

Racism and xenophobia: The role of the Church in South Africa

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Introduction

In an article titled *Difference and inequality*, Howard Winant points out that the United States of America (USA) faces a pervasive crisis of race, a crisis no less severe than those which the country has confronted in the past (in Cross & Keith 1993:108). The origins of the crisis are not particularly obscure; the cultural and political meaning of race, its significance in shaping the social structure and its experiential or existential dimensions all remain profoundly unresolved as the USA approaches the end of the 20th century. As a result, the societies as a whole, and the population as individuals, suffer from confusion and anxiety about the issue (or complex of issues) that we call race. In a similar way, the issue of race and identity has taken centre stage in Europe with the influx of refugees. A report in the newspaper *International New York Times* (26 April 2016) puts it more squarely:

As Britain engages in fierce debates centered on national identity, it is also confronting challenges to traditional norms of political discourse, with issues of race and religion surfacing more overtly and provocatively. (p. 1)

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Perhaps, the same can be said about South Africa today. Some 22 years after the inception of democracy South Africa seems to be exploding on the issues of racism and xenophobia. While making some references to other parts of the world, this chapter mainly attempts to look at the struggle of racism and xenophobia in South Africa and then proceeds to discuss the role of the Church in relation to these challenges.

■ Racism

Racism is not easy to define today. The complexities abound in a variety of ways. For example, many accused of racism respond with the argument that their actions and aspirations are to do with patriotism, or that their claims revolve around matters of *ethnic* or national *culture*, not race. To which others add the view that everyone is racist. Ali Rattansi (2007) explains the confusion and complexity of understanding racism by pointing out that:

the notion of race, and its associations with skin colour, facial features, and other aspects of physiognomy, has been intertwined, amongst other things, with issues of class, masculinity and femininity, sexuality, religion, mental illness, and the idea of the nation, and crucially, with the development of science. (p. 12)

In spite of what we have said above, it must be noted that at an International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, more than 160 countries agreed on the definition of racism as:

any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. (cited in the ANC's submission to the World Conference Against Racism NGO Forum Durban, 3 September 2001:3)

Such attempts at a definition tend to be general and far-reaching, with key terms (such as 'race', 'colour', 'descent', 'ethnicity', 'nationality') requiring further definition or conceptual clarification. A slightly more helpful definition for this is found in the *Early Years Trainers' Anti-Racist Network Manual*:

an unjust situation, in which a group because of its unequal place in society, suffers from a persistent pattern of prejudice, exclusion, injustice, discrimination and disadvantage which are slow to change and rooted deep in the institutions and structure of society and in people's psyches. (Darbyshire 1994:9)

For Lane (1999), racism may include practices and procedures that discriminate against people as a result of their colour, culture and/or 'race' or ethnicity, with the term 'race' being seen as a social and political construct linked to power, status, wealth and social

position (Derman-Sparks & Phillips 1997). Turning the process of definition on its head, McLaren and Torres (1999:59) argue that racism is an ideology that produces the concept 'race', and it is not the existence of 'races' that produces racism. Rather than attempt to define as a single term 'racism', therefore, it is more helpful to break it down into some of the various, invariably overlapping, levels on which it can be manifested.

Educational psychologist, Jace Pillay, attempts to do this in the South African context by exploring the notions and levels of racism in public schools. He refers to the different levels in which racism can be identified: 'overt racism', 'structural racism', 'institutional racism', 'covert racism', 'personal racism', 'interpersonal racism' and 'cultural racism' (Pillay 2014:150). Further, Pillay states that the emergence of *'modern racism'* has made the injustices and inequalities associated with racism all the more difficult to identify. More subtle and often disguised, this more 'covert' form of racism may not intend to be malicious, but many white people still subconsciously hold onto an internalised superiority complex in their interaction with black people. Because legislation outlaws all forms of racism in a democratic society, white people are expected to be 'politically correct', that is providing reasons for actions that cannot be seen as racist, but which are under the surface. For example, white parents may withdraw their children from State schools on the pretext that the large classes are not conducive to teaching, while in reality they do not want their children to interact with black children (Pillay 1996). Pillay points out that these levels of racism mentioned above are not mutually exclusive, but may have varying impacts on each other. They are also interactive and each level influences and is influenced by the others. One or a combination of levels could be operative at a given time.

