DEALING WITH VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA:

THE ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF CHURCHES

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Abstract

This article investigates the phenomenon of violence in South Africa. The statistics of the excessive violence are presented and the possible reasons for this violence are examined. In this respect the influence of the historic social stratification, the inception of Apartheid, the one-dimensional system of the past and poverty are highlighted. The central theoretical argument of this study is that churches and Christians can play an important role in the struggle against violent behaviour. This role can be fulfilled by nurturing a culture of respect for the concept of human dignity, human rights, and the rule of law and nation building. Furthermore, churches and Christians can set signs of hope in the society by being actively engaged in the alleviation of poverty, the recovery of family values and life, the nurturing of social cohesion and the setting of examples of non-violent solutions to conflicts.

Key Words: Violence; Churches; Social Stratification; Human Dignity;
Human Rights; Nation-building

Introduction

The South African society has become known for its high rate of criminality, especially for the violence that is involved. Barely a day will pass without press reports on shocking violent criminal activities. It is fair to say the violence has become part and parcel of the South African way of life (Bentley 2012:53). The South African Police Services publishes reports on criminal violence from time to time. A recent report illustrates the high levels of violence involved. The following table gives a glimpse of the current situation in South Africa (SAPS 2012:10):

Serious Crime: 2012					
Serious crime: crime ratio per 100 000 of the population					
Province	2008/09 Baseline	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Deviation 08/09-11/12	Deviation 10/11-11/12
Eastern Cape	3002.3	2929.8	2889.1	2806.2	-6.5%	-2.9%
Free State	4399.4	4164.6	4108.8	4343.9	-1.3%	5.7%
Gauteng	5676.0	5633.8	4980.0	4576.1	-19.4%	-8.1%
Kwazulu-Natal	2882.8	2838.4	2731.3	2669.9	-7.4%	-2.2%
Limpopo	1740.6	1750.3	1618.9	1873.3	7.6%	15.7%
Mpumalanga	3501.9	3411.0	3180.9	3073.7	-12.2%	-3.4%
North West	3106.6	3014.7	3105.5	3061.1	-1.5%	-1.4%
Northern Cape	4188.4	4021.1	3819.4	3793.5	-9.4%	-0.7%
Western Cape	6278.0	6334.1	6431.2	6601.9	5.2%	2.7%
RSA	3922.7	3871.7	3679.9	3608.7	-8.0%	-1.9%

It is not only the violence associated with criminal activities – as depicted above – that grips the attention of despondent onlookers and scholars interested in human relations, but phenomena such as domestic violence, violent labour protests, violent economic bargaining and violent behaviour on the sports fields are also becoming common in South Africa today. Violence is associated with problem-solving and winning. It seems that South Africans value vigour, power and strength in dealing with a problem and winning a competition. Violence has become a culture and is currently deeply embedded in the South African psyche.

Scholarly study reports based on empirical research have revealed various possible causes for this culture of violence, although the field of research has not been exhausted. Amongst these are:

- the broad normalisation of violence;
- the presence of firearms or other weapons;
- group dynamics and peer pressure, and susceptibility to this on the part of individuals among a group of perpetrators;
- prior hostility towards the victims;
- low self-esteem, or other specific types of psychological pathologies or dispositions, the prevalence of which may be linked to factors such as family dysfunctionality and the level of previous exposure to violence;
- a lack of confidence or poor communication skills on the part of the perpetrator;
- dynamics relating to the specific incident, including whether perpetrators believe they are being obstructed or lied to, language that provokes them, acts often linked to their use of drugs or alcohol;
- A desire on the part of the perpetrator for notoriety (SCVR 2012:13).

