AOSIS

Racism as a challenge for church and society in democratic South Africa: Human dignity perspective

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The image of God has been vandalised by racism in South Africa, which it is argued is a sin. It is an ecclesiological responsibility to address the vandalised image of God in South Africa. The author will argue from the human relationship as a build-up to the Theanthropocosmic principle. This principle denotes the relationship between God (theos) the human being (anthropos) and the physical-organic environment (cosmos). For addressing this responsibility, the grounds of internal racism are exposed using a philosophical interpretation. According to the author, there is a correlation between sin and racism. The latter is viewed as multidimensional from a Theanthropocosmic perspective.

The theoretical framework will be within hamartiology and soteriology. The philosophical interpretation will be utilised to broaden the understanding of the theological problem of the vandalised image of God.

Keywords: racism; church; society; democratic; human dignity.

Introduction

Between 2010 and 2020 there has been the tendency of racial conflicts and racist utterances, from social media to formal debates, in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. These utterances are heard in different provinces in South Africa and are found in institutions of higher learning such as the University of Eastern Cape and the University of Free State (Goga 2010; Ntombana & Bubulu 2017; Soudien 2010). The vandalisation of the image of God was indicated by the incident in which cleaners at the University of the Free State were forced by four white students to eat food that was believed to have been urinated on (Ntombana & Bubulu 2017). Laws of the apartheid era have been changing, but the attitude of people towards each other has not changed. This is part of the problem we are facing in South Africa and the rest of the world. This tendency is a reflection of the vandalisation of the image of God by racism in South Africa. The argument put forth in this article is that racism is a sin that needs to be addressed from all areas of life in democratic South Africa. In this research, the author will discuss some of the manifestations of racism in South Africa, how racism manifests itself through the multiracial or multicultural education system and the role of the church in addressing the vandalised image of God by racism.

Sin and racism as destructive agent of the Theanthropocosmic[1] connection

Racism as one type of sin has the common features of any other sin, which is the breaking of the connection between human beings that has an impact on the relationship between God and human beings. It is imperative to define and clarify the concept of sin, so that the reader may have a better understanding of this concept. In a racist society, individualism is the key as opposed to interconnectedness with God, human beings and the natural-organic environment. According to Ntombana and Bubulu (2017:1), people are living in different locations based on racial divisions and privileges, whites are still privileged, while the majority of blacks and a small number of whites are poor and marginalised. This racial and class division vandalises the image of God.

The author will focus on racism as a type of sin, not developing the theory of sin in modern society. The author will provide a brief definition and clarification of the concept of sin. It is primarily necessary to examine this concept (sin) based on the Old Testament and the New Testament, in chronological order starting with the old then moving to the new. In the Hebrew

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1.The Theanthropocosmic principle is a concept coined by Prof. van Niekerk from three Greek words, which are Theos meaning God; anthropos, which means human being or man, and cosmos, which means earth or world. In Van Niekerk's view, the Theanthropocosmic principle denotes the relationship between God, human beings and the physical–organic environment. This is the divine relationship, which cannot be broken.

Bible, the word used for sin (transgression) is *abar*, meaning to 'cross over'. It can also mean to 'turn away'. Kakwata (2016) defines sin from the Old Testament commonly utilised word to designate sin, which is the Hebrew word אֲטֵה (*chātāʾ*), which denotes 'to miss the right point or to deviate from the norm.'

The writings in the New Testament were originally in Greek. There are words in Greek to denote sin in the New Testament like '*anomia*' and '*hamartia*'. The word for transgression in 1 John 3:4 is *anomia*, meaning lawlessness (law breaking). The word for sin is *hamartia*, which denotes 'missing of the mark' (Kakwata 2016). Zodhiates (1992:130) defines the Greek term '*hamartia*' meaning 'sin', as a missing of the ultimate goal and the possibility of humanity, which is the creator (God) of humanity. Sin is wrongdoing towards the Creator, with more emphasis on the guilt aspect of the missing of the ultimate results and possibility of the life of humanity. *Hamartia* denotes the destruction of humanity as well as human dignity. Racism does not see human beings as equal and with dignity as intended by God, but it misses that point of the relationship between God and humanity as God's image. In this context, racism as a sin is to miss the point that all human beings are an image of God. Berkouwer (1971:1–3) indicates that human reaction to the challenge of where evil comes from (*unde malum*) is only to be noticed as that of not knowing the origin of sin. It is problematic to draw correlations between sin and evil on the one hand, and racism on the other. Sin, as a destructive agent to a Theanthropocosmic relationship, will lead the author to the argument that racism is a sin.

