

SEK Mqhayi and the Bible: Traditional poetry and essays in context

Ncedile Saule
Department of African Languages
University of South Africa
saulen@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

It is strange but not surprising that what Mqhayi wrote about more than hundred years ago still applies and is even more relevant in contemporary contexts. This article, with its main focus on 'traditional poetry and essays in context' - through the employment of biblical images, phraseology and some linguistic elements, is an attempt to demonstrate the unparalleled power of poetry permeated by the biblical spirit. The measure of Mqhayi's strength and articulation is in his unique artistic ability - using biblical language as a literary device.

1. Introduction

Traditional poetry has had a remarkable influence on almost all the literatures of the black community in South Africa. Delivered impromptu, charged with emotion, it has always been a medium of praise, criticism and entertainment. It has carried, and still carries with it various values in respect of the people's history, culture, language and education. When the Bible was introduced among the amaXhosa in the early 17th century, it did not take long for its spirit to imbue traditional poets. Traditional praise poetry, to a large extent, has since been characterised by a plethora of biblical themes and overt biblical references. An examination of some poetry by SEK Mqhayi and a selected sample of his writings bear testimony to this assumption. In analysing his writings, a simple aesthetic approach will be followed to interpret and fathom his philosophical depth. It should be noted that the approach is not the essence, but Mqhayi's noble ideas will be explored and their impact and dimensional influence on other literatures accentuated.

From the time the isiXhosa language was reduced to writing in 1823 by Rev John Bennie of Lovedale (Pahl 1989: xxxiii), its biblical tone in the very first phrase to be printed could not be mistaken thus: *inkomo zonke zezikaThixo*. With an overt biblical image by its reference to the Lord *fjinkomo zonke zezikaThixo* (all the cattle belong to God), the text marked the beginning of a pioneering work by the missionaries, which not only added another dimension to the spreading of the gospel, as up to that time only the English Bible was the printed medium, but also marked the humble beginnings of isiXhosa literature, a new development heavily influenced by the church.

2. Biblical setting in isiXhosa literature

Such beginnings, humble and noble as they seemed to be, were nonetheless not without criticism. There is a sense of frustration in Mphahlele (1962:36) who subtly suggests that the biblical influence on literature in African languages left much to be desired:

Earlier, it was restricted by a strong religious and moral content in the narrowest sense because it was published by missionary presses and written by enthusiastic converts.

By implication, the church as the initiator of the movement of isiXhosa-written literature and language, not only had control over what could be published, but also upon those engaged in the writing. That was so because the church was the first body to act as a gate for blacks to Western and Christian values through modern education. It is in the brief history (Gérard 1990:107) of the beginnings of the writing of isiXhosa literature that one becomes aware of the strong network that the church imposed on black scholarly interest:

'The literature of South Africa was launched in earnest after the British, in 1806, had established their rule over the Cape colony, as part of their overall strategy in the Napoleonic wars. Although hostile confrontation between the Xhosa and white settlers did not abate, this was the period when the foundations of a written art in the language were laid: it was reduced to writing by the missionaries who set up a school and a press at Lovedale in 1824; the Bible was translated, vernacular journals were issued; hymns were written by converts; and the first major writer in Xhosa, Tiyo Soga (1829-1878) translated part of the Pilgrim's Progress. The outcome was the first generation of Xhosa intellectuals, born in the 1850s. John Knox Bhokhwe (1855-1922), the Christian poet and biographer of Ntsikana, Walter Rubusana (1858-1916), a historian who was also renowned for an important collection of Xhosa oral lore, John Tengo Jabavu (1855-1921), the tireless journalist who was largely responsible for the foundation of Fort Hare College in 1916 and Tiyo Soga's son, John Henderson Soga (1859-1941), a translator and hymn-writer who wrote several books in English on Xhosa customs and history.'

Needless to say that the scholars mentioned above became SEK Mqhayi's role models in many ways with Rubusana, in particular, becoming his mentor - 'Intonga eyaqingqwa ngumCirha kuGompo', as Jobe (1974) notes in a poem in praise of *Imbongi Yesizwe Jikelele*, that being Mqhayi's honorary title. Their influence was well spread and long after their bones in their graves had turned to soil, their names are still upheld and their works, ideas and ideals have become a legacy. All that they stood for is being memorialised, their grave sites rehabilitated and monumentalised in an effort to restore isiXhosa literary and cultural heritage. They have become a history never to be forgotten. Testifying to this in the foreword, Pityana in Ndletyana (2008:v) acquiesces that indeed the effort:

... is an exercise in the recovery of intellectual traditions as a tool to a better understanding of contemporary society ... It is important if we are to understand the roots of debate and engagement, and the world of ideas and the influences which shaped the thinking of African men and women of ideas in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It requires of us a very rigorous re-examination of the claims that are being made in today's politics, culture, philosophy and religion. It establishes the value of an intellectual tradition that is rooted in the cultures and common wisdom of the people, and yet is influenced by the cultures of the settler communities without the loss of language and traditions.

