

The Role of the Church in Socio-Economic Transformation: Reformation as a Transformation Process

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Abstract

This paper consists of five parts. Firstly, a brief historical background of Reformation will be discussed as an exercise to remember Reformation. Secondly, we review the role of the ecumenical church (SACC) prior to democracy in South Africa. The purpose for focusing on the role of the church from this period is that it gives us a model to follow in our involvement in socio-economic transformation. Thirdly, the social and economic challenges facing the church and society in democratic South Africa will be discussed. Fourthly, we debate the role of the ecumenical church (SACC) in democratic South Africa. Fifthly, the article explores what role the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa (URCSA) is playing (descriptive) and ought to play (normative) through all her structures to transform the socio-economic situation in South Africa.

Keywords: church; society; economy; politics; transformation; Reformation

Introduction

This article will focus on the role of the church on socio-economic transformation, that is, what the church is doing or ought to do in order to impact changes on the socio-economic situation. The point of departure is a discussion on Reformation and its impact on people's lives. Furthermore, the socio-economic challenges in South Africa will be highlighted. The role of the church will be discussed from the ecumenical church (South African Council of Churches [SACC]) through to the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa (URCSA), and finally the role of ministers of the Word and sacrament as agents of change in the church and society. The research method employed in this paper is a qualitative research, where literature study, observation and document analysis are used.

Historical Background of Reformation and its Impact on Socio-Economic Transformation

The year 2017 marked a time when Christians across the globe celebrated the fact that the strength of Christian faith can transform the world. In 1517, the theologian and monk, Martin



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Luther, rediscovered the strength gained from God's compassionate love and justice. He passionately debated and transformed society and the world as thoroughly as he changed the churches. The Reformation in the 16th century (1517), of which we commemorated 500 years in 2017, was a wind of change in the ancient Roman Catholic Church. It was the second wave of division in the Catholic Church, after the division of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic Church in 1054. This section of the paper will focus on the (re)-membering of the 16th century Reformation pioneered by Martin Luther. We also need to appreciate the key principles of Reformation, as Martin Luther coined them in the 16th century, which are: Proclamation of the Word (Sola Scriptura); Priesthood of all believers (Socialisation); By Grace Alone (Sola Gratia); Faith Alone (Sola Fidea); Christian Scholarship.

These principles are much appreciated for the light they have given to the African people, to critically detect and examine these principles through their contextual lens. The most important of them all is the way these Reformers have liberated the Word of God from the hands of the ancient Roman Catholic Church Pope, who had authority over the Word of God. This access has given us the possibility to read and reread these texts from their context into our context.

What is Reformation? "Reformation means questioning the world as it is!" Reformation was not just a religious event; it had an impact on all areas of society, including education, science, economy, politics and health. Durand (2007, 129) reminds us that the Reformation was not without social, economic and political influence. Durand (2007, 129) states:

The sixteenth century was one of great complexity. The popular notion of this century as the period of great Reformation movement which, having started in Germany with Martin Luther, rapidly spread across the whole of Europe, is an over-simplification. There was not one but a plurality of reformations which interacted with each other. The nature of this variety of reform movements, despite their religious similarities, differed according to the geographical, local, political context within which they occurred. Historical, social, political and economic factors and influences played a far greater role in shaping the Protestant pluralism of Europe than is often suspected.

We need to remember that contextual factors have played a role in the formation of the Reformation movement. Hence, contextual factors need to be considered when one is worshipping within the Reformed tradition and living in a socio-economically deprived environment.

We need to remember that the Reformation is based on the Bible as the inspired Word of God, but this Bible as the inspired Word of God, was written in a different context, which we do not control. The fortunate part of it is that the very same God who has inspired the authors of the Bible to write his Word, has given us the Holy Spirit to illuminate us to understand the Word of God and to apply it in our own politico-socio-cultural-economic situation. The spirit of Reformation has influenced South African Christians in many ways.

As we celebrate 500 years of Reformation, together as Christians we can shape the world and society and commit ourselves to a life in fullness. In 500 years of Reformation history, Christians have learned that it is better to work with one another rather than against one another. We recall not only how people transformed the church and the world 500 years ago, but it also offers the opportunity to address important issues in our society, in discussion, in prayer for one another and at joint celebrations. In this joint celebration, it is important to address socio-economic issues that affect the church and society.

