AOSIS

The elephant in the room: The need to re-discover the intersection between poverty, powerlessness and power in 'Theology and Development' praxis

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South Africa remains a divided community on many levels: socially, racially and socioeconomically. This is no more evident than in the recent protests – most notably waged on university campuses and on the streets in the past year. This, the article argues, is closely related to the need to reclaim the notion of power by those who feel they remain relegated to the social and economic peripheries after over 20 years of democracy. While 'theology and development' praxis has been most closely associated in a post-apartheid era with welfare and charity approaches or pragmatic interaction with state and civil society (both of which have been critiqued), what has not been sufficiently addressed is the notion of power which once dominated ecclesiastical discourses. This is the proverbial 'elephant in the room', which the article argues must once again be revisited and re-engaged – both within scholarly reflection and within church practice – in order to address these divides.

Introduction

The rainbow nation heralded by Archbishop Tutu in the heady days of early democracy has not (yet – as an eschatological aside!) been realised. In fact, the Archbishop recently commented at a re-enactment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) faith community hearings that he felt God was crying over the injustices that still remain here and in the world at large. South Africa remains a divided community on many levels: socially, racially and socio-economically. This division by its very nature implies that some are included and others excluded from the mainstream of society. Or differently put, some are to be found at the centres of power, while others still languish at the peripheries or margins – excluded from the very practices and discourses that most affect them. Exclusion or marginalisation is perhaps most closely related to the issue of power (and therefore powerlessness), which is most acutely felt by those in poverty. This is no more evident than in the growing restlessness displayed by increasing social delivery protests, industrial action and campus unrest, which could be traced back to a lack of social power.

Within theology and development discourse,[1] a critique of the church's engagement with poverty as limited to notions of charity and/or pragmatic interaction with the state in South Africa has been critiqued by various scholars over the past 10 years.[2] What has not been challenged is perhaps what may be termed the 'elephant in the room' – the failure of the church to sufficiently recognise that to engage with poverty, there is a need to engage discourses and practices within 'theology and development' with regards to power and powerlessness. It is in fact this very 'elephant' whose presence the article suggests, may well be the reason for the church's inability to move beyond these approaches. It is against this background that this article seeks to explore the importance of revisiting the way in which power and powerlessness could (and should again?) be engaged with in order to promote a more transformational agenda by the church in its approach to alleviating poverty.

1.The sub-discipline or field of theology and development has only been popularised within South Africa since the late 1990s, where it was first initiated at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Stellenbosch University (August 2010:92). Although the field is often interchangeably referred to within other geographical contexts by terms such as *diakonia*, integral mission, transformational development, etc. (each of which of course have their own theological emphases) (Swart 2008; Padilla 2010; Samuel & Sugden 1987; Dickinson 1983; cf. Donsung & Phiri 2014), it is most popularly referred to in South Africa as 'theology and development'. Although the discipline is at times framed within the discipline of practical theology (cf. Swart 2008), August (2010:92, 93) contends that it is an interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary field. It is important to note that Swart (2008:119, 120) emphasises the role that both evangelical theological reflection as well as people-centred development thinking has had on scholars within this field in a post-apartheid era.

2.This article focuses its critique on what I term 'theology and development praxis'. It therefore does not specifically focus on critiquing the scholarly sub-discipline of 'theology and development' alone, but rather on the church's engagement with poverty as a whole.

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The reality: A context of exclusion or inclusive rainbow nation?

South Africa is still deeply scarred by its policies of exclusion as put in place by the apartheid state, and it is clear that despite the fall of the regime, poverty in this society is still largely a legacy of the structural inequalities of the past. Hein Marais (2010), in his book *South Africa: Pushed to the limit*, notes that:

> During the 'rainbow nation' interlude of the mid 1990s, the terms of belonging were undemanding and structured around the embracing principle of 'live and let live'. In the abstract this seems appealing, but is unsatisfactory in a society with a history as brutalising as South Africa's, a history that in many ways still constitutes the present and decides the future. (p. 6)

The lingering structural inequalities of the past, therefore, raise pertinent questions with regards to the question: Who is my neighbour? Answering this question becomes even more important when an understanding of who one's neighbour is (the economic, social or racial 'other') appears to be no closer than at the time of the fall of apartheid.