Sin as a destructive agent of the Theanthropocosmic connection

In Christian theology, Genesis 1–3 is the pivotal point where the argument for the beginning of sin emanated. The destruction of the relationship between God and humanity started in Genesis 1–3. The event of the Fall has severed the relationship between God and humanity, which impacts on nature because humanity needs to struggle to survive (Modise 2011). In Genesis 1–2, the ideal Creation of God that was sustained by the relationship between God and humanity was destroyed, for example the break between God and Adam, as well as Adam and Eve and their children. According to Modise (2011), there are two comprehensive strategies: firstly the Creation in Genesis 1 and 2, and consequently the evildoing and the appearance of sin in Genesis 3. Humanity knows that the descriptions in Genesis 1–3 are human depictions of Creation and the evildoing into sin and emergence of evil. Secondly, humans have the experience of social representations through human creatureliness, thus the consciousness of being created by God within a created natural world (Modise 2011:78).

According to Modise (2011:80), a conclusion cannot be drawn from the human state of being created and therefore from the experience of human Creation, the interior scheme of the priestly depiction of nature in Genesis 1–2:3 is restricted, as

shown in verse 31. According to the account of Genesis 1 and 2, God observed all that he created and viewed as good, reaching its amen in verse 1 of Genesis 2 where God concludes that he completed the Creation of heavens and the earth in all their vast array. The completion of the account is that the humanity and natural world were created and pronounced as good by God (Modise 2011:80).

According to the African-Christian philosophical perspective, African-Christians admit that sin and evil are destructions being done to the Theanthropocosmic relation (God–human beings physical–organic environment). Impairment done to the one is harm done to the other. It is generally known that racism was accepted as part of God's Creation (apartheid philosophy) and theologically justified. From a fundamentalist approach, however, the view that racism is part of God's Creation is stigmatised by viewing the curse placed at the end in Genesis as an explanation why we are no longer able to live together as human beings. The sting of racism as part of Creation is removed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as God's main reconciliatory tools to humanity.

Basically speaking sin and evil are the destruction of the perfect divine and human connection. In the African context, a relationship with God, ancestors and human beings in a community is very important as any break in this chain of relationship results in a natural disaster for which the term 'sin' is used to denote disaster (Mbiti 1969:98). The concept of sin means that falling into sin, as shown in the paradise portrayal of Adam and Eve, transpires in the life of every person and group. The critical perspective is that sin and evil have a connection to God and humanity. In every historical moment, sin and evil can be observed in the human experiential involvement in God's grand acts of Creation, reconciliation, renewal and fulfilment (Modise 2011:81). Racism, typified sin, is disregarding this divine order that humanity is created in the image of God, to live in relationship with God and one another on earth with respect and a proper relationship with the environment. One needs to build on the classical sources as Mbiti (1969:98) puts it. So then, God withdrew from humanity, partly because of the human disobedience to God, and partly through an accident caused by humanity, and partly through the severing of the link between heaven and earth. However, destruction occurred, it brought disadvantageous and tragic consequences to humanity, which leaves human beings as the main losers. These consequences disrupted the original state of humanity, which eventually impacted on the natural environment.

Mbiti emphasises that humanity brought sin and evil upon itself by breaking the law. Human beings through their philosophies, ideologies and thinking have contributed to the destruction of the relationship with God and with humanity itself, while God created them untarnished by sin and evil. The unfortunate and low level of experience resulting from such self-destruction goes hand in hand with an experienced presumed withdrawal of God from the relationship of existence as well as that one has a feeling of

being left in the lurch by the natural physical–organic environment (Modise 2011).

