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Death and the maiden

The complexity of trauma and ways of healing –
a challenge for pastoral care and counselling

topics

- violence against women
- systemic understanding of care and counselling
- methodology
- the personal and the political in pastoral care

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“Who are my mother and my brother?

Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother”

(Mark 3:33,35)

The field of pastoral care and counselling is undergoing a shift in emphasis. It is moving from a focus on the private lives of individuals and the ego to a focus on the social, political and the ecological systems that determine individual and corporate life.¹ The shift from the person to broader challenges brings up the question of how does the teacher of pastoral care prepare the student to address complex issues without losing sight of the individual, or self? What resources do teachers of pastoral care use to help illuminate the interplay between the personal, social-political, economic and ecological contexts? Feminist and liberation theologians have emphasized in their work that the personal is embedded in political contexts, hence, the political is personal and the personal is political. The question of the case study becomes important because the case study helps to determine what is to be explored, what are the relevant questions, and how we think about pastoral care issues. In this article we select as our case study, the drama, *Death and the Maiden*.² We reflect upon the interpersonal issues of trauma and healing within a political context. We derive from this focus implications for teaching systemic thinking in pastoral care. Systemic thinking is a way of looking at the contexts in which behaviour occurs and tracking the reciprocal connections between individuals as well as noting the changes that occur within individuals. We believe that the drama, *Death and The Maiden* provides an opportunity to demonstrate systemic thinking in pastoral care by focusing on systemic violence. It also provides a challenge to pastoral care especially where it (pastoral care) has been defined primarily in individual terms and as a professional relationship between a help seeker and a help giver. We pursue the question of how to create relation-

ships of safety, holding, trust and connections while acknowledging and finding value in differences.

In order to address this question we look at *Death and the Maiden*, a drama written by the Chilean author, Ariel Dorfmann. The context is the unstable political situation in Chile after fall of the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. There are three characters in the play, Paulina Salas, her husband Gerardo Escobar, and Dr. Roberto Miranda. The drama unfolds in the main room of Paulina and Gerardo's home. There the history of violence which permeates every aspect of Chilean society now determines the interaction between the three characters and meaning in their personal lives. The drama shows how long standing patterns of injustice and violation create long-term trauma and irreparable hurt which can become an integral part of everyday life.

The story

Paulina Salas, around forty years old, had worked with her husband, Gerardo Escobar, around forty-five years old, for political change. One evening she is informed by TV that he was announced head of a committee commissioned to investigate the events of torture during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. Contingency wills it that he is hindered to return home by a thundershower and then finds help by a doctor who accompanies him back home. His way of talking, quoting Nietzsche, and his manner of behaving makes Paulina suspicious. Then she remembers the trauma situation. In her home is the man, Dr. Roberto Miranda, around fifty years old, whom she believes is the one who betrayed and violated her in the worst possible way. She was abducted and tortured because the Pinochet regime wanted the name of her husband. She was made naked, violated and tortured with electroshocks. After the torture, Dr. Roberto Miranda came to attend to her. He promised to help. Instead, he raped her repeatedly, using her as an object of his own will. She was humiliated and hurt even more than by the electroshocks. Dr. Roberto Miranda played the famous string quartet by Schubert, one of her favourite pieces of music: *Death and the Maiden*.

Paulina did not confess. When she returned to her husband, she found him in bed with another woman. She is now faced with her torturer and the husband who betrayed her, all in one room. She is absolutely clear and decided on what she needs in order to begin healing. To be healed is her sense of self-respect, self-agency, and spiritual wholeness. She needed a confession about the truth of what had happened. She needed an acknowledgement of her perception and her suffering by those who inflicted it on her. This is exactly what both men in the drama are not willing to give. By using all her wits, strengths, determination, and a gun, she attempts to get what is crucial to restore her inner and outer sense of identity. The confession she receives from Dr. Miranda contains some of the following statements:

"I raped you many times. Fourteen times. I played music. I wanted to soothe you. I was good at first. I fought it hard. No one was so good at fighting as I. I was the last one to have a taste.

