

# **Mobilising the Local Church for Social Justice and Reconciliation: Theological /Missiological Reflections on the Ministries of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (1996 – 2011)**

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## **Abstract**

*Social justice and reconciliation are inseparable, and both are inextricably linked to ethics, discipleship and ministry, that is, with the Christian walk. More precisely the evangelical church of the “global south” has lagged behind on their praxis with regard to this aspect. “What could be done to get the church involved in social justice and reconciliation in post-Apartheid South Africa?” What theological and other resources and assets could be mobilised in order for the church to address the issues of social injustice and reconciliation? While using the Baptist Union of Southern Africa as a case study, this article carefully investigates these important questions and other questions with wider theological/missiological implications for how we are to understand our Christian calling in the world. Further, this article argues that the church is by nature and by calling an indispensable agent for fostering social justice and reconciliation. Finally, it suggests that this be achievable only if all the church’s assets and resources are mobilised for the purpose of social justice and reconciliation.*

## **1. Introduction**

Although social justice and reconciliation are crucial themes within Biblical theology and inextricably linked to ethics, discipleship and ministry yet many Church sectors struggle to foster and implement their implied imperatives in the outworking of their praxis in particular contexts. In South Africa where, after 20 years of democracy, we still have in practice racial polarisation, inequality, exclusion of people from resources and violence. When considered together, these things have resulted in so many people living on the margins of society. Church praxis, I argue; should explicitly consider these themes for the purpose of advancing the goals of collective wellbeing and peace. However, what is social justice and reconciliation?

The Bible verse that most explicitly captures what social justice is as a notion is Micah 6: 8 i.e. “...he has told you what he wants, and this is all it is: *to be fair and just and merciful, and to walk humbly with your God* (The Living Bible Paraphrased). It is apparent in this verse that the emphasis is on ‘doing justice’. In enhancing our understanding on the elements that represent ‘doing justice’ Waltke cited by Timothy Keller (2010:3) writes:

The term for ‘mercy’ is the Hebrew word *chesedh*, God’s unconditional grace and compassion. The word for ‘justice’ is the Hebrew

term *mishpat*. In Micah 6: 8, '*mishpat* puts the emphasis on the action; *chesedh* puts it on the attitude (motive) behind the action. To walk with God, then, we must do justice, out of merciful love

Simply put Mae Cannon (2009:31) explains:

social justice has to do with the way that material resource and social advantages are distributed and made accessible in society. Social justice is manifested when all people have equal access to resources and opportunities, such as health care, employment and education.

For me, reconciliation is like the other side of the same coin in relation to social justice. It gives evidence of social justice by working towards bridging the distance between races, groups, faiths and communities for the establishment of a just and harmonious society where old wrongs and injustices are corrected and rectified (see 2 Cor 5:16-19). Zachie Achmat (2010:110) is right when he said "no reconciliation without social justice". I contend that before wrongs and injustices are corrected and rectified, repentance and forgiveness are necessary. In the same vein Robert Vosloo (2001:26) elaborates further by stating; "no reconciliation, justice or peace through repentance and forgiveness are possible without *truthful memory and hopeful vision*". For me, hopeful vision is one which ushers social justice for all to the point where brokenness has been dealt with.

Unfortunately, the Evangelical sector of the Church of the global south has lagged behind with their praxis with regard to this aspect. An Evangelical theology perspective in understanding that social justice and reconciliation are important themes could be traced by surveying the international Evangelical Conferences of the last decades which has culminated in 2005 into the articulation of what is now known as 'Integral Mission' (see Rene Padilla 2006). Still, many evangelical churches lag behind in intentionality on matters related to social justice and reconciliation in their praxis. If they do, it is usually in a 'peace meal' manner. Because, with particular reference to social justice I agree with Cannon (2009:31) statement that "social justice is so poorly understood!". With reference to reconciliation, I observe that the church's proposed solutions and strategies are limited and, therefore, doomed to fail.

Hence, this article attempts to wrestle with the question; 'What could be done to get the Church involved in and do social justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa?' In the process of answering this question, the article begins first, by identifying theological and other resources and assets which could be mobilised to address issues of social injustice and reconciliation. Second, it discusses the Baptist Union of Southern Africa as a case study. Third, building on the insights gained from the case study it argues that the

Church is by nature and by calling an indispensable agent for fostering social justice and reconciliation. Finally, it suggests that the church become this agent only if all the church's assets and resources are mobilised for the purpose of social justice and reconciliation.