It is a well-publicised fact that South Africa has one of the highest inequality rates in the world, and despite the growth of a black middle class, poverty and inequality remain racially skewed (Roberts 2014:1168). Leibbrandt *et al.* (2010:9) note that not only is South Africa's inequality level one of the 'highest in the world. Furthermore, levels of poverty and inequality continue to bear a persistent racial undertone'.[3] There are certainly those who would wish to contest legacy of the past in shaping inequality today, and would argue that policies such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) have now resulted in a reverse trend, which impoverishes whites in order to enrich the black populace. This discourse of exclusion is on the rise within sectors of the white population, and has led to a rise in cultural and/or identity resistance within the public domain as symbolised by acts such the singing of the 'old' national anthem by Steve Hofmeyr, the popular Afrikaner artist, and the more recent strong resistance to the introduction of English as medium of instruction by Afrikaner pressure groups such as Afriforum (cf. Dawjee 2014; Shange 2016). The 2014 Reconciliation Barometer confirms this with findings that show 'a decreasing desire for a united South African identity, while a racial identity assumes growing importance' (Davis 2014:2).

There remain not only race cleavages but class cleavages as well. Roberts (2014:1168) notes that although wage incomes have been growing across race groups, income inequality has risen 'with income increasingly concentrated in the richest income decimal'. For this reason, some would argue that BEE has not been as broad as was hoped for and only served to further enrich those – such as the 'tenderpreneurs' – who were already wealthy.[4] These class divisions and the poor restlessness with their lot has led to an unprecedented number of service delivery protests,[5] industrial action and campus unrest (Grant 2014:1). These cleavages are perpetuated by unequal power relations – and there is clearly a widespread growing dissatisfaction with the status quo. Grant (2014:2) notes that 'the rising levels of protest are a warning that the problems of poor people need to be addressed'. The most recent of these is of course widespread unrest on university campuses, with black students calling for the de-colonisation of tertiary education, the reduction of fees for disadvantaged students and the elimination of barriers such as language to access by these students[6] (Msila 2016; Nicolson 2016).[7] Sadly, widespread direct violence on these campuses have become a hallmark of these protests as students vent their frustration at what they view as the structural violence of financial, racial and class exclusion (Nicolson 2016). These class divisions have also led to increasing debates around white privilege, which is viewed as being closely linked to the social and economic privileges enjoyed by the white sector of the population both during the previous dispensation and at present (Kotze 2015; cf. Van Wyngaard 2015:489–492).

Against the backdrop of the above-mentioned developments, the TRC faith community re-enactment in late 2014[8] revealed that many church denominations had begun to engage with the past but were now realising that the reconciliatory approach that Marais (2010:6) identifies as 'live and let live' or perhaps more aptly put 'forgive and forget' has not really engaged the deep social and economic injustices left by apartheid.

Other animals: Critiqued responses

The manner in which many churches have responded to loving their neighbour has not really engaged these deep social and economic injustices. Part of the reason, I propose, is because perhaps many of us have forgotten that poverty is a justice issue. While during the apartheid era, church leaders such as Allan Boesak challenged congregations to work for justice and relieve poverty, our approaches or action (for the most part) have been 'stuck' in two modes (cf. Boesak 1984). Both these

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3. However, despite the fact that 22 years of post-apartheid transition has not been sufficient time to see high aggregate inequality fall, intra-race inequality is also growing (cf. Leibbrant *et al.* 2010:21).

4. The country's president, Jacob Zuma, has himself come under fire with regards to corruption and there have been several civil society marches (some, such as the anti-corruption march have also included the church). Trending hashtags with regards to the president's corruption have most notably been #Zumamustfall and #paybackthemoney in reference to the use of public funds for his private homestead of Nkandla (cf. Gernetsky & Magubane 2015; Wicks 2015).

5. The near monthly protests along the route I travel to work (and the deteriorating condition of the road due to this), are a constant reminder of inequities and the powerlessness felt by many in our land. For a theological source on the SA's service delivery problem, see Swart (2013).

6. It should be noted that these campaigns by students 'are not only about transforming institutions of higher learning, but also the larger society' (Msila 2016). It is, therefore, important to note the students' linking of their own struggle with that of outsourced workers on these campuses.

7. These protests have been popularised by the #Rhodesmustfall (which is the 'mother' of these protests that began at the University of Cape Town) and the later #feesmustfall which swept through campuses across the country from the end of 2015 to the beginning of 2016.

8. This re-enactment was hosted by the Beyers Naude Centre for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University in October 2014. All commissioners present at the original faith hearings, including former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, attended and chaired these sessions.

approaches have already been critiqued within the sub-discipline of 'theology and development'; however, these critiques are revisited below for the sake of highlighting the lack of power discourses.