Traditional poetry continues to be used by contemporary leaders to milk its 'wisdom' to assist in decision making in politics and almost all other socio-cultural avenues. It is for that reason this traditional poetry will always be regarded as timeless. Although the generic argument in this article is biblical in intent and purpose, it will be discovered that Mqhayi in particular did not allow himself to be intimidated by Christianity, which he claims was brought to Southern Africa by people who had a hidden agenda.

The isiXhosa Bible, which was amongst the first books translated from English, was made easily accessible to everyone by the missionaries. It was freely distributed at schools and in churches. It is common knowledge that those who could not read listened attentively as it was read to them by those who were able to read. Christians in the amaXhosa community still memorise passages from the Bible to use them as a weapon to address situations of moral degeneration and, at the same time, to use the poetic dynamism in them to add weight to their advocations of social reforms.

Furthermore, since the language of the Bible invariably interweaves itself in common language usage echoing significantly pure and lofty expression, it follows *ipso facto* that in all communities, the Bible is a revered book which is read not only for the message, but also for its good idiom, much to the appreciation of Cook (1976:ix):

To enrich and ennoble the language of a race is to enrich and ennoble the sentiments of every man who has the command of that language.

As a book of unprecedented philosophical profundity, obviously people read the Bible to draw from it the love and pursuit of wisdom and knowledge and Mqhayi and his community was no exception.

3. SEK Mqhayi face to face with the Bible

Mqhayi's works are always held in the highest esteem because other than his rich vocabulary and special talent to invent words, he was imbued by the spirit of the Bible which manifests itself in no uncertain terms in his art. In the same manner as the Bible does, his writings set up in the minds of his readers' ideals of liberty, personal integrity of social conscience and responsibility. This is true especially of his traditional poetry which could be described as being prophetic at times.

With the situation in existence as mapped out above by Gérard, Mqhayi was born more than fifty years after the isiXhosa language was reduced to writing: '*wazalwa ngomhla woku-1 kuDisemba 1875. Wakhulela phantsi kweempembelelo zamadoda anjengo Elija Makiwane, PT Mzimba noJohn Tengo Jabavu* (Moropa 1991:41), (he was born on the 1st of December 1875 and grew up under the influence of scholars such as Elija Makiwane, PT Mzimba and John Tengo Jabavu). A tradition of reading and writing had already been set in motion and was gaining momentum. Mqhayi was one of the beneficiaries of that tradition and invariably was directly influenced by the Bible. He was engaged in the church situation early in his school life as a teacher trainee, *wangeniswa nasebulungwini benkonzo* (Moropa

1991:41) (he became a full member of the church) in the United Congregational Church (Rhabe), becoming one of its most powerful preachers under Rev WB Rubusana.

He, therefore, followed in the footsteps of many converts, but not without many controversies as he endeavoured 'to establish the artist's independence from the patronage of religious bodies' (Dathorne 1976:43-44). Appraising one of Mqhayi's contributions about which the missionaries were not happy, Dathorne further asserts that:

Although from the onset Mqhayi tried to get away from the mission-school writing, he did not involve himself with recreating the oral literature. Instead he worked fairly closely with oral sources (in addition to indigenous idioms, his work is full of the precision of one direct, but not hamstrung by a tradition) and his story emerges as another exercise in the attempt to establish individuality.

Considered to be a difficult person because of his criticism of some methods of the missionaries, Mqhayi's extensive use of the Bible in his literary works, however is unqualified. His declamation of the Prince of Wales in 1925, hailing him, *AA! Zweliyazuza!* (Satyo 1977:138), a symbolic reference to the unstable political situation that Great Britain, with its imperialistic policies, brought to bear on the indigenous people of South Africa, came to be regarded as the most vitriolic sarcasm levelled at Britain and the missionaries. His use of scriptural phraseology does not fail to stir the deepest spring of emotions:

Ah! Britain! Great Britain!
Great Britain of the endless sunshine!
She hath conquered the oceans and laid them low,
She hath drained the little rivers and lapped them dry;
She hath swept the little nations and wiped them away,
And now she is making for the open skies.
**She sent us the preacher, she sent us the soldier,
She sent us the Bible; she sent us the bottle;
She sent us the cannon; she sent us the breechloader;
O Roaming Britain! Which must we embrace?
You sent us the truth, denied us the truth;
You sent us the light, we sit in darkness;
Shivering, benighted in the bright noon-day sun.** (Translation by AC Jordan)

One only has to look at the debilitating South African situation among the Africans to see the truth in Mqhayi's words – with their majority still illiterate as in 'you sent us the light (education), we sit in darkness'. That blacks lost their land through the barrel of the gun is a known history. Note the ironic alliteration in the 'Bible' and the 'bottle'. His view of Britain and the cause of the missionaries, however, is not always clouded in scepticism. In his essays he acknowledges that the coming to Africa of Britain and the missionaries bringing with them the light (education) and the Word (Christianity) to the Dark Continent was in fact God's divine intervention (*Umteteli Wabantu*, 2 July 1927).