## **2. Church's Assets and Resources for Social Justice and Reconciliation**

This section first highlights the contemporary social justice issues and then presents the church's assets that could be mobilised towards social justice and reconciliation.

### **2.1 Contemporary Social Justice Issues**

Reflecting on ten years of democracy in South Africa, Steve de Gruchy named fundamental new challenges and opportunities for the country and the churches. He stated, the national reconciliation as the most pressing concerns for the livelihoods of the poor, issues of human sexuality and gender justice, reality of pluralism in a secular State and the promise and peril of Globalization (De Gruchy 2005: 223 - 255).

The broad issues tabled above by Steve de Gruchy continue specifically to manifest themselves in social crises associated with abortion, AIDS and tuberculosis, capitalism and globalisation, poverty and inequality, bioethics, consumerism, disaster relief, domestic abuse and violence, drugs and addiction, education, environmental justice, suicide, health care, homelessness, housing, xenophobia, hunger, incarceration, physical disabilities, politics, prostitution, racial reconciliation, refugees, sex trafficking, urban decay, and white privilege to name but a few.

I submit that as long as these issues remain unaddressed, social justice and reconciliation will remain elusive as we are currently experiencing in South Africa. Hence the Church, as the lead institution and promoter of piety in society, has to be active in promoting social justice and reconciliation. Because, in the words of Barbara Skinner; "there is no such thing as personal piety that does not affect society" (Skinner cited by Cannon 2009:17). For me, the church facilitates the growth of personal piety for the sake of making society a better place. Hence, I agree with Dietrich Bonhoeffer that; "the church is the church only when it exists for others...The church must share in secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving" (Bonhoeffer 1971:382f). I admit caution and discernment is needed for this engagement.

On this note Pope Francis (2013: 44) is correct; "We need to distinguish clearly what might be a fruit of the kingdom from what runs counter to God's plan. This involves not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also – and this is decisive – choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil"). In relation to this article, the fruit of the kingdom of God should

be visible signs of social justice and reconciliation everywhere in society including South Africa.

The aforementioned substantiate the fact that social justice and reconciliation project is multifaceted and holistic which moves beyond compassion to deal with the social evil which manifests itself through social injustices in all spheres of society. Hence, I argue all resources and assets of institutions including churches should be mobilised for this project.

## **2.2 Church's Assets**

According to Klaus Nürnberger (1999:371), the church has significant assets not easily attained by secular organizations such as:

- Spiritual and moral foundations which can be mobilized to generate vision, motivation and responsibility,
- Access to the most deprived grass-roots communities,
- A traditional focus on the family as the most basic unit of society,
- Members in all kinds of secular professions and primary groups with all kinds of spheres of influence spread throughout the fabric of society,
- A potential network of cross-cultural relationships which can be activated relatively quickly,
- An international network of communications

Further, Steve de Gruchy (2005:255-260) also highlighted key factors (as assets) from the Church's struggle against apartheid that:

Contain important lessons for our contemporary struggles, and constitute the enduring legacy of the 'great cloud of witnesses' in that struggle. The first is the affirmation of the public role<sup>i</sup> of theology and the church. The second lesson that emerged from the story of the past, namely human rights as a legitimate locus for Christian witness. The third is that this witness for *human rights*<sup>ii</sup> was very often given focus in the witness of individuals who played a leadership role in the life of the church. The fourth lesson from the past has to do with the ecumenical nature<sup>iii</sup> of the public witness of the church.

In relation to social justice and reconciliation and drawing from Nürnberger

and De Gruchy's insights, I have chosen briefly to discuss the following assets namely: faith as a spiritual and moral foundation, the public role of theology and the church, Christian witness geared toward the promotion of social justice and reconciliation and the Church's proximity to the poor and the marginalised.

### **2.2.1 Faith<sup>iv</sup> as Spiritual and Moral Foundation**

Mobilising a social institution with a divine mandate such as the church is not easy. However, when done, it is certainly about revivification and re-focusing because the assumption is the church is alive. Gregory Leffel sees a link between faith and activism as crucial for the Church to fit into the world around us and has gone further to propose a concept he called "*missio-ecclesiology*" which is simply a way of understanding the church in the light of its action in the world. He states; "this activism is done in the name of the gospel – as this is understood in the image of *shalom*: a world of peace, justice and reconciliation" (Leffel 2007: xix). Research is increasingly confirming that faith is an asset for social justice and reconciliation.