Racism¹ is generally linked with the asserting of whiteness. The ascendancy of whiteness is usually associated with the rise of capitalism, modernity and the nation-state, and the cultural capital which coincided with such developments. There are long-standing accounts of this process which place the colonised, enslaved, underdeveloped and dark-skinned world in the role of perpetually exploited proletarians in relation to the resource-stealing white and Western world (Robinson 1983; Williams 1964). In this version of the world, the global working class is of colour, and not by accident. Rather, capitalist expansion has depended so heavily on mythologies of race and their attendant violence that the double project of racial and economic subjugation is a constitutive aspect of this expansion (Bhattacharyya, Gabriel & Small 2003:35).

1. It is important to draw a distinction between racism, racial prejudice and racial discrimination. Racism is the belief that some races of people are better than others, and racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. Racial prejudice is a negative attitude towards a group of people based on race, arising from race-based stereotypes. Racial discrimination is when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation because of their race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin.

Although it is invariably linked to white Western subjects, who came to represent the embodiment of humanity and reason, whiteness is not simply an ontological state. It is an imaginary one. In Aaron Gresson's words:

whiteness is not limited to physical characteristics like hair texture, skin hues, nose shape, lip and hip size, and the like. Whiteness is about the position that the category of 'white people' happens to occupy in people's minds. (cited in Semali 1998:183)

June Jordan deepens this point by stating that:

white supremacy goes beyond racism, it means that God put you on the planet to rule, to dominate, and occupy the centre of the national and international universe - because you're white. (Jordan in Bernasconi 2003:21)

In the South African context it is the affirmation and imposition of whiteness as the superior pigmentation and population group at the extent of oppressing and dehumanising the black majority population which led to black people actually believing that they are inferior human beings. The apartheid policy entrenched the protection of white rights embedded in political privilege, social advantage and economic domination. Economics was racialised not just in terms of production forms and processes but also in terms of processes of distribution and consumption. The job market was systematically geared to protect the economic activity and sustainability of white people. It is clear that economic pressure was exerted and manipulated to sustain racism and white privilege. Further, apartheid policies activated institutionalised discrimination in such areas as housing, marriage, education, employment and health. The power of whiteness in this sense lies in its capacity to impoverish, starve, contaminate and murder, all seemingly within the bounds of legality.

While South Africa has now moved to a new democracy since 1994, it still continues to struggle with the issue of racism which has become ever so prevalent in many ways in the country. More so, we see the ever-increasing accusation of reverse racism² often made by white people. We have seen this in the social media in recent times which has caused hurts and pains in many people. People often think and ask how we can have such racist experiences and expressions in a new democratic South Africa. Do people never learn? Well, racism is often driven by deep-seated insecurities, anxieties and fears which are then expressed in numerous, neurosis-driven expressions of whiteness. But whiteness is not just rooted in fear; it also elicits fear. This is precisely what we are seeing in South Africa with the decline of white power and dominance.

2. This is a phenomenon in which discrimination, sometimes officially sanctioned, against a dominant or formerly dominant racial or other group representative of the majority in a particular society takes place, for a variety of reasons, often initiated as an attempt at redressing past wrongs.

To address the evils of racism in South Africa transformation must be energised by economic redistribution, social redress and political balance. This is precisely the challenge, while we have managed well to address some issues we have not been successful in getting to the heart of the matter. Consequently, economic power still lies mainly in the hands of white people who continue to provide market and labour leadership. Unless this issue is realistically and sensibly addressed, racism would continue to live with us because racism has perpetuated inequalities. We may have a democratic country, but the question is do we have a democracy that takes seriously the balance of economic and political power. Political liberation must be accompanied by economic liberation and redistribution if democracy is to be truly effective. Williams makes the argument that globalisation has reconfigured social relations, and there have been some losers as a result, but whiteness in its new global guise remains powerfully intact (Williams 1997). Some of the old codes associated with privilege may have been questioned (e.g. around language and dress), but many of the mechanisms of white privilege (e.g. social networks) remain. Using this argument Gargi Bhattacharyya et al. (2003:10) state that what we are facing worldwide is not the demise of racism but the changing configuration of whiteness. Can this be descriptive of the South African context today? Bearing in mind the multidimensional aspects of racism, it is imperative that we recognise the need for the transformation of the *whole* South African society. However, we need to realise that real transformation also requires the transformation of the economy as an integral part of transforming the South African society to combat unemployment, poverty and inequalities and to promote social cohesion and harmony. We shall return to this later as we focus on the role of the Church in South Africa today.

