

The Agenda of Simon Sekone Maimela as Student Political Activist in the Black Consciousness Context at Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College

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Abstract

In this article, the early days of Simon Sekone Maimela as a theological student at Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College are unpacked. He was one of the Lutheran theological students who actively established the Black Consciousness Movement at this college. He was also involved in the South African Student Organisation and other civil organisations. During his theological college days, it was not an easy task to establish this type of movement or to be involved in any civil organisation that was resisted by most White teaching staff and under apartheid in South Africa. Maimela connected his Christian faith with a life of socio-political justice. His contribution in the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, particularly to the issue of pastors' working conditions and salaries, is also described in this article. Another vital discussion is how Maimela introduced feminist theology lessons at the University of South Africa in 1981. Archives such as letters, minutes and reports of and about Maimela were used to compile this article. Interviews with Maimela and with his church and teaching colleagues were also conducted.

Keywords: Black Consciousness Movement; church workers; Covid-19; Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC); Sekone Maimela; South African Student Organisation (SASO); Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College (ULTC)

Introduction

Simon Sekone Maimela contributed extensively to the South African theological discourse. In the field of Lutheran studies and Black Theology debates, he published widely (Masoga and Mathye 2010, 67). Among Maimela's list of publications are



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Denominationalism: An Embarrassment for the Church (1982); *Current Themes and Emphases in Black Theology* (1986); and *Culture, Religion and Liberation* (1994). He was the co-editor of book chapters such as “We are One Voice” (1989) and “Initiation of Black Theology: The Rich Varieties of Theology and Hermeneutics” (1998). His book *Proclaim Freedom to My People* (1987) theologically and liberatively addresses racism, politics, and socio-economic injustices in South Africa. Black Theology and Black Consciousness were conceptualised concurrently, while some of the Black Consciousness leaders served as Black Theology leaders. Maimela was one of these leaders (Dolamo 2017, 6). Black Theology and Black Consciousness were conceptualised when Maimela was a student at Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College (ULTC). They were liberation movements responding to colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Maimela’s contribution from his commitment as a student political activist is of great symbolic importance for the historic liberation of South Africa. His theology of liberation contributes to South African education today. It is regrettable that even in democratic South Africa, the South African government has not thanked him ceremonially, as they have other leaders who contributed to the liberation of this country.

The article firstly discusses Maimela within the ULTC landscape and the Black Consciousness Movement at this institution. It also looks at Maimela’s signing of the Kairos document. This is followed by a discussion of Maimela in the higher education space, his contribution as an academic, and his involvement in the introduction of womanist theology at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The article concludes with his influence as a Lutheran pastor in an ecumenical space, specifically regarding socio-political issues such as the state of the country, education, and Covid-19.

Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College Landscape

ULTC was established at Umphumulo Teachers Training College of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa on 2 October 1962, the Oscarsberg Lutheran Theological College being its predecessor established by the Cooperating Lutheran Missions formed in 1910 (Mashabela 2020a, 63; cf. Mashabela and Madise 2021, 3). Maimela received his theological training at ULTC. He became a product of Unisa and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree (Mashabela 2008). ULTC has become one of South Africa’s theological institutions that have contributed to the lives of theological students and ecumenical churches in South Africa. It has produced pastors and academics such as Maimela to transform society according to the liberating grace of God. It has fulfilled the Lutheran missiological mandate: “To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical” (Biyela 2012, 50), which is the most concrete theological expression.

The Black Consciousness Movement at Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College

The Lutheran Theological College Governing Board meeting held at ULTC on 20–21 October 1970 decided on student affiliations of student organisations. Loken and Dlamini (1970, 3) assert:

While individual students are free to affiliate with movements of their choice, the Governing Board (GB) wishes to underline the aims of the college, i.e., training of the future ministry and that, as a result of this purpose, such youth activities should be conducted that will foster and be an inspiration of the students' future call as pastors and leaders of congregations/churches.

The Constitution of the Lutheran Theological College (Lutheran Theological College 1965, 10) further records:

Other organisations are the Students' Literary and Theological Society, the Students Christian Association, other groups that may be established. These students' groups shall, as far as possible, be organized by the students themselves in order to develop a living Christian community at the college. The staff council shall appoint staff advisors for these groups and support them.