Secular development agencies such as the United States of America Aid and the World Bank have started using faith as an asset for sustainable development. Joy Phumaphi and Lord Carey of Clifton said; "for nearly a decade, the World Bank and concerned world leaders of faith have worked together to seek common understanding of the causes of poverty and how to fight it" (Phumaphi & Lord Carey of Clifton in Marshall K & Van Saneen M 2007: xii). In the same vein, Seth Kaplan speaks of faith networks as catalysts for development while addressing Western governments and secular non-governmental organisations. He writes; "faith networks...maybe deeply enmeshed in communities across a country, providing in some cases the most reliable form of security, justice and, support for the poor" (Kaplan 2010:11). Faith is certainly an asset towards the promotion of social justice and reconciliation.

Sadly, I observe the evangelical sector of the Church still struggles meaningfully to connect faith and activism to fight poverty and other social justice issues in South Africa. This has led to the establishment of an evangelical sector of the church which mostly promote the *status quo*; a 'conformist' to instead of a 'transformer' of society. It has become confused and unclear in its public role in post-apartheid South Africa.

### **2.2.2 The Public Role of Theology and the Church**

In an attempt to sketch a vision of the prophetic role of the church in a new South Africa Beyers Naude (1996:255) wrote:

the role to be the watchdog of the state, namely to support the state where it implements policies and programmes which are in agreement with the deepest values of truth, justice, peace and human

dignity as we understand these values in the light of our Christian faith...our role should be one of critical solidarity – otherwise we do not help the state to fulfil its divine task as God intended it to be fulfilled

I concur with Naude that the church including the evangelical sector needs constantly to live in critical solidarity with powers and systems so that a genuine Christian social ethics geared to social justice and reconciliation is realised and nurtured. Emmanuel Katangole gives insights on this when he “realised that the challenge of Christian social ethics in Africa is to question even the cherished notions of progress, development, and democracy – notions that form the imaginative framework of thinking about the future of Africa” (Katangole 2010:14).

For example, the church in South Africa has a prophetic duty to question the fact that from 1996 when the South African democratic government adopted growth-focused economic policies many communities have been plunged further into poverty due to marginalisation and mass unemployment (see Aregbeshola 2010:2, The *Oikos* Study Group 2006:17). Therefore, in the face of alleged nepotism, power abuse and corruption at play in the infrastructural development programme, the church has a responsibility to raise its voice against all these evils. Sadly, very little is being done by the church in South Africa about this.

### **2.2.3 Christian Witness Geared Toward the Promotion of Social Justice and Reconciliation**

John Steward (1994:108) among others highlighted principles that could guide Christian witness namely;

God set out a plan for society, which is to model God’s just laws, including ethical concerns for others. God’s plan for Israel in the Old Testament sets out an ideal intended to flow on for the benefit of all humankind (Gn 12:2-3; Ex 23:2-3, 6).

The ethics of the Old Testament are social not private. The covenant laws assume an obligation to one’s neighbour (Ex 19:3-6, Lv 19:18; Mt 7:12).

Power, represented by land ownership as a symbol of control, is to be used benevolently for all and to produce equality of opportunity, as demonstrated in kinship/tribal structures (Dt 8:17-18; Lv 25:23; Job 24:2-4, Mi 2:1-3, 7:2-3)

Further on Christian witness, Tony Campolo (2008) reminds Americans primarily that practical acts of loving our neighbour transform us into personal expressions of the Christ we worship. He challenges all of us to recover the

active nature of our faith and to let it infiltrate all aspects of our lives.

The ethical concerns for others highlighted by Steward and Campolo should indeed drive Christian witness. These ethical concerns are often associated with human rights that I assume the church is aware of. To fail to put this knowledge into practice makes the church irresponsible in a society plagued by social injustices and human rights violations. With particular reference to South Africa, it also shows that the church has forgotten the vital lesson learned regarding the public role of theology and the church. In the fight against apartheid, the church arose against human rights violations which were committed by the white regime. It made these human rights issues a locus of their Christian witness.