■ Xenophobia

Let us now look at the issue of xenophobia. Prior to 1994 immigrants to South Africa faced discrimination and even violence which largely stemmed from the institutionalised racism of the time due to apartheid. One would have expected incidences of xenophobia to decline after 1994 with the establishment of the new democratic government, however; on the contrary, it increased. In May 2008, 62 people were killed, attacks apparently motivated by xenophobia, although 21 of those were South African citizens. In 2015, a nationwide attack on immigrants ensued which even prompted a number of foreign governments to begin repatriating their citizens. How do we understand xenophobia in the context of South Africa?

The word xenophobia comes from two Greek words *xeno* meaning stranger and *phobia* meaning fear. Both words combined speak about the intense dislike or 'fear of strangers'. However, this is extended now to include refugees and immigrants, people from other countries. It describes attitudes, prejudices and behaviours that reject, exclude

and often vilify people based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity.

Xenophobia is usually differentiated from racism. While racism speaks about the racial superiority of one race group over another, xenophobia refers to the feelings of fear or hatred of others from another group. Generally racist people accept the presence of others but attempt to keep them oppressed and dominated. Xenophobic people, however, tend to refuse to accept the presence of other people around them usually because they are perceived as a source of threat. In this regard of differentiation, Blumer (1958) points out that racism is more behavioural and xenophobia is more attitudinal. Xenophobia can be associated with racism and ethnicity where there is a dominant minority group, oppressed majority and suppressed indigenous group. In my opinion, xenophobia is directly linked to racism and ethnicity when institutionalised measures are undertaken to protect the rights and interest of the 'in-group' against the development of the 'out-group'. In this sense, it can be directly related to the South African policy of apartheid which entrenched the protection of white privilege against the majority black people.

The xenophobic crisis in South Africa was not between white and black people but between black South Africans and mainly black foreigners from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Mozambique, including people from Pakistan, India, et cetera. How do we understand these xenophobic attacks? Were they racist or ethnic in their form? Can it be described as such? Dixon (2006) claims that the:

presence of racial or ethnic group is only the first step in the causal claim of prejudice. The question is whether this threat related to size is due to the competition over available jobs, concerns about the welfare state being undermined, or whether immigrants are perceived to threaten the natural way of life of the majority population. (p. 2181)

All these lead to anti-immigrant attitudes. This is precisely the situation in South Africa. Immigrants have been allowed to settle mainly in poorer communities; consequently they have been accused of taking the jobs, wives and limited opportunities of the local population in the townships. Xenophobia is strengthened when immigrant workers settle for low wages and poor working conditions than what the majority population is prepared to accept. The free-ride on the welfare state also aggravates xenophobic reactions. While the South African government freely and rightly allowed for immigrants to settle in South Africa, they failed to implement what I refer to as an *integration plan* taking cognisance of the local population and that of the immigrants. Thus, it was only a matter of time that xenophobic outbursts would become a reality, as we have seen in 2008 and 2015 in South Africa.

Blumer (1958), using the concept of group theory, establishes that the larger the minority becomes, the more threatened the majority feels and, therefore, the more

averse the majority becomes. The majority becomes averse because it perceives that the minority is a threat to its dominant position as the group competing over scarce resources. Also, the larger the group, the greater the potential is for collective (political) action against the majority. In other words, the majority group can perceive large numbers of immigrants as competitors in the economic domain and/or in the area of identity politics. In group theory, people become averse towards 'out-groups' when they feel threatened by members of those groups. In other words, it is not the existence of immigrants that matters, but the existence of immigrants who threaten the host residents' position. These perceived threats are usually economically, culturally and religiously inclined.