Role of the Ecumenical Church Prior to Democracy in South Africa

The church is one of the inter-societal components that provide society with “blueprints.” If there is a belief that the church should not be supplying society with “blueprints” it actually means that the church should stay away from political, social, economic and judicial issues. The very action would create a crisis of faith and the content of the gospel is then at risk. Critical questions to be asked are: Where in the world does the gospel then get implemented? If that is the situation, what happens in the deepest inside of the individual and his soul? What transpires when this individual starts speaking, acting and initiates action in politics, health, education, social development or economy? Should these actions not correspond with the gospel? Should this individual not follow the Lord in all His ways? Should that individual not express the spirit of Christ and his love in his deeds, which are then the “blueprints” of politics? It becomes clear that the structures of society, or “blueprints” or systems in social, economic and political matters should not only be tested from the “outside” of “politics” or judged “afterwards” by the church with the gospel, but that the gospel and its principles should be the norm, guide, basis and contents of people’s values in structuring society and its “blueprints” (Meyer 1991, 11).

According to Meyer (1991), the church should play a direct role in the structuring of a democratic South Africa, the Constitution, the economic system and the political processes. The church cannot become a party in society, a political party, an economic friend of economic principles, as it has a completely different nature. It is a body of Christ, which means that it is above “politics” while infiltrating politics completely with the love, principles, spirit and power of Christ. It does not take sides, except for the poor, oppressed and suffering; it takes sides in the sense of championing the poor regarding the gospel’s demands of change in structures towards justice, equality, peace, compassion, reconciliation and restitution (Meyer 1991, 11).

Furthermore, one cannot really give a clear-cut answer on whether the church in the apartheid era did play its role as the church, or if the church was more of a political party, or if the church was silent, except the Dutch Reformed Church, which was on the side of the regime. Some individuals from the different denominations were vocal and prophetic, the likes of Frank Chikane; Allan Boesak; Desmond Tutu; Khoza Mgojo; Beyers Naude; and Fr Smangaliso Mkhathshwa. It would be very interesting to engage in a further study to find out what were the resolutions of denominations, and if these individuals were carrying their images in the political space. This is supported by Meyer (1991), who states that when the

South African situation and church involvement in socio-economic issues are considered prior to democracy, one can point out that society and the church were in such crises that the church hardly began its task of involvement. This in fact applies only to churches which shared the view that the church has a Christian responsibility to apply the gospel directly in politics. These churches hardly began involvement, as they were busy assisting with crises in the church and society. One thinks here of the SACC and its struggle in assisting the oppressed and poor in South Africa through the Kagiso Trust. Jonker (1991, 31) argues in line with Meyer:

In abnormal times, when normal political action is made impossible by unjust laws, the banning of political organizations and suspension of democratic processes, the church will have to step into the void with its political prophesy, to take up the cause of victims of injustice. That is also what the Biblical prophets would have done. But that is not the normal task of the church. When things return to normal and the democratic process is coming off the ground, the church should return to its normal task and leave political action to the political parties. The church should proclaim God's demands of justice, fairness and protection of the poor. The church should also not be afraid to criticize unjust laws and a specific political model.

The church, while busy with such abnormal tasks, played a vital role as an awareness institution, through its involvement and implementation of the gospel in society. The initiatives of the church during that time were in the field of black theology, liberation theology, contextual theology and publications like the *Kairos* and *Damascus Documents*. The Christian Institute—before it was banned—made a vital and lasting contribution to society in preparing the election manifesto, *A Message to the People of South Africa*, by publishing the series, *A Study Project of Christianity in an Apartheid Society* and its Christian witness on politics in its Christian Journal, *Pro Veritate*. The Rustenburg Conference (1990) suggested that churches in democratic South Africa should urgently and immediately continue with a similar institute, by involving all churches with the comprehensive task to apply the gospel in all areas of society (Meyer 1991).

Prior to democratic South Africa, the ecumenical church (SACC) and individuals from different denominations were actively involved in political transformation of South Africa. Jonker (1991) speaks of criticising the unjust laws and specific political models. In democratic South Africa, the church should be an active role player; criticising and complementing the government on socio-economic challenges in society.