In a recent article Rathbone & Verhoef (2012:67) plead for the nurturing of a theology of life, freedom and peace as a corrective on the modernist theologies of the past which, in their minds, perpetuated violence. This examination aims to take the argument further from a theological-ethical and practical angle of approach. The following article deals with the problem of violence in South Africa in an effort to contribute to the inter-disciplinary debate on the issue. While recognising the fact that only a multi-disciplinary approach can provide effective solutions to this complexity, it may be noted that a Christian ethical approach could provide some core principles that could play a part in curing the South African society. Most important of these is the reinvigoration of respect for major institutional values. The central theoretical argument of this investigation is that a vigorous moral renewal of the South African mind-set is essential in order to turn around the culture of violence, by nurturing an ethos of respect. Churches and Christians have an important role to play in this process. The article first of all investigates the possible historic roots of the culture of violence in order to establish the core of the problem and then the attention will move to a definition and application of plausible and useful ethical principles in dealing with the issue.

The Roots of Violence in South Africa

South Africa has a violent past dating back to the first contact between migrating tribes and the emergence of settlements as a result of the process of colonization. Early history was characterised by tribal wars, wars about land, racial conflicts, internal friction between blacks and whites, the Afrikaners and the British and violent clashes between ethnic groups. Churches were part and parcel of these hostilities by siding with various parties in the conflicts (Davenport 1997:51). Violence became a method of solving problems (Bentley 2012:56). Through the ages violence became systemic. This was evident in the process of social stratification that emerged in 1652 when the social order was dominated by Europeans (Elphick & Gilomee 1982:403). Blacks were not able to gain any economic or political power. They became a poor class in the Cape colony and occupied a middle position between the Khoikoi and the slaves from the East and other parts of Africa. In Europe the formulation of the theories of racial inferiority and superiority emerged in the eighteenth century and these led to the attitude of racial and religious superiority amongst Europeans (Ross 1993:81; Elphick & Gilomee 1982:390).

Vorster (2003:9) provides a thorough scholarly interpretation of the development of social stratification since 1652 and the establishment of the early settlements. It was a process of the establishment of lands set apart for black and white occupation of the so-called *terra nullius* (no man's land).[1] The land possession by whites caused tension and led to many violent clashes. Steytler (2000:1) explains that traditional or customary law always recognized the land ownership of the different tribes. A particular tribe's history of occupation and control of territory determined its land ownership and other land rights. Communal ownership was the order of the day. Land was owned by tribes and large families under the leadership of a chief. Terreblanche (2002:260) refers to this phenomenon as 'semi-feudalism'. The idea of individual land ownership and the *terra nullius* doctrine that originated during the rule of colonial powers was strange to the African setting. In fact,

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[1]   The colonial powers of that time regarded unregistered land and "wide open spaces" as "terra nullius" (nobody's land) and as a result claimed it, while it in fact was tribal land. This land was divided into farms with new deeds and in this way tribes were dispossessed.

traditional law did not recognize individual rights. Individual land rights were not regarded as independent rights, but as derived rights that were dependent on the ownership of the tribe to which the individual belonged. Shared tribal rules determined the individual's access to the land held in common. If the tribe lost ownership all the derived individual access rights also disappeared (Steytler 2000: 2). Africans did not understand why a single person could own land exclusively while others have no claim to use the land. These different views on property rights resulted in severe conflicts between black and white in South Africa.

The land possession culminated in the Lands Act of 1913 in terms of which Blacks were dispossessed. The Land Act of 1913 in South Africa reserved land for whites and blacks respectively. As the African population increased, their land deteriorated rapidly and especially men had to move to 'white' areas where they received meagre wages and were blocked from advancement by a legislated 'colour-bar', especially with regard to the system of private ownership for whites only. See in this regard the exposition of Elphick (1997:351) and Terreblanche (2002:260).

Systemic violence increased with the official inception of Apartheid and the simultaneous upsurge of Afrikaner nationalism. Apartheid's aim was to promote white interests at the expense of the interests of the indigenous people. Although various white administrations endeavoured to give the policy a moral face by arguing that the land will be divided to accommodate the aspirations of ethnic groups in various independent National States, the real needs of the Black population, namely access to the political process, were not addressed. The Bantustans became dumping grounds of the unemployed and thus contributed to the severe impoverishment of Blacks (see Omer-Cooper 1994:230). The policy was Apartheid, then separate development and the homelands policy, but essentially it was based on the official protection of white interests. Apartheid was systemic or institutional violence. Due to the failure of the system, the Apartheid governments resorted to security legislation to "protect the interests of the state". These laws and the accompanying militarisation of civil life became more serious and drastic in the 1970s and 1980s. Eventually it resulted in a low intensity civil war between the White controlled government and the Black resistance movements. Many violent clashes between the police and protesters took place and of these, the clashes at Sharpeville in 1961 and Soweto in 1976 became the symbols of the systemic violence of the period of Apartheid.