A writer of numerous church hymns, in his works Mqhayi draws upon the Bible as a treasury of imagery and he uses it as a book best familiar to him and to his readers. Some of the hymns he penned illustrate how his literary abilities were used to blend the modern and the traditional elements of writing and thinking in bringing out biblical images. The themes of his hymns (*Incwadi Yamaculo EsiXhosa: Ngamabandla aseRhabe*) range from eulogistic exhortations underlining God's greatness such as *Hamba nathi Mhlekezi - ke* (Go with us Great One); *Hlala nathi, Nkosi Tshawe lamaTshawe* (Abide with us Lord, King of Kings); *Yesu Nyana kaDavide* (Jesus, Son of David), to the prayer for blessings: *Bulelani eNkosini* (Give Thanks to the Lord); *Nanko enyuka! Nanko enyuka!* (There He ascends, There He ascends); *Sibulel' intsikelelo* (We thank the blessing) and giving oneself to the Lord: *Sithembele kuwe*; (We rely on You); *Vuya mphefumlo wam* (Joy to my soul); *Yithabathe le mithwalo* (Take away this load); *Yiza ngamandl' akho* (Come with Thy Might).

The roots of biblical influence were given further strength by his work of helping in translating and revising the Union version of the Bible (Scott 1976:31). This afforded him intimate acquaintance with words and phrases, constructions simple and complex, but effective, which he later made to serve as his standard of writing. This was further fortified by his natural talent in the language, an ability which reflects clearly in his works. Tracing isiXhosa literature from down the ages to the present, it will be discovered that a great number of writers have drawn their inspiration from the Bible and their works have been fairly influenced by its principles and have also had great influence in shaping their language. What Ackerman (1971:12) says about the influence of the English Bible to English writers is pertinent to how the isiXhosa Bible influenced amaXhosa writers of all decades as well:

The Bible was for generations the chosen companion of all men, from the highest to the humblest. Consciously or unconsciously it was adopted by everyone as a guide to the best usage. Never perhaps in the history of any tongue has a single book so profoundly affected universal expression as has the English Bible.

The historical background of isiXhosa literature at the time of Mqhayi's birth as well as his general outlook reflected in his works, are some of the indicative landmarks that his home education was grounded on the Bible as indeed it was (Mqhayi 1975). He became one of the most profound, insightful and inspiring writers of his time. There is such a natural flow of biblical ideas and phrases especially in his poetry that leads one to believe that his exceptional knowledge of the Bible (Ackerman 1971:27):

... can only be explained by a supposition that he studied the Book until its thoughts and teachings, its story and personalities, had fairly burned themselves into his memory and became part of his being.

Mqhayi's interpretation of the Bible is in line with the kind of life he lived and as such tried to find answers from it to address the isiXhosa situation at hand.

4. The Bible in SEK Mqhayi

What makes Mqhayi's work a useful instrument in the interpretation of human experience is that the Bible itself is literature and that according to Ryken (2005:1) 'virtually every page of the Bible is replete with literary technique and to possess the individual texts fully, we need to read the Bible as literature,' supports every scholar's view that the literary dimension of Mqhayi's poetry 'resides in its embodiment of recognisable human experience.' He does not only use the Bible to enhance imagery, but makes it part of his literary chemistry as will be observed in the following paragraphs.

4.1. Words and phrases from the Bible

On examining some of Mqhayi's works, there will be found abundant evidence of that intimate knowledge of the Bible. Besides alluding and sometimes quoting directly from the Bible, it is the spiritual vision of Mqhayi's mind that reflects the idealism of the Bible. One such example, the only one that will be cited in this regard, could be discerned in his poem titled *AA! Mhlekezi Omhle!* (Hail! Great One!) (Bennie 1969:19), one of his best eulogies in praise of the Lord. Notably, he opens the poem with a quotation from the Old Testament, a practice he adopts consistently in many of his works:

Ngako oko iya kuninika umqondiso ngokwayo iNkosi: Uyabona, iNtombi le iya kumitha, izale uNyana, imthiye igama elingulmanuweli. (Is 7:14)

(Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.) (Is. 7:14)

After this quotation he praises that Son about whom it was prophesied in the extract above using powerful visual imagery to portray the greatness of the Lord:

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 1. | Bayethe, Kumkani! | All hail, the King! |
| 2. | <i>Thole lentombi yakwaYuda,</i> | Calf of the Jewish lass, |
| 3. | <i>Wena, Sonini-nanini;</i> | Thy, the Everlasting; |
| 4. | <i>Wena, Jay' Omkhulu wezihlele,</i> | Thy, the Dearest to multitudes, |
| 5. | <i>Ngqin'ezingel' imiphefumlo;</i> | Hunter of those in want of the Spirit; |
| 6. | <i>Zibel' imihlamb' eyalanayo,</i> | Bringer of peace to warring parties, |
| 7. | <i>Lung' elikhulu lakuloMazulu,</i> | Great righteous one of the Heavens, |
| 8. | <i>Bayethe, Kumkani!</i> | All Hail, the King! |
| 9. | <i>Wena, mehl' anjengawesibane,</i> | Thy, eyes like a lamp, |
| 10. | <i>Wena, Tshawe, lamaTshawe;</i> | Thy, Prince of Princes; |
| 11. | <i>Wena, sinunza-nunza sesinunzela;</i> | Celebrity of the celebrities; |
| 12. | <i>Wena Mhle ngokwenyanga,</i> | Thy, Handsome as the moon, |
| 13. | <i>Wena Khwezi lomso;</i> | Thy, the Morning Star; |
| 14. | <i>Wena Liwa laPhakade,</i> | Thy, Rock of Ages, |
| 15. | <i>Wena, Nyana waseNyangweni.</i> | Thy, Son of the Highest. |

The poem follows the mode of typical traditional eulogy by employing the elements that are symbolic of an isiXhosa background in lines 2 and 5. These are reinforced by incorporating in the eulogy heavenly bodies with strong biblical imagery. 'Greatness', 'glory' and 'hope' are associated with these as in lines 12 and 13. There are strong but subtle allusions to the Bible in lines 4 as Jesus was followed by multitudes of people who listened to his sermons as for instance (Matthew 5:1-2) '*uthe ke, akuzibona izihlewele ezo, wenyuka intaba; waza akuhlala phantsi, beza kuye abafundi bakhe, wawuvula umlomo wakhe wabafundisa esithi*' (Jesus saw the crowds and went up a hill, where he sat down. His disciples gathered around him and he began to teach them). In line 9, Mqhayi insinuates that Jesus is the symbolic lamp that should light up the place for all to see and as such 'no one lights up the lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lamp stand, where it gives light for everyone in the house' (Matthew 5:15).

Thus far in this paragraph, it should be realised that Mqhayi uses the Bible not only as a reference in praise of the Lord, but also quotes from it words and phrases (lines 1-15) to reinforce his themes and to illuminate his impressions. His use of the Bible to reflect certain images in it could further be outlined in the following manner:

4.2. Excerpts from the Bible in SEK Mqhayi's poetry

Mqhayi uses relevant extracts from the Bible to reinforce the central idea of his poem. The amount of biblical text in direct quotations and/or paraphrases of the Bible interpenetrating his writings with the spirit of the Bible indicates his strong moral belief in the strength of the Word (*Umteteli Wabantu*, 2 July 1927). These texts with their philosophical outlook heighten the seriousness in the themes of his poems and prose in which he speaks from faith and also on the side of virtue finding its highest embodiment in the morality taught by the Bible (Mqhayi 1942). Below are direct quotations from the Bible used strategically at the beginning of the poem to focus attention on the theme and meaning of the poem. After a quotation from certain selected poems, follows a brief discussion to highlight its relevance in terms of the thoughts emphasised as in the following:

4.2.1. I-Kresimesi ka-1928 (p.12)

[1] *Ze kungafunyanwa namnye kuni oandisa unyana wakhe, nentombi yakhe emlilweni, novumisayo, nolitola, nohlaba izihlabo, nokhafulayo, nonemilingo, nobuza koneshologu, nosiyazi, negqwirha, kuba lisikizi kuYehova bonke abenza ezo nto; kungenxa yalo masikizi le nto uYehova, uThixo, azigqogqayo, zingabikho ebusweni bakhe. Uz' gqibelele ukuba noYehova uThixo wakho, kuba ezi ntlanga uzigqogqayo zaaphula-phula amatola nabavumisi (Deut 18:10-14).*

(There shall not be found among you, anyone that maketh his son or daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these

abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, harkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.)