The Board was in support of theological students affiliating with any organisation/movement linked to the training of students aligned with a pastoral ministry. Thus, the movement had to have the aim of preparing theological students to become leaders of congregations. The Constitution of the Lutheran Theological College clearly supported theological students to establish their organisations.

In April 1960, active political parties, namely the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and African National Congress (ANC), were banned by the South African apartheid government. These political parties were a serious threat to the government (Mashabela 2014, 10). Maimela says:

When the PAC and ANC were banned by the then apartheid government, the Black communities in South Africa felt a vacuum of Black leadership. Thus, a new generation of young Black leaders such as Bantu Biko and others started a formation of the South African Student Organisation (SASO) established in 1969. As students with Biko, we also invited the founder of Black Theology in South Africa, Rev. Dr Manas Buthelezi, who was able to teach us how to write and apply Black Theology in South Africa. Buthelezi was invited by many student organisations, including SASO, across the country in 1969 and early 1970s. (Mashabela 2008)

SASO became the machinery to fight against White power or supremacy. Black Consciousness was a weapon to defeat the apartheid ideology and sin. SASO promoted a philosophy of Black Consciousness to liberate Black people in order to transform their Black communities (Mashabela 2008). Maimela (1984, 44; 1987, 67) says:

The Black community would re-organize itself and continue its struggle against White power structures. Accordingly, it was not altogether unexpected that a new leadership would emerge through the formation of the South African Student Organization (SASO) in 1969 to continue the Black struggle against White power where banned organizations had left off.

Black Consciousness was closely linked to SASO (Harvey 2012, 20). SASO filled the political vacuum left by the banning of the PAC and ANC in the fight against apartheid. The Black Consciousness Movement was used as a liberating strategy for Black people to liberate themselves and enhance their human rights and dignity. Apartheid is an unacceptable philosophy because it violates the human rights of Black people. It was vital for student organisations to embrace and integrate the Black Consciousness Movement and Black Theology Movement as critical ideologies to defeat apartheid. Thus, SASO existed to challenge the enormous power of apartheid. Its formation was courageous enough to resist political, education, and socio-economic injustice from a human rights perspective. Maimela was convinced that these movements were the right liberating tools at teaching and learning institutions for the liberation of both teaching staff and students.

In 1971, senior theological students such as Maimela, Johannes M. Ramashapa, and T. S. Farisani initiated the Black Consciousness Movement at ULTC. During the late 1970s, the ULTC staff were predominantly White missionary lecturers with a few Black lecturers. ULTC staff were highly divided about the presence of these movements (Mashabela and Madise 2021, 15). Maimela says:

In 1971, students of Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College elected me unopposed as the leader and convener of the newly established SASO. I closely worked with gifted Tshenuwani Farisani and Johannes Ramashapa underground as elected committed members to establish a solid SASO and Black Consciousness Movement, which were difficult to be accepted at the theological college at Umphumulo. (Mashabela 2008)

Maimela, Farisani and Ramashapa asked Steven Biko to visit the college to address students. They wrote several letters to the authorities of ULTC to allow SASO, the University Christian Movement and the Black Consciousness Movement to co-exist at the college, as it was felt that these organisations were relevant to address the common problems of Black students and communities, but their requests were unsuccessful. Maimela said: "Our Black consciousness is the gift of Black people from God to continue to exist as who we are, not what we are unjustly defined and treated by whiteness" (Mashabela 2008). It is evident that student political activists such as Maimela, Farisani and Ramashapa were unshaken by apartheid. They were extremely committed to their call for the liberation of Black students in their environment of higher teaching and learning at ULTC. They were committed to the political activist call of liberation and transformation by God's liberating grace. They risked their lives to ensure that students liberated themselves under the banner of SASO, the University Christian Movement, and the Black Consciousness Movement. Maimela was also committed to

Africanise ULTC with a new look and renewal of what it meant to be African from a human rights perspective.

At the 15th meeting of the Lutheran Theological College Governing Board held in Johannesburg on 24–25 March 1971, the application of a new student organisation was discussed. Nielsen and Becken (1971a, 4) record the following:

The application on the University Christian Movement (UCM) for recognition as a students' organization at the Lutheran Theological College (LTC) was declined in agreement with a recommendation of the faculty of LTC. The application for recognition of the "Lutheran Theological College Association," which has mainly missionary aims, was granted. The application for recognition of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) was referred for further studies to GB and the Faculty of LTC; the results shall be reported at the next meeting.

