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TWO CONTRASTING MODELS OF MISSIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA:
THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION
AND THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

Mathew S. Clark

1. Introduction

South Africa is an interesting situation in which to observe the dynamics of Christian mission. It has had a settled European population since 1652, and a colonial history similar to that of Canada, Australia and New Zealand—perhaps more like Canada, with the Dutch playing a similar role to the French in that country. The major difference is that in those countries, the original inhabitants eventually became a minority, while it is the Europeans who remained a minority in South Africa.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, at the time of the arrival of the first Pentecostal preachers, the country consisted of four provinces, two of which were originally British colonies and two of which were recently subdued Boer (Dutch, or Afrikaner) republics. The country was recovering from devastating war, and many of its inhabitants resented British rule. Blacks and Afrikaners were especially economically disadvantaged.

At this time, there was still the simplistic notion among Christians that Blacks were pagans and objects of mission, and that Whites were Christians bringing the civilizing influence of Christianity to Africa. By the end of the twentieth century, this was no longer the case, although it was a notion that remained longest in the mentality of many Afrikaner Christian workers and politicians.

In this study, I would like to examine two contrasting styles of mission endeavor by two Pentecostal denominations in South Africa, and attempt to draw some conclusions that might benefit Pentecostal understanding of missions in a context broader than just South Africa. First I will give an extremely brief overview of the history of the two

denominations, and then will take a more detailed look at their missions practices.

2. A Short History of Two Denominations

2.1 The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM)¹

The AFM was the earliest Pentecostal denomination to register in South Africa. It was founded in 1908 in response to the preaching of John G. Lake and Tom Hezmalhalch from the USA. The local Zionist church under P. L. le Roux joined with Lake's followers to provide a ready infrastructure of existing congregations, both White and Black. Lake and Hezmalhalch returned to the USA, and in 1913 P. L. le Roux became the first South African president of the denomination. From this time the AFM operated as a totally indigenous South African church, with no links to, or oversight from, any other nation. Its members were from all nations and cultures represented in South Africa at that time.

The Blacks who had joined the AFM from the Zionist group of P. L. le Roux eventually found themselves estranged from the decision-making of the church, since most of the converts among the Whites were Afrikaners. These so-called "poor whites" found themselves in economic competition with the Blacks, particularly in the urban setting, and tensions were not long in developing. In 1919 a large group of Black members withdrew from the AFM and founded the Zionist movement, a branch of which, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), is currently the largest African Initiated Church (AIC) in South Africa.²

The now completely White-ruled AFM continued with a missions practice of "daughter churches," similar to that practiced by the Dutch Reformed churches. This eventually led to the establishment of a four major groupings in the AFM: the White (parent) church, a large Black

¹ The primary source for this section is the official history of the AFM of SA: I. S. vd M. Burger, *Die Geskiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloof Sending van Suid Afrika (1908-1958)* (Braamfontein: Evangelie Uitgewers, 1987), with insights from Christiaan R. de Wet, "The Apostolic Faith Mission in Africa: 1908-1980: A Case Study in Church Growth in a Segregated Society" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Cape Town, 1989).

² Many White leaders of the AFM seemed to have trouble with this link between the AFM and the Zionist movement: Burger does not even deal with it in his official history. However, it has been too well established by church historical research to still maintain that it is fictitious.

daughter church, a Colored (mixed race) daughter church, and an Indian daughter church. The Black church consisted of many different components, ordered primarily by language and region. One of the difficult situations at the time of the unity of the four sections in 1996 was that not all the components were part of the constitutional Black section, that is, the Black church in the Venda region of Limpopo province.

The AFM was always a very constitutional church, where its total pastorate and membership was involved democratically at every level: congregational, regional and national. The daughter churches operated under similar constitutions inherited from the parent body, but did not elect their own presidents—the missions superintendent appointed by the White church filled this office. During most of its history, the AFM tended toward a Presbyterian system of church government, although the inherently authoritarian nature of both Afrikaner and Black cultures meant that there was always a tendency to centralize authority in a few figures or councils, and to remain loyal to their elected leaders, even if they did not always deliver according to expectations.