Social and Economic Challenges in Democratic South Africa

The role of the church prior to democracy in South Africa was more on the strategies to achieve a free, just and equal society. The dawn of democracy arrived with its own challenges—the major challenge being socio-economic hardship. One cannot discuss the socio-economic challenges without referring to the broader thinking of South African politico-socio-economic development. Schoeman (2011, 227) indicates that economics and politics cannot be separated; hence he refers to “political economy.” He further refers to political economy as a link and the relationship between politics and economics within a

domestic economy. The economy of a country is not something apart from its political realities, but is in fact deeply influenced by politics. In turn, the economy influences and sometimes determines politics. Political economy gives birth to macro-economic policy; and within macro-economic policy there is an inter-play of politics, economics and social issues. Macro-economic policy refers to the way in which a government orders and impacts the state's economy. This policy has a bearing on the social sphere of a society, as it also covers aspects such as employment creation, social welfare services and expenditure (Schoeman 2011, 227). According to Schoeman (2011, 225), democratic South Africa inherited politico-socio-economic challenges that are characterised by the following three major aspects:

- A profound and racially skewed distribution of wealth.
- A typical developing economy with problems of poverty and oversupply of unskilled labour.
- A country with a broadly/narrowly diversified economic base, depending on which economies it is compared with.

It is in connection to these characteristics that one can identify the main politico-socio-economic challenges facing the church and society in the early years of the 21st century. Schoeman (2011, 226–227) identifies five main political and economic challenges, highlighted below.

The key challenge is for South Africans to decide on a specific content of the definition of the term “development.” Schoeman (2011, 226) indicates:

A first and overarching challenge, if not imperative, is twofold. South Africans will have to decide on the specific content of the definition of development and will critically analyse the extent to which current economic policies and programmes are compatible with development objectives and how viable these development objectives are within the context of South Africa's position in and dependence on the global economy.

According Gutierrez (1988), the term “development” is contextual and situational, hence he indicates that the concept “development” seems tentatively to have synthesised current objectives for more humane living conditions. The concept itself is not new, but its contemporary utilisation in social sciences is new, for it responds to a different set of issues, which have emerged recently. Indeed, the old wealth-poverty antinomy no longer expresses all the problems and current objectives of humankind. The origin of the concept “development” is, in a sense, negative. It is considered to have appeared as the antinomy to the concept underdevelopment, which expresses the situation and anguish of the poor countries, compared with rich countries. The concept of “development” has no clear definition, since there are many ways to regard it. Development is a total social process, which includes economic, social, political and cultural aspects. This notion stresses the interdependence of the different factors, that is, advances in one area imply advances in all of them and conversely, the stagnation of one retards the growth of the rest. Development should attack the root causes of the challenges and among them the deepest is economic, social, political, and cultural dependence of some countries upon others, an expression of the

domination of some social classes over others (Gutierrez 1988, 14–17). There is an agreement between Gutierrez (1988) and Schoeman (2011) that development is more than economic growth; however, development is multi-dimensional. In this light, it is important that South Africans should decide on the specific content of a definition of the term “development” in order to address socio-economic challenges.

In order for the church and society to be actively involved in addressing socio-economic issues, there should be a clear understanding between policy instruments and objectives. The lack of clear knowledge on these two concepts might bring confusion, because the country might economically derail if the two concepts are not clarified in order for people to have a better understanding of these words. Schoeman (2011, 226) indicates:

At the theoretical level, it is also important to distinguish between policy instruments and objectives, as confusion between these two may inhibit economic growth for development. An example would be that of privatisation. Is it an objective or a policy instrument? If the former, it means that distribution of wealth created by implementing a privatisation strategy is not necessarily taken into account and therefore no guarantee that such wealth will “trickle down” to benefit the broad population or those previously excluded from full access to the market. If the latter, it would mean that privatisation is linked to specific objectives and the way in which such strategy is implemented becomes a potential for redistribution through access to possible wealth creation.

This challenge requires a deeper knowledge of political economy for the non-governmental sector to intervene in South African socio-economic challenges. The first two main challenges are at the level of policy-making, where the church should create mechanisms on how to infiltrate this level to influence the decisions on policies.