It is contradictory that the Lutheran Theological College Governing Board (hereafter the Board), in agreement with the Faculty of the College, denied an application of the University Christian Movement by theological students to be recognised at ULTC, while granting recognition of the Lutheran Theological College Association. If ULTC authorities were in support of students being involved in student organisations, according to the theology of the church, but denied the University Christian Movement, which has the word "Christian" in it, then this was problematic theologically. Lutheran theological students applied for recognition of the University Christian Movement at ULTC as a liberating sign that there was something they could learn from this movement to advance their theological training. Furthermore, theological students needed recognition of SASO, which was strategically delayed by the majority of White ULTC staff. Theological students at ULTC wrestled with the question of balancing their spirituality and socio-political justice in the interests of serving their congregations and communities in the future. ULTC staff were not comfortable with the radical transformation that theological students brought to ULTC.

The 16th meeting of the Board held at ULTC on 10–11 November 1971 followed up on the SASO issue of recognition at ULTC. Nielsen and Becken (1971b, 6) record the following: "The application of individual students belonging to SASO for recognition as a student organisation at LTC was declined after a thorough study of SASO." Nielsen (1972, 2) reports that at the 16th meeting of the Board, the ULTC staff met with the leaders of SASO on 11 November 1971, as the leaders protested the decision taken not to recognise SASO. However, ULTC staff never changed their initial decision of not recognising SASO at ULTC. ULTC staff were not comfortable accepting any civic organisation at ULTC. This shows that they supported the government's apartheid policy. Civic organisations such as the University Christian Movement and SASO were linked to the Black Consciousness Movement, which aimed to fight against political injustices in South Africa. ULTC staff did not support these organisations as student organisations committed to community engagement.

On 25 October 1974, Makhathini (1974, 2), the Rector of ULTC, wrote a letter to his Lutheran colleague to update Rev. G. Lislerud in Norway about the state of ULTC.

These years of Black Consciousness, Black solidarity, and Black identity are a joy to live in. Students are very sensitive to anything done for or to them. A couple of sittings and very strong talks have been part of the trend in the seventies. This has, however, been a fairly calm year with rather a too quiet student body; for this, I am not too happy because the school lacks excitement.

Theological students who identified themselves as and were in solidarity with the University Christian Movement, SASO, and the Black Consciousness Movement at ULTC, were a serious threat to ULTC staff in the early 1970s. Thus, in 1974, they were not as active as in other years, but for some reason, Makhathini was not comfortable with this. Does this mean theological students were secretly making strategic plans involving the Black Consciousness Movement to further engage the theological campus? Their silence at the college was a serious protest against ULTC authority.

Maimela Signs the Kairos Document of South Africa

The Kairos Document was a historic, transformative, and liberation document of South Africa. It defeated evil and sinful policies and systems of apartheid in South Africa. Mabuza (2009, 40) states:

This was a document produced by the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), which was started by a concerned group of Christians as a response to State pressure. ICT is the producer and custodian of the KD. Kairos is a Greek word meaning the moment of truth, a given opportunity. The KD was written by a few theologians, notably Frank Chikane, Albert Nolan, forming the main committee. This happened at the height of apartheid in 1985.

Furthermore, Landman (2010, 52) says:

In September 1985, the (in)famous Kairos Document was issued by Black theologians and co-signed by Maimela. In October 1985, Maimela's house in Atteridgeville, a township to the north of Pretoria (Tshwane), was petrol-bombed. This was the fifth house to be attacked by petrol-bombers in the township in the space of three days.

Maimela and his fellow Black theologians such as Bonganjalo Goba, Itumeleng Mosala, and others were in solidarity in the call for the release of detained Black leaders (Mashabela 2008). Maimela was a very bold theologian who participated in the development of the Kairos Document, but it is worth emphasising that he signed it. This is a human rights indication that from an early age, he was a student political activist at ULTC, and his signing of the Kairos Document truly reveals that he remained a political activist even when he was an academic. It is sad that his house was petrol-bombed; however, what is critical is that he and his family survived.