Although the AFM was divided constitutionally into four separate churches, there was often contact between White congregations and those of the other sections. Contacts with the Blacks tended to be very “top-down,” and many White members would preach regularly in Black townships or mine hostels. Contact between Whites and Indians and Whites and Coloreds was an easier option because of many cultural similarities. The White congregations always remained very “mission” conscious, and it has always been easy to raise funds from their ranks for “the salvation of souls in Africa.” In the latter quarter of the century, many articulate Black AFM leaders began to object to being seen as “objects of mission,” and their strident objections led to a backlash in which today it is well-nigh impossible to raise funds for “African missions” among traditionally White AFM congregations, unless the need is somewhere outside of South Africa itself. This has led to the growth of a number of para-church organizations that offer evangelization, care of AIDS orphans, feeding-schemes, and training of pastors in numerous countries—but rarely in South Africa itself.

In 1996, the four sections of the AFM united under a single constitution, with a democratically elected church government. It consists of over 30 regions, whose chairpersons make out the Executive Council (now known as the National Leadership Forum), together with the elected office-bearers of the church. In 2000, the church voted for a new philosophy in church government, and now operates under a mixture of

the old democratic constitution and the “new apostolic paradigm”—a move from a Presbyterian system to an Episcopalian.

2.2 The Assemblies of God in South Africa (AOG)³

The AOG found its beginnings in South Africa as an umbrella organization under which numerous Pentecostal missionaries chose to operate. Some of these folk had been involved in missions in South Africa since 1908, and in 1912 one of them, Hannah James, applied to the USA Assemblies of God for permission to operate under that name in South Africa. This was granted, and the denomination received official recognition in South Africa from the South African authorities, from that time.

However, the official line in the USA appeared to be that the AG there chose to relate to the Full Gospel Church in South Africa, and were not keen on a separate AOG group existing in that country. This led to an on-off situation that lasted for decades. Eventually in 1932, the AOG was registered as the Assemblies of God in South Africa, under the supervision of the missions office in the USA. However, this decision by the USA AOG was reversed the very next year, and the AOG found itself existing independently in South Africa.

Since the AOG consisted primarily of expatriate missionaries working in mainly rural localities, its membership growth was primarily Black. The various missions were also fiercely independently minded, and vigorously guarded their own autonomy. This notion permeates the denomination until today, with most assemblies and most sections during the period of division in the church opting for lean-and-mean constitutions (that limited the activities of the leaders as little as possible).

In the 1930s, a number of significant developments took place. The large and influential Emmanuel Mission and Press joined with the AOG, but only on the basis of a constitution that would allow it full autonomy over its own affairs. Nicholas 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 own affairs. James Mullan also

³ The primary source for this section is P. Watt, *From Africa's Soil: The Story of the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Struik Christian Books, 1992).

left the Full Gospel Church, bringing with him a number of White assemblies, and became the founder of the White churches in the AOG.

By 1944, the AOG consisted mainly of a large Black church, partly the fruit of the labors of expatriate missionaries working on mission stations, and partly the result of the powerful preaching of Africa's "Billy Graham," Nicholas Bhengu. It also consisted of a growing group of White churches, which acknowledged James Mullan as their leader. The Executive of the AOG reflected both groups, but operated under the understanding that no party or grouping under the AOG umbrella ever interfered in the affairs of another. The AOG was essentially nothing more than a large umbrella cover for a number of groups. This state of affairs continued until the early 1960s.

A number of expatriate missionaries were working in South Africa under the supervision of the missions department of the AOG in the USA, and under the AOG umbrella in South Africa. However, the casual way in which church government proceeded in South Africa, compared to the more democratic and organized manner in which the AG in the USA comported itself, eventually led to a schism in AOG ranks. In 1964, the American missionaries in South Africa withdrew from the fellowship and established the International Assemblies of God (IAG). Missionaries from other western countries remained in fellowship with the AOG.

Among the White churches, the question of succession arose, as James Mullan aged. He had run the churches on an "apostolic" basis, doing more or less as he liked and moving ministers as he liked. Bhengu operated in a similar manner over the Black churches. A number of assemblies (mainly White), which had come under the AOG umbrella in more recent times, were alienated by the manner in which this sort of church government was applied. Consequently, in 1981 they separated under the chairmanship of Sam Ennis (an Irishman of Salvation Army background) to form the Assemblies of God Fellowship (AGF). James Mullan, aging and already having stood back for his own personal selection of successors, also left the AOG in sorrow. The "apostolic" leadership of the remaining AOG churches, although intended by Mullan to be taken up by a number of younger men, came to fall solely upon John Bond. Nicholas Bhengu effectively ran the Black churches as he wished, but with his support John Bond became and remained the head of the AOG until his recent retirement.

