkosi Hepworth Bhengu's Lasting Legacy, 268.

Bhengu went to be with the Lord on 05 June 1985, having lived a life of simplicity as a missionary, visionary, evangelist, and gospel pioneer. His life and ministry are important for leaders in politics, religion, business, and other areas of influence.

The prospects of the Government of National Unity

The government of national unity has the potential to unite South Africans in diversity. For this to happen, there is a need to take the principles shared by Bhengu very seriously. These include the gospel of peace and forgiveness, unity beyond party political names, nation-building, support for the leader, and modelling peace, unity, and prosperity. However, if the political parties in the GNU continue to pull strings as happened in the 1994 GNU, there will be an exodus of parties from the GNU. This will compromise the unity of the GNU and its continuity. The other challenge the GNU faces is the curse of the ANC, since Mbeki, whereby ANC presidents do not complete their terms of office. There is a likelihood that Ramaphosa may not finish his term, particularly considering the upcoming ANC elective conference in 2027. And since Ramaphosa is the custodian of the GNU, other parties may withdraw when the new ANC president comes in. There is a need to remember 2008 and what Frank Chikane calls the "Eight Days in September: The Removal of Thabo Mbeki". There is also a need to remember 2018 and the removal of Jacob Zuma. These past experiences point to 2028 and the possibility of Ramaphosa not finishing his term.

A deep reflection on Bhengu and his idea of unity that is not focused on names and positions, then the GNU should not be worried about names and positions, but focus on delivering services to the people for its sustainability. Therefore, with or without Ramaphosa, a GNU that is not centred on names can survive until the end of the 7th administration in 2029. Such a GNU is one built on specific principles and programmes rather than names and positions of individuals coming from different political parties.

The GNU will also have to find a unified policy approach, as policy matters can also compromise its longevity. Policy matters are a challenge, as demonstrated by the boycott of the Minister of Basic Education during the Basic Education Laws Amendment (Bela) signing ceremony. Even though the minister defended her boycott, citing her concerns, including implementing Grade R as a compulsory part of basic education, various aspects of school governing body policies, and centralised procurement, her boycott remains a sign of disunity before the public. Policy concerns are also demonstrated in the lack of support for National Health Insurance by some of the political parties in the GNU. The fear of these parties is section 33 of the NHI on medical aids, and since the health minister is adamant on this, it can also become a bone of contention within the GNU. There is also a need to remember that the policy matters made the NP withdraw from the 1994 GNU. Public service can also become a challenge when new ministers seek to appoint their technocrats and bureaucrats. These issues require unity, hence a proposal of Bhengu's unity talk as a relevant framework for dealing with possible disunities on policy matters and public service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is proposed here that for the GNU to succeed, there is a need for the embracement of the gospel of love and forgiveness for different parties with different manifestos to work together. Secondly, in the GNU, there is a need to put aside party-political positions in love for the Constitution and the citizens of the country. Thirdly, the GNU can succeed if there is a quest from cabinet ministers to move towards nation-building rather than to build and promote their political parties. In fourth place, the church should come in to support these cabinet ministers through prayer and moral support, and lastly, the cabinet ministers should model peace, unity, and the prosperity of the nation.

CONCLUSION

This article has reflected on the government of national unity using Bhengu's paradigms of unity that he shared in his farewell message. The article argued that GNU is a relevant framework given the current circumstances in South Africa. However, its success depends on adhering to the principles of unity as learned from the teachings and practices of Nicholas Bhengu on unity. Various

recommendations have been offered that would help the GNU succeed. The view of this article is that reflections on the GNU cannot be done by only looking at the Constitution; there is a need to also look at the theological reflections and implications of the GNU.

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