

40-YEAR CELEBRATION OF THE BLACK METHODIST CONSULTATION: A REFLECTION ON REVEREND SELBY LAWRENCE QUNTA MADWE

Ziphozihle Daniel Siwa

Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Zipho@mco.org.za

ABSTRACT

We are in the region that gave us leaders that we cannot forget, such as the renowned King Shaka kaSenzangakhona kaJama and Princess Nandi. We are in the land of renowned mentors such as uDingiswayo, who knew how to mould leaders, and whose mentee was King Shaka, who later showed eldership and strategic prowess. This is KwaZulu-Natal, a province rich in history and culture, a province that has produced many illustrious leaders in all spheres of life and for this we are grateful to God. It is in the spirit of the one whose leadership we have come to celebrate and reflect upon, Rev Selby Lawrence Qunta Madwe that I salute all those who are a cloud of witnesses, among whom are: Our own Father Khoza Elliot Mbuyisa Mgojo and Mama Stella Mgojo, Mama Virginia Gcabashe, Prof. Cyril Lincoln Sibusiso Nyembezi, Mama Jokazi (also from uMzimkhulu) and revered leaders such as Dr John Langalibalele Dube, Nkosi Albert Luthuli and Baba Johnson Mlambo. The list is endless and also includes those who set foot here and transformed this place positively, such as Mahatma Gandhi. We are grateful to God for these servants and many others that I have not mentioned. Included in this list is Reverend Selby Madwe, who is still with us.

Keywords: Methodist Church of Southern Africa; Selby Madwe

WHO IS REV. SELBY LAWRENCE QUNTA MADWE?

I have known Rev. Selby Lawrence Qunta Madwe since 1986 when he arrived in Port Elizabeth, and more closely when we were together at Rhodes University between 1989 and 1990, as well as during his time in Grahamstown Circuit 201. He was a year ahead of me in candidature—hence I met him at the Graaff Reinet Synod, where the bonds



Oral History Journal of South Africa
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/OHJSA>
 Volume 5 | Number 1 | 2017 | pp. 23–31

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2309-5792/2904>
 ISSN 2309-5792 (Print)
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developed that have not been broken since. I was a candidate when he was a first-year Probationer under the Superintendence of Rev. Nkululeko Tunyiswa. Our friendship, comradeship ties as well as commitment to our journey together have withstood the test of time. Life circumstances have thrown challenges in our relationships but nothing and nothing has been able to separate us thus far—and for this, we can only give praises to God. We have cried and laughed together and had our differences, but during all those times we have allowed each other the space to be ourselves. We never manipulated each other to an extent of not allowing the other to be himself. I held conversations with a number of people in his family, in church and society, and was humbled by the reminiscing that took place in all these encounters. The exercise of putting together this essay has been a blessing to me and am grateful to the leadership of the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC) as well as Rev. Selby Madwe for presenting me with this opportunity to reflect on his life.

The type of soil on which a seed is planted determines the quality of the fruit it produces, although other factors such as the availability of water and fertility of the soil are vital to its full growth and ability to thrive. This metaphor can be translated into the human circumstances where our nurturing environment has the ability to unlock our potential, which may be lying dormant in all of us. Our lives are intricately bound and shaped by the communities we hail from as well as the totality of our life circumstances, but most importantly, there is the grace and love of God, which never fail us. It is this grace that mitigates against negative influences that could have been destructive in our journeys.

Selby Madwe, an Africanist and Black Consciousness thinker, if I may refer to him; an African spiritual being, a servant of God and a humble disciple of Jesus Christ, was born into a Methodist family. His parents Shadrack and Nondlala Madwe (umaMbanjwa), parents to nine other children, two of whom have already passed on, were staunch Methodists, whose origins are traced to UMzimkhulu—kwaBaca, which happen to be the place of origin of the esteemed Rev. Dr Khoza Elliot Mbuyisa Mgojo. The values of *ubuntu*, which stem from a deep Christian Spiritual nurturing are evident in Selby's persona, in his aspirations and what he stands for in life, Ministry and leadership. One does not have to search at all for the respect and dignity he accords to all people, young and old.

The character of every individual tends to manifest itself easily over time. The rehearsed sayings and ready-made speeches sometimes do not match the actions. In Selby Madwe, what you see and hear is what you get. His preaching and mannerisms attest to the fact that he is the son of the Durban African Circuit Vice-President of the Young Men's Guild (YMG), as well as a fine Methodist local preacher.