No one died. I made it easier on them. That's how it started. They needed a doctor. My brother was in the Secret Service. He told me: Make sure nobody dies. You saw it yourself. You told me you are dirty and I washed you clean. The others said: You are going to refuse fresh meat, are you? And I was starting to like it.

They laid people out on the table. They flashed on the light. People lying totally helpless, and I didn't have to be nice and I didn't have to seduce them. I didn't even have to take care of them. I had all the power. I could make them do or say whatever I wanted. I was lost in morbid curiosity. How much can this woman take? More than the other one? Howls her sex? Does her sex dry up when you put the current through her? Can she have an orgasm under those circumstances? O God, I liked being naked. I liked to let my pants down. I liked you knowing what I was going to do. There was bright light. You could not see me. I owned you I owned all of you. I could hurt you and I could fuck you and you could not tell me not to. I loved it. I was sorry that it ended. Very sorry that it ended."

Paulina was the maiden who died. True, she survived physically. But her soul, mind, hopes, trust, and the meaning of her life were killed. Even so, she was not broken by the torture. What Pauline needed was the truth from Dr. Miranda, her suspected torturer.

Analysis

The drama leaves open the question of whether or not Dr. Miranda's confession is real or contrived. *Death and the Maiden* is about systemic violence and its consequences for everyday life. It deals with the long-term effects of torture and violence on human beings. The drama is mythical and historical in that the themes it deals with are timeless and actual. The fact that violence surrounds us, trauma is complex and the need for healing is everywhere makes this drama systemic, mythical and immediately relevant.

We remember that Paulina sacrificed herself in order to protect her husband, and that her husband, Geraldo betrayed her. How can healing occur in the relationship between Paulina and Geraldo - that is to say, how can trust be restored? The way Gerardo Escobar can become the real partner of Paulina Salas is to bond with and trust her as she pursues her suspicion about her torturer. Trust becomes a first step to hearing her. He must hold, help and protect her as she did him during the time of her interrogation. He must not be afraid to hear and face the truth of her story which is also a part of his own. Once, Paulina experiences his courage to chose her side and acknowledge her pain, she can let go of her murderous rage. Both Paulina and Gerardo can begin a new phase of grieving and of working through their pain. The same possibility exists for Dr. Roberto Miranda, to the degree that he can confess his complicity in the collective and personal violence, acknowledge his responsibility, repent, and make restoration.

Death and the Maiden is a symbolic story. It is one of the key narratives of the present situation in many countries of the world. In October of 1994, we participated in the leadership of an International conference for pastoral counsellors, held for the first time in the capital of the Czech Republic, Prague.³ The theme of the conference, Changing Values, indicated the struggles which post-conflict societies are facing, especially the post socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

We listened to the report of two participants from Papua New Guinea, Biul Kirokim and his interpreter, George Euling. Their village was recently 'discovered' by international mining companies. Their natural resources of trees and land were razed. Their air and water ways polluted, their customs and traditional way of life irreparably destroyed. New diseases and forms of illness occurred for which they had no remedy. They had to learn to rely on western medicines, which they could

not afford. People became depressed, developed psychological illnesses that were unknown. Their culture was humiliated. An entire people were violated, their land raped, their food source poisoned. Theirs is a trauma of unknown magnitude, and they search for ways to heal. What needs to be confronted? Who must do the work? Who needs to tell this story? Who needs to hear it? How can relationships of safety, holding, trust and connections be made in order for victims and perpetrators to be healed? And, how do we enable our students to make these connections in ways that empower them to be effective pastoral care givers and learners in situations such as these?

One of the presenters, Dr. Jan Urban, a former Czech dissident offered an answer to these questions. A culture of humiliation and shaming develops where there is personal and systemic violation of the dignity of persons and the effects of trauma are widespread. A culture of humiliation and shaming develops when people are not given space to openly process their experience of trauma after the acute stages of conflict have passed. A culture of humiliation and shaming develops further when public policy promotes amnesia rather than remembering. Public and private amnesia can be as dangerous as the traumatization itself. Jan Urban mentioned *Death and the Maiden* as one of the most important plays which addresses severe trauma and processes of recovery. This drama was not admitted to be staged in The Czech Theatre even though its content deals exactly with the experiences that thousands of people have had in the past forty years during and after the war. In this way, public policy promotes amnesia when people are not allowed to publicly acknowledge the violence done to them and find appropriate ways to transform their lives. If people do not want to hear or be reminded, then how can they be prepared for the consequences?