The charity or welfare approach

This approach entails the provision of basic needs to relieve the plight of those affected by poverty, such as food (*kospakkies* and soup kitchens), clothing and also the support of welfare organisations such as old age homes and orphanages. These approaches were popularly identified by David Korten (1990:115) as 'first generation' strategies and in many churches are framed in the diaconial mode of 'service' to the poor (cf. Swart 2006:24, 25). Although these relief approaches are not wrong in and of itself they have been critiqued by several South African scholars within the field of 'theology and development'. The approach has been critiqued largely from the perspective that it perpetuates dependency and the objectification of those on the receiving end of such charity (see Bowers Du Toit 2012:265; De Gruchy 2003:21; Swart 2006).

When one considers the deep class and race cleavages in society, such acts of charity (should they fail to move beyond mere acts of charity) may only serve to perpetuate the divides between neighbours if there is no awareness of the dangers of this approach. Not only does it hold the danger of perpetuating the divide between the 'have's' and 'have not's', but it may also seek to perpetuate the divide between the powerful and the powerless. Bowers Du Toit (2012:262) notes that the theological theme of 'love of neighbour' is often used as theological motivation for the churches' engagement with poverty. Although the potential lay within this theme to raise issues of race and class as to 'who is my neighbour?' in South Africa today, Bowers Du Toit (2012:264) argues it is often applied in a manner that simply reinforces the charity or welfare approach to the poor. De Gruchy (2003:21, 22) points out that this charity or welfare approach to poverty removes the agency of the poor and does not recognise the fact that 'poor people are always engaged in strategies and struggles for survival'.

The pragmatic approach

This approach, labelled as such by Swart within the South African context, is the attempt by church bodies and religious denominations in post-apartheid South Africa – as promoted in particular by umbrella bodies such as the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa (EFSA) and National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD) – to engage with the state[9] (Swart 2010, 2012). This approach has argued for a strong religion–state partnership based largely on arguments such as the grassroots reach of churches and other faith-based organisations as well as their moral basis, financial contribution to those in need and voluntary capacity (see e.g. Koegelenberg 2001; Louw & Koegelenberg 2003).

Often couched in the catch-all term 'social capital' (see Swart 2010, 2012), these are indeed strong pragmatic reasons for a government to engage with a civil society role player such as the church. However, while pragmatic arguments are chiefly concerned with the 'how' of development, perhaps more theological wrestling needs to be done firstly with the 'why' of development for such action to be both more sustainable and holistic in scope. It may even be termed an approach that wants to encourage the state to see its 'neighbour' as the church and *vice versa*. Swart (2010:19, 2012:73), nevertheless, argues that a church–state partnership along such lines should not be presented as the 'magic bullet' to address the challenges of poverty and inequality.[10] He notes that when social partnership becomes an end in itself, it may:

> rule out and may even be hostile to the possibility of conflictual dialogue about issues of power, inequality and access to resources, which are experienced by people on the ground as the real issues that are at stake. (Swart 2012:77)

The pragmatic approach was largely proposed during the first decade and a half of democracy, but now requires further scrutiny at a time when the government appears to be failing to act with regards to corruption even within its own ranks. The damning report by the Public Protector that the president had misused public funds in order to upgrade his rural homestead (Public Protector South Africa 2014) and the recent discarding of her report by a commission of inquiry led by the African National Congress are but one example of this (Nhleko 2015).[11] As such, how close is too close a partnership with a neighbour that despite some gains (such as in its implementation of social grants) is failing in many respects? To push the metaphor even further: while we are scripturally implored to respect this 'neighbour', are we not also scripturally implored to challenge this neighbour out of love for the many others suffering as a result of the injustices in the neighbourhood?

What made the elephant invisible? From resistance to assistance

Swart (2003:1) already observed as far back as the early 2000s that one of the key problems the South African church faces in addressing the poverty and development problem effectively is that the 'mode of involvement or discourse … required … to effectively address this challenge has not been sufficiently thought through'. More than a decade later, it appears that this remains the case. This is not surprising considering that 'theology and development' is a fairly new discipline within South African theological institutions and universities.[12]

Critique levelled towards this sub-discipline includes that of Balcomb (2012:10–12), who bemoans the lack of theological

9. It should be noted that EFSA's initial contribution to the development debate critiqued a neo-liberal notion of development as modernisation and credited its own theological roots as being firmly grounded in the 'spirit of the liberation struggle' (Swart 2010:16–17, 2012:67–68). Its contribution would later take on what Swart (2010) termed a 'pragmatic turn'.