One would recall that there was a time when we had African and European circuits on this African soil, as well as stipends paid in respect of being African or European. It is recorded in the minutes of the Methodist Church of South Africa (MCSA) Conference of 1965 that the pension contributions were graded as follows: R120 for Europeans, R40

for Coloureds and Indians, and R17 for Africans. These anomalies were happening in a church that had declared earlier in 1958 that it was “one and undivided.” This is how far we have come, and have not yet made progress in terms of healing the wounds of the past. It is also worth noting that Selby is the son of a migrant worker who moved from Johannesburg to settle in Durban and shared with those who knew him the stories of the migrant labour system, and the consequences thereof. Many would remember what the migrant labour system did to black families. It is a system that left some invisible yet indelible scars in many families and communities to this day. These stories somewhat planted seeds of activism in Selby, which I will refer to later on.

I was unable to attend Madwe senior’s funeral but gleaned enough information about the Madwe family when I spent some time with the family after Selby’s mother had passed on. I was privileged to listen to members of his family in the days leading to the funeral, as well as listen to tributes on the day of the funeral. It became clear to me that Selby comes from a family that is well grounded in Christian values and African *ubuntu*.

Life will always throw challenges in the way of a person’s journey. Selby never forgets the impact of the 1978 breakaway from the MCSA, as well as the formation of the then Transkei Methodist Church as this caused immense pain in many people’s lives, including Selby’s father. He tells of an occasion when his father went together with members of the Circuit to bury *uTata uZali* in Willowvale. When they arrived there they were not allowed to conduct the service as the MCSA was banned by the then homeland leader uNkosi Kaizer Daliwonga Matanzima. Subsequent to this his father Shadrack suffered a stroke and subsequently died as he did not recover from the shock that resulted from the painful experience. One understands why Selby is so quick to notice when seeds of division and strife are being sown and start to rear their ugly heads; because he has first-hand experience with how deep-seated wounds can be potentially destructive. These seeds of destruction are sometimes sown by the actions of self-centered individuals in pursuit of personal interests, who are also trying to settle scores motivated by their egos.

In Port Elizabeth, he met and married Nobuntu Mbane and together were blessed with three children: Luyolo, Anelisa, and Ntabozuko. The late Rev. Zolile August uNoZulu, a close colleague used to sing Selby’s praises saying: *IBhayi, alambathwa, kodwa into kaMadwe ifike yalambatha*. Nobuntu has journeyed with Selby through many joys and tribulations. When Selby was pulled out of Rhodes University by the church before completing his studies and asked to take a station in the Grahamstown circuit, I had to break the news to Nobuntu. We cried together at the Broughton Court Flats. I recall that Rev. Rod Burton came by and found Nobuntu and I in distress. He hastily made a turn back and stepped out of the door, leaving us wondering what he really thought of this awkward and vulnerable moment he had been witness to. Selby talked us through the situation and made us understand that the decision was not about him, but that it was taken in the best interest of the church. In this case, the one who was directly

affected by the situation assumed the role of a counsellor. Such selflessness is one of the greatest attributes of a man we gathered to celebrate during the 40th anniversary of the BCM. Nobuntu has this to say about her husband: “Humility and love for the people are his survival tools in life.”

Who can deny that?

Formation Outside the Family

Surely the streets of Durban would have much to tell about his growing up in its corners, but that is beyond the scope of this essay. All I can say is that he proudly remembers that he went to school in Durban and matriculated at Dr John Langalibalele High School, a school named after the first president of the African National Congress (ANC). Although Selby is more oriented to the ideology of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), he had a high regard for the ANC, because the liberation movement had a common goal, which was shared by other liberation movements—to liberate the oppressed African majority. The different approaches employed by the ANC in the quest to liberate the country gave birth to several other organisations and parties. The African National Congress played a significant role in the lives of many of us, and this cannot simply be wished away. This fact alone gives impetus for critical engagement in debating thorny issues so as to curb some of the challenges and excesses of governance when consistent and transparent oversight are neglected. The movement as a whole needs constant critical engagement from all interested parties so that it does not lose focus. Critical engagement seeks to assist the movement to remain true to its founding objectives. There is an English saying “Don’t throw away the baby with the bath water”, which is said to have begun in some parts of America among the English-speaking white communities at the time when there was scarcity of water. This meant that whole families had to use one tub full of water to bath. The eldest would be the first to take a bath, and the baby would be the last, and by the time one bathed the baby the water would be so dirty that one could easily forget that there was a baby in the bath. Therefore, each time one threw out the bath water, one was always reminded that they had to ensure that a baby was not hidden in its murky depths. As such, things African and born of a noble cause must not be thrown away with the bath water—a philosophy espoused by Selby Madwe. The main objective of all the liberation movements was to liberate the oppressed and marginalised. This goal has only been attained on the surface when one considers the infighting, factionalism, tribalistic inclinations, corruption and deviation from the original goals. All these will result in the baby being thrown away with the bath water. Selby Madwe remains firm in his conviction that he wants to defend the credibility of the movement.