Modise (2011:79) building on Thielicke (1969) and Mbiti (1969) argues that human beings were originators of sin that led to humanity's self-destruction. This destruction makes human beings powerful beasts. It produces a centrifugal tendency, which drives humanity apart from one another, which can be witnessed in the fratricide of Cain and dispersion at Babel. Furthermore, humanity breaks the chain of the meaningful existence between God, Oneself, Others and the environment. As a result of the destruction of this relationship between God, humanity and the environment, human development, with reference to the sense of greed and individualism, eventually destroys nature, which is supposed to sustain humanity and humanity sustain it.

König (1994:109) contends that a sound interconnectedness between God and human beings is the mark of humanity that lives in harmony with God; the alternate way of living is the destruction of the image of God. This alternative living is to survive by either using the wrongful way of life or the destruction of relationship in human life, which has an impact on the destruction of God's image. In less meaningful relationships, human beings might still be bound to one another because of shared jealousy or hostility against each other, but these feelings can never promote fulfilment and a meaningful life. Human beings might experience the breaking down of their relationships and live in isolation. Sin, in this sense, is essential lawlessness and a denial of the injunction to love oneself. This denial of the injunction in a way undermines human dignity.

As it is argued that sin is the breaking or destruction of the relationship with God and other human beings, Roberts (2005:58) argues that sin is placed in oneself rather than in God. In the area of race, it is complicated for most whites in America and other parts of the world (South Africa for the context of this article) where racism is practised to overcome this deep-seated drive toward the worship of self. A realistic humanism requires blacks to be aware that their togetherness is shot through with the possibility of exploitation of one another. Under conditions of survival, human beings often lose real fellow feeling, as well as any willingness to inconvenience blacks even for the welfare of others. Sin as self-centeredness is a disease that inflicts the black community as well as the white population. Even the black church has not escaped the blight of self-centeredness.

Social sin is, however, a certainty in the contemporary society in the South African context during 25 years of democracy. It is often referred to as social injustice and racism. This practice of sin can be identified in many unfair acts by the government, political and economic structures, and in detrimental actions such as human rights violations, discrimination and racism. Politics and political economy can function as structural forces leading to evil practices. The classical words of Gutiérrez expound this reality vividly: that sin is manifest in

oppressive structures, in the exploitation of human beings by human beings, in the domination and slavery of people, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation (Gutiérrez 1973:175). This argument leads to sin, which is modern racism, which destroys blacks and whites alike from within inherent racism in the form of a multicultural and multiracial inter-societal structure.

Modern racism as a destructive agent to a Theanthropocosmic connection

The first and fundamental aspect is that communities, which interact and influence each other, form the organisation. These communities in one way or another undergo certain stages of growth and development, and ultimately the whole society also becomes and extends towards a particular point of evolution (Bandura 1997:23). According to Bandura (1997:23), the perception that blacks are inherently inferior to whites has been referred to as old-fashioned racism. Mugambi (2018:26–59) indicates that Africans learn from their parents and the entire community how to relate to peers and superiors. Furthermore, it illustrates that attitudes about race and ethnic relations are instructed at an early age, and after that perpetuated through conscious and subconscious reinforcement. Human dignity is destroyed when attitudes of both inferiority and superiority are reinforced through legislation, governance and media organs like radio, television, newspapers, film, social media and the internet. Blacks in the 21st century continue to be displayed negatively in these organs of communication, with the consequence that an inferiority complex has become normative among blacks. Simultaneously, the superiority complex has become normative for many whites. These complexes of superiority and inferiority undermine human dignity. A superiority complex dehumanises the image of God (Mugambi 2018: 26–59). In the situation where racism is not legal, the former racists have a way of using concepts that threaten the human dignity of blacks. Concepts such as multiracial or multicultural or a diversity society are used to replace the racism. In the South African context, apartheid was legalised, and this sanctioned system delivered an extreme example of structural racism until 1994. This brand of racism involved behaviours, practices and attitudes that openly defined blacks as inferior to whites and less powerful. These behaviours, exercise and attitude have caused a severe division in South African society during the apartheid era and have footprints in the democratic age as illustrated above.