A further challenge that has a direct impact on the lives of the majority of South Africans is more on overcoming the poverty cycle. This challenge has a bearing on many socio-economic ills like family fabric; national division; human trafficking; xenophobia; Afro-phobia; health issues; unemployment; landlessness; corruption; and crime. Schoeman (2011, 226) indicates that an additional challenge closely linked to the above, is for South Africa and Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries to overcome the brutal cycle of poverty. Normally presented as four variables continuously impacting on and reinforcing each other, are low savings and investment; low capital accumulation; low productivity; and low average income. The existence of this cycle is continuing and deepening over time to the “super constraint” of unsuitable policies. This means that to overcome this debilitating cycle of poverty—and with it the dangers to domestic and regional order, stability, peace and security—is fundamentally a political issue. The role of the state and the methodology and attitude of government, together with macro-economic policies, become critical in alleviating poverty and inequality and in implementing sustainable growth and development strategies. The first two challenges have a bearing on this brutal cycle of poverty, because inappropriate policies have led to this cycle (Schoeman 2011, 226). Defining “development” in a particular context and clarifying policy objectives as well as policy instruments should be regarded as very important to address this challenge.

An additional major challenge is the lack of implementation of policies to break out of the poverty cycle. Schoeman (2011) argues that it is in the jurisdiction of escaping out of the poverty cycle where capacity, political will, assets and the level of skill—not only in formulating policy, but most importantly the implementation of it—become crucial. It is very important to consider that on this challenge we are dealing with an interface between the economic area and the more encompassing political and social areas; thus the relationship between government, business sector and organised labour will largely determine what is to be done (Schoeman 2011, 226). In Schoeman's argument, he did not include the religions forum or church as a role player, since there are churches all over the country, unlike labour movements and business chambers. Furthermore, Schoeman (2011, 226) argues that:

Although this debate is of great relevance to the future performance of the South African economy, it is but one part of the much bigger and long-term challenge of promoting economic growth to be utilised in developing human resources with a view to genuine economic development. It remains to be seen whether government can shift the focus of the economic debate from one between business and labour, with lip service paid to the fourth chamber, to a debate that will take the latter fully into account. Since early 2005 there has been an apparent shift by the government in the direction of a much greater emphasis on poverty reduction, with the state taking a leading role.

Schoeman (2011) argues in line with Terreblanche (2002) when he refers to the debate between government, labour, and business on poverty alleviation as lip services paid to the fourth chamber. Terreblanche (2002) argues that business played a major role in creating poverty in the apartheid era; the converse is that the very same business needs to play a role in poverty alleviation in the democratic era. Terreblanche (2002, 143) states:

In its *Recommendations on Business* the TRC makes an appeal on business to play a voluntary role in compensating the blacks for the disadvantages of apartheid. In par. 159 (vol. 4, Ch. 2) the TRC says that business could and should play an enormously creative role in the development of new reconstruction and development programmes. From a moral point of view, these kinds of requests have a positive ring to them. What should be remembered, however, is that the exploitation of blacks did not happen voluntarily, but was very much *compulsory and systemic*. It was based on an economic and political system embedded in the network of compulsory legislation and justified by ideologies that were propagated as self-evident truths. To expect that business will be prepared to compensate the blacks voluntarily and to the necessary degree for injustices committed towards the majority of them for almost a century, is not only too idealistic, but rather naïve. To give businesses the opportunity to pay-off their "apartheid debt" through charity, will boil down to an opportunity to let them off the hook rather cheaply.

Schoeman (2011) and Terreblanche (2002) suggest that policies should be designed and implemented. The government needs to regulate the role of the business sector in poverty alleviation. Local businesses need to contribute towards poverty reduction and alleviation as a long-term goal, rather than seeking international intervention in the form of a Chinese model of state intervention in economy.

The Chinese high-growth, government-led economic model has endorsed China to implement a major social and economic transformation strategy, based on the expectations that are markedly different from the *Washington Consensus* that informed South Africa's Gear policy

(Schoeman 2011, 227). The expectation is that the economic model will benefit South Africans, while in essence it will benefit the Chinese government and its people. The Chinese government depends on capitalism, but it is guided by a state constantly aware of the need to raise living standards and the quality of life for hundreds of millions of Chinese people. International politics informed us that one country couldn't assist the other without benefiting enormously from that relationship; it is generally known that China is one of the most largely-populated countries in the world. Frankel (1969) argues that when the country or government is incapable to find economic employment for all its citizens, a country may try to conquer (conflict) relatively empty territories to settle their citizens, or arrange for peaceful (cooperation) migration of its population surplus (Frankel 1969, 213). The Chinese high growth, government-led economic model might be operating at the level of cooperation, while South Africa is at the losing side of economic output. Mutually advantageous trade appears together with thinly hidden economic exploitation. Most economic and social issues thus require a fundamental rethinking of the nature of the boundaries between domestic and international politics.