He got this formation from a number of outstanding African thinkers. One of them is Rev. Dr Stanley Mmutlanyane Mogoba, who also happened to be his mentor. As a young man, he would look after the houses of both Rev. Dr Stanley Mogoba and Rev. Vuyani Nyobole. One can only imagine the positive influences that these Methodist

giants of faith and service-oriented leaders had on the young Selby. He remembers the time when his hometown was burning during the political uprisings, particularly during acts of violence sparked by conflicts between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the United Democratic Movement (UDM). Luminaries such as Rev. Dr Wesley Mabuza were frog-marched to the stadium, and Rev. Dr Stanley Mogoba bore the brunt of state brutality. The lives of Black Consciousness Movement proponents such as Striny Moodly, Sath Cooper, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, and the late Bishop Sigqibo Dwane had lasting influence on Selby. This was during the time when the nation was at war with itself, something that must not be allowed to repeat itself ever again in future. This is the time that Selby was sent to the National Youth Leadership Training Programme (NYLTP), at the recommendation of uTata Stanley Mogoba. They did not know at the time that they were shaping a leader of the Black Methodist Consultation and a committed servant of the church, who has in his own right, played a vital role in the formation of many others.

Selby, an ever-committed activist in the cadre named BMC was given the responsibility to lead the cadre as Chairman. The dictionary defines a cadre as a small group of people with a common purpose and unifying relationship. We are indeed in need of such cadres in our time as we long for a more humane world—the likes of which Dr Nelson Mandela painted when he said—“we are more familiar with the laughter of children than their tears.”

Selby worked with an Executive Committee made up of Mr Mteteli Caba; General Secretary, Ms Bulelwa “Step” Mpepo, who was the Assistant General Secretary and Ms Maureen Kenya the Treasurer. This team put before the BMC three themes: *Burning bush but not yet consumed* (2005); *Who am I?* (2006); and *Have you caught anything?* (2007). During this period the said leadership reports that their focus was on:

- Improving internal communication
- Promoting black unity—thus advocating that blacks must not be set up against each other
- Black leadership development, and
- Making the BMC a centre of influence in the MCSA.

These focus areas were aimed at restoring confidence in the BMC. It has always been Selby’s intention to restore the dignity of all African people. This ideal calls on all of us to take stock and measure how far we have fared towards achieving this ideal.

Adekeye Adebajo, writing about the journey from the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) employed the words “Europe’s original sin against Africa occurred at the Conference of Berlin in 1844–85, when the rules were effectively set for the partitioning of Africa on the eve of the scramble for the continent’s riches” (Adebajo 2010). This has contributed hugely to Africa’s hatred of itself and the manner in which Africans look down on themselves, evidenced by such

things as violent acts of Afro-phobia and the rape of mother Africa by her own children. I have seen and heard Selby painfully advocating and acting against the scourge of violence by Africans against one another, as well as the destruction and plunder of Africa's resources. Together with Rev. Mike Vorster, he was at the forefront of caring for the victims of the 2008 and 2015 Xenophobia/Afro-phobia. We salute them together with many others with whom they worked for their courage and compassion during these difficult times. The occasion of the lecture, from which this essay was written, gives us an opportunity to desist from violence of any nature, as well as railing against anyone in ways that sow seeds of division, thereby causing harm and pain.

It was befitting that this lecture was delivered on 7 May 2015, the first day of a 40-day prayer period for reconciliation. The call to soak the nation in prayer, especially from 7 May to June 15, just a day before June 16 (Youth Day) was made by the South African Council of Churches (SACC). One would recall that 16 June 2016 marked the 40th commemoration of the 1976 Soweto uprisings that spread throughout the country, leaving many dead and thousands more traumatised, especially young people and children. The call was triggered by the work of Pieter Bezuidenhout who did research and produced a doctoral dissertation titled *Die dienpslig-SAW generasie en die soeke na heling, versoening en sosiale geregtigheid* (2015) Bezuidenhout's dissertation explored the "identity crisis" and pain of the conscript generation. These are the people who were conscripted into the army and made to fight and kill their peers in black communities and in exile. Part of their healing journey is seeking reconciliation with the 16 June 1976 generation "with a deeper meaning of reconciliation including healing and social justice" (Bezuidenhout 2015) These two generations, coming from a history of immense pain, are joining hands to champion for a holistic reconciliation. The 40 days of prayer period was observed in preparation for the public launch of this journey, which was a public event that took place on Saturday, 11 June 2015 at the Orlando Stadium, Soweto. One can read some of the dramatic testimonies, including one by Dan Montsitsi, one of the leaders during the 1976 student uprising¹. A reconciler in the person of Selby Madwe made us gather at the stadium on the day the prayer kicked off. Indeed this was a fitting moment.