The Apartheid period was also characterised by a deep-rooted surge of Afrikaner nationalism. This nationalism centred on the protection of Afrikaners over and against British liberalism and the *Swart Gevaar* (the danger of a black majority). This nationalism was propagated in school curricula, political and academic presentations and even in some of the sermons in the three Dutch Reformed and Pentecostal Churches. The black population was depicted as a threat to the survival of the Afrikaner people, the 'white civilization' and even Western Christianity. To protect the national independence of the white people – and especially the Afrikaners – the supporters of Apartheid sought to keep all political power in the hands of the white population at all cost. Hence the development of Apartheid structures according to the unique pattern of social stratification (Vorster 2004:146). In this way the Apartheid governments created a social order typical of racist structures. The social order expressed the pattern of in-group, out-group people with the attitude of 'us' and 'them', a rewriting of history to prove the right of self-determination and a division between white economic superiority and black economic inferiority (Marger 1994:15; Schutte 1995:68). With the assistance of tough security legislation this system

with its racist pattern was forced on the black population. The system developed into a political dispensation that was inherently violent with all the distinguishing marks of structural violence.

The neo-Marxist social analysis, which was developed in the 1960s by the German philosopher Marcuse (1971:28 bronnelys gee 1964 en 1969, outeur moet regstel), posits that oppressive systems are inherently violent and calls for liberating violence. Structural violence breeds counter-violence. Marcuse views liberating violence as the only moral way to bring about fundamental change. Democratic means do not abrogate the master nor the slave. Neither does reform. Violent revolution is the only way to liberate people from the one-dimensional society where people do not live in freedom and peace but are 'lived' by the establishment (Marcuse 1969:75). This social analysis became popular in the seventies of the previous century and paved the way for a Philosophy of Revolution (Roszak 1969 nie in bronnelys), as well as a Theology of Revolution (Shaull 1969:148; *see also* Fierro 1977:318). Freedom movements embraced the neo-Marxist ethics of liberation and romanticized violence as the only way towards change. This philosophy and theology made their mark in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The South African society was, in terms of Marcuse's definition, a striking example of a one-dimensional system that evoked a violent response. There was seemingly no other way to attain change than the option of violent resistance.

The violence of the system and the counter-violence of the struggle were officially ended with the inception of an all-embracive democracy in 1994. Apartheid was abolished and so was the struggle. Great leaders such as Mandela and Tutu made it their calling to promote peace and reconciliation. The new constitution, based on the core values of human dignity, freedom and equality ended the one-dimensional dispensation of the Apartheid system. In jurisprudence and law-making the new Government endeavoured to be true to the Constitution. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission played a large part in the establishment of a culture of forgiveness and healing (*see* South African Government 1995:5; Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998:57). Furthermore, many honest attempts were made by churches, non-governmental organisations and organisations in civil society to further the cause of reconciliation and peace.

In spite of all these efforts violence prevailed and is still deeply embedded in the South African psyche. The idea of legitimate violence became obsolete, but the mentality prevails. Violence as a form of resistance still typifies labour actions of which the Marikana massacre in 2012 amongst others, is a striking example. Violence to reach a goal or to solve a problem is widespread amongst the youth. Pockets of violent racial and xenophobic conflicts are common, notwithstanding the extensive condemnation of racism and xenophobia (*see* Desai 2010:99; Sharp 2008:1; Ilesanmi 2011:280). Many cases of hate speech are dealt with by the Human Rights Commission. The question may be asked: Has the belief in systemic violence as it was practised in the past and the nostalgia of the counter-violence, really left the South African scene? My contention is that it has not. In the white community some people still tend to see repressive actions as problem-solving and actaccordingly. Some blacks still resort to violence to satisfy their demands – especially in the labour environment. Furthermore, the inequality brought about by the Apartheid system is prevalent in the society in spite of affirmative action, transformation and Black Economic Empowerment (Terreblance 2003:419).