Despite this intervention, there was a concern about the economic growth that is incapable of addressing unemployment in South Africa. In this sense almost 50 per cent of the budget was allocated to social services with the poorest fifth of the population receiving two-thirds of their income from social grants (Schoeman 2011, 227). Terreblanche (2012, 105) does not agree with the reduction of poverty through a social and welfare policy framework, as he further argues that social policies have failed miserably to alleviate poverty in South Africa. The South African social and welfare policy framework has not accomplished real socio-economic transformation, wealth redistribution or eradication of poverty. State transfers only provide assistance to South Africa to live from hand to mouth. South African democratic macro-economic policies have generated only limited economic growth, while resulting in significant job losses and raising socio-economic inequalities.

These major challenges are just too serious, but not too difficult to be addressed by any state, if all role players are participating in socio-economic transformation. The large and widely-spread stake-holder is the church, which accounts for more than 80 per cent of the South African population. The ecumenical church needs to empower its member churches in order to play a major role in socio-economic transformation. The church, prior to democratic South Africa, has provided the “blueprints” for the church in democratic South Africa in terms of its involvement in socio-economic transformation. The new challenges demand the church to design new strategies to address them. These challenges are categorised into two categories, namely theoretical and practical challenges. The theoretical challenges need academic involvement. The following are theoretical challenges:

- Deciding on the content of the definition of the term “development” in our context. (Clarifying policy instruments and policy objectives.)
- Impact of international politics on socio-economic transformation. (Role of China in South African political economy.)

The above challenges, that are more academic, will need a mixture of theory and praxis; there is a wide opportunity for church academics to engage in doing theology in South Africa to assist the church to play a vital role in socio-economic transformation (Modise 2015, 13). Furthermore, Modise (2015, 13), quoting Hall (2010), indicates:

Institutions of higher of education are called upon to demonstrate social responsibility and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes. Institutions of higher learning comprise of people, meaning students and academics, who need to be engaged in this initiative ... that need to effectively utilise this opportunity to do theology within communities by translating academic writings into action that will assist the communities to be liberated from all constraints of life.

This exercise can assist churches to use their own academics to study, exegete and analyse the term “development” in a South African context, in order to assist South Africans to decide on the content of the definition of the term “development” in our context. It is also their duty to clarify what the policy objectives and policy instruments are so that they can be used correctly. The following are more practical challenges that can be approached practically by the church:

- The lack of implementation of policies to break out of the poverty cycle.
- To overcome the brutal cycle of poverty normally presented as four variables continuously impacting on and reinforcing each other: low savings and investment; low capital accumulation; low productivity; and low average income.

The church should play an effective role in addressing these challenges; to effectively use all its resources—including human resources from the academic sphere up to the labour market. The role of the SACC in democratic South Africa will be evaluated in terms of its policies and participation.

Role of the Ecumenical Church (SACC) on Socio-Economic Transformation in the Democratic Era

The SACC and all churches in democratic South Africa are challenged to carry on the legacy of the ecumenical church of the apartheid era, by starting Christian institutes to continue their involvement in society. The SACC is mandated by its constitutional objective principle 3.1, which states:

The principle objective of the council is: to give expression of the Lordship of Christ over every aspect and area of human life by promoting the spiritual, social, intellectual and physical welfare of all people. (SACC Constitution 2007)

This objective opens doors for the SACC to play a vital role in socio-economic transformation in South Africa, because the objective speaks of every aspect and area of human life. The 1994 election and deployment of different people to participate in governance have compromised prominent church leaders¹ to politics.

¹ It is worth noting that the SACC was once captured by the state through government deployment of prominent role players in the SACC in the likes of Frank Chikane, Fr Smangaliso Mkhathshwa; Allen Boesak; Desmond Tutu and many more. This capture has resulted in the silence of the SACC for some years after the establishment of democratic South Africa.