In 2002, the three groups found a formula for unity, and celebrated their re-established unity. The newly re-united AOG would appear to still cling to its desire for local autonomy under a minimal constitution, but how these nuts-and-bolts will be arranged is part of the continuing saga.

3. A Comparison of the Missions Practice of the AFM and the AOG

At this point, the question arises of what is meant by Pentecostals in South Africa by “missions.” At the beginning of the century, it was clearly understood to be cross-cultural communication of the gospel by Christian Europeans to pagan Africans. A century later, it probably still holds this primary connotation, particularly for conservative Whites and for many expatriate missionaries. However, this is no longer so clear-cut. Is missions-work “missions” only when there is a cross-cultural component involved? Or is it “missions” when there is an element of preaching the gospel to people (perhaps of one’s own race) of a non-Christian background and/or culture? Can a South African be a missionary to a South African? Can a Black be a missionary to a Black? Can a Black be a missionary to a White? In present-day South Africa, all of these scenarios are possible. Indeed, this is so much the case that missiology may now be found under practical theology at some South African seminaries. “Missions” and “evangelization” are now one and the same thing.⁴

For the purposes of the discussion below, I am using the term “missions” as it operated among the parties who were involved in practicing it. This novel way of escape is of course not so secure, since in the context under discussion the term has evolved as the various subjects and objects of mission activity have questioned it.

3.1 Missions Activity in the AFM

Although it came to operate under the traditional racial divisions that were eventually legislated by the State in the apartheid era, the AFM was at all times from 1913 an *indigenous South African church*. While it ranked its membership racially, there was never a time when expatriate missionaries, or a foreign church office, directed the affairs of the church in any way.⁵

⁴ Auckland Park Theological Seminary, the flagship theological training center for the AFM, has never had a head of Department Missiology with a doctoral qualification in missions. The lecturing is normally done by teachers with qualifications in Practical Theology or New Testament.

⁵ De Wet, “The AFM in Africa,” p. 95 notes that the first “missionary” council of the AFM was established in 1910, and consisted of three White members and three “native” members. It was called the Native Council. This was remarkably egalitarian for the times, although de Wet sees the equal numbers as evidence of paternalism.

At the same time, the AFM was always a homogenous church constitutionally. Each section was governed under a similar democratic, Presbyterian-type constitution. There were no autonomous groups operating under an umbrella constitution: “mission” was something the entire White church did, and it did it officially and together. (That Blacks could also be missionaries did not occur to the White leadership.⁶) In the very latter part of the century, some White congregations developed their own missions programs, normally in cooperation with (or as initiators of) a para-church body.

The practice of founding “daughter churches” was considered a practical manner of doing missions in South Africa. The other Afrikaans (reformed) churches also followed it, and it had the effect of developing large and spiritually healthy culturally-homogenous churches without forcing the White people to worship in a racially integrated setting. While today this racial attitude of the Whites is obviously seen as ethically unacceptable, its absence was unthinkable in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ Even the non-racial AOG developed on the lines of White assemblies and Black assemblies, for all that they were not forced to do so by their constitution.

The involvement of White congregations in “missions” activities in terms of relationships with their local Black churches also meant that institutionalized segregation did not necessarily imply total segregation. The relationship was extremely paternalistic, but the discrepancy in economic resources between White and Black during the period under discussion left little alternative. The fact was that some very close relationships and friendships developed between White and Black Pentecostals even in a segregated church environment. Until the overt radical politicisation of the church situation by younger articulate Blacks in the 1980s and later, there was never a time that it could be said that the hearts (and purses) of the White membership were not open to their Black colleagues and co-believers.⁸

⁶ De Wet, “The AFM in Africa,” p. 97.

⁷ Burger, *Geskiedenis van die AGS*, p. 422 notes how by 1917 the question of integrated worship had become a problem for a church whose White component represented more and more the *Boerekultuur*. This led to official pronouncements that “Coloureds” and Blacks should worship separately.