His Contributions

Reverend Selby Madwe, uQunta, is a servant who has given his all to the call and service to the poor at great cost to his own life and that of his family. The text that he quotes often, and which I know has guided his life in Ministry is found in Hebrews 13:5–6: *Isimilo senu masingabi sesokuthanda izinto, yanelani zizinto eninazo, nide nomelele nithi uSomandla ulusizo lwami angandenza ntoni na umntu.*

When we discussed his move to Botshabelo as friends, I tried to discourage him and this is what he said: "I will not measure my moves by the benefits I will get, but

1 See the website of the South African Councils of Churches for further details (<http://sacc.org.za/>).

by a sense of call that connects with the needs of the people I am called to serve.” His experiences at the NYLTP, as well as his encounters with brutal forced removals, became the driving force for his desire to go to Botshabelo. It was while he was with the NYLTP, through the conscientisation programme that their awareness of the brutalities of the Apartheid forced removals was raised. At the time tears were shed for the victims, irrespective of which tribe or ethnic group they came from—tears for the people of Makgoba village, the people of Tsitsikama, the people of Qwaqwa and many others. More importantly, it was the people of Botshabelo that Selby was drawn to serve. His compassionate heart makes it easy for him to go with joy to places where he is needed most. One of the lessons we can draw from this giant of faith is his commitment to serve where the cause comes first and before any personal interests.

Selby is well known for his empowering leadership style. He does not theorise about delegation, empowering and team building; he walks the talk. Sometimes he just implements something without mentioning anything to anyone. Some people have regarded this as a sign of weakness, but I can attest to the fact that the people he served have not been the same after working with him. Below are some of the reflections and thoughts of the people that observed Selby’s life, Ministry and leadership:

- Ms Boniwe Moleshe affirmed Selby’s leadership style of empowering those he works with. “He is able to allow the creativity of the team to blossom and is comfortable in not taking the glory.” I agree. Indeed as Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Peace Laureate says “A tiger does not proclaim its tigrity, it pounces” (https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Wole_Soyinka.) One can only witness the impact of Selby’s Ministry and one will never hear him beating his own drum.
- A Circuit Steward of one of the circuits he had served made this comment: “There is evidence that uMfundisi uMadwe responded once to the call and he meant it. He does not lead worship, he worships. Watch him sing the Methodist hymn 225:

Soloko intliziyo yam ibanjwe ezonweni...Kanti ke namhla, Nkosi yam, usel’undisindisa; Kuhle ukhanyo phezu kwam, lwase lundikhanyisa...Likhulu ithamsanqa lam endilizuba kuWe; Kukhulu ukuvuya kwam endikuphiwa nguWe.

- Ms Gretta Makhwenkwe observes that Selby is very hospitable and cherishes the “social aspect of food.” He nurtures relationships and is very appreciative. Most importantly *uyakhuzeka, unobubele*. Siphso Nyembezi, who has also experienced Selby’s hospitality and humility concurs. Note: *uyakhuzeka*. Again the words of Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Peace Laureate are appropriate here: “The greatest threat to freedom is the absence of criticism” (<https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes>). We have to learn to listen when others point to impact of any negative actions and turn around—uSelby *uyakhuzeka* (“Selby takes kindly to criticism”).
- The former General Secretary Rev. Vido Nyobole, who has known Selby from secondary school days observes the following attributes in Selby: “Servant

leadership, humility readiness to serve, willingness to learn and determination—setbacks do not deter him from pursuing his goals. He loves God and he loves the church.” This is affirmed by a colleague and friend Rev. Siphon Nyembezi, who adds that Selby strongly believes in the prophetic actions of the church, which requires that the church be in the forefront of addressing social issues and redress justices.

CONCLUSION

I salute here in this essay a gentle giant, a prince of the Methodist pulpit. Some may have missed the strength of his character, Ministry, and leadership because of his humility and commitment to make others appear bigger than him. Many will attest to his nurturing spirit and his resolve to unearth talent for the sake of the bigger cause. He has done this in the circuits in which he served, in the Young Men’s Guild where he held the position of president twice—in the Grahamstown and Natal Coastal districts, as well as in the Black Methodist Consultation. Others may have thought that he inept as a leader and sought to “take over” but Selby never fought back, but simply kept on, never allowing his eye to be taken away from the ball—the well-being of others and creation.

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