In the early years of democracy, the church played a role of consultation, conferences and publication on socio-economic issues, in order to make an informed contribution to the government of the day on socio-economic matters like land and poverty issues. The outstanding involvement of the church during the early years of democracy was the involvement of the church in the discussion around land dispossession and restitution of land. During November 1997, the SACC, jointly with the National Land Committee, organised a conference to address the effective use of church land. The active participation of the church on this conference has informed the government on how church land and land in general can be used. The outcome of this conference was the publication of a document titled, *The Church Land Policy Framework* and the book titled, *Church, Land and Poverty: Community Struggles, Land Reform and the Policy Framework on Church Land* (Gillan 1998, i). This was the demand of Rev. Dr Khoza Mgojo from the Rustenburg conference in 1990, when he argued:

This conference should commit itself to repenting of past actions and develop strategies leading to restitution in one specific area, the question of land. The land must be returned to the people. It cannot be owned by the few and worked by the many. The land is the future, and without it, the majority of people will be lost. This may retard the process of reconciliation in our beloved country. The churches too must do something about the vast amount of land they control. Strategies to address the question of the re-distribution of the wealth of the country should be set up. This entails housing, health, education, schooling, wages, leisure facilities, employment, pensions and ecology. (Mgojo 1991, 23)

Mgojo (1991) has set the tone in his paper, titled "Vision" (at the conference of Rustenburg) for land and economy in democratic South Africa. The SACC, in 1997, carried the task by organising a conference on effective utilisation of church land; here it (SACC) intended to take a lead on land re-distribution, as Mgojo has envisaged in his address in Rustenburg on the last years of apartheid, to set a vision for the church and society in democratic South Africa. The result of landlessness is poverty in society.

There was also an academic exercise from South African theologians and their counter-parts in Europe (on church and development), which suggests ways and means to improve the socio-economic situation in southern Africa. The conference on church and development was organised by Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (EKD); the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC); the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the World Council of Churches. The ecumenical foundation of southern Africa played a major role in this conference. The product of this conference was the publication of a book titled, *Church and Development: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, by Koegelenberg (1992). In this publication there is an interesting chapter that describes what the SACC ought to do in democratic South Africa. Mthembu (in Koegelenberg 1992, 343) indicates:

We are challenged by developments in our country to move away from protest to development, from relief to participative development, from a self-centred approach to a people-centred approach. These facts prove beyond doubt that the role of NGOs, particularly church-related NGOs, is indispensable. In order to address current challenges in our country, the church is in a process of phasing out relief programmes ... The church has a strong base

through its constituencies and it is this force which will be a tool for development and change in our country.

Mthembu (in Koegelenberg 1992, 343) challenged the churches to be active participants in the socio-economic transformation; he encouraged the churches to be people-centred rather than self-centred, which is the current problem in South Africa in all occupations. The focus of the church during the late 1990s was on conferences and publication in order to provide information and strategies for the church in the democratic era.

It is already mentioned above that churches were involved in consultation, research, conferences and publication on socio-economic issues. The above outstanding involvement of the church on these issues was the land and development issues. The next outstanding role the church played was on economic justice. The Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET), as a SACC wing, has conducted many research studies in respect of issues of macro-economic policy, poverty eradication, the poverty reduction strategy programme, job creation, globalisation, business and the truth commission. This represents the church views on the impact of macro or micro-economic policies on people's livelihoods (Ndungane 2002). The result of these consultations, research and conferences conducted was the publication titled, *The Church's Search for Economic Justice* by Ndungane (2002). All these consultations, researches and conferences conducted are the evidence that the church played a vital role in socio-economic transformation in South Africa.

Currently, the SACC is busy reviving itself to the normal task of the church. The role of the church at this level is stated in the SACC's booklet, titled *Church in Action # the South Africa we pray 4* (Mpumlwana 2016). The following critical socio-economic challenges were identified on 16 December 2015 at the Regina Mundi Church in Soweto:

- Healing and reconciliation.
- The restoration of the family fabric.
- The destruction of poverty and inequality.
- Economic transformation.
- Anchoring democracy. (Mpumlwana 2016)

These five critical socio-economic challenges centred around one critical challenge, which is poverty and inequality. Mpumlwana (2016, 33–34) indicates:

Reconciliation devoid of socio-economic justice can only be but shallow, given the history of dispossession and material deprivation of the majority of South Africans (blacks). Lasting reconciliation requires redressing these historic injustices through inclusive and equitable economic development. Inequality persists at worrying levels with glaring imbalances in the distribution of income and opportunity across race and gender. A key leveller of opportunity is quality (decolonised) education. Young people face an uncertain future without adequate provision of quality education and requisite skills. Inequality has a huge social and economic cost as it leads to and sustains poverty, which is the result in the underhanded survival sub-culture of the poor people. In this regard the fact that the poorest people are black, yields a consequential racial profiling of the fruits of inequality and poverty—the fruits of family breakdown, crime and violence. Healing and reconciliation require dealing with poverty and

addressing the roots of material and opportunity inequalities (e.g. in health and education), taking into account the race and gender dimensions of inequality, as well as the impact of urban-rural split.