Christian leaders such as Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude, Alan Boesak, and Frank Chikane coming from different sectors of the church embodied this prophetic Christian witness. Tony Campolo (2008:34-35) conveys the same though, “God has chosen to use the church to usher in the fullness of His presence in history, and the primary way through which the church changes the world is by commissioning its members to serve in each and every social institution (See Eph.3:10, 6:12, Mt 13: 33, Mt 5:13, Am 5:24).

#### **2.2.4 The Church’s Proximity to the Poor and the Marginalised.**

The church is one of the institutions which has remained close to the poor and the marginalised in post-apartheid South Africa. Reflecting on the situation of city slums and ghettos in the United States of America Tony Campolo (2000:57) said:

Most other institutions have failed and some even have disappeared from city life. Business and industry have followed the flight of the middle class to the greener grass of suburbia. While everybody and everything seems to have moved to the suburbs, there are still a lot of churches left.

What Campolo observed in the United States of America is exactly what we are experiencing in South Africa – business and industries have left the poor and marginalised societies such as Timbaza in the Eastern Cape and Babelegi in Gauteng for greener pastures of Egoli and Cape Town where they can maximise their profit and expand to meet the requirements of the global market. Yet the churches have remained behind.

They carry on ministering to people disempowered by; “systemic evil” – social, economic, and political structures and policies that, once created, seem to have a life of their own” (Campolo 2000:47). In my opinion, the mere fact that these churches are continuing with ministries in these poverty-stricken



contexts, coexisting with communities suffering social injustices and human rights violation, they have over the years acquired practical knowledge on the do's and don'ts within these contexts. This practical knowledge is an asset for social justice and reconciliation.

Admittedly, the history of the struggle during apartheid in South Africa confirms that the church was in a better position to speak against injustices and human rights violations because it was very close to the marginalised who were hurting and were being crushed. Through its various agents, the church mobilised to fight against apartheid. In the post-apartheid era, it had the privilege of giving input into the reconciliation processes.

Let me now turn my attention to telling the story of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in relation to these four assets I have just discussed.

### **3. The Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA): Story, Successes and Shortcomings**

In this section, I shall discuss and evaluate the BUSA as a case study to show how it mobilised these assets or failed to for the purpose of social justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa (1996 – 2011). It is in the main a critical analysis as far as social justice and reconciliation are concerned. In addition to my personal experiential learning, I have relied substantially on the Masters of Arts (Theology) research of Rev Angelo Scheepers, who has served and been a member of BUSA since 1970, for insights. He is presently the General Secretary of the BUSA and was elected BUSA President in 1991 and also served as the Western Province Area Coordinator.

About my personal involvement with BUSA; I have served God through the structures of the BUSA from 1992 to 2012 in full-time ministry. Thereafter, I served as a part-time self-supported pastor of a new church plant at Winterveldt in the City of Tshwane. I began as a deacon/missionary at Letlhabile Baptist Church at Stinkwater / Hammanskraal, and then became the pastor of Letlhabile Baptist Church and manager of Letlhabile Community Development Association and finally the national leader for Deeds of Love Ministries (formerly known as Baptist Union Community Assistance and Relief) which is the social development and relief arm of the BUSA. In the course of all these years I was very privileged to be given the opportunities to serve on various BUSA boards such as Pretoria and District Church Planting and Development Committee, Soshanguve-Mabopane-Hammanskraal Baptist Fellowship, the Baptist Mission Board, the BUSA national executive and the Baptist Theological College council.

The BUSA was formally constituted in Grahamstown in 1877 and, according to Angelo Scheepers, it “has grown to become a fully multi-cultural and multi-lingual denomination” (Scheepers 2008:6), see also <http://www.baptistunion>.



org.za/index.php/find-a-project). Local churches and fellowships that belong to the BUSA are located in seven Territorial Associations within the Republic of South Africa. They are the Baptist Northern Association, the Western Province Baptist Association, the KwaZulu-Natal Baptist Association, Border Baptist Association, Eastern Province Baptist Association, Free State Baptist Association and Baptist Association of the Northern Cape.

The current purpose statement was adopted at the 2003 Assembly in Kimberley so that “Under the Lordship of Christ we exist as a multi-cultural fellowship of inter-dependent churches, functioning in territorial associations, to impact this generation with the gospel” (Baptist Handbook, 2003-04:408).