In my assessment, the reaction to the 'out-groups' has been mainly economically linked and partially culturally instigated. Racism and ethnicity can play a role in the area of culture, especially when it comes to intermarriages and values of the majority population. Foreigners are viewed as potential threats to national identity, social order and, most importantly, to the values cherished by the majority population. While the cultural aspect may be an element to the xenophobia attacks in South Africa, it is not as dominant as the economic reason. The competition for scarce resources is the root cause of xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Although economics does play a serious role in, for example, addressing the refugee situation in Europe, of equal significance are the cultural and religious aspects. Previously, when foreigners entered into a host country, it was hoped that there would be a process of assimilation through which immigrants would take on the language and cultural values of the host country; then there would be no problem. Nowadays, this does not seem to be the case. Instead of assimilation what we are witnessing is cultural pluralism and religious differences. We can even see this in South Africa where foreigners first came into local churches but soon started to meet separately, using language and culture as the main reasons of justification for independence and separation.

In the Western world and even in parts of Africa Islamophobia has become a huge religious threat with immigrants, fortunately not so much within the South African context. Although there have been traces of attacks on Muslim foreigners, it is not intended against Islam as such, but driven by economic realities and struggles. Especially in Europe and America, Islamophobia displays a mix of ingredients that lead to a wrongful view of conflict of religions and civilisations: the association of Islam to violence and terrorism, the suspicion concerning Islamic teachings, the prohibition to display visual signs like veils, headscarves and minarets (Herring 2011:290). What can be seen from all these are the fact that cultural and religious intolerances are also becoming serious factors that contribute to xenophobia and racism. Ultimately, racist and xenophobic discourse is characterised by its affirmation of the immutable nature of cultural, ethnic or religious

identities. We shall now turn to look at the role of the Church in addressing racism and xenophobia.

■ What can the Church do to address racism and xenophobia?

In addressing the issues of racism and xenophobia in South Africa the Church has to lead the way, in conjunction with others, so that all may have the fullness of life in the context of racial harmony, economic justice, peace and inclusivity. In this regard, the Church is called upon to do, among other things, the following.

The Church must engage the issue of racism and xenophobia from a biblical and theological perspective. We should not get caught up with the economic order and practice of the day; instead, we need to do proper analysis and speak prophetically into the context. The Church must be able to analyse the context, conduct research and establish the facts about the situation. It is not acceptable that we simply accept the government's position on racism and xenophobia and rely on the media and social networks to inform our thinking and position on matters. The Church must be able to get to the grassroots causes of the issues surrounding racism and xenophobia. What does Scripture teach us about pilgrims and co-pilgrims, this world, the use of the earth and its resources, economic sharing and solidarity, the care of the poor and needy, the Kingdom of God, justice, peace and righteousness? These are important theological themes the Church often displaces in the quest to identify with power and privilege. The Church needs to engage a prophetic role in the light of injustices and the dehumanising of human beings.

Further, the Church should be able to read the signs of the times and be proactive in forecasting the future rather than been reactive and coming into the fray when it is forced to. The Church should hold the government accountable in its immigrant programme and integration plan. In Germany, I was excited to hear wonderful stories of how churches have come together to assist refugees with food, clothing, shelter, documentation and help in finding jobs. They have partnered with government in addressing the refugee crisis. In fact, the Church has suddenly come alive and people are keen to get involved, despite the fact that some people are not happy about the presence of refugees. In the USA, churches have opened their facilities to welcome refugees, providing opportunities to learn English, helping them to prepare for employment interviews and jobs.

The Church needs to ensure that the government does have a plan to combat racism and xenophobia. During the apartheid days in South Africa, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) promoted the programme to combat racism. This endeavour should be revived to address issues of racism in South Africa today.

The problem is that much of those programmes ended with the establishment of the new democratic South Africa, but that does not mean that we had adequately addressed the challenges of racism. If anything, the given realities indicate that we have not dealt with racism at its deepest level. The Church in South Africa must return to helping people confront and address deep-seated racist beliefs and practices and take the lead to welcome and assist strangers.

The Church should take the lead in education, reorientation and building of relationships. It is true that children learn racism as they grow up, from the society around them – and too often the stereotypes are reinforced, deliberately or inadvertently, by mass media. McLaren (2003:930) states that friendship reduces xenophobia and racism. The ‘theory of contact’ tells us that when people rub shoulders, have ample time and opportunity for building meaningful relationships, they soon learn to trust one another. The prejudice, racial inclinations and xenophobic feelings of hatred and dislike are reconditioned and challenged when people get to know one another. The Church should play a vital role in this regard. The Gospel is one of good news and love. It is a message of how the love of Christ brings people together, triumphs over evil and establishes the good. The idea is not to Christianise or convert but to be Christ-like and to be the Good Samaritan exercising love and compassion on the poor, injured, neglected, suffering and dying.