10. Swart (2012) also questions whether local churches have the capacity to meet what he calls the 'rising expectations' of the state regarding the role of local congregations.

11. In recent months, this has led to several #Zumamustfall marches throughout the country (see footnote 5).

12. See also footnote 1.

engagement in postgraduate theses in the field at the University of KwaZulu-Natal delivered in the period between 1995 and 2009. This is indeed also true of the two dominant approaches previously mentioned, namely the 'charity and welfare' and 'pragmatic' approaches. However, there are many root causes behind an insufficiently thought through discourse. For not only do the theological discourses that shape these approaches have theologically shallow roots, but they could also be regarded as 'weak' in their acknowledgement of power. In each approach, there is an underlying assumption that poverty can be addressed without confronting the powers, that is, that charity or neighbourly partnering alone can bring about transformation. And behind this underlying assumption lies the failure to recognise that poverty 'is perpetuated by injustice that is organised and embedded in structures' (Maggay 2009:2–3).

In digging deeper still, one finds that the insufficient mode of discourse in South Africa that Swart refers to, and that this article identifies as a discourse and practice that neglects the 'disconnect' between poverty, power and powerlessness, may be rooted in the dismissal of liberation theology as a relevant mode of doing theology at the fall of apartheid. At the time of the fall of apartheid, a prominent theologian such as Villa-Vicencio (1992) seemingly rejected the 'resistance' narrative of liberation theology when he declared that:

> The challenge now facing the church is different. The complex options for a new South Africa require more than resistance. The church is obliged to begin the difficult task of saying 'Yes' to the unfolding process of what could culminate in a democratic, just and kinder order. (p. 7)

And in similar fashion, proponents of the new development agenda in South African theological-ecclesial circles noted at basically the same time when Villa-Vicencio made his statement that:

> The word 'development' is a political buzzword. It replaces, or is fast replacing, the word liberation. The struggle is no longer for liberation, but for the development of people in the post-apartheid South Africa. The struggle for political liberation has now brought us to the point where we are forced to consider the future nature of the struggle and the contents and character of the new society we all intend to build. Almost all are agreed that political liberation will prove to be nothing but an empty shell without economic liberation: the way to the nation is through development … Behind the open political arena a whole host of organisations are re-writing their agendas and reformulating their programmes to come into line with the demands for a relevant and defensible plan of action for the 'new time'. For these organisations development is the theoretical and strategic category around which to organise. (Govender *et al*. 1992:14)

What the above-mentioned authors could not predict was that 22 years after the fall of apartheid there still appears to be no 'just and kinder order' for the poorest of the poor. Ten years after democracy, Koopman (2004) noted that liberation theology had provided a clear-cut social theology during the apartheid era that enabled the church to identify the evils of racism, classicism, sexism, economic injustice and the gap between the rich and poor. In the light of this observation, he

proceeded by mourning the quietism and passivity of the church in engaging the reconstruction of South Africa.

I wish to propose that it is perhaps exactly the idea of theologians and Christian leaders being tasked in the post-apartheid dispensation to move from what Steve De Gruchy (2003:452, 2008:11) labelled as a culture of resistance (to the evils of apartheid) to one of assistance (regarding the many challenges of development) that resulted in this quietism and passivity of the church. De Gruchy (2003:452) further noted in this regard:

> Whereas theologians and pastors of the previous generation were schooled in the prophetic 'No' expressed in *The Kairos Document* and the *Belhar Confession*, today we are seeking ways to collaborate with and assist the nation's democratically elected leaders to make life a better way for all its citizens. (p. 452)

This way of thinking was clearly in line with theological reflection at the time of De Gruchy's writing, which argued for a 'theology of reconstruction' rather than a 'theology of resistance'. It is unsurprising – and perhaps even appropriate – that this project came to life within the heady days of Tutu's 'rainbow nation' (mid to late 1990s) at a time when the ANC had begun to talk of a Reconstruction and Development programme (Vellem 2010:548). Not least, however, it is worth noting that a culture of assistance rather than one of resistance ties back into the charity and welfare approach with ease and forms the basis for the pragmatic approach. And it is also worth noting that the agenda proposed by EFSA's 'Church and Development' conferences in the 1990s very much supported the replacement of the term 'liberation' with that of 'development' as the 'key to a new paradigm' (Swart 2008:109).[13] It is, therefore, not difficult to understand that exactly because the socialist ideal espoused by some liberation theologians does not co-exist well with the dream of the rainbow nation, a theology of reconstruction replaced liberation theology (Vellem 2010:553–555). And in this regard, it is interesting to note that even Villa-Vicencio (2007:184) himself predicted that:

> Because political liberation in Latin America and South Africa is not 'evenly distributed', it is likely that the fissures and ferment that have always been part of liberation theology will become more pronounced in the future. (p. 184)

This is of course precisely where we found ourselves 22 years after the fall of apartheid and dare I say the fall of liberation theology.[14]

Acknowledging the elephant: What has power got to do with it?