Social stratification left a highly unequal society and a large sector of people living in abject poverty. In spite of the remarkable development of a mainly black middle class, the

poverty caused by the systems of the past affects a large proportion of society. Nearly 25% of all South African citizens are unemployed. Moreover, young people account for a large number of the unemployed sector of society. Despite many plans and programmes by the South African Government to alleviate the poverty the successes are inadequate. Unemployment unleashes an entire range of negative social consequences, of which the most important is that it deprives people from living off the fruit of their toil and enjoying it. Furthermore, unemployment leads to illiteracy in children due to a lack of education and training. As a result of the people's unemployment and low income, they cannot do much to improve life circumstances for their children or to ensure a better future. In this way the cycle repeats itself in the next generation. Medical counselling and services are difficult to come by for the unemployed and their children. The result is large families and high death rates amongst children. The unemployed in South Africa easily fall victim to HIV/Aids, and the high death rate in this part of the community causes even more broken families and orphans, leading to more poverty. In this way the continuous cycle of a culture of poverty starts.

Low wages contribute to the problem. Wilson and Ramphele (1989:54) said in 1989 that low wages were one of the main causes of poverty in South Africa. They indicated statistically how large the wage gap between 'white', 'brown', 'Asiatic' and 'black' South Africans was. Although there has been some improvement since the eighties, and especially in the last decade, the greatest part of the black working corps received wages lower than the minimum life standard by 1985. Since the implementation of the new constitution, the wage gap cannot be argued solely on a racial basis, because a large black middle class has developed. There has been improvement in this regard, but the wage gap between the middle class and the lower class is still unhealthy, in spite of the implementation of minimum wages.

Of all the negative aspects of poverty and unemployment the inclination to react violently to the living conditions determined by the extreme poverty are important to note. Poor communities are prone to violence in the form of domestic violence, violence caused by substance abuse, criminality with violence and violence against women, as Landman (2011:63) explains in her recent study based on empirical research. However, the violence in South Africa is not limited to poor communities. Violent crime and domestic violence are also prevailing in the more affluent communities.

The short historical survey indicates that violence has become part of the South African community's fibre, and no part of the community can be excluded from this phenomenon. Contributing major factors are the systemic violence of past structures, the dehumanization of people by Apartheid, the historic inequality between white and black people and nowadays between rich and poor and the wide occurrence of poverty. To my mind these reasons are the most important, but certainly not the only ones. Problems with the effective application of the law, inefficient policing and the lack of moral standards, amongst others, can also be mentioned as contributing factors to this troublesome trend in South African life. Therefore, the reduction and limitation of violence needs a multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary approach.

Any form of violence by an individual or group of people boils down to one core feature, and that is a lack of respect for a fellow human being. While legislation, jurisprudence, political planning, economic growth and transformation are all important factors to deal with in the reduction of violence, the fundamental solution is to teach and equip people to respect others and what this respect entails. Bentley (2010:563) reminds us

that the solution is not only to follow leaders, but that every person should be involved in solving the problems of our society. This viewpoint is especially important to consider when seeking an ethos of respect as a solution to the problem of violence. In the nature of things Christian ethics will address the issue from a moral perspective. Therefore the next section will deal with the possibilities this discipline offers in this regard, as well as with the important role churches and Christians could play.