The Church should understand that *cultural differences* play a very significant role in separating and dividing people. Because these are often religious in nature, their members tend to interpret most of life through a religiously informed grid. Differences in culture are often given absolute and transcendent meanings. Furthermore, all religious expressions are embedded in particular cultural forms, so individuals experience God through culturally specific media. This is what is referred to as religiously charged ethnocentrism (Christerson, Edwards & Emerson 2005:175). How can the Church provide space to address this reality to expand and broaden the horizon of a limited worldview or cultural experience? Most churches in South Africa are now attracting people from different race and ethnic groups, yet they fail to create meaningful spaces where people can share their different life experiences and learn from one another about the other. The experience of worship and the use of liturgy can be more meaningfully adapted to facilitate and embrace diversity and learning.

In attempting to build relationships and allay fears that swell racism and xenophobia, the Church should embark on a programme of education to biblically explore what it means to be God’s people on the earth. The Church has a unique opportunity of attracting people from all sorts of backgrounds; it should use this facility of the ‘mixed economy’ to enable people to *transcend cultural and racial boundaries*, retain their identity, but learn to respect and accept the way of life of the ‘other’. How can the Church build bridges and not walls, become inclusive and not exclusive and in so doing demonstrate that God so ‘loved

the world?’ These are some of the challenges we need to be discussing in the light of resurfacing racism and xenophobia both in South Africa and across the globe. The Church needs to also make its contribution to this end. While respecting and accepting the variety of cultural affiliations prevalent in South Africa, the Church must help interpret and integrate these as part of its endeavour to build a nation. The Church is in a unique position to encourage cultural tolerance, education and acceptance because millions of people in South Africa from different races, tribes, colour, languages and cultural backgrounds belong to it. In order to build our nation in this regard it is important for the Church to start promoting the same in its life, work, witness and worship. Thus, the Church by virtue of the fact of what it is called to do and the unique position it has in society, together with its already established infrastructure, must take the lead in building and uniting the nation culturally and politically.

The Church has to put time and effort in building the *human community*. The majority of people in South Africa have been dehumanised and demoralised for a long time. Apartheid made them feel like no people. In fact, the majority of South African black people still suffer with an inferiority complex. They still have this notion of being second- or third-class citizens. Although apartheid is no longer existent in the laws of our country, it continues to live in the hearts and minds of people and it will do so for a long time. In short, we are still far from the establishment of the ‘Beloved Community’ that Martin Luther King spoke about in the fulfilment of the American dream and the actualisation of the Kingdom of God, a society where all live lives that befit their dignity as children of God; a society where everyone is accepted, everyone belongs (Marsh 2005:50).

Modern racism, as we have shown earlier, is taking many forms; it is no longer just the simple issue of black and white. The Church by the very nature of its mission has the ability to reach into peoples’ hearts and minds. It does this through the message of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Church must never hesitate to proclaim the biblical message that all people are equal before God, and in this sense it must seriously engage issues of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ that continue to perpetuate separation and division. It must not choose to remain with a comfortable message when its calling is to speak the truth in love. The Church must work towards the restoration of the dignity and self-worth of all those who have been dehumanised. It needs to embark on programmes and activities that bring people together, empower and train them and develop their confidence and skills so that they do not think any less of themselves, but as people created in the image of God. For example, the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement in the USA is working for the validity of the lives of black people. It campaigns against police brutality against black people. All of this is intended to build the human community that abounds in mutual respect and acceptance. The Church, as part of its task of building human community, needs to

learn to be the 'Church for Others'. Building the human community requires dealing with all those realities that continues to propagate racism, tribalism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia.

We also need to be Church *together* with others. Opening the Church, especially its parochial organisation, means embracing the world we live in. Thus, Church is not only for others, but also *together* with others. In this sense, the Church opens its doors to people of other faiths and no faith. The Church joins with people of other religious affiliations to help build the human community. Duncan makes the claim that Christianity can no longer be treated either as a foreign faith or as a superior faith to others, including African Traditional Religion (Duncan 2002:333). This, too, provides the opportunity to address issues related to racism and xenophobia. The Church then, is not only for one another but *with others*. Understanding and appropriating this ideal will help address religious intolerance, violence and Islamophobia, which are so prevalent in the world today.