The challenge for pastoral care and counselling

The challenge for pastoral care here is in the whole movement of hearing the painful story of victims, and moving perpetrators through the processes of recognition, confession, repentance and restoration. The events of the drama could happen anywhere. They occur everywhere. But efforts to acknowledge such events may be resisted. Herein lies a partial challenge for pastoral care and counselling, namely to make known the subtle connections between personal suffering and public events, especially when people do not want to hear or know. Pastoral counsellors may be in an uncommon position to do systemic thinking and reveal the connections between public events, psychic trauma, interpersonal relations and spiritual direction. From these ideas we draw the following implications for teaching systemic thinking. The drama, *Death and the Maiden* will serve as guide.

First, the teacher or trainer may invite the students to read the drama and reflect upon its meaning for them. Then teacher may lead the students in a discussion by asking, ‘what is the problem?’ Rather than to assume that the definition of the problem at hand is known or shared, it is important to ask ‘what is the problem?’ Just as there are different ways of seeing and knowing, there will be different understandings and conflicting definitions of the problem. The different ways of seeing and knowing may later provide alternative approaches to the problematic situation. Hence, it is important to ask what is the problem and uncover the different ways of seeing, and entering the problematic situation.

Next, the teacher can invite the students to do some background reading about the Chilean situation. Students are encouraged to identify new questions stimulated

by the reading of historical documents and gain perspective on the political context and the authors point of view.

Students can link these new questions with their previous questions about the definition of the problem.

Given what they now know, the students may work in small groups to develop a scenario of the situation which they will role play. Class members are invited to think about the definition of the situation implied in the particular scenario and how the definition of the situation determines the motives and interaction between the characters and possibilities for healing.

Role play this situation and think about it from the perspective of each of the individuals in it.

After several role play situations are presented, the students are invited to think about the context as a whole. The overall purpose is to enable students to see multiple levels of interaction and meaning, and thereby identify alternative approaches and resources for healing. Some resources may already be available in the interaction system and wider society. Other resources need to be created in order to help transform painful situations.

During this process, another challenge for the teacher and trainer of pastoral care and counselling is to create space and time safe enough to address the pain, shame, anxiety, rage or denial connected to life stories of traumatization. There may be students or trainees who have been abused themselves and need protection for their own deep emotions, memories or present experiences. Also, the teacher and trainer need a place where they can take care of their own well being. Therefore, teaching and training which address violence and traumatization need special care given to the process in order to deal with the emotional involvement of all participants. The development of ritual elements may be helpful because ritualized beginnings and endings help to establish safe boundaries for the time and space need to process the emotions raised by the role play. Rituals can consist of small sentences like “I hear you, sister, or brother” by the whole group after a woman or man has shared her or his feelings. Rituals can include symbols like a bowl of water for cleansing and refreshing. A stone can be circled in order to contain pain or rage which then may be washed away by water. Rituals are most helpful when they are developed and agreed upon by the participants themselves. This is especially important in intercultural⁴ settings where symbols have a different meaning for participants from diverse ethnic and spiritual traditions.

Further implications

We draw further implications of this drama for systemic thinking and as challenge for pastoral care. Where justice has been long denied and the effects of traumas remain hidden, there will surface a need to deal openly with the trauma and right the wrongs. There will also be strenuous efforts on the part of perpetrators to deny wrong doings, and to disavow any knowledge of it. New identities may be created to cover up the violence.⁵ Others may unwittingly become an accomplice in the cover-up. Death and the Maiden revealed how a dictatorship created complex public relationships, determined the quality of private lives, and effected an inner sense of self. These interwoven issues (complex external event, private lives, and inner sense of self), in various ways, are manifest through all three of the characters in the drama. Death and the Maiden is about a real life everyday situation, in

that it deals with the long-term effects of betrayal torture and violence on human beings. This drama was written in a world marked by differences, unilateral use of power, changing gender roles, and increased violence. It forces the questions of how do we relate to those who have hurt us irreparably or whom we hurt? What knowledges need to be unmasked? What information needs to surface? Who is to do this work? Faced with such questions, and in such a context, can we create relationships of safety, holding, trust while such work is done? Can connections be made and sustained while acknowledging differences in ways of seeing and knowing?