⁸ Burger, *Geskiedenis van die AGS*, pp. 422-23 reports John Lake as follows: “The Afrikaner...has always lived among the natives; he knows them, and is a much better missionary than the overseas man. The difficulty with the Afrikaner, as a rule, is that he is like our Southerner in America; there is a

From the early 1990s, the traditionally White congregations of the AFM have changed their missions involvement from involvement within South Africa to involvement in Africa (and also in other parts of the “10-40 window”). Despite the unity process in the church, most White members are reluctant to give money for work among the Blacks in South Africa, for two major reasons: 1) the Black leadership insisted volubly from the 1980s that Blacks should no longer be seen as mission-objects or targets, and 2) the White membership was emotionally alienated by the strident pro-liberation, pro-ecumenical (and indeed, pro-Marxist) rhetoric of some of the leaders in the Black church.⁹

During the time of segregation in the AFM, a number of powerful Black church leaders and evangelists did arise. One of the earliest was Elias Letwaba, who worked with Lake and Le Roux, and who did not depart the AFM with the Zionist schism. The most influential in recent years was Richard Ngidi, a Zulu whose ministry led to the establishment of scores of churches in KwaZulu-Natal province. However, the White church government of the AFM never allowed such persons to exercise the sort of influence that Nicholas Bhengu had in the AOG.

The new unity constitution of the AFM (adopted in 1996) does not allow for any racial distinctions to be made in terms of membership, office or ministry in the church. In effect, this deprives the church of any notion of “missions” activity within its own ranks, since until unity “missions” was always understood as “White going to Black” and as “White giving to Black.” The Missions Department of the AFM has for some time been known as the Department of World Missions and Evangelisation, with the proclamation of the gospel in South Africa being understood as “evangelization,” and to non-Christians (e.g., Muslims) outside of South Africa as “world missions.”

strong prejudice on his part against the blacks, and only God, the Holy Ghost, can remove that. But, bless God, He does, and the most devoted white workers we have among the natives are these, whose hearts God has caused to love the natives.”

⁹ This reluctance has been overcome to some extent by the Project Judea tent-ministry group, where local churches are asked to sponsor tents and evangelists (at a fixed cost per tent per annum) for the purposes of planting new churches in traditionally Black areas. The response from many large White AFM churches has been heartening. However, the project is the brainchild of White AFM pastors, and has a White directorship and financial management, factors that are found reassuring by the missions committees of the funding churches.

3.2 Missions Practice in the AOG

Initially the AOG was mission: expatriate missionaries who were working in Africa “to bring the light of the gospel to Black pagans.” The notion of becoming AOG was simply to promote fellowship and to alleviate loneliness. As indigenous Black leadership developed in (or gravitated to) the AOG, the role of these expatriate missionaries became more peripheral, involving administration and education more than evangelization. Because “missions” was such an assumption the beginning, there does not seem to have been a time when it could be said that the AOG had an official missions policy in its constitution, or a local missions director or superintendent.

This missions activity was often done in a mission-station setting. The larger and more effective the station, the more intense (and understandably) the desire was to be granted fellowship with autonomy, and without interference. This was true of, for example, Emmanuel Mission when it negotiated for acceptance under the AOG umbrella. The matter was not settled until Mullan could assure Immanuel Mission that the relationship would be one of autonomous equals in partnership, and not in subjugation. Emmanuel Mission was especially noted for its press, where Christian literature was produced as a means of, and as complement to, evangelization.

For the first half of the century, the major membership component of the AOG was its Black churches. Only in the latter half did a significant number of White churches arise within the denomination. This meant that indigenous White churches and leadership came to exist alongside indigenous Black churches and leadership. As undisputed leader of the Black component, Bhengu was insistent that local White churches should not become involved in any way in evangelization of Black people. He had initially agreed on a Peter-Paul arrangement with Mullan: Bhengu goes to the Blacks and Mullan goes to the Whites. This division of labor was ironclad and water-tight, in Bhengu’s mind.¹⁰ As a result, the non-segregated AOG, at grass-roots level, was more segregated than the

¹⁰ Ironically, the crunch with regard to this issue came after 1973, when a number of White AOG ministers attended the Conference on Missions and Evangelism in Durban. This was an ecumenical conference (something AOG ministers would normally never attend!) and it inspired a number of White ministers to launch evangelization efforts on the Black townships. This raised Bhengu’s ire, as he considered evangelization of Black’s his personal domain, and it caused severe tension in the denomination from then until Bhengu’s death. Whatever Bhengu’s actual motivation, many White leaders viewed it as a matter of his ego.

officially segregated AFM, where Whites had no trouble working with and among their township brethren.

Because from the beginning the AOG always had a majority of Black members, and because there were no racial limits or quotas in the executive of the movement, a dominant, very powerful and articulate Black leadership arose within the AOG, most especially in the person of Bhengu. This leadership developed its own style of dealing with miscreants and dissenters, as was seen in Bhengu's cavalier treatment of the erring Molefe.¹¹ Because of the Black majority in the executive, it was also clear that nothing was going to change without Bhengu's permission. Frustration with this state of affairs was one of the prime reasons for the separation of the AGF in 1981.