[2] *Xa bathe kuni, - Quqelani kwabaneshologu, nakoosiyazi, abalozayo, abadumzelayo, yithini: Abantu mabangaquqeli kuThixo wabo yini na? Ngenxa yabaphilileyo, mabaquqele kwabafuleyo na? (Is 8:19).*

(And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead?) (Isaiah 8:19)

[3] *Ke bona abantu abangendawo, noosiyazi, kukhona baya kuhambela phambili ebubini, belahlekisa, belahlekiswa (2 Tim 3:13).*

(But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.) (Timothy 3:13)

Mqhayi celebrated the end of almost every year with a eulogy in praise of the Lord's blessings. A poem of thanksgiving for a worthwhile year of spiritual fulfilment and material prosperity as well as encouragement to those who fell victim to misfortunes. The poem would also serve as a reminder that people should concentrate on those things which would gain them blessings as is the case in *Ikresimesi ka-1928*. He calls on people to make a resolution to heed God's warnings against unholy practices as indicated for instance in quotations [1], [2] and [3] above. He charges that he himself is not in a position to stop the people's waywardness, but the warning is a very serious one as it is His Word that:

[4] *Lithetha ngegunya nangamandla!*

(It speaks with authority and force!)

Lithetha ngobunganga nobungamasha!

(It speaks with boldness and assurance!)

Lizw' elinamandla loMenzi!

(Voice with authority of the Maker!)

Ingangamsh' enkulu yakuloMazulu!

(His Greatest of the Heavens!)

UDuma barhwaqel' iGama layo!

(He roars as they shiver, His name!)

Who dares stand against a voice of authority as the one portrayed by Mqhayi. It is, however, the manner in which he uses the biblical language to reinforce his own language and idiom that magnifies the image of the greatness of God. As in [2] and [4] above, Mqhayi uses metaphoric appellations to refer to the Lord indicating his Greatness. The central line of the poem, *ndimemez'inguquko* (I call for rebirth) (p 13) which also suggests its main theme is directly linked to the warning contained in quotations [2]. People should leave all their wicked ways such as believing in witchcraft - *oohili neempundulu neenyoka* (tikolosh, lightning bird and snakes) - and embrace the Word.

4.2.2. *I-Kresimesi ka-1934* (p 15)

[5] *Hambani niye kumbikela uYohane, izinto enizivileyo nenizibonileyo (Luka 7:22-23).*

(Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard). (Luke 7:22-23)

To Mqhayi the birth of Jesus couched in the term Christmas indicates, among other things, the cleansing of sins. That is why he urges his people to rejoice for the coming of *I-Kresimesi ka-1934*. He uses poetry [5] to list proof from scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah and that this cannot be denied. The proof consist of observable deeds and actions that were experienced by the people during Jesus's time and reported for us to read and believe in our present time. This idea is more emphasised in 6 below.

4.2.3. *Nguyesu* (p 18)

[6] *Loba yintoni na isiko lale nkwenkwe nokwenza kwayo? (Gwebi 13:12).*

(What must the boy do? What kind of a life must he lead?) (Judges 13:12)

The poem is about the birth of Christ and all that surrounded that event. Mqhayi links it with the birth of Samson [5] as the angel could have been a pre-incarnation appearance of the Lord. As Samson was destined to rescue Israel from the Philistines, Jesus would rescue us from Satan as depicted in his poem. The theme that Jesus is the Saviour is reinforced by the use of the quotation below:

[7] *Zitsh'izithunywa zeZulu;*

(Say the angels of Heaven;)

Iza kusindis'ilizwe,

(He is going to save the world,)

Kwimbubhiso kaSathana.

(From being annihilated by Satan.)

Communication is what communication is and for their plight people should continue to seek ways of finding channels to reach the spiritual world above and hence the vigilance that the people should take all the time in their lives as in *Umqondiso* (sign or symbol) below:

4.2.4. *Umqondiso* (p 20)

[8] *INKosi iya kukunika Umqondiso Ngokwayo. (Is 7:14)*

(Well then, the Lord himself will give you a sign:) (Is 7:14)

In this poem, Mqhayi tries to make the point that people should not find excuses for not wanting to communicate with the Lord just as Ahaz refused to test the Lord with a sign. All the time people should be thirsty to hear about good things and for that matter, things that would change their life for the better. To him the birth of Christ is a sign of hope that people will be liberated from oppression and other restrictive measures imposed on them by their conquerors, the colonialists.

4.2.5. *1929* (p 24)

[9] *Kuba ndinguYehova igqirha lakho. (Eksod 15:26)*

(I am the Lord, the one who heals you) (Ex 15:26)

In this poem, Mqhayi reflects on the year 1929 during which people did not have a good harvest. He blames the misfortune on the waywardness of his people especially their adherence to witchcraft and witchdoctors. He refers everyone to his greatest 'witchdoctor' whom he calls *Makhanda-Mathathu* (Holy Trinity). Of interest is the manner with which he adopts the method of consulting a witchdoctor to the Christian environment. The refrain is used for emphasis and this has the effect of making the situation familiar and easily comprehensible to those whom he tries to persuade:

[10] *NdinguYehova igqirha lakho:*

(I am Jehovah your healer)

Vumani! Siyavuma!!