Maimela in a Higher Education Space

Maimela's initial training at ULTC took him on the path to becoming a Lutheran pastor, which led him beyond what he originally anticipated. After completing his PhD, Maimela was appointed as a lecturer at Marang Lutheran Theological Seminary in Rustenburg in 1980 and as a senior lecturer at Unisa in 1981. Maimela was the first Black lecturer working at the Faculty of Theology; he lectured in Systematic Theology and with Bonganjalo Goba became the second Black lecturer at the Faculty in Practical Theology. In 1994, Maimela was appointed as the first Black Vice-Principal at Unisa (Landman 2010, 51) and held this position for nine years until 2002. It was very rare for a Black person to be appointed to this position under the predominant leadership of White academics. This was a huge achievement for Maimela, his family, and Lutherans, and one to be celebrated. His services at Unisa involved not only liberating and transforming it but Africanising and decolonising it (Mashabela 2008). His passion for political activism was to Africanise Unisa from a human rights perspective without fear of an entrenched Whiteness ideology at Unisa. Unisa will not be truly African unless it transforms and liberates itself from being a Western university to becoming a truly African university.

Maimela worked closely with Takatso A. Mofokeng, an editor, as associate editor of the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, which was published by the Black Theology Project as a forum. The forum was a platform for the critical analysis of theological ideas and "a contribution to the development of Black Theology in South Africa and elsewhere" (Mofokeng and Maimela 1992, i). The editorial board of the journal was led by Black theologians Itumeleng J. Mosala, Buti Tlhagale, Lebamang Sebidi, and Mokgethi Motlhabi (Mofokeng and Maimela 1992, i). Maimela was a skilled writer who wrote extensively on theological and ethical issues as well as Black Theology and African Theology that were human rights centred. This is the calibre of Black theologian South Africa and Africa needs, even in the current context. Black Theology and its forum were a human rights project for Black people to liberate and transform themselves from the oppressive spiritual, political and socio-economic forms of apartheid. The identified Black theologians oversaw the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* to promote justice. It was the journal of liberation, truth and reconciliation designed to transform South Africa into a human equal space. This journal has been silent for a long time. It needs to be revitalised and led by Black theologians to address issues of unemployment, corruption, illegal immigration and occupation, and poverty in South Africa. The journal is the baton to address South African realities in the 21st century.

Maimela Supports and Introduces Womanist Theology at UNISA

Womanist/Feminist Theology is the greatest theology, not only for liberation but as an advocate for human rights. It calls for the equality of women and men's spiritual and socio-economic justice; a theology that reclaims women and men as both created equally in the image of God. Molobi (2010, 49–50) states: "Maimela was a gender

sensitive scholar and perhaps this was largely due to his ministerial work. This shows that Maimela's commitment to an influence in all areas of life, including gender, cannot be downplayed." Maimela was concerned about women's issues in the context of Black Theology in South Africa. Furthermore, Landman (2010, 56) points out:

In 1982/3 he introduced feminist theology at Unisa. Indeed, his honours class in feminist theological studies included women who later became prominent South African feminists: these included Denise Ackermann, who later joined the University of the Western Cape; Marie-Henry Keane, later Professor of Systematic Theology at Unisa; and Daphne Madiba, who argued for the ordination of women in the Lutheran Church, where she later served as an ordained pastor.

Maimela is identified as a holistic political activist as he introduced and taught Womanist Theology so that female students could become their own liberators and write their own theology. He also taught and empowered men with Womanist Theology to support women and change a negative perspective about women in the church and society. Maimela introduced Womanist/Feminist Theology at Unisa to prepare women for women's liberation studies and to transform South African communities. As the first Black scholar to introduce Womanist Theology at Unisa, he was able to transform Unisa academics to follow in teaching central gender and womanist studies. For Maimela to teach Womanist Theology at Unisa was a historic, defining moment for Unisa, giving it a new look and renewal in an academic space.

A Lutheran Pastor and the South African Council of Churches

From the late 1970s onwards, Maimela and others were requested by churches and the South African Council of Churches to present profound studies and analyses of socio-political justice in response to the South African crisis (Maimela 1980, 7). On issues of socio-political justice and ecumenical engagement, Maimela understood well that to be a pastor was to be a pastor of socio-political justice. As a pastor in the Lutheran Church, he was also a political activist because of the conviction he had from the liberating God.