4. Comparison of, and lessons from, these two models

The AFM and the AOG, in terms of historical development, "missions" practice and basic ethos, are two completely dissimilar denominations. When reconciliation in the AOG is finally concluded, there could be some dispute as to which church would be the largest Pentecostal church in South Africa. Certainly the AOG has more Black members than the AOG (and its mission story could thus be considered more successful!), while the AFM has a much larger White membership than has the AOG. Its Black membership is also not to be despised in terms of size. The AFM in South Africa has also been very active in planting itself in other African countries, and has AFM affiliates in many southern and east African countries, as well as the Indian Ocean islands.

In terms of history, the AFM was a White church that rather casually labored among Blacks and developed Black daughter churches that never really influenced the denomination seriously until the 1990s. The AOG was a largely Black church under expatriate development until the advent of Mullan and Bhengu, when it developed a significant White membership, and its Black membership came to operate under Black leadership rather than expatriate.

¹¹ An eye-witness, Charles Enerson, reported to me (in a private conversation in August 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa) that he was moved by Molefe's public humiliation, which was at Bhengu's insistence. Apparently Molefe's primary sin had been to refer to Bhengu as "an old woman." Molefe was disciplined by the Conference (actually, for some more serious misdemeanors than insulting Bhengu), and Bhengu slammed out of the meeting disgusted at how lenient the sentence was.

It could be argued that, while the AFM speedily became a totally indigenous (though mainly White indigenous) South African church, for the first thirty years of its existence the AOG was primarily a foreign mission work. Even its existence as AOG was dependent upon the vagaries of missions policy as promulgated in Springfield, MO. While the AFM, as an indigenous South African church, mirrored pretty accurately the social trends and biases of the South African scene, the AOG initially reflected the more liberal values of its expatriate heritage. The irony of the 1964 separation of the IAG lies in the expatriate disapproval of an indigenous leadership style in the AOG in South Africa that diverged from the liberal democratic pattern of its own US denomination! The “development” of Black indigenous leadership suited the expatriates’ missions theory, while the “style” of leadership that the indigenous Black (and White) leaders developed did not.¹²

What can we learn from the comparison between the two denominations in South Africa?

4.1 Autonomous Groups under an Umbrella, Compared to a Parent-Daughter Church Model

On the surface, it would appear that the earliest methods adopted by the AFM and the AOG stand in stark contrast: the one was a model of autonomous mission groups working together voluntarily, and the other a model of a centralized denomination that founded “daughter” mission churches. However, if one looks closer, there is actually something of a similarity. The autonomous mission groups of the AOG were normally representative of a “sending” group outside of Africa, and certainly did not plant completely self-governing Black churches in South Africa. The AFM, as an indigenous church, did not represent overseas “senders,” but its White section played a very similar supervisory role. Like the AOG, it planted Black churches that were limited in the extent to which they could govern themselves.¹³

¹² According to Watt, *From Africa's Soil*, p. 62, the issue for the missionaries was the lack of a constitution limiting the exercise of personal power by leaders such as Bhengu and Mullan. The issue for the South Africans was that they had no wish to be “limited” by a form of church government imposed on them from the USA. When the missionaries appeared to favor Molefe over Bhengu, he was seen to deal with this challenge ruthlessly (see above).

¹³ A. Anderson, *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1992) p. 8 notes that the Black churches of the Pentecostal denominations

Both the AFM and the AOG only really took serious notice of Black leadership aspirations, when they were faced with capable and articulate Black leaders within their ranks. In the case of the AFM, this leadership developed slowly, was highly politicized, and only really came into its own late in the century. In the AOG, this leadership actually came from outside, in the persons of Bhengu, Gumede and Buthelezi, and it came much earlier than in the AFM. It was also far less politicized.¹⁴

That the “Black experience” in the AOG was less repressive and confrontational than in the AFM probably owes a lot to the difference in background and culture of the White leadership of each group. In the AFM, even though P. L. le Roux had been a missionary of first the Dutch Reformed Church and then the Zionists, the White leadership was conservative and Afrikaans. Although not necessarily hostile to the Black membership, this group would certainly never have been “soft” or liberal in its dealings with Africans. On the other hand, the White leadership of the AOG consisted primarily of expatriate missionaries, people whose sole reason for being in South Africa was their love and compassion for Africans. Later, when a number of South African Whites were involved in the AOG, it is significant that one of the things they intended to do at the fateful conference in 1981 was to “bring Bhengu to heel”¹⁵—a typically White South African attitude of the time!

