



that created this ideology are still at work and permeate the most diverse worldviews and practices.

Racism, which is an ideological or intellectual opinion or attitude, leads to discrimination, which is an act that is disadvantageous in practical terms for the person concerned.

In law, discrimination is unfavourable treatment (often resulting from a situation of domination) based on sex, age, ethnicity, religion, skin colour, social rank, etc. The law specifies the situations that can be discriminatory, particularly in terms of access to employment and careers, housing, public goods (schools, social services, etc.), public places, social protection, education and training. It may involve a comment, a physical attack or any other form of discrimination or unequal treatment.

The historical depth of racism, with discrimination as its corollary, is considerable, and weighs heavily on its current forms. But the phenomenon does not simply repeat itself, even if it is more or less weakened by the action of those who oppose it. It also demonstrates a great capacity to adapt to social, cultural, religious and political changes in our societies.

Racism is transformed, and reappears rather like the hydra of Greek mythology, the monstrous serpent whose heads were reborn each time they were cut off.

All forms of racism follow a common pattern, which consists of classifying people into categories based on real or fictitious differences, which are considered to be innate and immutable. This differentiation is a source of disapproval and devaluation for the groups thus created, and legitimises acts of rejection, exclusion and even violence against them. What's more, it often goes hand in hand with attacks on dignity and violations of human rights.

The phenomenon may appear to be on the way out; because it has been punishable by law since the second half of the twentieth century, it is considered incompatible with our social norms. The consequence is that this fact led to a great deal of hypocrisy; individuals who openly declare themselves racists are now very few in number, or at least marginalised. This could be the good news. This is misleading. The bad news is that racial discrimination is still very much present, in many different forms in socio-economic life.

The increasing pollution of the public arena by little shock phrases, reinforcing a little more already tenacious prejudices, uttered by politicians or media columnists, are the expression of discrimination that does not always say its name.

The historical and political context, the characteristics attributed, the discrimination inflicted and its impact vary according to the groups targeted; the claims will therefore differ accordingly.

Beyond this conceptual clarification, let us return to the reference text of our sermon. How can we, as a Church, I would even say as a Christian, understand this account of creation in the light of the theme of this year's event?

I would like to spare you from the great debate that has arisen among Old Testament theologians about the Creator's use of the plural (*Let us...*). This is not the point, today.

The likeness of God to humans is therefore not a matter of appearance, but requires faith against appearance. Faith itself is the only possible confirmation for understanding this likeness. The problem is that all too often, the proposition: "**Humans bear the image of God**" is inverted, and we form a human image of God, too human in fact to be truly God. God is not an old man in a cloud, nor is he some kind of superman with human feelings. This kind of simplistic theology very quickly leads to complications, such as the impossibility of explaining why he leaves evil in the world.

In fact, God is much more complicated and complex than we think. His way of acting in the world is much more subtle: it's a power of love, an impulse of life, leading to progressive evolution.

***Now, our text is not a revelation about the nature of God, but about the nature of human beings.***

The most common reading of this verse comes from the fact that throughout the beginning of Genesis, God is presented exclusively as **Creator**. So if we are in God's image, it is because we are also given the power to be creators, co-creators, co-workers, co-workers with God, in order to take part in God's project, to build/make a better world with greater joy, peace and love... We humans are not in the world just to enjoy it, but to work in it, like Adam, who is said to have been placed in the Garden of Eden, not to rest, but to cultivate and guard it.

We have a divine mission that goes beyond the duty of all animals to reproduce; we are responsible for the world.

God did not create us because he was lonely or needed something to do. He is entirely self-sufficient. So it is out of love that God gives humankind the grace to be his creatures and in God's image. So being created in God's image means that we were made to be in relationship with others. Our essential and most fundamental need is to love and be loved, since the image of which we are is LOVE. Ultimately, God made us in his image so that we could glorify him and eternally enjoy a relationship of love and intimacy with him.

So we understand that being created in God's image is not an abstract theological concept. It actually gives us the basis for understanding and deepening all areas of life. Our vision of human nature, the way we treat others and the environment, the value we place on human life and civilisation - all these are rooted in our understanding of the image of God that we are. In a secular world that has largely rejected this concept, it is vital that we develop our capacity to speak about and defend this reality, and to apply it to the challenges, not least the scourge of racism, that faces our society today.

In fact, God as Creator is the Father and Mother of all human beings, and he/she does not reject any of those who come to him, whatever their situation. For him, everyone is the same. Because all human beings are equal before God, no one can legitimately claim to be superior to anyone else for any reason whatsoever. Moreover, it is wrong for God's image of us to look

down on others, to belittle them or to discriminate against them because of their race or anything else.

So, it is true, a woman or a man who makes disparaging remarks about people of another race or for any other consideration cannot consider themselves true disciples of Christ. Nor can they consider themselves to be in agreement with the teachings of Christ. Every Christian, in the name of the image of God which is upon them, has a duty to surround God's children with compassion and to rid themselves of all prejudice, in particular, all discrimination.

The fact remains that racism, as portrayed, has serious consequences for the people concerned and, by extension, for society as a whole. Faced with this reality, we must be determined not to turn a blind eye. If we are to respond to the legitimate claims of those affected by racism, which relate to the most basic rights, we need to recognise the nuances and complexity of the issue, and open our eyes not only to individual behaviour, but also to the interaction of norms and structures - implicit and explicit - in society. Because at the end of the day, it's all about enabling everyone to participate in social life and access social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual resources on an equal footing.

It is undeniable that today, racism, including discrimination in all its forms, is at the root of most prejudices. We are called upon to repent of this in order to re-establish the divine image that we have lost. Social peace and the harmony of our societies depend on it.

Let us not forget what the Lord tells us, and I quote: "***Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven***" (Mat. 7:21). And the Father's will is for us to love one another (John 13:34); for, "***If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love his brother whom he sees, how can he love God whom he does not see?***" (1 John 4:20).

MAY THE LORD BLESS HIS WORD

AMEN

## LET'S PRAY

**Lord !**

You created us all in your image, good and equal, but we have allowed divisions to arise between us. We pray that unity may be reborn and that each of us may accept the other's differences so that we can live together in harmony.

Heavenly Father! Teach us to live together as human beings worthy of you, in mutual respect and sister- and brotherhood. Help us to close our eyes to our physical, social and cultural differences. Come to the rescue of our ignorance and our poorly educated mentality. Renew our intelligence so that, once and for all, our world can put an end to racism, discrimination and xenophobia.

Cleanse our hearts so that there can be no more prejudice, discrimination or rejection of any kind. May we have respect for everyone we meet, whatever their differences. May our mouths be filled with good words for the promotion of peace.

Dear Lord! Don't let hatred overcome us when we suffer injustice. May anger and violence no longer be our means of defence. May we draw inspiration from your Word, your intelligence and your Wisdom to respond to those who attack us. We reject all ideas of revenge or retaliation that would pervert our humanity. We let you be our avenger and our shield.

In accordance with your commandment, we wish to love our neighbours as ourselves. Help us to love as you wish. In these times of adversity and vexation, we need your Holy Spirit to change the way we think and act. We want to have that love that doesn't change and that forgives everything; love that is stronger than injustice.

We thank you for your protection in all circumstances, especially for agreeing to bring us together in Barloo for this year's conference. We felt your presence among us and throughout the proceedings. We are very grateful to you for this inspiration and we have faith that you will not let anything or anyone get in our way.

We pray for peace and reconciliation in the world. We do not forget our network, all of our members.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, we pray.

AMEN