

## POWER, VIOLENCE AND THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEACE-BUILDING

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**ABSTRACT:** Our nations have exercised power in isolation through the elites. This use of power is often at the expense of the masses, thus leading naturally to the culture of violence. Moreover, in a time when the flagrant abuse of power has become evident in cruel violations of human right and dignity by insensitive regimes across Africa, the church appears powerless, and unable to assert its influence on the politico-religious landscape. The overwhelming reality of violence in all its manifestations presents a fundamental challenge to the centrality of peace as a defining theology of the church. The present paper seeks to address the centrality of peace in the church's mandate of changing the contemporary culture of violence and misuse of power in Africa. As a community that claims its origin in the coming of the Holy Spirit, the paper also asserts that the Church's motivation for peace should come from the biblical faith tradition – a tradition of God's option for the victims of power, the prophetic denunciation of injustice, Jesus' rejection of power that corrupts, and the witness of the early Christian communities as ones guided by alternative values and goals. By taking up the task of overcoming violence, churches and Christians make a common affirmation of their faith, share a common hope, and commit themselves to actively overcome all causes and forms of violence rooted in the manipulation of power.

**KEYWORDS:** Power, Violence, Peace Building, Christianity

### INTRODUCTION

Deenabandhu Manchala stresses that power, an essential factor in all dynamics of human interaction, is increasingly sought after and exercised today in ways that seem to pose serious challenges to the ethical integrity of our generation, with implications for the present and the future, the personal and the communal, and the local and the global. Churches need to recognize that the roots of violence lie in the way power is understood, exercised, feared, coveted and glorified by the perpetrators, victims and even spectators of violence.<sup>1</sup> As part of the world, churches have been guided by the dynamics of power,

<sup>1</sup> Deenabandhu Manchala, *Nurturing Peace: Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence* (Geneva: WCC Risk. 2006), 37-45.

cherishing and living with these orientations as well as ambiguities within and outside their realm. In spite of “the consciousness of the biblical models for a responsible use of power,”<sup>2</sup> instances of manipulation and misuse of power in the church and institutions both in the past as well as in the present are manifold.

Furthermore, Manchala notes that while this is so, the church in the twentieth century took its shape in a context of dominating yet changing power constellations. Its search for the unity of the church and of humanity has both echoed and challenged the dynamics of political and societal transformation. Manchala outlines two major phases.<sup>3</sup> He notes that in the first phase, ethical discussions were marked by the effort to interpret rapid social change. This implied a gradual shift of attention from the power of the state and government to the new forms of power related to technological development and their capacity to orient and implement decisions. It also acknowledged the emergence of the power of the people as a new reality. The second phase is in the context of the discussion on a just, participatory and sustainable society which upheld that the struggle for justice requires a new understanding and practice of the political order and the use of power. This implied an exploration of options which Christians and churches must use in their political witness and the biblical and theological bases for the use of power. These phases culminated in the world convocation on the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Seoul in 1990, which issued ten affirmations, the first of which was that “all exercise of power is accountable to God.”<sup>4</sup>

Today, the Church is confronted with the necessity to explore the means of bringing about a just, participatory and sustainable society in a globalized world with a new dialectic of power centres. Economic, military and political powers have each taken new shapes, necessitating the need for fresh analysis and theological reflection. The violence resulting from present global power constellations is evident in the injustice in the global market, the control of resources, knowledge and technology, which in turn are challenged by acts of terrorism, the privatization of power, the proliferation of weapons and means of destruction, and the weakening of effective state structures, even international ones such as the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this paper will make

<sup>2</sup> Konrad Raiser, “Rationale for a new ecumenical discourse on power” *Cret-Berard Report* (Geneva: WCC. 2009), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Keenabandhu Manchala, in Konrad Raiser, “*Nurturing Peace: Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence*”, 37-45.

<sup>4</sup> Raiser, “*Rationale for a new ecumenical discourse*”, 37-41.