Another important challenge was named by Jan Urban: the churches have access to social and political power by being able to speak up publicly. Traumatized persons, as the drama of Paulina's life demonstrates, need the naming of the atrocity that happened. One of the main problems for Paulina is that even in her own perception she is not certain if her identification of the perpetrator is right. Is Roberto Miranda the one who did the torturing? Not being reinforced in her perception by her husband and facing the denial of the perpetrator are among the most difficult experiences for her. Not being listened to and believed in telling the truth, is one of the worst experiences for girls or boys when they give signs to adults of being abused. For the speakers of the people in Papua New Guinea, one of the problems they face is the disavowal of the impact of Western economy's destruction done to their ecological and social-spiritual system. Companies have produced films which are meant to demonstrate the environmental care of these Western companies based on scientific research whereas the knowledge of the inhabitants is neither heard nor acknowledged in the world's public.

To invite women and men as speakers and representatives of communities that continue to be exploited and traumatized is one step the intercultural pastoral counselling movement has provided. But even here questions such as, 'How did you learn English' and 'What kind of food do you eat' were addressed to Biul Kirokim of Papua New Guinea. Trainers and teachers of counselling from Europe demonstrated a profound lack of knowledge and interpathy because their questions failed to respond to his life threatening situation.⁶ There was disappointment and anger about our own limitations amongst some participants of the conference. We became aware of how much we have yet to learn in order to develop models of intercultural counselling in which mutuality of learning and teaching are developed, hurt and anger can be worked through.

The personal and the political

Pastoral counsellors work between and within the realm of the personal and the political. We listen to personal and political stories like Paulina's when we work with refugees and victims of violence from all parts of the world, including the stranger from afar or the neighbour next door. It is a demanding challenge for a pastoral counsellor to listen to stories of torture and respond appropriately to the counsellee's or trainee's experiences of violation, dreams and flashbacks. We are challenged to help them to express their rage and ambivalence, and struggle with shame and isolation. Given this challenge, it is easy for the counsellor to feel overwhelmed by this complex reality, to feel helpless, discouraged, incompetent and burned out. We might identify strongly with the victim and condemn the perpetrator so that hopelessness or anger seem overwhelming. We might also recognize that there are many issues that we have not yet addressed adequately in our

own lives. For example, our response to the amount of abuse of especially women and children, our own racism, our participation in the structural violence of exploitation of non-white societies by white western culture and economy may escape our awareness.

In the work with traumatized women, children and men it is important, not only to establish safety and reliable connections but also to make transparent the counsellors support of the victim. Counsellors may show support of a traumatized victim and increase their understanding of the victim's situation by acting as an advocate. The counsellor may do this by helping a rape victim, for example, to gather a support network and by being present at a court hearing. In that way counsellors not only show support for the counsellee, but can enlarge their understanding of the legal process, and the counsellee's personal and political situation. As the problem of traumatization is mainly one of losing the power of decision, the basic sense of self-agency and trust in self, other and world, it is crucial to address the meaning of life in the process of healing.⁷ For example, once the counsellor gains an enlarged picture of the counsellee's situation, there is greater opportunity to help the counsellee find new ways of understanding what happened and enable new connections.

It is here that we meet a further special challenge for pastoral counselling. Contemporary models of pastoral care and counselling continues to be under the influence of Western psychology at the expense of engaging in critical reflection on ethical traditions as a source of meaning making. Traditional pastoral care used ethical traditions, Bible, theology, reason and experience as it's basis. But with few exceptions, these sources have been neglected. Some of the questions that arise as theological challenges are: How do we use our traditions to address the confrontation with present day evil, violence and the traumatization of thousands of women, children and men. How do we do this theologically and spiritually? Where do we locate our own sources of meaning in our lives in the midst of such violence? What do biblical symbols like "the freedom to which Christ has liberated us" and "do the will of God", "brothers and sisters" mean to us? How do we listen to the voices expressed by women and men of diverse religious traditions? They question the androcentric metaphors and paradigms in which the Christian message of healing and restoration has been cast. Those who suffer point to the need for new interpretations that make sense of their experiences and offer hope for everyone. How do we communicate our own moral resources and committed actions in ways that respect the otherness of the other and at the same time, create safe space for steps towards healing and creativity? How can we teach others in a way that makes it a learning experience empowering for all participants?