Ntombana and Bubulu (2017:1) indicate that South Africa is still a racially divided space, wherein white people are still privileged. Some white people in some areas attempt to shift the racial boundaries and are able to create an interracial identity. Furthermore, they do not equate whiteness to privilege and superiority in a democratic South Africa but inclusiveness as multiracialism, which is challenged in this article as subtle racism.

Ntombana and Bubulu (2017) have confirmed that there is still a racial division amongst South Africans, and there are categories of whites, some of whom are willing to shift and others that resist change, away from racist behaviours and practices. This resistance to change is perceived as a modern form of racism (Batts 1989:18). Distinguishing between old-fashioned prejudice and modern racism helps to recognise and acknowledge how racism has changed and developed through the years in post-apartheid South Africa. This form of racism has created a sophisticated division amongst South Africans. Modern racism involves the giving of non-race related reasons for behaviours that continue to exclude and discriminate against each other. It is critical to think of contemporary racism as internalised dominance, attitudes that are so deeply entrenched that they exist at a subconscious level. While modern racism is often not consciously malicious in its intent, it is still based on the assumption that black people are inferior to whites. As a result, this more subtle form of racism continues to deny black South Africans access to economic growth despite the initiatives made by the government to advance the previously disadvantaged through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and Affirmative Action (AA) policies (Ntombana & Bubulu 2017:2). The negative feelings that are attached to this belief do not change or disappear just because of changes in laws and practices. Instead, the emotions have to be submerged and hidden because of the differences in what is viewed as legal and politically correct in South African society. For the fact is that racism perpetuates itself within the community if left unchallenged, it cripples, scares and harms people and culture. Racism is so complex that one cannot honestly deal with it from one angle of life; it is multifaceted or multidimensional. Its complexities range from individualistic, institutional and symbolic.

It is imperative to argue that racism is still alive and experienced by many blacks who continue to suffer from the effects of racism. Mtose (2011:325) argues that racism is alive, active, pervasive and no less damaging. The abolishment of apartheid laws that are replaced by progressive policies like BEE and AA have not solved the challenge of racism in South Africa. There is a tendency of not speaking of racism amongst whites and blacks. No one, therefore, can be neutral or silent in the face of this great evil or sin. We are either for it or against it. Black theologians must end their silence too. We have opposed racism much too gently. We have permitted white theology in exchange for the rewards of being accepted by the white religious establishment (Cone 2012:438–453). Racism is a sin that needs courageous people to confront it in all its complexity.

In the face of racism, people see the gross denial that human beings are all created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), that as human beings, people share an ordinary life and destiny. The Christian belief that human beings are created in the image of God has severe moral consequences, not only in terms of human beings' responsibility for the physical–organic world but also in terms of human relationships. This view emphasises the indivisible unity of what constitutes human beings before God. In this view of human nature, there is no place for racism. For racism represents sin and utter disobedience (Mofokeng & Goba 1983:56). It is stated that, as human beings are created in the image of God, therefore they must enjoy human rights and dignity. As fellow workers with God, human beings are confronted by the demands of obedience to the will of God. The relationship to God always involves moral obligations (Carey 1977:35–36). Therefore, by investigating racism, human beings observe the manifestation of human sinfulness, a person who denies the essence of humankind. For in racism we come across a view of humanity that emphasises biological and cultural differences. There is an observation of division of the human community which relegates some by their race to an inferior position in society. The biblical view which emphasises that human beings are created in the image of God also points to the broader relationship people have with God, one another and the physical–organic environment.