<sup>5</sup> World Council of Churches. “Terrorism, Human Rights and Counter Terrorism”. Discussion Paper for Members of the CCLA Commission, Presented at the 47th Meeting of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, (Chavannes-de-

an attempt to analyze how power is abused, the relationship between power and violence, and between structure and the community dilemma of the church. The paper also offers direction and perspective in helping the church to embark upon theological consciousness that will address the present local and global misuse of power. justified.

### ABUSE OF POWER AND PEACE BUILDING

Truth, justice and peace together represent values basic to granting human rights, inclusion and reconciliation. When these values are ignored, trust is replaced by fear and human power no longer serves the gift of life and the sanctity and dignity of all in creation. The Council should work strategically with the churches on these issues to create a culture of non-violence (Harare 1998).<sup>6</sup>

At this point, the phenomenon of power will be examined. The term power is not used here to refer to what is known as "powers of the universe," natural forces or forces of the cosmos. These phenomena constitute forces or energies, and they only gain the quality of power when people grant them that in a sort of mythological way. Johan Galtung speaks of three types of power – ideological power, remunerative power, and punitive power.<sup>7</sup> Ideological power is the power of ideas; remunerative power is the power of the economy; and punitive power is the power to destroy, the power of force or the power of violence. A society can be structured in such a way that either one or all of these types of power are dominant. On a less negative note, others speak of power simply as the ability to achieve purpose.<sup>8</sup> Allan Boesak offers a good definition of power as the concentration of ability.<sup>9</sup> It is seen as a purposeful, deliberate concentration, and ability such as the ability to rule, to control, and to continue to control. It is the ability to create.

For some Christians, "power" is a negative word. They believe that Christians should not use power because it is antithetical to love. They understand Jesus' cross as an expression of powerlessness which should be followed as much as possible. While space does not permit a review of the long

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Bogis, Switzerland, 14-19th June 2005), 3

<sup>6</sup> Ransom Aikali, *Democracy and politics in Nigeria*. Course Notes. (Kaduna, Nigeria: NDA Officer's Training 2000), 98.

<sup>7</sup> Johan Galtung, *The European Community: A Super Power in the Making*. (London: Allen & Unwin 2004), 33.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. King, Martin Luther (Jr). *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon 1998), 37

<sup>9</sup> Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power*. (London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1978), 46

and complex discussion of the relationship of love to justice, or of the taxonomy of differing kinds of "power," the present discussion rests on the conviction that such a view of power is too simple and it will briefly focus on the "relational" power in human affairs. It assumes that, often, power is a positive and necessary factor in human relationships. The concern here, however, is to reflect on power as a negative, disruptive factor in human relationships. Three observations are discussed below.

First, power is a natural and necessary factor in society. We are focusing here on "relational" power or the expressions of power in human relationships or communities. The exercise of power can be a positive force in human relationships. Examples include the power of ideas, of art, and of empowerment. As a social being, humans need one another and the mutual strengthening which results from organic coherence in social groups. "We are persons only in the context of other persons."<sup>10</sup> All groups have some power structure, which may have positive as well as negative attributes and consequences. This is true of families, churches, civil society organizations, businesses, and of states. Moreover, differentiation in status and/or function is often beneficial to all members of such societies, irrespective of their position.

The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner argues cogently that the first stage of a society (a state in this case) is the imposition of some "order" to preclude or overcome anarchy. Only after some order has been established can a state evolve to the next three stages – law, just law, and distributed power.<sup>11</sup> The first characteristic of power therefore is that some form of power is necessary and positive in the social life of human beings.