In building the human community, the Church must work at ensuring and securing the rights of human beings. The Church has the responsibility to work towards the fullness of life for all people on earth, and in this regard it has the duty of upholding and defending human rights where it is violated. Bonhoeffer, for example, tried to reconcile the puzzle of seeing natural life as either exclusively an end or as a means to an end. Using the role of Christ, he argues that insofar as Jesus Christ's life expresses its createdness, it is an end in itself, and insofar it expresses its participation in the Kingdom of God, it is a means (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 6, p. 179). Bonhoeffer thus contended that rights are the expression of life as an end in itself while duties arise from life as the means to an end. In this sense he declared that rights come before duties (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 6, p. 186). He further claimed that human rights are God-given, and therefore no one should violate them. In the context of racism and xenophobia human rights are always violated. The Church has the responsibility of standing with God in defending the rights of people to live with dignity and sustainability. The numerous municipal protests in South Africa are an expression of standing up for ones' rights for basic provisions and healthy lives. The Church needs to support these endeavours and challenge the authorities that fail to fulfil their elected responsibilities in the interest of the poor people.

The Church should impress on the fact that human rights should be understood in the broader context of respecting the rights of others. As John Mbiti wrote, many traditional Africans believed and conducted themselves in such a way that: 'Since we are, therefore I am', or, otherwise stated, 'I am because we are and not the other way round'. In a general sense, life was largely communal, and it still remains largely communal, although the Western individualised concept is fast spreading among Africans. Otherwise, as Akinsho pointed out:

By contrast the African concept of human rights is based on the conception of communalism, which is collectivism since rights exist because of the communality of humankind and this concept derives its power from aspects of human dignity which corresponds with communal duty. (Cited in Bedford-Strohm, Bataringaya & Jahnichen 2016:98)

The African concept of ubuntu can teach us a lot about human community and communal rights and care for one another – a concept that can help us to overcome the challenges of racism and xenophobia.

The Church must continue in the struggle for justice in South Africa, and in particular economic justice. South Africa has received political liberation; however, nothing can really change without the new government having economic power. In this regard, in order to make a difference to the lives of people in their impoverished circumstances, it is necessary to transform power relations; to shift the balance of power towards the poor, as well as to lay foundations which can help to determine the shape of society, as a long-term measure. The Church in South Africa must therefore challenge the economic system in place. An improvement in the quality of life is related to a fundamental restructuring of the economy, which is essential to meet the needs of the majority of the population. A major part of economic growth and improving the quality of life is by opening up the economy, and thereby creating access to those traditionally discriminated against (Kleinschmidt 1995:175). Racism and xenophobia has a direct bearing on economic factors and systems. The task of the Church is to play a prophetic role in addressing inequalities that continue to fracture and divide people.

In this sense, the Church must enter into the realm of economics and not simply leave it to the trained professionals. In any case, most of these professionals are probably members of the Church. Hence, the Church should not resist the opportunity to teach these people to apply the Word of God to their professions as well. Perhaps the Church should share in the training of our economist – the time has come for us to engage a theology of economics. Economics does not only have to do with growth, it has to deal with people, attitudes and ethics. In this regard, the Church has much to offer to the shaping of the country's economic policy and budget. Opportunity is often given to public participation in drawing up the government budget; the Church should participate fully in these structures upholding the interest of the poor and needy.

Economic justice is and must be a concern for the Church. However, if the Church is to be true to this end it must first put its own 'house in order'. It is no use pontificating or pointing fingers at others when it is guilty of the same sins. This warning is in place because too often churches have been, and still are, part and parcel of existing political-economic systems. Therefore, churches have to begin with repentance over their past role in society seeking to liberate themselves from their own history and thus earning the authentic right to speak on behalf of the exploited and poor people.