The issue of power is popularly embedded in secular development discourses in the form of the notion of

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13. Especially, the two later conferences, the 'Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP): the role of the Church, Civil Society and NGO's' (1994) and the fourth conference in 1997, which focused on the issue of transformation of the welfare sector in South Africa, would move further away from liberation discourse to social development discourse (cf. Swart 2012:69–71).

14. It is important to note that it was Villa-Vicencio himself who coined the term 'a theology of reconstruction', advocating that it had to supplant the liberation theology of the apartheid struggle.

empowerment, which is often used in its 'soft' guise of skills transfer (De Beer & Swanepoel 2011:52). However, in his seminal work *Comfortable compassion? Poverty, power and the church*, Charles Elliot (1987:78) notes that development is essentially a process whereby both individuals and societies take control of their own destinies in order to affect transformation. In this way, Elliot recognises that to empower the poor and marginalised is to give them decision-making power, not merely to equip them with skills. Furthermore, Elliot (1987:78) emphasises that taking control of one's destiny is not only a 'matter of taking power' but also a matter of taking power to confront the people, the institutions and the relationships that seek to use others as objects to be disposed of, as pawns in their own game. To exclude the poor from such decision-making is after all what Friedman (1992:30) calls the 'systematic process of disempowerment'. Power is, of course, intrinsically linked to participation, and development practice centres on the participation of the poorest of the poor in their own development (cf. Swanepoel & De Beer 2011:51).

Liberation theology, together with 'state theology', had largely dominated the theological–ecclesial discourse during apartheid. However, in contrast to state theology, liberation theology had urged the churches to take political action in campaigning for the abolition of pass laws, land ownership and influx control of black people's free movement into cities and therefore the improvement of their family lives. Churches at the time were called upon to face these issues on an institutional level and use their church structures in order to 'mount large-scale campaigns' on macro and micro levels, in terms of short-term schemes and action on the congregational or parish level (Wilson 1984:82, 83). This challenge to the church was a challenge to confront the powers that be at the time – using the church's 'people power' to mobilise the nation against the tyranny of an unjust state. Allan Boesak, a prominent liberation theologian[15] at the time, saw an ontological understanding of 'power to be' – as Tillich put it – as intrinsically linked to the concept of dignity. Importantly, however, this dignity is not only seen by Boesak as inward and individual, but needing to be enacted also within the structures of society (Balcomb 1993:171).

Theologically, this approach was undergirded by a preferential option for the poor. At the time, Boesak (1984:9) stated clearly that 'the God of the Bible is the God of the poor and the oppressed'; and that 'he is on their side'. In a similar vein, Gutierrez (2012:180) also states that at its core, the preference for the poor is based on nothing less than the fact that 'the whole Bible, from the story of Cain and Abel onward, is marked by God's love and predilection for the weak and abused of human history'. In this placing of the poor as God's favourites, a kingdom reversal is affected. However, in this reversal, the powerless do not become powerful, but become empowered. It is a reversal which affirms the dignity of people in poverty and sends a message to the non-poor that they are

to actively 'affirm the worth of poor people as human beings' (Lotter 2008:207). The marginalised are empowered, because their stories move from the margins to the centre of our understanding of God's world. Their 'power to be', both inwardly and outwardly in the structures of society, is restored.

It is interesting to note that at least in two recent articles dealing with the issue of Christian *diakonia* in the World Council of Churches' journal *The Ecumenical Review*, the tension between justice and compassion for the poor has been problematised (Chung 2014; Phiri & Dongsung 2014). What is more is that both articles appear to relate back to liberation theology's 'solidarity with the poor' in their call for *diakonia* to be recognised as more than 'binding the wounds of victims or doing acts of compassion' (Phiri & Dongsung 2014:255). Phiri and Dongsung (2014) go on to state that:

> Truly authentic diakonia involves both comforting the victim and confronting the 'principalities and powers' (Eph. 6:12) … Ecumenical diakonia that seeks transformation is 'prophetic action which also involves speaking truth to powers.' In this sense, service cannot be divorced from advocacy for justice and peace. (p. 255)