Second, power is not neutral. Often it is argued that power is neutral – that whether power will be benevolent or destructive is dependent on the attitudes and motivations of those who wield it. This is similar to the argument of the National Rifle Association in the USA that "guns don't kill, people do."<sup>12</sup> The same logic would apply to those who say that the internet is neither inherently good nor bad. It depends on whether the internet is used for education, medical research, efficiency of law enforcement or military purposes, on one side, or whether it is used for law evasion, terrorism, and concentration of corporate power on the other. However, history shows that power is not neutral. Power in human hands, heart and spirit is never neutral. There is something strange about the experimentation of even good power in the hands of human beings.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Augustine Shutte, *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a South Africa*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication 2001), 89

<sup>11</sup>Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*(New York: Harper, 2000), 18

<sup>12</sup>Thatcher, Margaret. "Advice to a superpower"(New York Times, 11 Feb. 2002), 29

<sup>13</sup>Thatcher, "Advice to a Superpower", 29-32.

Thatcher argues that, it is not just the Robert Mugabes and Milosevics of this world in whom power initially exercised for the good of others, or the nation, is transmuted into self-deception, self-interest and self-aggrandizement. That seems to be a universal human condition – even in religious people (or especially religious people). This is easier to describe as a universal reality than to explain it, though theories of the origins of the drive for power abound ("will to power", existential anxiety, need to control, an innate striving for completion and perfection, instinct for survival, etc.).<sup>14</sup>

It is not as if the problem of power is a measurable thing – that power is good up to a certain point or level and evil after that. The more fundamental problem with power is that the destructive sides of power seem to grow with the exercise of power right from the very beginning. Like a parasite that depends on the health of the host organism, the negative grows along with the positive from the very beginning. Edmund Burke observes that:

Those who have been intoxicated with power, and have derived any kind of emolument from it, even though but for one year, never can willingly abandon it. They may be distressed in the midst of all their power; but they will never look to anything but power for their relief<sup>15</sup>

Lord Acton's assertion is also cited universally with approval, "Power corrupts, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely." It is the fear that power tends to become absolute which makes totalitarian claims of the state possible and most alarming. The mutual reinforcement of economic, political, communications and ideological power is anathema in the persisting view of ecumenical literature, right from the first assembly of the World Council Churches (WCC). The fear of this increasing concentration of power gives such credibility to the dangers of globalization and an unleashed World Trade Organization, and it is this tendency towards totalitarian claims which so alarms people, even in the USA, where there is but a single, dominant military and cultural power. For many people, this fear of a single "world government with military capabilities" applies also to a body like the United Nations – unless there is a system of checks and balances to ensure that power will not be abused.<sup>16</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr describes the ambiguities and inherent ambivalence in the use of power.<sup>17</sup> He is quick to note that self-deception and hypocrisy are not

<sup>14</sup>Thatcher, "Advice to a Superpower", 29-32

<sup>15</sup>Edmund Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society*. (London: G. Bell, 2003), 9

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Ogletree, W. *A Constructive Essay: The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 47-86.

<sup>17</sup>See for example, chapter 8 of Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.

the monopoly of those wielding coercive and destructive power over others, but even peacemakers and moralists are subject to the same temptations to use coercive power in the name of their high convictions. The corrupting character of power, even power thought to be exercised for the good, seems ineradicable. It constitutes one of the greatest challenges to peace making because it is so deeply rooted in the human psyche, so constant, so pervasive, and has such dire consequences for all of society.

Third, we must state the relationship between power and authority. The Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary states that "power is possession of controlling influence while authority is the right to give orders or make decision."<sup>18</sup> Authority is legitimized power. In different societies, of course, authority is legitimized in different ways – for instance, in the divine right of kings, aristocracy, selective suffrage, universal suffrage, etc. To an increasing degree, the consent of the governed is a criterion of legitimate authority. Power cannot be eradicated completely, nor should it be. However, power needs to be exercised in ways which make it accountable to those most directly and deeply affected by that power.<sup>19</sup> "Accountability" is the implicit notion behind Brunner's observation that ordering power is to be tamed and directed by law, then at an even higher level, "just law", and finally, "participation". The idea of accountability was enunciated clearly in the WCC's early articulation of a "responsible society," which became the core political/economic concept for ecumenical social ethics in the 1950s. According to the Evanston assembly:

[A] Responsible society is a society where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and to people whose welfare is affected by it.<sup>20</sup>