Racism, classism, ethnicism and xenophobia are all economic strategies to survive as a particular group of people, while others are impoverished. Poverty and inequality eradication speak to economic transformation, there is no economic transformation without poverty eradication. Anchoring democracy is to create a safe space for people to live in a country free of poverty and inequality. For the purpose of this article I will focus more on what the ecumenical church mandated the member churches to do in order to address these challenges. These mandates will be presented in a table form.

Table 1: The SACC Mandates for the Entire Church to Address Socio-Economic Challenges

THE SACC MANDATES FOR THE ENTIRE CHURCH TO ADDRESS SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES	
Healing and reconciliation	Affirming family life
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Safe space to open up woundedness 2. SADF conscripts—June 16 generation 3. Community dialogues to promote Social cohesion. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family audits 2. HIV and AIDS ministry 3. Absentee fathers 4. Wedding challenges 5. Shared parenting 6. Working conditions for parenting.
POVERTY AND INEQUALITY	
Poverty Eradication	Addressing Inequality
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programme provides for immediate needs (from the church food and clothes, etc.) 2. Basic needs (government and business through church agency: schooling, skills, internships, health, water, electricity, housing, identity documents, grants, jobs, etc.) 3. Long-term needs: potential change agents are identified within each family and assisted with access to educational and/or marketable skills development and finding productive activity. Partnership is created with government and business. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Addressing inequality in health and education <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) On equity in health: The heavy burden of disease and ill-health weighs heaviest on poor families (b) Equity in education: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Early childhood cognitive, numeracy and literacy development (ii) Culturing reading (iii) Grade schooling education support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner empowerment • Youth resource centre (iv) Christian teacher enlistment.
Financial Literacy Education	Nutrition and wellbeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life-long teaching of congregations and communities about family financial management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The church has to address the challenge of food and nutrition for poor people.
TRANSFORMING UNEQUAL ECONOMIC POWER RELATIONS	
ANCHORING DEMOCRACY	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The action process 2. Regional inputs 3. Business incubation and service hubs 4. Survival appreciation survey. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishment of unburdening panel 2. Support for electoral processes 3. Civic education 4. Ongoing monitoring analysis.

It is the intention of the SACC to play a major role in addressing these challenges and one of the strategies is to revive SACC provincial structures. There was a time when provincial structures were non-functional, due to lack of funds and energy from most members of the church at that level and mal-administration at the national office. These problems resulted in the SACC's retrenching and closing most of the provincial offices. The SACC has also realised that the national and provincial structures are in essence not the church, but policy-making structures, hence it intends to establish ward-based ministry as a vehicle for the implementation of policies. These ward-based ministries will be agents for socio-economic transformation in the name of the SACC and the entire South African community. Furthermore, the SACC is now at the strategic stage of transformation, where policies are drafted, advocacy and campaigns are conducted to member churches and church leaders (National Church Leaders' Forum).

The role of the ecumenical church has been discussed in length in the above arguments. It is now important to focus on the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) as the church of the Belhar Confession. The church ought to live and practise its confession.

The Role of URCSA in Socio-Economic Transformation

In terms of the Belhar Confession, URCSA should be engaged in service to God, one another and the world. This type of service is stated in its church order in articles 4 and 5, as will be discussed below.

URCSA exists as a legal person in its meeting, namely the church council, presbytery, regional synod and the general synod, each being the legal owner of its property and funds and having the right to legal action in civil law. These legal persons have the obligation to serve the society at their respective levels. The most instrumental of the four levels is the congregation that is more close to the people, where the entire church needs to serve. The congregation has the following responsibility towards God, society and the physical-organic environment. The Church Order of URCSA (2012, 16) states the responsibility of the congregation in article 4, which is that the congregation forms a community of believers in a particular place to serve God, one another and the world. Service to God has a bearing on the whole life of the congregation and therefore includes service to one another and the world (URCSA Church Order 2012, 16).