### **3.1 Story and Successes**

The BUSA came from a history marked by separate racial development. Scheepers’ research reveals that the separate development mentality prevalent within the BUSA during its formation and during the period 1960-2005 was not as a result of apartheid but of 1) British colonialism, 2) missions philosophy prevalent in Europe and America round about 1877, 3) British Baptist ministers who came to South Africa did not feel compelled to fully embrace the Bantu people and 4) the South African Baptist Missionary Society work was based on the British model which focussed only on evangelising the Bantus (Scheepers 2008:2-3). Yet, these Bantus were excluded from full participation into the affairs of the Union. I observed some residue of this past at play when I began ministry in the 1990s; the old ‘script’ was still engraved in the mind of some colleagues.

According to Scheepers (2008:76-97) the 1990s were the “beginnings of transformation” and the new millennium began with new developments. The following evidences of transformation could be highlighted in the 1990s, these evidences in my opinion started to wrestle internally with social justice and reconciliation within the BUSA. I have singled out the following:

The 1990 BUSA Presidential Address by Rev Van den Aardweg; (Baptist Handbook 1991 cited by Scheepers 2008:77-78):

...the Rev A van den Aardweg chose as his theme for the Assembly and for his Presidential Year ‘The Unchanged Gospel’s Answer to a Changing Society’. He stressed the need to work for change in our society and toward unity within the Baptist family at all levels. During the year we have seen historic changes taking place in our country, with the removal of legislation that has supported the ideology of apartheid, bringing to an end for many, long years of oppression, humiliation and suffering and heralding a new day of hope and expectation for us all

- The BUSA Executive meeting of October 1990 expressed that BUSA would need to be reconstructed to reflect more adequately the nature of its constituency (BU Executive Minutes cited by Scheepers 2008:78)
- Initiative towards reconciliation between the BUSA (previously mainly white with some “coloured” churches and which only become fully multiracial/multicultural from the 1990’s) and the Baptist Convention of South Africa which in 1987 withdraw as an association of BUSA to become a separate/independent denomination and is made up of Black African churches.
- Change in the composition of the BU Executive, which used to be an entirely white executive committee and the “affirmative action” process which was implemented afterward.
- Greater transformation that took place within the leadership structures e.g. in 1991 Rev Scheepers became the first ‘other than white’ Area Coordinator of BUSA, Rev Ngamlana became the first ‘other than white’ Associate General Secretary from 1994-1997 and the first Black BUSA missionary to Africa in 2005. Sydney Dyasi became the Area Coordinator of the Border Baptist Association in 2000; Salwyn Coetzee became the first Baptist Youth of South Africa National Director of colour and in 2006, Linzay Rinquist became the first ‘other than white’ to occupy the position of Principal of one of the theological seminaries.
- The phasing out of Special Associations which could be perceived as a ‘cultural window-dressing structural mechanism’.
- With reference to theological training, Rev Ngamlana became the first black full-time lecturer at the Baptist Theological College (Randburg) from 1995 – 1997.
- New National Ministries were initiated such as the Baptist Union Community Assistance and Relief (BUCARE) which was established in 1995 with the following mission statement; “To motivate and enable Baptist Churches to witness to Christ through social concern and social action that will empower deprived communities to address their physical, social and other needs, and to provide relief where necessary” (Baptist Handbook, 1996-97:227). From 1997-2000 BUCARE, through consultation with churches, began by identifying Baptist

people and churches that were already involved in social development and relief ministry at grassroots. During this period, it also conducted workshops around the country on how to develop integrated and holistic ministries using John Steward's training manual "Biblical Holism: Where God, People & Deeds Connect". These workshops paved the way for local churches to start imagining possibilities of community ministries.

- The establishment in 1991 of a forum that concentrated in the main on the movement of the Baptist Union towards being a fully South African union, that is non-racial in practice and leadership.
- In 1991, the "Executive reasserted its unequivocal rejection of Apartheid as a sin and it committed itself afresh to work towards the establishment of a just society in South Africa" (BU Executive Minutes cited by Scheepers 2008:88).
- The amalgamation of some former Baptist Convention of South Africa Regional Associations with those of BUSA's Associations.