The emphasis on accountability (and transparency) has become even more prominent in ecumenical conversations, and in particular, the accountability of those wielding power to address most clearly the needs of the weakest and most vulnerable segments of society. This emphasis on measuring the legitimacy of power by the effectiveness of that power to enhance the wellbeing of the poorest and most oppressed segments of society, the most vulnerable, is a major contribution of ecumenical social ethics in the past decades. Too often, legitimacy has been defined too casually as benefiting "society as a whole",

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(New York: Scribners, 2007), 7

<sup>18</sup>Wehmeier, S., McIntosh, C. and Ashby, M. *Oxford advanced Learner's dictionary: 7th edition International Student's Edition*. (Oxford: University Press. (n.d)), 84, 1136

<sup>19</sup>Burke, "A Vindication of Natural Society", 15

<sup>20</sup>World Council of Churches. *Evanston Report*. (London: SCM Press, 1999), 113

which has often led to preserving the status quo and favouring those with greatest power and prominence. The Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD) has made major contributions to this emphasis on empowering the vulnerable which is the major concern of this paper.

The role of power is fundamental to the understanding of any system of violence.<sup>21</sup> Violence, after all, an exercise of power over the powerless or retaliation against such power. The exercise of violence by the powerful and, to some extent, by the powerless may, in fact, indicate a lack of power and an awareness that power might be exercised in quite different ways which may, in turn, reflect the superficiality of value systems which allow and justify such heartless and violent acts. Illogically, this is as true of the powerful as of the powerless and indeed, a manifestation of a lack of power, a lack of legitimization and a lack of capacity to explore and exercise measures and possibilities that do not violate or weaken life:

When we unleash dubious forces in the pursuit of worldly power, we ourselves become its victims. In the pursuit of wealth, military strength and other images of power, we actually become dependent on these images and lose our capacity to imagine and pursue more healthy alternatives. And when our limited images of power fail us – when, despite our wealth, we confront a host of seemingly irresolvable social problems and humanitarian crises and when, despite our military strength, we find ourselves in unwinnable wars – we are reminded that our images of power are often, in fact, illusions.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, to communicate and encourage critical discourse with the powers of today may be more crucial than ever before, since contemporary structures of power are often experienced as violent in themselves. In view of the growing concentration of power into fewer hands at all levels – local, national and international – and of the phenomenon of struggles for horizontal power, the question of who controls these powers or who has access to them is ever more pressing. Ken Booth observes that, “the drivers of the global economy (the principles of capitalism) and of the state's system (the principles of political realism) represent the common sense of their structures because they embody the interests of the powerful, by the powerful, and for the powerful.”<sup>23</sup> He

<sup>21</sup>Manchala, *Nurturing Peace*, 6.

<sup>22</sup>US Christian Contribution “Reflection on the International Use of Power by the US Government: A US Christian Contribution to the WCC's DOV”, Washington DC, 14th September 2009. Accessed 9 April 2014 from <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/us-respose-nurturingpeace.html>

<sup>23</sup>Ken Booth, “Reason of power and the power of reason: Some reflections from

stresses that the instrumentality of power must be interrogated. When power is understood instrumentally, it is desired, sought and amassed for what it can do. The paradoxical nature of power must be understood; it is both an opportunity and a threat to its holders and to others.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, power sustains itself by dominating, possessing, manipulating and controlling people's lives and systems.<sup>25</sup> One of the causes of this is the fear or awe that power induces. The sheer scope of this power decimates resistance even in the face of blatant victimization. Those who, therefore, feel powerless and remain passive tend to deny their own capacity to resist, and their own innate ability to be innovative, and so are unable to hold the powers accountable. The church needs not only encourage people to live up to the dignity and power that it affirms, but also to be wary of false claims of powerlessness. Instead, as theologian Edesio Sanchez notes, the church must look for ways to use its power in accordance with the gospel for the empowerment and full participation of people, enabling them to claim their rightful subject-hood.<sup>26</sup>