A prophetic task

Death and the Maiden, moved both of us deeply. We identified with the victim's rage and uncompromising desire for revenge, to balance the scale of justice; to make the perpetrators pay-in-full. Why should they be let off? It brought up memories of our own pains, wishes to be acknowledged in our experience of abandonment, rejection and devaluation. But the drama must also permit us to identify with those situations where we have oppressed, violated or figured into the trauma of others. To recognize this more complex level of trauma can lead to denial or to healing. It can release energies of hope when emerging narratives are enlarged and incorporate both our idealized selves as well as our shameful self. A

more complex understanding of trauma can offer metaphors of transformation that enable us to connect the violence that is within with the brutal, systemic violence that comes from without. Both may be denied. Both possibilities present us with opportunities to re-envision the meaning of care in a world of increased violence, where political change and upheaval are creating new forms of trauma and affiliations. Ours is a changing world, pushed by global developments, technological innovations, and uneven growth with deeper divisions between the wealthy and the poor. We are challenged to raise anew the question: Who is my mother, my sister and my brother? We have much to learn from the question and the answers, especially in contexts of world wide economic and social change. Pastoral caregivers are further challenged to fashion creative responses to violence; to see and make the connections between personal suffering and political activity - especially where long standing patterns of injustice and violation contribute to long-term trauma and irreparable hurt.

There is a prophetic dimension to this challenge. It is to make known the subtle connections between personal suffering and public events, especially where people do not want to hear or be reminded of their past. Pastoral caregivers are challenged to find or create a role in situations where people who refuse to heed warning signs, will nevertheless, be unable to escape the consequences of their refusals. This is analogous to the young smoker who ignores the warning signs and refuses to stop. Such a person may soon be faced with the consequences of lung cancer and early death. She and he may never acknowledge their contribution to all the others affected by their behaviour. We are challenged to find courage and skill to confront the perpetrators denial of violations, and find compassion sufficient to enable them to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. This means that pastoral caregivers will be challenged to hear painful stories and learn to move perpetrators through the processes of recognition, confession, repentance, and restoration. And what about forgiveness? How do we deal with the perpetrators confession and repentance? Are there deeds so horrendous that forgiveness is impossible? In the process we too must learn to recognize our limitations, and the complex levels of trauma that incorporate both our idealized and shameful selves.

Notes

¹ A few book titles signal this emphasis: Larry Kent Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992); George Furniss, *The Social Context of Pastoral Care: Defining the Life Situation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994).

² Ariel Dorfmann, *Death and the Maiden* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991). Citations from page 59.

³ 8th Seminar on Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling, 18-23. Sept. 1994, Prague.

⁴ By "intercultural" we mean a setting in which a member of one ethnic group facilitates a process or therapeutic intervention that empowers a member of another ethnic group to make beneficial decisions. See: Jafar Kareem and Roland Littlewood (eds.), *Intercultural Therapy: Themes, Interpretations and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1992), p. 11.

⁵ The North American Theologian James Poling has addressed the strong tendency of male perpetrators very well in his book *The Abuse of Power* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991) in which he portrays two of his cases in his own work with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. He also discusses the theological impact of the abuse of power in regard to the image of God and concepts of Christology.

- ⁶ David Augsburger has defined a difference between sympathy, empathy and interpathy: "In interpathy, the process of knowing and 'feeling with' requires that one temporarily believe what the other believes, see as the other sees, value what the other values." See David W. Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1986) p. 31.
- ⁷ Stuart Turner in his article on "Therapeutic Approaches Survivors of Torture" states: "Only if the therapist or group has developed some coherent understanding of the social and political context in which they are working, can they really start to address the ideological needs of their clients" (in: J. Kareem and R. Littlewood (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 167).