Nurturing an Ethos of Respect

The Role of Churches

In her recent study Olivier (2011:66) came to the conclusion that churches and Christians are part of the problem of violence due to their lack of proposing alternatives and being agents of peace. Churches and Christians fail to offer an alternative way of living amidst the violence in its various forms. To a certain extent, I believe this tendency can be ascribed to the post-modernist revival of pietist and quietist theology where the social calling of the church is overshadowed by the post-modernist believers' hunger for spirituality. In their assessment of the development of the Christology in South Africa, Mouton & Smit (2009:265) focus attention on this developing tendency in South African ecclesiastic life. Therefore, one should ask: What should the role of the churches and Christians be? A few short remarks in answer to this question are necessary.[2]

Firstly, as a holy community the Church must ensure that its plans and actions comply with the moral principles of Scripture as they are expressed in the Ten Commandments. These principles are amply described and explained by Douma (1996:12). At the core of these principles lies the great commandment – the command to love God and the neighbour. This pillar of Christian conduct forces the Church to preach and promote love as the antipode of all forms of violence. Lack of doing so compromises the Church, as was so often the case in the history of South Africa. In this respect Olivier (2011:69) is correct in her negative assessment of the role churches and Christians are playing with respect to the violence in South Africa today. Churches and Christians have to become critical voices in the development of the new dispensation. The calling to holiness obliges them to be involved in the sanctification of society in all spheres where sin blemishes the rule of Christ (Ridderbos 1969:286). Their voices should be much more audible when it comes to violence against women, children, criminality and systemic violence.

Secondly, churches must act as alternative communities or communities of character (Hauerwas 1981). The church is in essence God's pilgrim people or a *Kontrast Gemeinschaft* (Harvie 2009:35). This description entails that a church should have an ethos based on the teachings of Christ and should not act as an extension of the divided and troubled community. As an exemplary community it should be a model of love, stewardship, self-denial and total obedience to God. Christ must be viewed in the Church to the same degree that the Gospel must be heard. Just as the sacraments portray the ideas of love, reconciliation and forgiveness by way of symbols, all the other acts of the Church should point to the importance of the principles and norms of the Kingdom.

Up to now churches in South Africa found it difficult to meet this obligation. Instead of being examples of the new community in Christ, they became images of the social patterns

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2   For a thorough explanation of the role the church can play in the process of nation-building in South Africa *see* Vorster (2007:247-262).

of society. The ideology of Apartheid penetrated some churches and they organised themselves along racial and ethnic lines (Olivier 2001:246). Women were oppressed within the churches as much as they were oppressed within society at large. Bias against homosexual people, stigmatisation of people with HIV/Aids and lack of concern for children are features of many churches, and they merely reflect the deficiencies of the South African society. It is fair to say that churches in South Africa have become to a large extent the extension of a troubled society. As such, churches themselves became instruments in the establishment of systemic violence in the form of racism, xenophobia and sexism.

The exemplary character of the Church has to be restored before it can become a truthful church in this new Liberal Democracy. The prophetic criticism by the church will be regarded hollow rhetoric if it is not backed up by deep-rooted internal reformation. This should include the formation of an ethos of non-violence and the promotion of peace and reconciliation within the Christian community. Churches must become examples of the non-violent co-existence of people of faith and this worldview, and way of life, should become examples to society at large.

Thirdly, the church should remain true to its role as a preaching community (Bright 1977:164). Stott (1982:15) reminds us that preaching is indispensable to Christianity. He says that without preaching a necessary part of the authenticity of Christianity will be lost because Christianity is in its very essence a religion of the preaching of the Gospel. Sermons on Sundays are indeed very influential because it reaches people of all walks of life and in all social situations. The preaching is directed at young and old, rich and poor, the flourishing and the distressed. It conveys the Christian hope for the despondent, but also the ethic of the new life in Christ. Preaching to the thousands in local congregations is the most effective way to penetrate the consciences of people. In this respect the churches have a huge opportunity to address the prevailing problem of violence in South Africa. Preaching should deal with all the issues relating to violent behaviour in concrete terms. In this way the message of non-violence can make way into the deepest corners of the South African society. The preaching should appeal to Christians to be custodians of non-violence wherever they find themselves.