In the global context, the church has the moral responsibility to explore and propose models of power that open alternatives to the use of violence. Constructive and sustainable change in the world has most often been brought about through non-violent rather than violent means. Non-violent struggle shows that power, even when concentrated and focused, does not have to engage in violence to achieve its goals. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of satyagraha brought an awareness that there are other sources of power than the objectified and internalized structures of power, and that the person who is in contact with the spiritual source in its cause for justice and freedom cannot be overpowered. The church needs to strengthen its witness to the life and proclamation of Jesus, whose awareness of the already present as well as the coming reign of God was a feature of his challenging, non-violent ethics (Matthew 5–7). However, even with non-violence as the preferred option, some would argue that there might be situations where violence is unavoidable and where responsibility for the life of people requires the use of force. In such situations, "restricting the use of force to non-fatal measures and refraining from killing might still allow the possibility for shaping a situation."<sup>27</sup>

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international politics". *Cret-Berard Consultation*, (Geneva, 14 September 2005), 78.

<sup>24</sup>Booth, "Reason of power", 78-79.

<sup>25</sup>Booth, "Reason of power", 78-79.

<sup>26</sup>Edesio Sanchez, "Power that empowers, power that destroys" Unpublished Material. (Kaduna, Nigeria 2007), 2

<sup>27</sup>Steven B. Heys, the *Moral Vision of the New Testament*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 89



## STRUCTURE OF VIOLENCE AND THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

According to the Faith and Order Team of the World Council of Churches (WCC), power, in the world and in all human relationships, is also a complex factor in the life of the churches. Although aware of the biblical models of responsible use of power (e.g. Mark 10:45),<sup>28</sup> the church, both as an institution and as a people, is often found wanting in responsible and life-enhancing models of power. Unfortunately, a significant trend in the adaptation of certain traditions and practices in the Bible where the misapplication of power is endorsed has also been observed.<sup>29</sup>

Edesio Sanchez illustrates this point by means of an analysis of the confrontations of different notions of power in the book of Judges.<sup>30</sup> Although a woman, Deborah occupied an important leadership position that benefited the people during the period of Othniel, during the period from Jephthah to Samson, women became victims of the misuse of power and violence (Judges 11–16). The people of God are often seen taking sides with violence; indeed, violence escalates as the Judges story develops. Likewise, certain conceptions of God, biblical images, ecclesiastical institutions, theologies and liturgies have been drawn from hierarchical notions of ordering and, therefore, have become the dominant expressions of the church. The result is that the church is often oblivious to the dangers of absolute power.

Talking about the relation between power and pastoral care, Duncan Forrester says that the primary agent of pastoral care is the church, the community of faith.<sup>31</sup> The Holy Spirit empowers the church to resist the misuse of power that exercises itself over others. The church is required to share power with others and called to speak and promote peace, love and forgiveness in a world that is riddled with violence and conflict. In other words, the church needs to offer alternatives to violent and life-diminishing ways of exercising power.

<sup>28</sup>See "Interrogating and redefining power: Aide memoire of a theological consultation organized by the Faith and Order Team of the WCC in Cret-Berard, Puidoux, Switzerland, 10-13 December 2004.

<sup>29</sup>This raises another theological concern which should not be glossed over, and which requires further work, that is, the effect of the images of a violent God in the biblical tradition, including the violent imagery of the apocalyptic writings. For a helpful engagement with this issue, see the essay by John Mansfield. "The conqueror and the crucified: Reading the book of Joshua in an age of terrorism". In Michael A. Kelly CSSR and Mark A. O'Brien OP (eds). *Wisdom for Life*. (Adelaide, Australia: ATF Press, 2005), 57-75.

<sup>30</sup>Sanchez, "Power that empowers", 5-12.