This service to God, one another and the world is evident in the actions of URCSA as reported to the General Synod of Okahanja, Namibia 2012. This evidence is found in the agenda of the General Synod of Okahanja, Namibia 2012 in the report of *Core Ministry for Service and Witness*. The following projects can be viewed as the pilot study that needs to challenge URCSA to engage more on socio-economic transformation:

Table 2: Development projects

The social development projects	Healthy promotion projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water project • Orphaned and vulnerable children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-based care • Prevention of curable and incurable disease. • Substance abuse.
Economic development projects	Educational development project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job creation • Income-generated project • Funeral parlour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill development • Day care centres • Training of people.

These projects are in one or two regional synods; the challenge is how URCSA should motivate its individual members, local congregations, presbyteries and regional synods to participate in these projects in a way that the church contributes positively and evenly on socio-economic transformation. However, this is more descriptive in approach; what is important for URCSA is normative approach (what URCSA *ought to do*). As already indicated in the discussion on SACC mandates which see poverty alleviation as the central problem that needs to be addressed, URCSA ought to address the transformation of the mind. The church within its mandates (as stipulated in article 5) needs to emphasise article 5.2, which states:

Instruction: In addition to instruction through the Word during the service of worship, baptised members and other persons who wish to make a public profession of faith shall be instructed in the Word of God and the teaching (doctrine) of the Church. There shall also be ongoing instruction of all practicing members in ways determined by each congregation according to its own circumstances. (URCSA Church Order 2012)

The role that the church ought to play in socio-economic transformation is the instructional (empowering) role, where the church organises workshops, seminars and conferences on socio-economic challenges and how to address them. The Core Ministry for Congregational Ministry (CMCM) and Core Ministry for Service and Witness (CMSW) need to run these workshops specifically on parenting, leadership training, skills development, adult-based education, healthy family life, moral regeneration (CMCM), economics, politics, human rights, media and civil society in the form of poverty alleviation (non-formal education for survival). URCSA is best positioned in terms of human resources to perform these duties. There are students and retired professionals in different fields to facilitate these workshops, training and seminars. For example, students of economics, political science and education together with theologians in different congregations should be used for empowering communities. Samson, Mac Quene and Van Niekerk (2002, 70) argue:

The education potential of university students in the community should be harnessed in terms of a volunteer programme. For example, business students can teach basic accounting or economic literacy courses to enhance the chances of success or even create the economic opportunity for the poor to empower themselves. Students can run workshops during their holidays or assist in child-minding or youth programmes for children on holidays. [Each one teaches one.]

Furthermore, there are professional retirees within URCSA and communities who can be utilised effectively to empower people within the church and society, to address socio-economic challenges. Samson et al. (2002, 70) state that communities consist of retired professionals as human resources that can be used effectively in the church and society. Communities underestimate the human resources available, the so-called “grey power” in their midst. The harnessing of this power is authoritative in two respects: the youth can gain from the retirees’ years of experience in their workplaces and at the same time, one is teaching the youth to respect the experience of the senior citizen.

URCSA, as the church of the Belhar Confession, needs to stand where God stands; caring is one of the means of standing where God stands. Caring is the other role that URCSA ought to play in socio-economic transformation. This role is emphasised by article 5.3, *Care: There shall be mutual and communal caring for one another, both spiritually and physically* (URCSA Church Order 2012). There will be different levels of involvement for the church to care for its members and entire community. The Core Ministry for Service and Witness (CMSW) ought to have very strong policies that govern the institutions for relief and charity to alleviate poverty, as the short-term goal. This caring ought to be mutual and communal. Partners in this caring should both benefit from the process of caring and no one should be harmed, while at the same time it ought to be communal in nature. The actualisation of this role needs an integration of services and structures. Samson et al. (2002, 70) indicate:

There will be different levels of involvement, some church communities may not have financial resources, whereas other church communities may have the financial resources but little person-power. The emphasis should be on an integrated active approach within the church community. The silence of the poor should be met with the buzz of activity.

The caring process of this church should be more integrated in nature, where there is exchange of resources and knowledge, while caring for the poor and needy. In this instance the SACC proposed ward-based ministry, which will be the best model to follow in order for URCSA to play a vital role in caring for the poor and needy in the church and society. URCSA cannot walk alone; it will need other member churches of the SACC to address socio-economic challenges in society, because of the integrated approach to care for the poor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ministers of the Word are the main transformation actors in the whole theatre of socio-economic transformation, like Martin Luther and other Reformers have done to try to reform the church from inside. When we remember the 500 years of Reformation, the Reformed Churches with their own ministers of the Word need to play a vital role to transform the South African society for a better socio-economic life for all.

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