Nevertheless, the comparison between autonomous groups and the denominational missions does raise the issue of effectiveness. In the early nineteenth century, the rise of missions societies already pointed to the difficulty of church denominations doing missions. The diversity and focused energy of the autonomous groups appears to give them an edge over a denomination with its bureaucracy and sacred bovines. The eventual withdrawal of the American missionaries from the AOG was partly an effect of their commitment to the particular denominational ethos of the AG in the USA. In its early years, the AOG in South Africa provided an umbrella for groups of virtually every possible national provenance. This diversity impacted the AOG, and is probably one of the

were neither self-supporting nor self-governing, but were (largely) self-propagating.

¹⁴ John Bond, *For the Record: Reflections on the Assemblies of God* (Cape Town: Nu Paradigm, 2000), p. 99 notes that Bhengu avoided political involvement, and warned his converts to do the same. He was not anti-White, but was certainly pro-Black. (This attitude was similar to earlier Black leaders in the AFM, such as Letwaba and Ingidi.)

¹⁵ Watt, *From Africa's Soil*, p. 74.

reasons why, until today, the sentiment in the AOG is for a minimal and largely non-prescriptive constitution.

4.2 Official Segregation versus “Natural” Segregation

The AFM unashamedly identified with the social developments in South Africa that were formulated by the Afrikaner nationalist government, and that eventually became apartheid. In the early years, this was simply because that was how Europeans in Africa thought and behaved. In later years, it found expression in the AFM in a determined resistance to communism and Black nationalism, and an emotional identification with Afrikaner nationalism.¹⁶ Only in 1996 did a White leader of the newly united AFM apologize (publicly at a live televised meeting) for the attitude of White Pentecostals toward their Black brethren.

The AOG is proud that this was never the case in their movement. Although they refused to identify with the liberation theologians and the ecumenical movement (believing that church and politics do not mix), they also did not practice discrimination of the racial kind in their church government. However, after the meteoric rise of Bhengu, a virtually total separation of the races developed in the AOG, and its protagonist was not a White leader but a Black. Watt believes that the “group” system developed in the AOG initially to guard the autonomy of the various groups under its umbrella, and that these groups only later took on a racial identity.¹⁷ Whether this innocent explanation is adequate, or whether one could argue that later on it was Bhengu’s personality that was its driver, the fact is that, in fact if not in church law, the AOG came to represent in its own forms the divisions in South African society. Watt maintains that this had the two-fold benefit of protecting the smaller White churches from Black numerical domination, and of allowing the development of self-confident Black leadership. The two arguments, while probably pragmatically valid, ironically enough were often used by Afrikaner nationalists to support the establishment of Black independent

¹⁶ Burger, *Geskiedenis van die AGS*, p. 423 reports the official line of 1944: “The [Apostolic Faith] Mission stands for segregation. The fact that the Native, Indian or Coloured is saved does not render him European.”

¹⁷ Watt, *From Africa’s Soil*, p. 117. Anderson, *Bazalwane*, p. 87 takes issue with Watt’s sidestepping of the issue of the AOG church conveniently reflecting the racial divisions in South Africa society.

homelands, equal-but-separate, the very cornerstone of apartheid doctrine!

The experience of the Indian section of the AFM is instructive in this regard. There are over one million Indians resident in South Africa, and 90 percent of them are Hindus. The only Christian group to really impact this population has been the Pentecostals. The Indian daughter-church in the AFM thrived as a daughter church, although some of the restrictions on leadership did chafe. However, once the church dissolved its separate racial sections and united as a non-racial church, the single greatest loser has been the Indian church. As a small minority within the nation and the church, the daughter-church concept protected them, and allowed the development of their own training institution, of powerful and effective Indian church leaders, and of meaningful interaction between Indian congregations. This protection no longer exists, and the continued success of the Indian work in the AFM is one of the critical challenges facing the denomination in the new century.

The Pentecostal churches in South Africa simply have to come to terms with the reality of the segregation of the races in the church. While this is no longer enforced, the historical realities of Africa imply that it will simply continue to be a fact of life. South Africa now remains the only country in Africa where a significant population of European origin exists (about 5 million), and the massive differences in culture, economic means and use of resources, language, and outlook on life are not soon going to be erased. Europeans in Africa rarely Africanize culturally, and the sheer size of the Black semi-urbanized and peasant population of South Africa makes its modernization (in terms of prosperity, education and influence) impractical—at least in the short to medium term. In other words, the gap will remain. How this issue is dealt with by the Pentecostal church in a country, which became an international pariah because of its racial policies, will surely have something to say to the wider Pentecostal community.