<sup>31</sup>B. Duncan, and D. B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explanations in Practical Theology*. (Edinburgh, T & T. Clark, 2000), 74

The church can act in a credible manner only if it addresses and repents of its complicity in the violence of political, economic, social, military and imperial powers. Repentance is required not only for the crusades, slave trade and colonial conquests of the past, but also for its present collusion with unjust economic, political and military power.<sup>32</sup> The church is called to be a community of peace that gives people hope and life; a community that fosters unity, upholds truth, and strives for justice and fairness in all structures of human relationships. There is a long biblical tradition of wariness and critique against “self-sustaining structures of power, beginning with the critique of the kingship in Israel.”<sup>33</sup> This affirms that all exercise of power is accountable to God. Therefore, it also affirms that all forms of human power and authority are subject to God and accountable to people. This means the right of people to full participation. In Christ, God decisively revealed the meaning of power as compassionate love that prevails over the force of death.<sup>34</sup> The WCC, in its message to the churches during the launch of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) in 2001, said, “The real strength of the church remains in the seeming powerlessness of love and faith. Churches must seek every day to rediscover and experience this power. Overcoming violence calls and challenges them to live out their Christian commitment in the spirit of honesty, humility and self-sacrifice.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover:

The church as an inclusive relational, dynamic, interdependent community is meant to be a working model of God's dealing with the world and humankind, manifesting to the world God's intentions. Whatever polity it takes, it should be communal, personal and collegial. The church, as a human institution, has some of the most powerful and some of the most powerless. Therefore, it is called to exercise power as God exercises power, through servant-hood. The church in the hospitality of its worship must reflect this open fellowship in Jesus.<sup>36</sup>

To sum up, the church must also be a well of empowerment, similar to the well in Genesis 21. The ecumenical movement does not stand outside these developments and is not exempt from the danger of perpetuating them, sometimes through the unconscious mirroring and sustaining of power structures in our world today. Nonetheless, its members are called to be signs

<sup>32</sup>Valamoyu Palu, “Participation in God's mission of reconciliation” *An International Review of Mission*, Vol. 83 331, 563.

<sup>33</sup>Sanchez, “Power that empowers”, 1-5.

<sup>34</sup>Palu, “Participation in God's mission”, 572.

<sup>35</sup>WCC Central Committee Meeting. Ecumenical Centre. (Geneva, Switzerland, 2009), 4

<sup>36</sup>Manchala, *D Nurturing peace*, 110.

and instruments of God's reign of peace and justice and of a concept and practice of power which fosters the life and communion of all creatures. It is therefore necessary for churches to interrogate power in order to nurture a culture of peace. Although this points towards the need to redefine power and to reconstruct the images of God in ways that affirm the finer and life enhancing attributes of God and God's purposes for the created order, the reflection on power is presented in a way that opens possibilities for more liberating interpretations and consequently more responsible forms of power.

### EMPOWERING TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE

The Church and the recent WCC documents addressing issues of violence and power in their overlaps and aggravations, oblige the ecumenical community to empower people and churches for a responsible use of power that enables a just and equal distribution of means, resources, space and products. The Church is not alone in this calling; similar voices to empower the weak and the vulnerable can be heard in many societies and cultures, from various people with different intentions. In biblical times, for example, exilic prophets sought to empower people to survive their persecution and displacement. Walter Brueggemann speaks of two moments of the prophetic imagination: the critical voice that identified and the voice that provides alternatives and hopes. The latter is an example of the call to empower.<sup>37</sup> Other figures have done the same in their various communities, such as Medha Patkar and Mahatama Gandhi in India, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X among African-Americans, Wasgari Mathai in Kenya, Mandela in South Africa, TeWhiti, Whina Cooper in Aotearoa (New Zealand), and many others.

Overwhelmed by structures and cultures that dominate and discriminate, the world today is deprived of many of the opportunities that life offers. Access to opportunities is necessary for human fulfillment, as these provide possibilities for exerting power to resist and to seek safety. In fact, most victims of any form of violence, including that of nature, are the poor, the weak and those who have been systemically disempowered by social, political and economic structures. Empowerment of the weak and the vulnerable, therefore, is an essential step towards overcoming violence. However, the call to empower also has paternalistic undertones and hence needs to be viewed and affected with care. Traditionally, disempowered communities do need wider solidarity which can help prevent them from falling victim to the vicissitudes of the times and social dynamics. Calling for empowerment rings loud in contemporary contexts.