Fourthly, as a worshipping community the churches can also promote a culture of non-violence. Worship and liturgy and their influence in the life of Christians have attracted renewed attention over the past few decades (WCC 1982: VIII). Every ecclesiastical tradition has its own forms of worship. However, the new ideas brought forward by the Baptism-Eucharist-Ministry document can enrich these traditions. Churches in South Africa may consider focusing on social problems as part of their worship in order to create sensitivity and awareness. In his recent study De Klerk (2012:113) indicates how important a liturgy can be with regard to the Christian's voice in society. Liturgies have a deep emotional influence in the spirituality of believers. By relating the worship to the social circumstances of the congregation the Christian attitude of love, stewardship, self-denial and obedience to God can be developed.

A liturgy promoting the idea of non-violence and raising awareness of the violence in South African life and sensitivity for the various forms of violence is a highly emotional and effective tool churches can use in the struggle against this destructive force. People involved in violence either as perpetrators or as victims can reveal their stories to others. In the struggle against Apartheid liturgies were used with success in mobilising people against this injustice. Ministry of the sacraments can be arranged in such a way that it highlights

the Christian's calling to non-violence. The worship service can thus function as a generating station where the energy for social change can be created. Christians can be the carriers of this energy to the secluded regions of society where people are living in the darkness of despair. Worship should move people to seek solutions for the prevailing violent behaviour of people in South Africa.

Churches have indeed a very important role to play in the process of promoting non-violence. If churches do not take this duty seriously they are certainly part of the problem, as Olivier (2011:69) contends. Moreover, over and above the above-mentioned ways in which churches can be involved to resist violence they can also encourage other moral agents such as educational institutions, non-governmental institutions and corporations to walk the extra mile in the reduction of the prevailing forms of violence in the country. When it comes to education certain key factors should be addressed. These are intrinsically related to the core values of a morality of non-violence and the development of an ethos of peaceful co-existence. Attention will now be turned to these specific values.

Respect for Human Dignity

In all faith traditions human dignity is regarded as a core moral principle in inter-personal relations. This is also true of all secular and humanist traditions (*see* De Waal; Currie & Erasmus 2000:230). Since World War II the concept of human dignity became extremely prominent in the Christian-ethical discourse and was especially promoted by the Political Theologies of the seventies of the previous century and the current attempts to develop a public theology. Thus far the doctrine on the dignity of humans within Christianity has been founded mainly on the Scriptural idea of the *imago dei* (the human as image of God). In his thorough research on this concept Jönsson (1988:72) indicates that the *imago dei* is set in the Old Testament as the point of departure for the mutual relations amongst people. The deeper message of the concept is that people should respect each other because all are bearers of the image of God. Ferguson (1988:329) also remarks that the doctrine of the image of God forms the theological groundwork for the Christian's understanding of and response to ecological concerns, humanitarian concerns, sexual concerns, evangelistic and apologetic concerns and eschatological concerns.

The emphasis on human dignity is a welcome development in Christian ethics and ought to be enhanced by the churches in all the abovementioned ways. Testimony, liturgy, preaching and ecumenical witness can be of immense value in the promotion of this moral concept,in a community disturbed by violence in all its forms. People in South Africa should learn the value of others over and above all the divisions of the past. The concept of human dignity is the remedy for the vestiges of social stratification, Apartheid and the present xenophobia, domestic violence and criminality. Churches should become the custodians of human dignity and should be deeply involved in equipping the community to adopt this idea as the foundation of all human relations.

The message of respect for human dignity should be carried forward by Christians into the communities they are living and into all walks of life (*see* Kretzchmar 2010:585). First of all Christians should display this respect for human dignity in their own relations. Christians in positions of authority ought to be examples of visible respect for the human dignity of their subjects. Christian men must be taught by their churches to treat their wives and children with respect. Christians of different social groups, ethnic origin and races have to live together according to the standards of human dignity in order to demonstrate what an ethos of respect may mean for society at large. In this respect the co-operation of other

faith traditions and secular societies could be utilized. Respect for human dignity must penetrate deep into the South African psyche as a counterforce against the tendency of violent behaviour.