Maimela Challenges the Identity and Quality of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa

In the second General Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa held at Lobethal on 8–12 December 1980, Maimela presented a Bible study on "The Church, its Officers and its Needs Today":

It is surprising that even among Lutherans, both clergy and laity, the church is often confused with the building which houses the church. Because of these confusions, it is not less important that as we deliberate about the church today in South Africa, we should be clear about what we are talking about. The church of Jesus Christ cannot be identical with buildings that house the church, neither can it be identical with its employees such as bishops, deans, pastors, etc. For the church of Christ is more than

these: it is, as our confessions make clear, an assembly, a gathering of people of God for the purpose of hearing the proclaimed gospel. (Maimela (1980, 1)

Maimela challenged the second General Assembly of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa in 1980 to move away from the misleading ideas of councils claiming to be the church, and people naming the building and bishops, deans and pastors as the church. For him, the church was clearly defined according to the confessional teachings of the Lutheran Church as an assembly of God where the gospel was preached, and sacraments were administered according to God's calling. The identity and equality of what the church was had to be clear to the people of God in the Lutheran Church. This means that bishops in this church were challenged to revisit the doctrine of ecclesiology and to teach their pastors to further teach their congregations.

Disappointingly, this confusion regarding the church identity still prevails, even in the 21st century. Lutheran bishops no longer organise refresher courses or in-service training for deans and pastors to continuously train their congregations about the church and contextual theology. In this 21st century, Maimela has challenged both the Lutheran Church and ecumenical organisations such as the South African Council of Churches and others to revisit and teach the true identity of the church of God.

In 1980, Maimela (1980, 2) further stated: "Unfortunately, in our over-centralisation and over-management, people have come to believe that it is to pastors, deans and bishops that the responsibility of winning the world for Christ has been given." He argued that the task of the church was not only for church officials, councils and assemblies, but for church members as well, who had been called to serve in the Lutheran theological practice of the priesthood of all believers.

The point here is that Maimela was concerned about the clergy being the only people who could lead and manage the church alone. This is problematic theologically because the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is being misused and violated by the clergy and the people of God. Thus, the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa is called to renew itself by bringing its original living identity of the ministry of the priesthood of all believers, as both clergy and laity are called in service of the community. It is necessary to assign individuals according to their endowed gifts and training in order to serve the church meaningfully and productively, as well as the community for socio-political justice.

Architects of Poverty of African Pastors: Why the Church Denies a Self-supporting Ministry

At the same second General Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa in 1980, Maimela raised a serious concern about architects of poverty of African pastors in the Lutheran Church:

The office of the pastor is perhaps the most important in the church because without preaching, the flock would starve and go astray. Also, without habitual absolution of sin, all salvation might be lost, because none of us is a saint. They perform their work with efficiency on behalf of and for the benefit of the congregations. It is unfortunate that most church members often forget that these dedicated men and women are carrying a task delegated to them by the church itself. In fact, they would go to such an extent that these church workers, their very own workers, should not complain because they have been called. They forget that these church workers are not called to suffer hunger and starvation, to sacrifice their children, and to walk in tatters but are called to preach the gospel, administer sacraments and to unburden sins of their fellow believers. (Maimela (1980, 3–4)

He was very concerned that church members created an impression that pastors must not complain about their working conditions and economic situation because of their calling. In his opinion, church members were architects of the poverty of African pastors in the Lutheran Church. This showed a lack of solidarity by church members to financially support church workers. Church members had to be dynamic and create better working conditions and economic situations for church workers so that these workers could enjoy working for the church. It was the duty of the church to provide sustainable economic justice to its workers.

This state of affairs can be applied to churches and church workers today under Covid-19, who are seriously under threat. Pillay analyses this as follows:

The Covid-19 challenge is unprecedented. It has caused enormous trauma, disrupted economies, social life, mass transportation, work and employment, supply chains, leisure, sport, international relations, academic programmes; literally everything. Churches and religious communities have not been spared; they have been severely affected and, in all likelihood, permanently transformed by the pandemic. The new landscape calls for both resilience and adaptation, embracing new ways of doing things and of being church. (Pillay 2020, 266)