<sup>37</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 657-683.

Consequently, the Church must define the targets of empowerment that it encourages. This is necessary because, through the ages, structures and cultures have empowered some people to destroy other peoples and identities, to terrorize and occupy their lands, to extend their own ideologies, to enforce social divisions and hierarchize societies, and so on. The Church does not endorse moves towards empowerment that lead to the misapplication and manipulation of power. What the Church calls for is the empowerment of people and societies towards affirming life, accountability and mutuality, interdependence and peace (shalom).

Of course, it is one thing to talk about empowerment and another to walk in its way; and one thing to empower and another to empower towards particular goals. In other words, the Church is called upon for the empowerment of people and societies to build fires, not for (self) destruction but for warmth, light, feasting, sharing and creating a space where peace is forthcoming. Empowerment must make people innovative and responsible. Empowerment is a double-faced concept, one of complexity and ambivalence at the same time. With the consciousness of these limitations, the purposes of empowerment may be understood in the ways outlined below.

First, empowerment for survival. The popular saying that, “a hungry person cannot be satisfied or fed by sermons/words,” stresses the urgency of the call to empower people, especially the disempowered and the excluded, to survive. This is the call to action beyond mere affirmation to overcome the violence with which the world and particularly Nigeria, wrestles with. In the face of the acceleration of violence and abuse of power, the first call is for empowering people to survive.<sup>38</sup> Manchala further writes, “Empowering to survive is to safeguard life from abuse and destruction.”<sup>39</sup> It needs to be the primary vocation of the church, which confesses its faith in the God of life who came to earth to grant life in all its abundance, to all people. In other words, the church should have the courage to leave aside its theological, institutional and cultural hesitation and justification for inaction for the sake of the survival of the exhausted victims on the underside of history. The church should not let its own survival be more important than that of those who are denied life. The call to empower testifies that ethics should always be foremost.<sup>40</sup> The call to empower is a call to embrace, cuddle, nurse and protect life.

Therefore, there is a subverting quality to the call to empower to survive. It is an instance of resistance, for in empowering to survive, the churches frustrate the power of oppression and they declare that oppressors do not have power over the lives of the people. Victims, like Job, shall rise from the ashes of

<sup>38</sup> Manchala, D. *Nurturing Peace*, 8-9

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 112

history.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the call to empower is a call to hope. When this call is given a body, it becomes a call to hope. In other words, the call to empower and embody survival is apocalyptic in the biblical sense of the term. It is transformative both in the present and for the future.

Second, empowerment to live in solidarity and interdependence. According to Jurgen Moltmann, one of the consequences of the obsession with the self-absorption of the enlightenment and presuppositions in the concerns discussed above is the reassertion of the spirit of individualism in many spheres of life today.<sup>42</sup> This happens at personal and public levels. Such public-level individualism is seen all too often in the parochialism which sets up barriers to keep differences at bay. On an international level, it gives rise to ethnocentrism and justifies colonization. A man looks out for himself alone; the family becomes nuclear; city-dwellers are ignorant of what it means to live in the countryside; a church cares only for its own members and emphasizes the imaginary and unhelpful divide between the sacred and the secular; a nation provides only for its own interests; and so forth.<sup>43</sup> These forms of individualism store and spread the seeds of violence and terrorism because they thrive on detrimental notions of the other.

