

United in our diversity we can overcome the social ills plaguing our society

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INJUSTICE takes on many forms. Racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, ageism and ecocide are just some examples of discrimination, dehumanisation and injustice. To advance justice by overcoming these different forms of discrimination, we need to develop three sets of common practices: we need to conscientise, organise and mobilise for justice.

We can apply the set of common practices to racism. To overcome racism we need to conscientise one another about its nature.

And to do this, we need to understand the three dimensions of racism and other forms of discrimination and dehumanisation. Racism firstly refers to our mostly subconscious and subtle mental pictures, presuppositions, prejudices, attitudes and logics regarding other ethnic or colour groups.

These pictures entail that we view others as either inferior or superior with regard to physical appearance, skin colour, face shape, nose size, hair texture, intellect, moral advancement and capacity to relate to God.

Classic racist theory determined the dignity, worth and value of different groups in terms of this hierarchy. Even in a democratic South Africa, it seems that your race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age etc determine where you are

placed in the hierarchy of dignity. Ecocide, ie the destruction of animals, plant and nature, is the result of this picture of human superiority and nature's inferiority.

The second dimension of racism and other forms of discrimination is that societal structures are established which reflect this picture of inferiority. The various laws of what could be called macro-apartheid and micro-apartheid remain the prime example of how pictures of discrimination and dehumanisation pave the way for structures of discrimination and dehumanisation.

Macro-apartheid measures involved the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act and the Act on Mixed Marriages. Micro-apartheid was constituted by various acts that determined where different population groups could travel, receive access to services like health care, education, welfare, where we could enjoy leisure, where we could live and where we could be buried.

The third dimension of racism and other forms of discrimination refers to the religious and secular legitimation that is offered for these pictures and societal structures of discrimination.

Apartheid theology is a classic example of attempts to provide legitimation for racist prejudices and racial structures.

Racism and apartheid were

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proclaimed as God's good news for South Africa, as the divine solution for the so-called problem and crisis of racial diversity.

To overcome racial discrimination we need to conscientise one another about the subconscious pictures with which we live. The words we use subconsciously betray our subconscious racial pictures and prejudices. For example, to call those students and staff members on our campuses who are not white diversity students is to perpetuate racist thinking. It means that white is used as norm, and that all who are not white constitute the diversity.

If we should take black as norm, whites will be part of the group called diversity students. To call black, coloured and Indian people non-whites is to make white normative. Our words make our worlds.

Words are creative. They can

either create a new reality of justice, or perpetuate old realities of injustice, discrimination and dehumanisation.

Our body language also betrays racial prejudice. To listen attentively when white people speak, and to show less interest when black people speak is to betray that you expect intellectual solutions from white people but not from black people. We need to conscientise one another of these subconscious forms of discrimination. Conscientisation means that we make one another aware of our prejudices. It also means that we accept the challenge as a matter of conscience, as a moral matter.

The second set of joint practices in addressing racism and other forms of discrimination entails that we organise. We need to break down the societal structures that embody these various forms of discrimination. Laws and policies that imply and advance discrimination need to be scrapped. Institutional processes, discourses, plans and practices need to be transformed. The institutional culture of organisations, ie the collective personality, communal character and common identity of an institution, which harbours prejudices and practices of discrimination, needs to be profoundly transformed.

In addressing our societal and institutional structures, the voices of those who are disadvantaged and wronged by these structures should



INJUSTICE: Pupils at Sans Souci Girls' High School in Newlands protest against what they say are discriminatory and racist practices at the school.

Picture: DAVID RITCHIE

lead the transformation process.

In the third instance, we should mobilise the rich diversity of our religious, secular and cultural resources and energy to overcome these injustices and discrimination.

We need to develop the so-called political will, civil courage and

activism to address injustice. We need to develop unity amid division, cohesion amid alienation and solidarity amid inequality.

Together we can overcome discrimination; dehumanisation; address alienation and division and rid the world of injustice, of racism,

classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and ecocide. Together we can build a democratic society where justice and its fruit, lasting peace and joy, reign supreme.

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