The church is called to renew itself and implement new things as it responds to the unplanned event of Covid-19. The church responds to Covid-19 as a process of unending renewal in being a spiritual institution. Its spirituality, economy, education and theology are affected by this pandemic. Thus, the church has a momentous task to effectively rebuild its ecclesiology in service of the people of God. Therefore, Maimela's views about the negative economy of the church are still relevant in this new era of Covid-19. Even in the 21st century, the issues of the working conditions and economic situation of pastors are still a challenge, as the majority of South African churches have not prioritised or discussed these issues. Churches have not increased the salaries of pastors for a decade, if not longer. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed many churches that are underpaying their church workers, and paying their pastors exploitative salaries. Under the Covid-19 era, pastors have started caucus forums and proposed to establish unions within the church to challenge their churches to address the issue of exploitative working conditions and salaries; other pastors have moved to

other places of work. Even those pastors who were supportive of an exploitative church system have also joined the caucus forums and left the church for greener pastures (Mashabela 2020b).

The point here is that pastors are reactionary to their churches, particularly under Covid-19 constraints. The majority of churches have experienced a serious financial crisis, which could have been avoided even before the start of Covid-19. The sad part is that pastors are now receiving an increasingly inadequate salary. An unhealthy church economic system is unsustainable and has no authentic theological basis; there is, therefore, an exodus of the clergy, even among those who were supportive of this unhealthy system. The church is in serious crisis because even its membership is dwindling under Covid-19, and members have moved away from their affiliated churches to other churches that are surviving under the pandemic. The church is urgently in need of pastors who can adapt to the political activist and prophetic ministry of Maimela for church justice and socio-economic justice.

At the second General Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa in 1980, on the liberating of church members, Maimela (1980, 4) further stated:

They need to learn that free lunches are not available in the church of Christ today in South Africa, because the church is themselves not Berlin Mission, not American Board, not Hermannsburg, not Swedish Missions. Our churches need to accept their responsibilities now, they need to choose between quality ministry and bad ministry by willing to dig deep into their pockets. A progressive de-centralization of church machinery might help in this regard. It is time that parishes or certain circuits are respected and are allowed to be adults to run their affairs, merely using diocesan, national offices as resources. It is time that liberation is granted to our congregations as much as it's time for the Pastors Liberation Movement so as to win their freedom from being abused simply because they have agreed to serve on behalf of their fellows.

Maimela challenged church members to learn that Lutheran missions were no longer funding the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, as they used to. Interestingly, Maimela challenged church members to urgently accept the responsibility of funding and running their church. The parishes or circuits needed to be given an opportunity to create sustainable funding in consultation with their diocesan and national offices. The church members were called to repent and transform their church's economic structure of missionary dependence.

It is highly problematic theologically that Lutheran churches in South Africa, for decades, have depended on a missionary economy and inherited a church structure that is problematic in an African context. While African pastors need to liberate themselves from the church economics, it is urgent that church members economically liberate themselves first. Maimela's view on church economic transformation in 1980 still applies, even in the 21st century, where the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa is called to address and transform the socio-economic situation of the clergy. This is not a

Lutheran problem only, as most churches in South Africa still pay their clergy an inadequate salary. In church assemblies and conferences, ecumenical organisations seldom have discussions or papers presented on the economic situation of church workers. Academic theological conferences are also silent on this matter. The church and academic spaces are called to respect and address the challenges of church workers as a human right.

Regarding other aspects of the needs of church workers, Maimela (1980, 10) stated: “[The Evangelical Lutheran Council of Southern Africa’s] General Assembly as the super parliament is too big to hear individual cases that reach the Church Council. It needs a smaller body to deliberate issues of dispute.” He raised this issue on the premise that the council was already in a crisis of litigations, and bishops and council leaders were involved in dealing with cases of pastors who were not represented or treated well. He was of the opinion that an independent body had to treat matters of church workers with dignity and uphold human rights. He further stated that Anglican and Roman Catholic churches and other Lutheran churches had “ecclesiastical courts to hear cases and appeals” (Maimela 1980, 10). The point here is that Maimela challenged the church to address the issues of church workers with fairness and justice to avoid secular courts and legal costs, as the church already struggled to pay its workers decent salaries.