{Agree! We agree!!}

Vumani! Siyavuma!!

{Agree! We agree!!}

This is a typical example of a writer who tries every means available to objectively change the people's way of life and manner of thinking. One could sympathise with Mqhayi because all the condemnations used by the missionaries could not divorce the amaXhosa people from the practice of consulting *amagqirha*. Be that as it may, Mqhayi should be applauded for his attempt at reconciling traditions by compromising the scriptural language in order to create a more realistic milieu which the amaXhosa would understand and appreciate.

4.2.6. *U-1931 no-1932* (p 27)

[11] *Nisikelelwe ma-Afrika bantu bam. (Is 19:25)*

(I will bless you, Egypt, my people.)

There is an interesting aspect concerning this quotation in that the revised Bible does not have *ma-Afrika*. In this research no version of any Bible was found to contain *ma-Afrika* or Africans. Since Mqhayi had helped with the translation and editing of the Union version of the Bible, many other versions have flooded the market. *Ma-Afrika* in the context of the poem might be viewed as relevant since the countries mentioned in the Bible are in Africa. The countries mentioned in this verse, Egypt, Assyria and Israel were generally at loggerheads whereas in Christ former enemies may unite in love. People and nations that are poles apart politically should worship together as friends. That is one of the recurring views in the works of Mqhayi. It is also the major theme of this poem. When the year ends people rejoice and when the new year dawns people still rejoice. Mqhayi uses personification to depict good relationships between people. As 1931 (personified) comes to an end, *umnyak'omdal' ubukwa njalo nawo*, (the old year is always appreciated) and 1932 starts, *wungeneni nidumisa umnyak' omtsha* (enter the new year rejoicing), people should emulate this act by glorifying the Maker.

Other poems in which Mqhayi has used direct quotations from the Bible to strengthen the theme and add quality to language are the following:

4.2.7. *Umfi Umhlekezi Seeiso Griffith* (p.33)

[12] *Uye phi na umthuzeli wam esingqaleni? (Jer 8:18)*

(I am sick at heart.) (Jeremiah 8:18)

Umfi U-Charlotte Manyhi Maxeke (p 35)

[13] *Ndesuka ndingunina kwaSirayeli (Gwebi 5:7)*

(Came like a mother for Israel.) (Judges 5:7)

4.2.8. *Umfi Umfu. John Solilo* (p 37)

[14] *Ngokuba uYehova eyazi indlela yamalungisa (Ndum. 1:6).*

(The righteous are guided and protected by the Lord.) (Psalm 1:6)

4.2.9. *E-Dikeni* (p 44)

[15] *Sukani nihambe kuba asiyindawo yokuphumla kwenu le (Mika 2:10).*

(Get up and go; there is no safety here any more.) (Micah 2:10)

4.2.10. *AA, Lusingasinga!!! Dr WG Bennie* (p 48)

[16] *Konke okwenzayo wokuphumelisa (Ndum. 1:3)*

(They succeed in everything they do.) (Psalm 1:3)

4.2.11. *U-Mafukuzela (U-Dr JJ Dube)* (p 51)

[17] *Lowo uwufumeneyo umphefumlo wakhe wolahlekwa nguwo, nalowo uwulahlileyo umphefumlo wakhe ngenxa yam uya kuwufumana (Mat 10:39).*

(Whoever tries to gain his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it.) (Matthew 10:39)

4.2.12. *Umka-John Knox Bokhwe* (p 53)

[18] *Lingaphezulu nakwikorale ixabiso lakhe (Miz 31:10).*

(She is worth far more than jewels!) (Proverbs 31:10)

4.2.13. *U-Nkosazana Minah Thembeke* (p 57)

Intokazi kaRulumente Philip Soga

[19] *Wathi uDyafu: Yini na le, ntombi yam! (Gwebi 11:35)*

(When he saw her, he tore his clothes in sorrow and said, 'Oh, my daughter!'.) (Judges 11:35)

4.2.14. *Ukukhutshwa Kwesuthu Ekholejini* (p 66)

[20] *Kwathiwa igama laloo ndawo yiGiligali unanamhla (Yosh 5:9)*

{The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have removed from you the disgrace of being slaves in Egypt" That is why the place was named Gilgal, the name it still has.) (Joshua 5:9)

4.2.15. *Umkhosi Wemidaka II* (p 83)

[21] *Igwala malithi: Ndiligorha! (Yoweli 3:10).*

{Hammer the points of your ploughs into swords and your pruning-knives into spears. Even the weak must fight.) (Joel 3:10)

4.2.16. *U-MNGA* (p 88)

[22] *Ezintweni zonke bulelani (1 Tes 5:18).*

{Be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus.) (Thesalonians 5:18)

In these poems not only does he use direct quotations showing Biblical influence and images, but also uses the general language of the Scriptures to give the poem the desired Biblical tone. Sometimes he prefers to use out of the ordinary Biblical expressions to enhance his own idiom. As a result the language becomes dignified and lends weight to his message. It should be noted that Mqhayi's method of allusion does not follow a designated pattern such as using the same Biblical idea or motif to refer to a number of events in his essays. He alludes to the Bible whenever the situation demands and these vary in terms of the subject he is discussing.