Churches and Christians, as the custodians of respect for human dignity, are in a good position also to motivate other moral agents to further this cause in society. A direct and vigorous involvement in structures like labour unions, educational institutions, political parties, corporations, the media and sport and recreation organizations by way of an active discourse can further the respect for human dignity in all spheres of life. Up to now the concept of human dignity has been enshrined in the constitution of the country as a core value, but it has not become alive in the South African way of life. It is up to churches and Christians, in close co-operation with other faith communities and moral agents, to rectify this situation. If respect for human dignity can become embedded in the thinking and way of life of South Africans, a giant leap will be taken towards the limitation of violence.

3.3 Respect for human rights

The development of a true ethos of human rights and the institution of liberal democracies are high on the political agendas in many parts of the world – especially in the developing world. Today's society has learnt that liberal democracy is the best political system for the control of abuse of power by the state and for the protection of the fundamental human rights of individuals and minorities (United Nations, 1995:122; *see also* Devenish 1999,17).

The South African Liberal Democracy has become settled and has evoked an intensive and on-going debate in the courts and in the media on the contents, claims and effects of the Chapter on Fundamental Rights. Seen against the background of South Africa's history of social stratification, this development must be lauded. However, the establishment of the system has not been attended by a development of a culture of human rights. Batchelor (2000:4) reminds us that human rights must first live in the heart before it can live in the law. Much has to be done in South Africa to instil a human rights approach in the hearts of South Africans. The establishment and development of the system must be accompanied by the simultaneous nurturing of a culture of human rights.

Various theological traditions were suspicious of the concept of human rights in the past and influenced societies negatively in this regard (*see* Dorian 2011:657; Leith 1982:220). In the meantime the tide has changed due to the theological influence of the World Council of Churches and theologians such as Barth (1946:33), Bonhoeffer (1995), Moltmann (1977:31) and Küng (1997:114). The concept of human rights became a plausible topic in the theological-ethical discourse, especially after the devastation of World War II and the liberation of the colonies. Churches and Christians have thus been equipped with a rich, recent tradition to address the lack of a culture of human rights. In this regard churches and Christians have an important calling. As in the case of raising respect for human dignity, churches can enhance respect for human rights by way of their wide range of activities. Christians can further the culture of human rights in all spheres of society.

In this respect the topic of socio-economic rights must especially be addressed. These rights are becoming an important point of discussion in the human rights debate. Proponents of the neo-liberal economic philosophy regard socio-economic rights as a vestige of socialism and as an obstruction to the market driven economy. This philosophy maintains that the market driven economy will take care of the needs of the poor and the deprived if this system is allowed to function without obstacles, such as those involved with the quest for the realisation of socio-economic rights.

This notion is not correct, at least not in every economy. With regard to South-Africa, Terreblanche (2003:419) has proven that this kind of economy has benefited the rich and created a larger middle class, but the gap between the rich and the poor has actually widened. The poor are becoming poorer. Therefore the pursuance of socio-economic rights in this society is a necessity, even if their application may affect the huge corporations. Corporations should understand this predicament and should engage in the discourse about socio-economic rights as their contribution to curb the violence stemming from poverty and unfortunate living conditions of a huge part of the South African population. Respect for human rights entails respect for socio-economic rights also, and churches and Christians should enhance this discourse.

Respect for the Rule of Law

Christian ethics gives prominence to respect for the law as a consequence of the fifth commandment. In his discussion of the ethical relevance of the Ten Commandments Douma (1996:178) reminds us that this commandment covers not only parental authority, but all others forms of authority. Authority is a gift of God to office-bearers and this gift should be employed in a responsible way. Kessler (2010:548) provides ample ethical guidelines for exercising power from a Christian ethical perspective. He explains that power must be used to the honour of God and in service of the neighbour (*see* Douma 1996:185). Authority must not be abused nor neglected. On the other hand, all subjects should respect authority that is exercised in a fair, just and responsible way.