Furthermore, to state that human beings are made in the image of God is to create a profound theological statement that human beings' relationship with God, other human beings and the natural world is regarded as the African spirituality. The issue of interconnectedness is an integral part of life, especially in the way Africans relate to nature. Africans do not primarily hold the dignity of life, but value nature. The concept of body, mind and soul also includes issues of ecology (Masango 2018:81) – this relationship is destroyed by racism. In this sense, racism represents a categorical denial that human beings have this unique relationship within the Theanthropocosmic principle of life. Hence racism is described as a form of idolatry (Mofokeng & Goba 1983:56–57). Hodgson (1976) postulates:

> It [racism] represents a primal manifestation of idolatry, for it entails the apotheosis of one's race and negation of the others; its logic is genocide, although its practice is segregation. It demonstrates the inherent deceptiveness of all sin because 'race' is a fantastic concept that calls attention to merely superficial differences between ethnic groups. (p. 197)

This postulation is supported by Goba (1980) in his address to the consultation on racism organised by the South African Council of Churches where he points out:

> From a theological point of view, racism is a form of sin, for it denies the essential oneness of God's people. It is a form of idolatry in the sense that it denies the significance of God's intention for human relations. Racism, according to our Christian understanding of sin, is bondage, one which originates from an interior act of self-enslavement. This inner bondage of racism is objectified in the building of oppressive socio-political structures. (p. 19)

What Goba (1980) did not cover in his argument is that in addition to denial of the essential relationship between God and human beings, and the denial of one's inner relationship of spirit, soul and body, there is a denial of the involvement of human beings amongst themselves and the physical organic environment (Theanthropocosmic relationship). Racism

destroys the relationship between God and human beings, as well as the intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship. Demenchonok (2009:466–467) indicates that bad faith constitutes the sinner speaking the truth to the self, instead of the sinner attempting to avoid one's freedom. Racism is dehumanisation, which is a form of bad faith, which denies the humanity of human dignity and rights, and requires lying to the human self about something of which humanity is aware. In bad faith, humanity handles authentically the stumbling blocks that stand between self-postulating and self-realisation. These stumbling blocks are believed not only to be socio-politico-economic or racial but also ontological ones. Race matters are expounded in terms of the ontologies of black and white personalities and of the interactive dynamics of these ontologies, which result in a conflict between these two personalities. Bad faith is a form of sin, and if racism is a form of bad faith, according to Demenchonok (2009), therefore racism is a sin. Hence, racism in the form of multiculturalism or multiracism needs to be exterminated at its roots.

Internalised racism in South Africa in the form of multicultural institutions

Legally speaking, racism is illegal in South Africa, but in how people live and interact there is a lot of evidence of racism. Inherent racism manifests itself as an internal suppression and domestic domination. Roberts (2005:58) postulates that multicultural and multiracial initiatives have appeared to such an extent that matters of human relations are more complex than ever. Racial tensions have been strengthened by a substantial influence of other non-white ethnics from the southern hemisphere in the American context. Unfortunately, there was less progress made in black–white relations before this more complex situation was initiated. The tension is now at an epidemic stage between blacks and Hispanics, blacks and Asians, as well as others. Other non-white ethnic peoples are competing with blacks in urban America for limited resources (Roberts 2005).

South Africans are now suffering the similar challenge of multicultural, multiracial and multidimensional schools, but racial tension is so high that, even in some of these schools blacks will travel by bus while whites will travel in their private coach to the same sports event, at the same ground. A further example of problematic multiracial schools is the code of conduct that still reflects apartheid rules. In 2016, Pretoria Girls High School was confronted with criticism from South Africans that the school is racist in terms of its code of conduct that excludes and suppresses black learners from conveying and being themselves. Waltham (28 July 2017, p. 1) comments:

> In this case, the focus was on hair and the realisation that something as natural and healthy as a black person's hairstyle was a problem for the school. The main reason for this, of course, was the fact that many schools' codes of conduct still have

apartheid principles, values and rules which have not changed despite us now living in a constitutional democracy with more freedoms and rights.