5. Poetic essays

It is not by any choice but necessity that Mqhayi alludes to the Bible when voicing his concerns about those who use the Bible for their personal gain. Among his subjects of criticism are some church authorities. The essay titled *Indlela yeNkosi* (The way of the Lord) is a typical example of an effort by Mqhayi in which he uses the allusion to broaden the substance of his essay with a view to criticising a certain wrong. The central idea in the essay is, in fact, a person's search for God by finding the way to Him which is difficult because 'my thoughts, says the Lord, are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my thoughts and ways above yours' (Is 55:8-9). In this essay, Mqhayi is critical of those who make others suffer by creating a situation which prevents any relationship with the Lord. The destruction of traditional isiXhosa values and religion by the missionaries in preference for methods that were foreign to the amaXhosa, was a contributory factor to social disorder. *Indlela yeNkosi* (The way of the Lord) portrays a disastrous situation after people lost communication with their Maker caused by others who were self-centred and bent on undermining other people's thinking. The essay in fact revolves around the fact that it is not man who should decide for the Lord about his people. This idea links up well with his general image that since all people are equal before their Master, they have no reason to discriminate against others or see others as inferior, a situation against which he comments vehemently in all

his works. And furthermore, it is not true that God is the God of white people only, just because they brought the idea of the Bible to the amaXhosa people. God is God for all nations, *UTHixo wezizwe neentlanga - uThixo olawula konke* (God of nations - God who reigns over all) as in Romans (14:11). Mqhayi explains the situation in the following manner:

[23] *Into esiyifundileyo kwizizwe ezimhlophe, sifunde ukuba uThixo nakuzo ulawula njengokuba wayelawula kuthi; kukho umqokozo othile omnye osusela kukumkani, kude kuse ezipalamenteni zamadoda, kude kuye ebafazini nasebantwaneni. Sifunda kwizizwe ezimhlophe izinto esibe singaziqondi kamnandi, imfundo yezikolo zentsapho, nempundo ephakamileyo nenzulu, yimfihlelo engoNyana wakhe uYesu Krestu.*

{What we learned from the white nations is that God reigns over us in the same way as He does to them; there is a chain of communication which starts from the king, to the parliaments down to the women and children. We learn from the white nations about things that we did not understand, school education, philosophical education and very scientific education, knowledge through His Son Jesus Christ}.

What transpires in the passage above is that the life of every individual is bound by faith in God from the youngest to the oldest. The social fabric which establishes unity with the Almighty should be kept intact. In his essays, Mqhayi acknowledges the importance and, at the same time, is grateful to the civilisation brought by the Europeans. He views it as one of the greatest phenomena to have happened to his people. However, he is mindful of the fact that this was an act of God. Those who brought civilisation and the Word to the amaXhosa should therefore not claim its acceptance as their own victory as it is something that is 'yimfihlelo engoNyana wakhe uYesu Krestu.' (secret of His Son Jesus Christ).

Using an array of biblical allusions to highlight the plight of blacks, Mqhayi also lashes out at their moral degeneration caused by the misunderstandings which emerged between the amaXhosa people and those who brought Christianity to them. *Imfundo neLizwi* (Education and the Word) With its biblical overtones, it is a direct challenge to authorities who used the two concepts, education and Christianity, largely as tools for manipulation to break down the old-age culture that existed. To magnify his images of reconciliation of traditions, he uses the parable of the sower, the good seed and the good soil as an example to illustrate a situation obtained among the amaXhosa people. This situation was directly opposite to the one in which (Matt 13:8):

[24] *Ezinye ke zawa kuwo wona umhlaba omhle, zanika iziqhamo, olunye lwanika ikhulu, olunye amashumi amathandathu, nolunye amashumi amathathu.*

{Some seed fell on good soil, and the plants produced corn, some produced a hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty}.

In spite of the fact that amaXhosa accepted the Word (seed) they still did not bear the desired fruit i.e. stay away from superstition, backbiting and laziness. Instead people,

especially in the urban areas, indulged in self-destruction, a situation which Mqgqwetho also decries as she, according to Opland (Furniss & Gunner 1995:164) 'laments the loss of rural values in the cities'. This creates the impression that in the isiXhosa situation, although 'some seed fell on good soil,' the plants produced weeds.