Other literature

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The tradition of racism in the USA

topics:

- slavery and racism
- political concept of “reconstruction” and “integration” in the USA

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Racism in America

Doing a workshop on Racism in America is a very difficult task for me. It is difficult because there are so many facets of this dreadful social ill that it is mind-boggling to try to put it in any kind of perspective. It is difficult because I believe that an hour and a half of discussing this topic will bare little fruit in terms of resolution. It is difficult because it is not an historical problem that existed a long time ago, but a current situation that I and many others must face every day. Talking about it simply brings to mind the fact that we hear, see, smell, experience racist pollutants in our environment all of the time. The only relief that I feel sometimes, is to escape the reality of this situation by not dwelling on it or thinking about it. And so to organise my thoughts into a presentation has been a tremendous challenge for me.

It is not a challenge from which I shrink, but a recognisably humbling experience that I have felt called to have on many occasions, the experience of standing in the gap between the oppressors (the racists) and the targets (the victims of racism). Because of my sense of calling and purpose and because of my choice to be a leader in society, I feel it is my duty to rise to the occasion of sensitising others to the plight of this disease which affects us all. The disease of which I speak, which has been at epidemic proportions in the United States for centuries, is none other than the de-humanising, demoralising and degrading disease of racism.

What is racism? However we define racism, such as one race hating or despising another, one race feeling superior to another, one race being better than another, etc. etc., the one thing that is constant in any true definition of racism is that one race has power over the other race. Without the ability to control, diminish and/or demolish a race, racism cannot exist. Along with the negative attitudes, the negative feelings, the philosophical concept, the moral precepts and, yes, the theological constructs about a race, the one outstanding factor that does not exist in many other situations is the fact that the race that embraces these feelings and attitudes about another race also has the power to control the race that it despises.

In answer to the question, what is racism, Dr. George Kelsey, in a profound book entitled *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* (1966) states that: “Ra-

cism is a faith. It is a form of idolatry... In its early modern beginnings, racism was a justificatory device. It did not emerge as a faith. It arose as an ideological justification for the constellations of political and economic power which were expressed in colonialism and slavery. But gradually the idea of the superior race was heightened and deepened in meaning and in value so that it pointed beyond the historical structures of relation, in which it emerged, to human existence itself.” In her book *Race: Science and Politics* (rev. ed. 1947), Ruth Benedict expands on the theme of defining racism as “the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to hereditary inferiority and another group is destined to hereditary superiority. It is the dogma that the hope of the civilisation depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure. It is the dogma that one race has carried progress throughout human history and can alone insure future progress.” Martin Luther King jr. in his book *Where Do We Go From There: Chaos or Community* (1967) says, “since racism is based on the dogma that the hope of civilisation depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure, its ultimate logic is genocide. Hitler, in his mad and ruthless attempt to exterminate the Jews, carried the logic of racism to its ultimate tragic conclusion.” King goes on to say “racism is a philosophy based on contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the centre of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission.”

And so we understand racism to be an ideology, a dogma, a faith by which people live. In its ultimate practice, millions of lives have been destroyed mercilessly and even more millions are held in daily bondage and are victimised by the mind set of the race that is in the dominate position.

Racism is different from prejudice. Prejudice is a learned attitude and feeling that one person has towards another or another group of people. In many ways it looks like the same thing as racism, except that it is born of an internal feeling and does not require the one who feels the prejudice to have power over the other. Prejudice exists in the hearts and minds of both the oppressor and the oppressed. However, racism is often devoid of any feeling at all. An ideology does not necessarily require the person holding it to have any personal feeling about it at all. It is a common thing that racist behaviour and practices are acted out without any personal bias or malice in the consciousness of the one who is being racist.

The school teacher that says to the African American child, “you should take general math instead of algebra because algebra will be too difficult for you”, may indeed be trying to protect the child, but is fostering a racist position. The friend who says, “I like you very much and would love to take you home with me, but my neighbours would have a fit”, may not intend any put-down, but is yielding to racist behaviours and tactics. A person representing an institution may reject one based on race by saying, “it is not my personal feeling and I honestly believe it’s wrong, but it is the policy”, is still being racist in spite of the fact that he or she may not have personal prejudice as the primary motivate of his/her behaviour.