This quote highlights the re-emphasis within the ecumenical movement of a return to power discourse when engaging poverty. Both the charity and pragmatic approaches appear to have unwittingly divorced their engagement with poverty from advocacy for justice and peace – in a scramble for reconstruction and partnership rather than resistance. Resistance has its place in the practice of *diakonia*, and it is clear that this is being rediscovered. Elliot (1987:97–99), nevertheless, questions an understanding whereby actions of conscientisation and advocacy can on its own be regarded by the church as sufficient tools for mobilisation. He notes that once the 'local power blocks are confronted', this will not automatically result in assets transfer from the rich to the poor nor the transfer of skills to manage such assets. In fact, if the powerless are not equipped with the skills to manage assets, 'the assets will quickly be re-appropriated by the elite and their friends' (Elliot 1987:99). Accordingly, is this not what we are currently seeing in South Africa with regard to the continually growing inequality, which has seen not only the further entrenchment of the old white elite but also the rise of a black elite who appears intent on only retaining its own assets. This furthermore highlights Ajulu's (2001) concern that:

> for the process of empowerment to occur, 'power to' is desirable because it directly empowers the most marginalised to have access to resources, to be capable of attaining goals and to satisfy needs.[16] (p. 104)

Christian development thinkers such as Ajulu (2001) and Myers (1999), furthermore, recognise that a holistic understanding of empowerment includes the recognition of social, economic and spiritual needs. The latter demands

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15. Of course, Boesak is often more widely acknowledged as a 'black theologian' rather than a 'liberation theologian' (Mothoagae 2012:279). It should also be noted that black theology is often recognised under the umbrella term of 'liberation theologies'.

16. Friedman (1992:67), for example, notes that there are eight bases of social power that the poor can draw on for their own empowerment: 'social networks, information for social development, surplus time, instruments of work and livelihood, social organisation, knowledge and skill, defensible life space and financial resources'. Friedman, of course, does not recognise the spiritual dimension of power.

from us to engage the powers with the recognition that central to the gospel is the 'life, death, resurrection of Christ and his victory over the powers of this world and death itself' and that it is 'the task, the dangerous, costly, killing task of the Church to ensure that power and its Powers are exposed to this story' (Elliot 1987:128). Wink (2012:360), in this regard, also meaningfully rejects Latin American liberation theologies' reduction of the 'principalities and powers' to the purely structural and makes the point that the powers are both 'an outer, visible structure and an inner, spiritual reality' (cf. Elliot 1987:126).

In each of the critiqued approaches in the previous section, one encounters the temptation to play the same power games: 'top-down' hand-outs from the rich to the poor, partnerships within which lie the temptation to pander to the powerful and theologies which may forget to acknowledge the insidious nature of the Empire – make fertile ground for assimilation into what Walter Wink termed 'the domination system' (cf. Boesak in Smit 2014:30). It is this integral nature of the powers that must be recognised – 'Apartheid is dead, long live Apartheid' (cf. Elliot 1987:126). It lives in the hearts, minds and bodies of many in our nation. And it lives in the inequalities we see every day and the racist sub-texts on social media (cf. Elliot 1987:102). As those seeking to address poverty and inequality within South Africa, we will need to acknowledge the insidious power of the previous system and its current appropriation by the new democratic dispensation. We will also need to name the power of charity in perpetuating powerlessness and proclaim kingdom values such as freedom and equity as being rooted in our faith.

Eating the elephant: Piece by piece

My underlying critique of the two previously noted approaches (charity and welfare and pragmatic) against the background of our contextual challenges is simply that however positive they are in certain respects, they fail to address the very divides within our society, which perpetuate poverty and inequality. An African proverb states that you eat an elephant piece by piece, so I would like to propose three ways in which we can acknowledge the 'elephant' – both within the sub-discipline of 'theology and development' and in church praxis.

Acknowledging power in our theological discourse on development

What I have argued gave rise to and continues to maintain the dominance of the two approaches, is a theology that is not radical enough for the challenges we face. Any theology that wishes to address issues of poverty and inequality must address power discourses as well as radicalise an understanding of who our neighbour is.