Alluding to the Bible again, Mqhayi is not surprised by the nature of such a situation, because some of the missionaries were not honest enough in their duties as they allowed themselves to become the political instruments of the colonialists, as Barker (1994:153) also points out that 'subsequent events, however, quickly made them change their minds. With a large number of evangelists supplementing their incomes by acting as either government spies or land agents.' Mqhayi unequivocally maintains that:

[25] *Xa abafundi babethunywe ukuba bahambe kulo lonke, bavakalise iindaba ezilungileyo bababhaptize, babethunywe loo nto yodwa, bengenatyala ke ngokunzonza nokutshona kwezo zizwe, emveni kokuba beluvakalisile udaba olulungileyo, bababhaptiza.*

(When the disciples were commanded to go to the world to announce the good news and baptise, they were sent to do just that and should therefore not be faulted for nations that fell after they had spread the good news and baptised).

The above allusion to Matthew 28:19-20, 'go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you' has far reaching connotations regarding Mqhayi's impressions about the work and intentions of the missionaries who used coercive methods to obtain compliance with some of their modernising demands. The amaXhosas had to accept, as a complete code of conduct, all teachings which the missionaries claimed were from the Bible. Mqhayi's sentiments that the missionaries were partly to blame for lack of commitment on the part of the black converts and a general indifferent attitude towards Christianity and education on the part of a larger section of the amaXhosa people, are shared by Sithole (1968:84) when he also intimates that the missionaries had a hidden agenda:

Their primary goal was to propagate the gospel of Christ to their fellow human beings, although it was not uncommon that **some of them were more interested in the propagation of their own culture** rather than the gospel of Christ. (author's emphasis)

Using subtlety of term [25] Mqhayi manages to bring out the fact that the missionaries undermined the culture of the people and that was a concern. His allusions are subtly employed in order to strengthen idiom and underline message. At no stage does he allow the biblical language to overshadow his style. His paraphrasing of the biblical language [25] for instance is one of the methods he uses so that attention remains on his text rather than on the event to which he alludes. As a result, the biblical layer only lends depth and authenticity to the theme of his essays.

6. Conclusion

The discussion in this article has clearly elicited that Mqhayi uses words and phrases which can be traced to the Bible indicating, therefore, a mind that has learned to lean on it in its comprehension. The phraseology characteristically gives his texts a biblical tone which in turn heightens the seriousness of his conceptions and the philosophy behind his thoughts. This has also had the effect of causing his writings over the years to become an enduring rejuvenation for the isiXhosa language. This is mainly due to him being imbued with the spirit and atmosphere of the Bible that reflects on his philosophical images. As with the entire spirit of the Bible, Mqhayi could also be associated with ideals of liberty, personal integrity of social conscience, of faith and social responsibility, the very aspects with which the Bible concerns itself.

7. References

- Ackerman, T. 1971. *The Bible in Shakespeare*. Columbus: The Lutheran Book Concern.
- Baker, B.J. (ed) 1994. *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*. Cape Town: The Reader's Digest Association Limited.
- Bennie, W.G. 1939. *A Grammar of Xhosa for the Xhosa Speaking*. Alice: The Lovedale Press.
- Cook, A.S. 1976. *The Bible and English Prose Style: Selections and Comments*. Norwood: Norwood Editions.
- Dathorne, O.R. 1976. *African Literature in the 20th Century*. London: Heinemann.
- Gerard, A. 1990. *Context of African Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Jolobe, J.J.R. 1974. *Umyezo*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Moropa, C.K. 1991. *Okubhaliweyo ngesiXhosa 1910 - 1988*. Pietermaritzburg: Heinemann.
- Mphahlele, E. 1962. *The African Image*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Mqhayi, S.E.K. 1975. *UMqhayi waseNtabozuko*. Alice: Lovedale Press.
- Mqhayi, S.E.K. 1942. *Inzuzo*. Alice: Lovedale Press.
- Opland, J. 1983. *Xhosa Oral Poetry. Aspects of a Black South African Tradition*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Pahl, H. (ed). 1989. *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa*. Alice: University of Fort Hare.
- Ryken, L. 2005. *Reading the Bible as Literature*. Ph.D. Thesis, Oregon University, USA.
- Satyo, S.C. 1977. *Traditional Concepts of Literary Conventions in Sinxo's Works*. Unpublished M.A Dissertation, UNISA, Pretoria.
- Scott, P. 1976. *Mqhayi in Translation*. Department of African Languages. Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Sithole, N. 1968. *African Nationalism*. London: Oxford University Press.