In the New Millennium, further structure-related and strategic developments took place within the BUSA. One that is closely associated with social justice and reconciliation is linking social action to mission and evangelism. Three gateways of opportunity were identified at the time e.g. ministry to those with HIV/AIDS affected and infected community in South Africa, job creation opportunities and disaster relief. Building on the momentum generated through Biblical Holism workshops, Deeds of Love Ministries (as a social development and relief arm of the BUSA) carried on mobilising local churches to get involved in their communities. Its roles were that of a catalyst, resource mobilisation and training

The Deeds of Love Ministries 2008-09 Annual Report and Goals:1, reported at the 2008 Assembly stated that it:

- Is planting and nurturing a Baptist fellowship and a community development centre at Winterveldt where 40 people gather every Sunday for a church service and 40 orphans and vulnerable children are cared for daily.
- Is developing an agricultural project in Campbell where 30

families will directly benefit from this project, and ten small businesses will be launched.

- Has established and is nurturing ten small businesses i.e., bee-keeping, fish and chips, catering, cleaning, the sale of chickens and tailor-made clothing.
- Is sponsoring 202 orphans around the country with schooling and food.
- Has trained 174 leaders and theological students in the “Choose Life” course: an ethical value based response to HIV / Aids around the country.

In 2010-11, these ministries grew stronger; the multifaceted community centre/ church was firmly established at Winterveldt; the Campbell agricultural project started to generate income and partly employed three members of the committee, the small businesses started to become profitable, the number of orphans sponsored increased to 318 children around the country and the number of leaders trained on HIV/AIDS course grew to 249 people (see Deeds of Love Ministries, 2009 – 10 Annual Report and Goals: 4).

In addition to the above, according to 2010 Deeds of Love Ministries database compiled by the author there were 44 churches involved in small businesses and self-help projects, 103 churches in social welfare and mercy ministries, 51 churches in training and empowerment projects, 26 churches involved in addressing issues related to HIV/AIDS and six associational projects involved in orphan care, education, childcare and job creation. We have over 250 projects from 159 churches and 3 associations involved (Mangayi 2010:1).

In summary; from the historical sketch of the BUSA, the following social injustice issues were part of its history e.g. racial exclusion and segregation, racial oppression, humiliation and suffering, broken relationships with ‘daughter’ churches, lack of emancipation and affirmation, internal cultural divisions and poverty. Many of these issues were mostly associated with the BUSA, with the exception of poverty and lack of resources among the African black Baptists which could be linked to the systemic evil of apartheid. How did the BUSA address these issues? What assets did it use?

### **3.2 What Assets did the BUSA Mobilise Towards Social Justice and Reconciliation?**

Under point 2, I singled out four assets which could be mobilised for the purpose of social justice and reconciliation namely faith, the public role of theology and the church, Christian witness and the church’s proximity to the poor and the marginalised. I argued that if these assets are mobilised the

church will step up to the stage where it becomes once again an agent for social justice and reconciliation. To what extent did the BUSA mobilise these assets toward social justice and reconciliation.

With reference to mobilising faith as a spiritual and moral foundation for social justice and reconciliation, it is apparent in the story of the BUSA that at the core of transformation processes triggered by Van Den Aardweg's Presidential Address in 1990 lies the cry of faith to live as regenerated Christ-like communities. Faith in the "unchanging gospel" of Christ compelled the Rev Van Den Aardweg to remind the BUSA that the Lord requires his church to "act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God" (Mi 6:8). By faith, the rest of the BUSA agreed to embark on the tasks of the multifaceted transformation and renewal experienced in 1990s and the New Millennium. Faith, I contend, was the asset used by the BUSA to dare to become a 'transformer' of self-identity, structure, leadership, etc.

With reference to the public role of theology and the church as an asset for social justice and reconciliation, two things stand out from the historic sketch of the BUSA e.g. the establishment of a forum to foster the process toward becoming a non-racial union in practice and leadership and the unequivocal rejection of apartheid as a sin in 1991. I suppose the transforming and regenerating power of faith gave the BUSA boldness to reject both racism and apartheid as social evils in their theological discourse in post-apartheid South Africa. Also, the changing political landscape forced these changes upon the BUSA. The BUSA realised that racism and apartheid promoted values contrary to that of truth, justice, peace and human dignity as we understand these values in the light of our Christian faith. Hence, for the sake of social justice and reconciliation these social evils were rejected.

In relation to Christian witness, evidences of 'loving your neighbour' were apparent at both local and national level with the establishment in 1991 of national ministries such as Deeds of Love Ministries and in the New Millennium the fact of linking social action to mission and evangelism strengthened its Christian witness in communities. One example of this is an integrated community centre/church at Winterveld, which ministers to HIV/AIDS affected and infected communities. Another example is the establishment of the Campbell agricultural project in the Northern Cape. Also, the HIV/AIDS training given to church leaders strengthened the BUSA constituency to witness in their community in a holistic way addressing issues pertaining to the pandemic.