In many ways, our (South African) society is still called to engage power – perhaps not in the exact same key as liberationist discourses did during the apartheid era, although it is clearly

not enough to, for example, talk of love of neighbour or power in a 'weak' sense nor to simply critique charity as a notion. In terms of calls for the de-colonisation of institutions of higher learning, 'theology and development' may need to draw deeper from the wells of Black and African theology in engaging within a context of re-living some of the very issues related to power that they espoused and engage them in a new context. There is the temptation in doing theology and development to simply appropriate an understanding of empowerment from the field of development in a one-dimensional sense – that is, as skills development. Not only has the notion of empowerment as skills development already been critiqued by development scholars, but as theologians we should engage theologically with the relationship between powerlessness, power and empowerment. If participation is key to people-centred development, then the inclusion of the voices of the poorest of the poor in our theological research and practice must be evident. Theologies that re-assert God's solidarity with the poor, oppressed, powerless and marginalised may assist us to re-concientise both rich and poor in order to break the chains of charity that prevent the participation of the poorest of the poor.

We cannot, and should not, be led by mere pragmatism. I recently witnessed a group of young Christian grassroots community workers who were engaged in advocacy work but were surprised and encouraged by the resources offered to them in the scripture. How can Christian community workers engage in advocacy without the rich resources of the scripture such as the Exodus and the prophets (not to speak of Jesus) to remind them that power is a theological concept and closely related to poverty and justice issues?

This radicalising of our discourses within 'theology and development' need not be alienating or race baiting but must take seriously the social unrest and lack of restorative justice in our country (cf. Bowers Du Toit & Nkomo 2014). In this context, we will need to name the powers of our past and present and recognise our own role in perpetuating systemic evil through maintaining the status quo. Our *diakonia* cannot be divorced from the quest for social justice and therefore our theological engagement and discourse must be one that keeps poverty and justice in tension with each other – radicalising our understanding of the churches position with regards to the powers of the state and market.

The kind of pragmatic approach previously identified and undertaken in the interests of partnering with the state has borne some fruit. However, in the growing critique against government (as perhaps most notable in the #Zumamustfall and #paybackthemoney hashtags with regard to the president's alleged corruption), the church may have to reconsider whether it does not need to take a more radical stance with regard to state engagement. The National Development Plan (National Planning Commission 2011) is clearly calling for engaged citizenship, but the rules of engagement may need to shift towards a more critical engagement with the state in order to push for a more radical social justice agenda. As David Bosch (1993:95) once stated, we should 'adopt a positive, but sober attitude towards the civil realm'. At times – as during the

apartheid era – the church will need to 'speak truth to power'. This implies the need to begin again to question both state and market in its dealings with the poorest of the poor. It is encouraging to note that in recent months, the clergy are once again beginning to make public their concern with the state and institutions that exclude the most powerless (Mail & Guardian 2015).

We as the church are not there to mimic the Empire but should instead critique a neo-liberal agenda, which operates at the cost of the poorest of the poor (Chung 2014:308). Van der Ven (2011:135) notes that the church cannot simply 'leave it to market forces, while at the same time the poor drop over the edge of that market'. He cites as the reason for this (albeit from a European perspective) that the privileged have become accustomed to the poverty of the poor and have excluded themselves 'both physically behind gated communities, and mentally behind a web of preconceptions … that poverty and the poor are inherent in society' (Van der Ven 2011:135). In today's context, those of us as Christians who have relative wealth must perhaps also be called to repentance in our maintenance of the status quo. It is interesting to note that this is the same challenge faced at the time of *The Kairos Document*, which critiqued the apartheid system and the theology which undergirded it as maintaining the privileges of 'whiteness' at the cost of the black masses:

> At present they have false hopes. They hope to maintain the status quo and their special privileges with perhaps some adjustments and they fear any real alternative. But there is much more than that to hope for and nothing to fear. Can the Christian message of hope not help them in this matter? (*The Kairos Document* 1985:28)

As *The Kairos Document*[17] enjoined the church at that time, the oppressor must be called to repentance. Do many wealthier Christians not fear that the privileges that still accompany race and class (both – or one or the other) will be taken away and so we retreat further and further into the 'pseudo-innocence' that Boesak critiqued? (Boesak 2010:3, 4) The social unrest we see in our streets should enjoin the church to challenge the status quo even in our midst.