In 1981, Maimela was invited by the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa, which was facing a serious challenge in meeting its church demands and church workers. His topic was “The New Testament Forms of Ministry and the Lutheran Concept of Ministry.” Maimela (1982, 121) explained:

This topic, which I have been requested to discuss, has been dictated by an acute awareness that the traditional ministry of the word we have inherited from our mother church is seriously inadequate to meet the needs of our situation. For we know too well that we neither have the financial resources nor the “man-power” to make this idea of one full-time pastor for every congregation a practical reality. We have to aim at what is possible and practical, we have to create practical alternatives. It is in this connection that some among us have been toying around with the idea of part-time ministry as a practical option in our circumstances. (Maimela 1982, 121)

The above discussion notes that the Federation faced a serious challenge in paying its pastors an adequate salary and sustaining the inherited Western Lutheran Church tradition of a full-time pastor for every congregation. Maimela proposed that to close this gap, Federation member churches had to introduce part-time ministry as a practical alternative. The question remained whether this proposal of Maimela would solve the problem of the Federation form of ministry or would create uncertainty regarding church unity and service. What was critical for the Federation was thinking and acting to provide a solution for its congregations. Maimela (1982, 131) further stated: “Each congregation can easily be provided with its own pastor who is self-supporting, and could more effectively touch the lives of the congregations, and effectively minister the means of grace, unlike our present over-taxed structure.” In reflection here, Maimela

was convinced that part-time ministry would reduce the financial burden of the church and resolve the shortage of pastors to serve congregations. This was central to the life of congregations in becoming more effective in responding to the needs of the community as well.

Maimela (1982, 132) further believed that only full-time pastors should be appointed as parish pastors and professional theologians of the church, while self-supporting pastors should serve as assistants. He further said that in large congregations with more than one self-supporting pastor, one of them could be appointed as a parish pastor for a limited period, and simultaneously a full-time pastor could supervise the self-supporting pastors.

It is problematic theologically to make a full-time pastor a supervisor of self-supporting pastors. The proposals of Maimela create the impression that full-time pastors are superior to self-supporting pastors. Surely congregations would view self-supporting pastors as inferior because they are assistant pastors. This ministry method will cripple the future of ordained ministry in Southern African Lutheran Churches. Federation member churches have a collective responsibility to treat full-time and self-supporting pastors as equals in serving and holding church positions. This will sustain the unity of Federation congregations.

Maimela Challenges the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa to be involved in Socio-political Justice and Teaching

At the same Lutheran General Assembly, Maimela was of the view that the church had to be involved in the fight against apartheid in South Africa:

The question is whether our traditional ministry is adequate to meet the challenges of the day, which the church of Christ in South Africa faces? I do not believe so. So, we need to evolve new ministries and offices to meet the challenges adequately. One important office we need to create [is] a watchdog office dealing with justice and social issues. [In] our general assemblies we do not only deal with budgets and private or spiritual matters, but make great pronouncements on great social issues, on important moral and justice issues, on economic matters, military matters, on school boycotts, on (guerrilla) warfare on our borders, on education, on poverty etc. All these need planning, “man”-power and home-work. (Maimela 1980, 5–6)

Maimela was concerned that the church should not reduce itself to preaching the gospel without addressing socio-political issues. He challenged the church to form ministries that addressed economic and socio-political situations in South Africa. These had to include the development of studies in ministry that equipped the church to deal with the daily challenges of apartheid. The church was called to the ministry of socio-political justice in service of the people.

Maimela further asserted:

It seems that [the Federation] should establish the department of studies, manned with men and women who are to devote fulltime work to [studying] issues that confront our church. We need teachers who sort out issues presented to them by prophetic ministry, teachers who will evaluate positions and doctrines, and offer our leadership position papers. (Maimela 1980, 7–8)

Maimela said that the church was underutilising the Lutheran theological seminaries; thus, seminaries had to be included in providing leadership on issues that confronted the church. He suggested a church department of studies, prophetic ministry and theological training institution to enable the church to respond to South African challenges effectively. For him, this department of studies had to be led by teachers who would thoroughly study the presented issues. They were expected to give a critical analysis and offer the church leadership position papers.

Conclusion

In this article, Maimela is presented as a student political activist and more. He developed and continued to uphold the character of a political activist in the South African context. This political activist calling must be visible in the church and society in service of the people. The church is also called to exercise its role to protect its workers' rights and be the proactive community of God regarding socio-political justice. In the 21st century, the church must be well grounded in what socio-political justice is from an ecumenical perspective to make public and prophetic theology more visible.

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