Peace, therefore, is possible only when people are in solidarity with one another and affirm their mutuality and interdependence. This is the ecumenical vision of power (as opposed to "power over") which the Church advocates.<sup>44</sup> The vision calls for greater awareness of the rationality of life, the realization of justice and the redistribution of power in all structures of human relationships.<sup>45</sup> This means that the church needs to be more public and engaged with the world, ready to form partnerships with all those who yearn and work for justice.<sup>46</sup>

The attempt to empower people to live in solidarity and interdependence is not limited to marginalized people. It needs to go as far as requiring the privileged to face the disturbing presence of the marginalized and enable them to be in solidarity with them. This is necessary because if solidarity and interdependence were directed only at the victims and the underprivileged,

<sup>41</sup> Angelou Maya, *And Still I Rise*. New York: (Random House, 1978), 14

<sup>42</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, New (York: Harper & Row, 1977), 10

<sup>43</sup> Deenabandhu Manchala, *Nurturing Peace*, 9-11

<sup>44</sup> Maya, *And Still I Rise*, 14-5

<sup>45</sup> New Aye, "Empowerment as constructive power for gender equality" *CTC Bulletin* 20 No. 3, 2004, 82-87. Temple, Arnold. "Empowering for fullness of life" (*CTC Bulletin* 2004, 127-130 Forrester, *Truthful Action*), 81.

<sup>46</sup> Raiser, "Theological and ethical Consideration", 2

then it might imply the continued individualization and fragmentation of human communities.

Third, empowerment to exercise power responsibly. Given the leaning of humanity towards what Martin Luther saw as a fallen state from which we cannot escape during this life, it is necessary to name and empower those forms and expressions of responsible use of power. Every person has some form of power, but not every person uses that power responsibly. Irresponsible use of power has produced violence in families, communities, nations and the world. Bath Colley states that, “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”<sup>47</sup> Since violence is produced in human minds, both intentionally and unintentionally, peace can also be nurtured and spread through human intentions and actions. It is our responsibility to one another to use our powers responsibly, and it is the responsibility of the church to empower us to exercise power responsibly.

Herein lies a critical response of the church. It must repent of its participation and complicity in irresponsible uses of power—from the concentration camps of Europe to the genocide church sites in Africa and the atomic weapons testing holes dug in the Pacific. This call for repentance and responsibility comes loudest from the so-called mission fields where the church arrived under the protection of colonialism.<sup>48</sup> The Church and the state arrived as a couple, hand in hand, cutting and digging to establish themselves at the expense of local and native peoples and cultures. It is therefore necessary for the church to admit its moral responsibility for its past and present irresponsible uses of power. Empowering to exercise power responsibly, therefore, must start at home, from within. This is the pastoral role of the church<sup>49</sup> which must develop its caring presence throughout a world where religious bodies share in the shame of fuelling violence.<sup>50</sup>

Truly, the commitment to follow the way of peace and non-violence requires the courage to reveal the dynamic of violence and its destructive result in human communities. Therefore, it means making visible the misuse of power to the victims and the perpetrators to enable them acknowledge that their conditions are a consequence of violence. The task is further complicated by the fact that violence, power and force are very often used interchangeably.

<sup>47</sup> Bath B. Colley, *A Community Approach to Overcoming Violence*, 1-9

<sup>48</sup> WCC, “Commission of the Churches on International Affairs”. *Human Right: A Global Ecumenical*. (Geneva: World Council of Churches. 1993), 23-89

<sup>49</sup> Forrester, *Truthful Action*, 73-89.

<sup>50</sup> Harold J. Ellens, *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 60-69.

## CONCLUSION

An important motivation for this commitment is the determination to stand alongside certain groups of people who always seem to be the victims of most forms of violence on account of the abuse of power and values that dominate structures of human relationships in our world today. Therefore, even if violence is not completely rooted out, it is a matter of human responsibility as well as a biblical imperative to see that the innocent and the powerless are not its victims. The only way we can confront increasingly widespread violence through misuse of power is if we once again become aware of our responsibility in terms of the dignity shared by all human beings. It is right to remark that for Christians, the confession of the dignity and value of human beings is anchored in the insight that all human beings are created in the image of God. Therefore, the indifference to human dignity and the rights of others must be overcome in families, in churches and in the power structures of our societies that cause violence. All who wish to safeguard their own dignity and peace in the long run must do so in ways that account for the dignity and peace of others. It is high time that the church realised the relationship between one's own dignity and that of others.

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