Another example is from the Pietermaritzburg area where schools were under fire in 2017, for defending white learners who were being overtly racist towards black learners in white schools; they claimed that the learners' racism was a result of 'stress'. In reply to this action, community and alumni protested against these schools and raised awareness about racism in South African schools (Waltham, 2017:1).

It is not only a code of conduct or learners that reflect internalised racism, but even educators who are supposed to teach and protect democratic principles are found to be racist in their practice. In 2017 another reflection of the internalised racism had manifested itself in South Africa at St Johns College where an educator was accused of being racist towards black learners and had made some offensive, dehumanising and demeaning comments about them. Waltham (28 July 2017, p. 1) comments:

> It extremely concerns [us] that we have teachers with racist mindsets in post-apartheid South Africa who continue to teach our students. In addition to this, it is also a massive problem that we have teachers who have warped, white supremacist viewpoints, who taught during the apartheid era and are still teaching students today in our constitutional, democratic South Africa.

These are just a few examples of cases of racism that are found in the so-called multiracial schools in South Africa. Hence multiculturalism is seen as a current term and a failed ideology to address racism in church and society.

Demenchonok (2009:470) indicates that multiculturalism has become a current term, while it is merely lip service being paid to the development of diverse culture. He further states that, in liberal multiculturalism, the other's 'right to exist' is acknowledged, while considering one's own culture or truth superior or absolute. Multiculturalism is the form of pseudo-oneness or assimilation of different races in the same basket without any change of cultural transmission from the so-called inferior elements in the bucket to the superior portion, but is the transfer of culture from the principal component to the superior ones.

The postmodern thinkers' critique of the dominating 'mass culture' unmasked the relations of knowledge and power. The one with experience and ability will always be the dominating one. However, its weakness is relativism and scepticism regarding global concepts and values. In the postmodern theories of culture, there is an internal tension between multiculturalism and deconstruction. Multiculturalist implies an essentialist connection between cultural production and ethnic or physical origin. In contrast, intercultural philosophy and 'transcultural' argue for the

concept of cultural diversity free from determinism and representation (Demenchonok 2009:471).

The failure of multiculturalism has stimulated the efforts of many philosophers to find an alternative theoretical view of cultural diversity and to rethink the matters of identity and diversity. Racism is embedded in multiculturalism; hence, there is a need for an alternative approach to different cultures in society. In this article I will follow the alternative path to cultural diversity, which is 'transculture', developed by Mikhail Epstein, a philosopher from Russia.

Epstein (1999:24–25) proposes that transculture will work better than multiculture in a society that has experienced racism division and is still living in a context of racial division. The reason for the choice of transculture is that it is a different brand of cultural advance, which is an open symbolic substitute for the current cultures and their established sign systems. Meanwhile multiculturalism is an essentialist construction between cultural production and ethnic and physical origin (race and gender), perceived in terms of 'representation'. Transculture can be an alternative to internalised oppression and domination, because transculture is a process of liberation from the symbolic habits of culture itself, from its linguistic confinement and self-enforced cultural identities. It surpasses the limitations of 'innate cultures' thus liberating people from those symbolic limitations, ideological addictions, patriotic obsessions that belong to people as members of a particular cultural group (Epstein 1999:24).

Transculture is considered as an inalienable right of the individual's liberty from one's own 'inborn' culture. It implies the diffusion of initial cultural identities as individuals cross the borders of different cultures and assimilate them. Transculture is a state of belonging of the individual to many cultures. In building up one's identity, an individual may rely on the variety of potential cultural signs, similar to the those experienced by an artist in freely choosing from a universal symbolic palette the colours for painting one's uniquely universal self-portrait. The universality is viewed as internal diversity of individuals, their dialogical openness to others and self-identification primarily as members of humanity. Importantly, universality does not prescribe any pre-established value system or canon identified with a specific culture. Universality articulates a critical philosophical, methodological approach at the heart of which is an 'outsiderness' and critical distancing about any existing culture, including one's native culture. It is humble and self-critical, to the time and place of its claims on truth. From a transcultural perspective, each religion is incomplete, and its potential can be realised only if it transcends its borders and is engaged in dialogue with other cultures (Demenchonok 2009:471). In this regard, the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu described the negotiation process of interchange and exchange, fusion and restraint between different thought patterns, cultures, societies, religions, philosophies and sciences as follows:

[F]or a set of ideas to be genuine possession of people, they need not have originated them, they need only appropriate them, make use of them, develop them, if the spirit so moves them, and thrive on them. The intellectual history of humanity is a series of mutual borrowings and adaptations among races, nations, tribes, and even smaller sub-groups. (Bodunrin 1991:177)

The 'moving spirit' to which Wiredu refers can be translated to mean a moving spirit that moves as an interchange and exchange, fusion and restraint between and within cults, churches, cultures, religiosities, ethnicities, societies, sciences and languages. It is the net effect or distillation of the various sense-making orientations and views of people that animate, encourage and move them to more cultic, ecclesial, cultural, religious, ethnic, societal and lingual borrowings and adaptations within and between themselves. Racism is all about consciousness, and the combating of racism needs to be approached from the consciousness perspective.

Church to combat racism in churches and society

The function of the church is to raise the awareness and consciousness of the people of God. Hence, the researcher views the church as one of the societal institutions that ought to address racism in South Africa. Because racism in the context of this article is a sin, it is the function of the church to contest the sin and evil in society. The church has a role to perform, which is to assist the people of God to head towards reconciliation or redemption. Mofokeng and Goba (1983:8) set the tone in the 1980s that the church, despite its apparent weakness and lack of prophetic zeal, still plays an essential role in addressing the challenges of the social changes and racism. For example, in the South African context, the mainline Catholic and Protestant churches have attracted the criticism of the government. The church still has a critical task to perform in challenging those oppressive and racist structures that destroy human lives and prevent the development of just social order. Tshaka (2009:159) indicates that the silence of the church on public issues is disturbing in democratic South Africa. It is fascinating to note that this silence of the church on general issues is in no way unique to the South African context but has become a global phenomenon (Tshaka 2009:159). In the same tone, Boesak (2005:243) pondered that the church is not a sociological phenomenon, fascinating chiefly because of the way we expose our weaknesses, internal strife and insecurities in the pages of newspapers. Neither are we just another non-governmental organisation trying to draw attention to our single-issue agenda. We are the church of Christ, called and mandated by God to speak to the whole of human existence, in the whole of society, to seek the Lordship of Jesus Christ by challenging, subverting and changing structures in society until they conform to the norms of the Kingdom of God (Boesak 2005:243).

Roberts (2005:13) contends that the churches as a collective (ecumenical), as structures of social, political and financial power, are called forth to attack racism as a serious concern for the world. Churches involved in empowerment and development programmes amongst blacks must utilise their example, their moral influence, and their political strength to activate an entire nation to heal the wounds of an oppressed race. It is also the concern of the ecumenical bodies like the World Council of Churches (WCC) to face the evil of racism. In 2010 the WCC made a declaration concerning racism as a sin. The declaration of the WCC Conference on Racism in 2010 indicates that racism is a sin as racism excludes other races from the so-called race. Racism, caste-based discrimination, and other exclusionary applications are integrally sinful because, on several levels, they overthrow the second commandment of love, 'to love God and our neighbour as ourselves' (Mt 20:37–39). These exclusionary practices are jargons of self-exaltation on the part of those who practise them and thereby violate the First Commandment (Ex 20:3), that states that humans can have no other gods before the one true God, who creates, reconciles, and renews all, including human beings and those humans considered as 'them'. These forms of discrimination deny the biblical witness of Genesis 1:26–27, which affirms that the human being is created in the image of God. These harmful exclusionary acts contradict the reality that the socially constructed detachments human beings plan to detach the human selves from other human beings have no place in Christ (www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/racism).