With the inception of the 1996 constitution South Africa bode farewell to a system of unjust laws and irresponsible authority. New laws were promulgated within the framework of the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution. Laws and actions by the governments on national, provincial and regional levels that were regarded as unconstitutional were set aside by the Constitutional Court. One can conclude that the instruments that can guarantee fair jurisprudence and responsible governance are in place. Therefore the rule of law can be respected.

Christians should set the example of respect for the rule of law. Lawlessness has become a disturbing occurrence in the South African society. In this respect also the churches have a major educational role to play by being the protagonists of fair and just laws and the application of the laws in a responsible way, but also by appealing to the public to respect the rule of law. Harsh penalties alone will not change the tide. A country cannot be legislated into an orderly society – this must come from within as a fruit of deeper convictions. Churches can motivate other moral agents in society to apply their minds to the development of these deeper convictions. Committing acts of violence for whatever 'noble' reason is against the law and this fact should be propagated by churches and Christians in the execution of their social calling in society.

Respect for Nation-building

In the post-colonial era, and especially after the cold war, various processes of nation-building have been taking place in many countries. The most important of these endeavours is the building of nations in Africa and in Eastern Europe. Nation-building is a long and difficult process with a number of inhibiting factors. The modern phenomenon that homogenous societies are declining rapidly due to demographic changes and globalisation can, among other things, be regarded as a powerful obstacle in the way of nation-building.

Nation-building as it features in modern life has also become a central issue in Christian ethics. Villa-Vicencio (1992:19) welcomes this development and presents the biblical metaphor of post-exilic national reconstruction as an example of the importance of nation-building in Christian ethics. Arguing from a revelation-historical perspective one can go even further: indeed, one can argue that biblical concepts such as transformation, growth, development and deep-rooted change are core concepts of the Christian Gospel. That these concepts do not only pertain to the spiritual and ecclesiastic domains, becomes clear when one investigates the social relevance of the love of Christ and Christian love. The calling of Christians to manifest the attitude of Christ in love, stewardship, self-denial and obedience draws social life, and indeed nation-building, into the sphere of Christian ethical concern. Nation-building is as much a Christian-ethical theme as it is a concept in other social sciences. In this respect Villa-Vicencio is correct, although he could have provided a more thorough theological reflection of the concept, as Richardson (2001:366) remarks in his critique.

What exactly is nation-building? Is it a political route? Should it be an economic process or a moral one? Researchers tend to narrow down the concept to one of these topics (Ihedhu 2004:1). However, nation-building should be seen as much more than one course of action. Marx (2002:54) is correct in his warning that nation-building should not become just a new and destructive form of cultural nationalism. It is a wide-ranging process. It entails political and economic development. It should include social development and it has a moral character. A definition of the concept should pay attention to all these topics.

In view of these remarks, nation-building can be defined as the social process of transforming an underdeveloped, poor and divided society into a community with peace, equal opportunities and economic viability. In such a community individuals should enjoy dignity, basic human rights and the prospect to observe their own religion, tradition, culture and language in harmony with other people who may function within other traditions.

In previous colonies and oppressed societies nation-building is a prerequisite for establishing peace, dignity and prosperity. Without this kind of transformation these societies will run the risk of imploding due to vast deficiencies in their social fibre. They usually inherit insufficient infrastructures, old-fashioned political and economic policies and highly divided communities from their previous rulers. They often emerge due to violent resistance and struggle, and even civil wars and ethnic conflict. Moreover, they bear the burden of moral decay. In 1994 South Africa was an excellent example of a community in this predicament.

Churches and Christians should be deeply involved in nation-building in word and in deed. The Christian social ethics demands an active commitment to the core building blocks in nation-building. This involvement entails active and responsible participation in the following social processes:

- the alleviation of poverty;
- the recovery of family values and life;
- the nurturing of social cohesion;
- the setting of an example of non-violent solutions to conflict.

Conclusion

Violence in South Africa has many causes and faces. It needs a multi-faceted approach. In this process churches and Christians have an important role to play as moral agents motivated by the Christian social ethic. To be involved in all the abovementioned means that churches and Christians can contribute to solving the problem of violence and set a sign of hope for the troubled South African community.

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