It follows that the church's critique might once again need to be taken to the streets. Indeed, it is clear that in the past year, members of civil society – from trade unions to students and even church leaders – have begun to do just that. During the apartheid era, churches used their 'people power'[18] to concientise and mobilise local people to address issues of social injustice in broader society and their own communities. In order to ensure that this does not take place only within our race and class 'ghettos', the South African Christian community will need to take the powers of race, class and

inequality very seriously – to that extent that we acknowledge their presence and assist Christians across these divides to take those powers seriously.[19] This was especially poignantly expressed by Christian social justice activist Craig Stewart at the 2015 anti-corruption march where he called on:

> … those in this crowd who are white, must not and cannot ignore the fact that our economy's foundations are the maintenance of white domination and of black oppression and pain. The structures and systems built by apartheid and colonialism remain and it is their role that must fall. As indicated by the Reconciliation Barometer, we are fast losing ground and will need to muster our theological imaginations and the power of prayer in challenging churches to face these divides. (Wicks 2015)

One thing that the TRC re-enactment brought to light was that we have not taken the notions of inequality and white privilege seriously enough and have struggled to link the notions of restorative justice and reconciliation. There are, however, small signs of hope that have sprouted in the past year, such as the AHA Movement,[20] work done by the Restitution Foundation, Micah Challenge Changemakers,[21] Freedom Mantle[22] and so on. Such movements, often relying on the imagination and hope of the younger generation, possibly have the potential to present an alternative vision of what society could look like – and provide rallying points from which to regain lost ground. From my point of view, research in 'theology and development' will need to take issues of inequality, race and power more seriously too and study the manner in which congregations and denominations can be mobilised and empowered to really engage such issues once again. As an intra- and interdisciplinary field,) argument that because practical theology has contact with people at grassroots:

> … it can … function to bring about vertical connections between different groups … It may offer an avenue whereby the voices of the marginalised can find expression in the public domain, thereby connecting less powerful communities with powerful communities with sites of public discourses and decision-making. (p. 438)

'Speaking truth to power' cannot be only at the level that umbrella organisations and movements such as the South African Council of Churches or the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA) (or even the aforementioned organisations) operate but must be revitalised at the local congregational level. Furthermore, 'theology and development' as a sub-discipline at universities and colleges

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17. The year 2015 saw the commemoration of 30 years since the release of *The Kairos Document*. *The Kairos Document* has of course also spurned several other contextual versions in various parts of the world (Africa, Europe, Palestine, India and North America; see Leonard 2010).

18. As previously noted many churches were used as mobilisation points in the struggle to mobilise the masses against the apartheid state. The term 'people power' is of course also borrowed from the Filipino struggle for democracy where the Catholic church also played a significant role.

19. It is interesting to note that in recent months, white people have been accused of not taking these very issues seriously. This has based largely on their unbridled support of the #Zumamustfall banner and marches in comparison to their negative responses to (largely black) student protests.

20. AHA stands for Authentic Hopeful Action and is a new initiative started in 2014 by Rev Edwin Arrison and others to engage and mobilise Christians with regards to social justice issues.

21. This programme, which trains young Christian community workers how to design advocacy programmes, is funded by Micah International and supported by The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA).

22. This initiative was launched in 2015 and is the youth voice of the South African Christian Leadership Initiative (SACLI), a network representing largely denominational church leaders.

that train future clergy and community workers should not only deal with community development in a project-centred fashion but also train their students in church mobilisation and advocacy skills.

Conclusion

Many of the contextual issues I have mentioned are far from new. They are, in fact, some of the very issues that the church in South Africa grappled with in the 1970s and 1980s, but which the South African church abandoned in our well-intentioned desire to realise the so-called 'rainbow nation'. The call to radicalise neighbourliness in order to produce a more inclusive society, remains a hard one and as South Africans we appear to be fast losing ground as evidenced by the many civil society, industrial and student protests that have increasingly led to greater polarisation as calls for inclusion appear to go unheard. The church has sadly not radicalised 'neighbourliness' sufficiently by operating largely within a welfare and charity paradigm and at times seeking to pragmatically engage the state in a manner which did not sufficiently critique its actions. It has, therefore, been argued that this praxis together with a shift from 'resistance to assistance' within church circles tended to ignore the need for the recognition of the notion of power to continue to inform praxis.

In many ways, the current protests and unrests are evidence of the lack of empowerment of the marginalised in the post-apartheid era and, therefore, their attempts to reclaim power and promote liberationist and post-colonial discourses. This clearly makes demands on our praxis as church, the way in which we reflect and respond faithfully within such a context. For this reason, should the church not revisit the theologies of resistance? Certainly, revisiting and possibly even re-imagining a theology and praxis of power is one of those ways and it is hoped that this article has identified some pointers in this regard. These are but possible pointers, while in seemingly desperate times, the church must be reminded of the power of the resurrection as encapsulated by the following quote from *The Kairos Document*: 'there is hope. There is hope for all of us. But the road to that road is going to be very hard and very painful … But God us [sic] with us' (*The Kairos Document* 1985:28, 29).

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