4.3 Expatriate Missionaries: Are They a Success or a Failure in a Country such as South Africa?

The local European population in countries such as South Africa has not always welcomed expatriate missionaries—as they have not in others such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Those who are born among, and live and interact with, local “native” populations do not always

respect the idealism and implicit criticism of these foreigners, whom they deem naïve. Missionaries can very easily be labelled troublemakers.¹⁸

In terms of numbers of Black converts, the AOG appears to have been more successful than the AFM in its missions work. However, since the size of the Black group in the AOG owes much more to the ministry of Bhengu than to the labors of the expatriate missionaries, and since Bhengu came to the AOG from the Full Gospel Church (a thoroughly indigenous South Africa Pentecostal denomination), such an assumption can be questioned. The AOG learnt what the AFM already knew (even if they reluctantly acknowledged it), and that is that the most effective evangelists among Blacks were Black preachers. However, this “indigenization” of the Pentecostal church cannot be attributed to the missions planning and strategy of either the expatriate missionaries or of the indigenous, White-controlled South African denominations. It simply happened and indeed, like Azusa Street and similar Pentecostal beginnings, should probably be seen as the gracious providence of a compassionate God.

After the rise of Bhengu, the major role of expatriate missionaries within the AOG appears to have been in the auxiliary services of the church, such as education, ministry training and health care. Few expatriates can today come to South Africa and begin to preach the gospel to the Black Africans. This is a ministry most ably carried out by Black preachers themselves.

Would it have made any difference to Pentecostalism in South Africa, if the expatriates had never come there, and had never established the AOG umbrella? In one sense, one can truly answer “yes”: Bhengu, being who he was, could never have thrived in an indigenous Pentecostal church such as the AFM or Full Gospel. Only the AOG umbrella, and the climate of sensitivity toward Black aspiration that had been cultivated by the expatriate missionaries in the AOG, could have accommodated him. Had it not been for the AOG, Bhengu may have become just one more African prophet, gathering around himself a number of converts, and

¹⁸ John Bond, *For the Record*, p. 99, who took over Mullan’s role as the “apostolic” leadership figure in the AOG, comments as follows: “I cannot recall many missionaries (if any) who truly understood the Blacks.... It is a fact that some thought they did, and were thus vulnerable to manipulation by the Blacks they thought they understood so well.... Missionaries have not been perfect. They have made mistakes. There have been paternalism, cultural arrogance, ignorance and missionary colonialism.” This criticism, while relatively mild, is pretty representative of what many indigenous South Africans, both White and Black, think of missionaries in general.

probably developing a syncretistic sort of Afro-Christian religion. Africa already has hundreds of thousands of such figures.

4.4 Theological Education in the AFM and the AOG

Both denominations followed the early Pentecostal pattern of being sceptical about the value of formal theological training for clergy—indeed, of the very notion of clergy itself. However, in the denominational environment of the AFM, the notion of formal training was gradually accepted. Since it took some effort and a certain amount of confrontation within its ranks to eventually establish this culture in the AFM, the daughter churches were not admitted to its privileges very early in the process. Nevertheless, through the concern and application of resources of a number of expatriate individuals and local leaders, for the last 20-30 years of the twentieth century there has been formal and adequate theological training available to AFM ministers of every race. It is the current policy that an AFM minister holds at least a three-year diploma in theology as an entrance requirement to full-time ministry. The general acceptability of formal theological education has also led to a large number of theologians progressing to doctoral level in their studies, making the AFM one of the highest qualified (per capita) Pentecostal denominations in the world.

This has not been true in the AOG. Various individuals, and the AG missions office in the USA, have established a number of Bible training colleges and seminaries in South Africa. However, theological training and qualifications are still considered optional for AOG ministry candidates. It is the African members who appear to be most keen to achieve a theological qualification, while in most White AOG churches there is no culture of theological training at all.

This disparate evaluation of theological training appears to owe much to leadership styles of the different groups. The earliest expatriate missionaries reflected both tendencies in early Pentecostalism: 1) well-trained non-Pentecostals who, after their Pentecostal experience, went into the mission field as Pentecostals, and 2) untrained laity who were moved by the Spirit to come to Africa and proclaim the gospel. Like most early Pentecostals, neither type saw their primary mission as theological education of the indigenous peoples.¹⁹

¹⁹ Commenting on the lack of training and vulnerability to heresy of the earliest recognized Black workers in the AFM, de Wet, "The AFM in Africa," p. 124 notes that this was not surprising, since the Black workers received their training from White workers who had no training at all!