In addition, other evidences of Christian witness in the community through social development and relief are visible through the work of local Baptist churches. These churches witnessed in their communities by 'demonstrating

the love of Christ' in tangible and practical way.

In relation to the church's proximity with the poor, 250 projects initiated by local churches in addition to national Deeds of Love Ministries thrusts give evidences that the BUSA has been attempting to be a 'friend to the poor and the marginalised' in South Africa. This also shows that these local churches' proximity to the poor is an advantage for many of these churches to do more than what they have done so far in terms of social justice and reconciliation. Also, the fact that the BUSA rejected the racial divide allowed the Union to welcome into its membership churches that are by circumstances poor.

### **3.3 Shortcomings**

In the aforementioned I have discussed how the BUSA mobilised the assets of faith, the public role of theology and the church, Christian witness and proximity to the poor with some success for the purpose of social justice and reconciliation.

However, there were a number of shortcomings. First, although faith in the gospel motivated the BUSA to embark on internal transformation for social justice and reconciliation yet faith in the BUSA continued to contribute toward systemic transformation. The link between faith and social activism was blurred. This has led to the 'conformist' rather than a 'transformer' attitude toward society to largely a 'private affair'. The BUSA did not openly use this asset to venture into the public square in many structures of the BUSA.

Second, the public role of theology and the churches of the BUSA were, in my opinion, limited to rejecting racism and apartheid. The colonial script which is engraved in current powers and systems, structures and institutions have remained unchallenged. For example, as I explained earlier, the alignment of the South African economic system to embrace growth-focused policies in the 1990s has caused more misery and poverty in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Katongole (2010) the same colonial script is used but by different actors. The same old script which sends people to 'endless cycle of violence, plunder and poverty' is still used. Yet, the BUSA has not sufficiently raised its voice to condemn these issues and advocate for alternatives.

Third, the BUSA's Christian witness drive for the promotion of social justice and reconciliation was also limited and focussed only on social development and relief concerns. Its social development and relief arm has no mandate to take Christian witness to spheres of politics and economics for instance. It was rather expected to facilitate and provide resources for internal concerns. It is in essence 'inward looking' in its Christian witness.

Finally, the BUSA's proximity to the poor and the marginalised was not used to the full for the purpose of social justice and reconciliation. Deeds of Love

Ministries' database showed that only a third of BUSA churches are involved in their communities, two thirds sit with resources and assets vital for the promotion of social justice and reconciliation.

One could argue that there are a number of reasons for these shortcomings, which could be a matter for another researcher to investigate. Nonetheless, I agree with Katongole (2010:1) that reasons for such shortcomings are:

deep-seated assumptions about the relationship between Christianity and the social, political sphere. One assumption is that the task of ensuring peace, democracy, and development – in a word, the social and material conditions of life – belongs to the jurisdiction of politics. Christianity, which belongs to the realm of religion, can only make a helpful contribution to the field of politics.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this article, I argued that the church is an indispensable agent for fostering social justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa, and the church has by its nature and history have crucial assets such as faith, the history of the public role of theology and the church, the history of Christian witness and proximity to the poor and marginalised. These assets need to be mobilised by the church to advance social justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa.

Reflecting on the BUSA case, we learned that this church denomination used those assets with some success within its internal structures and also experienced shortcomings. The shortcomings are associated with 'inward-looking' thus failing to become a 'transformer' of society in tangible ways outside its turf.

In essence, the article highlights the fact that the church has resources and assets that could further the positive impact for social justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. Once these resources and assets are mobilised to the maximum, "justice will roll like waters and righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Am 5:24)

#### **5. Notes**

1. The public role of theology and the church has to do with the church not being afraid to bear witness in the public arena, to speak on matters of state and society, and to translate its faith convictions into political praxis.
2. Human rights are concerned with affirming and promoting the humanity of people



3. The ecumenical nature of the church in South Africa played a role in forming ecumenical agencies such as the Christian Institute, the South African Council of Churches and the Institute for Contextual Theology. These agencies in turn played a role in the production of such key documents such as *The Message to The People of South Africa and the Kairos Document*.
4. Without prejudice and discrimination, faith in this article refers to the Christian faith in the Trinitarian God as declared in the holy Bible.

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