Racism, caste-based discrimination and other forms of discrimination foster hatred and violence – the same are in opposition of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, and a negation of human faith in God who gave human life and sent his Son to ensure survival for all, in all its abundance (Jn 10:10). These corrupt practices of dehumanising exclusion are governed by a denial of the blessedness of the rich diversity within the Creation itself, where each kind of living thing was named and pronounced as being 'good' in Genesis 1 (www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/racism). The difference in the beautiful nature is a reflection of the value of diversity within the very life of the triune God, who creates, preserves, and loves in freedom and plenty (www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/racism). The biblical witness urges us to celebrate the blessedness of diversity as a gift (Rm 12) designed to bless the churches and the communities which they serve. Wherever and whenever we reject these instances of God's fecundity and abundance, we deny the very nature of the God we claim to profess (www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/racism).

For this reason, member churches must be involved with combating racism within their geographical areas. The WCC has also encouraged its member churches to participate in campaigns, advocacy and programmes to combat racism in church and society. The WCC conference on Racism in 2010 proposed the following as the role the church needs to play:

- Churches ought to initiate programmes designed to promote greater understanding and acceptance across multicultural and religious lines.

- Churches ought to challenge nightmarish reality in which men, women and children of God are condemned to live.
- Churches ought to be credible in proclaiming the message of reconciliation, justice and unity.
- The entire body of Christ has a prophetic task to denounce by word and deed all forms and expressions of existence which constrain the reality of the abundant life which God offered to us in Jesus Christ.

The church as the body of Christ and faith community has something more to offer the world. God has entrusted the church with the message of addressing injustices that are faced by poor people. This message of the gospel will lead them to have justice, and thus lead them in the issue of reconciliation. God entrusted the church not only to proclaim the good news of reconciliation but also to be the agents of reconciliation. The church, as a faith community needs to engage constructively with the issue of racism in all walks of life. The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), in its Pastoral letter on Racism of 2012, thinks that the following would be helpful for the church when engaging racism in its institutions like church services, faculties and seminaries:

A hermeneutical approach to racism should be followed so that people may understand:

- the dynamics of society and church that created and perpetuated racism
- the teachings of Scripture about human dignity
- the teachings of Christ, who came to be our peace and to destroy the barriers between people
- The role of the church as a healing community in society (URCSA 2012).

People who understand these hermeneutic approaches can make strategies together to engage with racism constructively. In fighting racism, the church needs to acknowledge that a programme alone will not solve the problems, but rather a *process* in which the church is involved is required. People do not change overnight. It takes time, and it takes work (URCSA 2012). The following activities can assist in building a good relationship and dealing with racism. Theological education can be utilised to eradicate racism in democratic South Africa. The following can be done: research and publication on racism and how to eradicate racism and a workshop for ministers of the word and sacrament to enrich their sermons on humanity and God. These theological education activities will empower denominations like URCSA and others to address racism in their midst.

The URCSA in addressing racism in South Africa designed a programme for a long-term solution, with the hope that in 2016 the church would get the programme running. The URCSA followed the WCC's goals and plan of actions to implement these directives. The main goal is for churches to acknowledge the existence of racism in the church and society to address racism in church and community (URCSA 2016).

The action plan for the programme for churches to combat racism as captured on two levels are at the personal and institutional level. The church needs to learn the dynamics of society and the process of how racism extends and is perpetuated in humanity, the impact of psychology and internalisation of racism, learning how to relate Scriptural passages that recognise human dignity with combatting racism, and finally the church should act as a healing community of unity, reconciliation and justice within diversity (URCSA 2016).

Conclusion

The argument in this article suggests that there is a correlation between sin and racism. This sin impacts negatively on the relationship between human beings and eventually between God and human beings as well as the environment. This sin has many faces, which manifest as internalised racism in the form of multiculturalism that was discussed in this research study. The researcher proposed transculturalism as an alternative to multiculturalism as borrowed from Demenchonok's view. However, this study illustrates that despite all influence of racism from apartheid, the church still has a role to play to address racism within democratic South Africa.

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Author's contributions

I am the sole author of this article.

Ethical consideration

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