However, once two distinct indigenous groups arose, it was the attitude of their leaders that became canonized. As leader of the White group, Mullan rejected the notion that a Pentecostal minister needed any formal theological training. His successors adopted and implemented his views, and until today any protagonist for formal theological training in White AOG ranks is difficult to find. However, Bhengu urged his converts and co-ministers to improve themselves by getting educated. While he may not have stressed theological training above any other disciplines, his urging had a bearing on the greater openness of the Black AOG ministers toward such training. In the last half-century, the Black population in South Africa has been led in its search for upward social mobility by the same sort of people who led the Afrikaner nationalist movement to its independence from Britain: lawyers, medical doctors, teachers and preachers.

There may be a closer link between the attitude toward theological training and leadership styles. Since the AFM changed its constitutional direction from a Presbyterian form to the “new apostolic paradigm,” it is noticeable how many of the newly emerging “apostles” tend to discourage their followers from theological training. When it was a more democratic denomination there was a levelling effect upon leadership that did not allow any particular figure (least of all the extremist ones) to dominate the sentiment of the church. However, the new paradigm allows “apostolic” leaders to determine the requirements for ministry under their own mantle, which both is fragmenting the church in terms of its ethos, and is leading to a growing superficiality in terms of membership knowledge and training.

Bhengu, on the other hand, appears to represent a different, more caring model of leadership. Although there is ample testimony to his domineering and autocratic leadership style, he seems to have cared as much for the development of his people as for his own prerogatives as a leader.

In terms of Pentecostal missions activity, and indeed of the future of Pentecostalism itself, the development of such leadership needs to be carefully cultivated. A mistake that has often been made in the expatriate missionary environment has been the inability to “let go” of the local indigenous leadership, or to encourage it to develop for its own good and the betterment of the local people. And in broader Pentecostalism, the glitzy model of exploitative and often abusive leadership, which underlies so much of the independent charismatic ministry environment, has all too often been adopted by Pentecostal ministers. The development of leaders who are servants, of leaders who are in Pentecostal ministry

not because it is a career option, but because it is a sacrificial vocation, must become a primary concern of those who lead, teach and train.

4.5 Black Leadership's Attitude toward Political Activism

Although they belonged to different generations, it is still worth noting the significant difference between Frank Chikane of the AFM and Nicholas Bhengu of the AOG. Each was the most prominent and well-known Black leader of their denomination. However, Bhengu earned his reputation as powerful evangelist, while Chikane earned his as a political activist.

Chikane's activist career began within his own church, and there is every reason to believe that it was his experiences at the hands of an insensitive White AFM leadership that led to Chikane's complete identification with the political aims of the Black liberation movements in South Africa. Today he is the Director-General in the Office of the President of South Africa, and his influence in the AFM is largely over. Nicholas Bhengu, until his death, resisted the call to political activism, despite the oppressive experiences of his people.

The difference may perhaps be traced to the difference in racial ethos in the two denominations. During Chikane's formative years, the White leadership was involved in rapprochement with the Afrikaner institutions of the day: the dominant Dutch Reformed Church, and the ruling National Party. Both of these were proponents of the apartheid system, and both considered themselves as bulwarks of civilization, resisting the communist powers that were taking over Africa. While the AFM leadership consorted with such powers, there was little chance of a firebrand like Chikane receiving sensitive treatment in his church.

Bhengu joined an AOG which was both racially egalitarian and apolitical. Neither position was ever negotiable in the history of the denomination. From this climate, and with the conciliatory treatment that he received from his White colleagues, there were few of the sort of frustrations that could have matched those which drove Chikane to rebellion in the AFM.

In terms of race relations, then, the expatriate-founded AOG definitely was more successful than the indigenous AFM

5. Conclusion

One nation, two large Pentecostal denominations, two dissimilar histories. This is the story of the AFM and the AOG in South Africa. Today both are fourth generation churches, in that way very similar to their counterparts in the North Atlantic setting. However, as part of Africa, they both share common experiences, lessons and links with their compatriots on the two-thirds world, where Pentecostalism is often a first or second generation movement.

Perhaps this short review may add to the understanding of leaders, ministers and teachers in both worlds.