The Church needs to be mindful to the fact that although apartheid may be a thing of the past, its legacy of hurts, sufferings, wounds and painful experiences continues to surface in the present. The complex history of South Africa necessitates the twofold ingredient of reconciliation and healing to become part of the process of transformation, in 'healing a broken people' in our country. It is a known fact that when people who have gone through dramatic experiences of gross human rights violations, *viz.* torture, assassinations and massacres and the like reminiscent and make known their plight by talking about them, they experience healing. In order to facilitate this process of healing in our land the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established. Many have shared their stories, recorded the facts and relived their horrible experiences during the sitting of the Commission. While the TRC has helped many to receive healing, the whole issue of amnesty and reparations remain in question. It is here that the Church must hold the government to its promises. Is there a correlation between political reconciliation and the Church's understanding thereof in our context that can be utilised to build community and ubuntu? (see August 2005:14–29).

The Church has a vital role to play in bringing about racial reconciliation and healing in South Africa, and here it needs to embrace a pastoral-prophetic approach. It ought to do this because many of its own members have become victims themselves or they have been affected in some way or another. Likewise, the Church can also encourage its members, who have promoted the evils of apartheid, in whatever way, to seek repentance and forgiveness. Reconciliation and healing are the business of the Church as expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. While proclaiming love and forgiveness the Church must take cognisance of the deep pain and sufferings of people under apartheid, whom lost loved ones and are still searching for answers to people still missing.

It is a biblical fact that the truth shall set us free. It is also a biblical fact that we serve a God who advocates justice. Allan Boesak has pointed out that the politicians and journalists have claimed the concept of reconciliation from the Church making it a buzzword in the new South Africa (Boesak 1995:27). He pleaded with the Church to reclaim it and to emphasise the biblical injunction that reconciliation is really not possible without confrontation – confronting what we are, confronting what we have been and confronting what we have done.

Reconciliation is not possible while one tries to cover up the sins, to paint over the cracks; they have to be uncovered for reconciliation to take place. The tragedy in South Africa is that we have moved on without attending to the evils of apartheid, and racism is now resurfacing to haunt the South African nation. Admittedly, the Church too failed in adequately addressing the problem of racism, pain and suffering. Reconciliation requires that we surface the truth from under the carpet; confront it and find forgiveness and healing, which would also require restorative justice. The Church should incorporate this into its liturgy, worship and practice. The Church should embark on programmes to

facilitate healing and reconciliation ministries. It is a matter of fact that unless this happens we will fail in our attempts to build a new nation. The Church has the right to pave the way in this responsibility because biblically speaking, it is itself a reconciled community, a community of the redeemed, a community of love and a healing community (Pillay 2002:319).

The majority of churches in South Africa consist of a mixture of people from different cultural, ethnic and racial groups, and as such it has the ideal facility to promote reconciliation and healing in our land. Though people may be members of the same church their experiences in life may be vastly different because of the tragedy of apartheid. The Church must not resist the opportunity of bringing its members together and embarking on exercises to foster reconciliation and healing. It can be certain that such endeavours by the Church will have a rippling effect throughout the nation, especially if the greater part of the South African population is said to be Christian. An even greater measure of success in this attempt surrounds the Church because all its members, no matter their experiences, already have a common unity in the name of Jesus Christ.

Clearly, the Church as it addresses racism and xenophobia is to be both a living example and an agent of human unity. Wherever there is division, enmity or discrimination, there reconciliation must be the mission of the Church. When the Church is not about the task of reconciliation, it has lost its way, working at cross purposes to its own identity and misunderstanding its fundamental task.

■ Conclusion

In spite of all the good efforts to build a new community, country and world, racism and xenophobia would continue to perpetuate separation, division, oppression and domination of different people groups. This divide would continue to extend itself in racial, cultural, political, religious and economic manifestations that persist in the failure of creating human community and unity and racial harmony. The Church, because of the very nature of the Gospel of Christ, is called to bring unity, reconciliation, healing and peace. The (ecumenical) Church in South Africa struggled in dismantling apartheid; it must now continue to build a nation freed from the evils of racism and economic injustices. It needs to work towards the fullness of life for all people.

■ Summary: Chapter 1

Racism and xenophobia have become a worldwide issue and challenge. The recent flood of immigrants and refugees into Europe and America has put this matter on the world map. In South Africa racism and xenophobia have, in recent times, reached

explosive proportions and have greatly intensified the need for the Church to get more deeply involved in the creation of racial harmony and peace as it works towards the fullness of life for all people. This chapter explored the challenges of racism and xenophobia in South Africa and concluded by discussing the role of the Church in combating these realities.

Chapter 1

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