Dr. Valerie A. Batts, a psychologist who does workshops on what she calls “The New Racism”, says the new racism is more dangerous than the old racism. In the old days you knew how people felt and they stood their ground for whatever their ideals and philosophies were. If you wanted to address the issue you knew exactly who to go to and who you had to deal with. In new racism the person is rarely identified. New racism is institutional. It is designed and maintained by a board, committee, or some kind of policy making group. Once the policy is formed, the

committee disbands and nobody claims responsibility for its creation. When the policy is confronted, nobody has the power to reverse it or to even discuss its ethics, morals or injustice. Those who are hired to enforce the policy, do so without any personal conviction one way or the other; their only concern is to please the institution who pays their salary. This allows racism to go on and on unchecked, perpetuating itself endlessly. I will talk more about new racism later. Let me speak now about the birth of racism.

Racism as we have experienced it in the United States is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of our world. There has always been slavery and class systems throughout the world for as long as we are aware. However, the kind of dehumanising and demoralising slavery and racism that we experienced in the slavery in the United States had its origin in the 15th century. Before that period of time, while there was a consciousness of race and colour, it was primarily to identify persons and the origin of their birth, rather than to belittle them or suggest that they were inferior to any one else. Most of the biblical characters were of African descent (in spite of the fact that the Bible has been tampered with in such a fashion as to lead persons to believe that biblical characters were some other race) but racism was never an issue in biblical times. Five hundred years ago Columbus was credited with discovering America. That credit is assigned to Columbus as though this was a land totally uninhabited. That is a racist notion in itself, that a land inhabited by Native Americans and people of African descent could be discovered by someone else. The powers that be (the racist powers) decided for political and economical reasons that the fact that people were living here when Columbus came does not count; hence Columbus is credited with discovering a land that was already known about for thousands of years.

The origin of racism

The origin of racism is inextricably tied to colonialism. Long before the colonial period, Europeans visited Africa for the benefit of what they could learn: mathematics, science, art, astrology and medicine. All of these things were far advanced in Africa before the common era. At the beginning of the colonial period, however, Europeans who went to Africa observed African culture from a distance. They drew conclusions from what they saw and heard and wrote about it when they returned home. For example, when visitors to Africa saw a healing taking place from some distance, they interpreted the dancing, chanting and animated movements of the healer to be crazy nonsense. They called the healers witch doctors. Being on the outside looking in, they were not aware that these “witch doctors” were really holy men and women who had spent a minimum of 20 years of the most rigorous, sacrificial and disciplined training to be able to perform those healing exercises that were observed. This kind of misinformation and negative interpretation of experiences in Africa led journalists and human scientists to write extreme derogatory descriptions of African life, culture and religion.

Much of what was written was not taken seriously until some religious leaders added to the damaging reports theological and christological dogma that supported the ideologies of African people as subhuman, descendants from apes and lacking the soul that would bring them under the umbrella of God’s saving grace. Once the clergy began to denounce African people as more animal than human, and if human at all, certainly not to the same degree as Caucasian people, racism was born and christened in the name of superiority and greed.

The need for racism in America

It was necessary to identify a people that were sub-human and at the same time were intelligent enough to follow the instructions of a land owner who was trying to generate wealth with his property. With the colonial expansion was a new land ripe for growing cotton and other things which began a world wide textile business in the United States. It is interesting to note that racism was not limited to people of the African diaspora, but also included Chinese, Native Americans and Irish. All of these races were involved in the tremendous textile industry that was developed in the southern part of the United States and it was through racism that labour was made available to do the work.

In the case of African people, the slave trade became an international industry. As more and more cotton was grown and the textile industry continued to flourish, there was a greater and greater need for more labour to do the work. Even though slaves represented the cheapest labour that could be found (no labour cost), every effort was made to transport as many slaves at one time as a ship could possibly hold. They were packed in the lower part of the ship like sardines. The living conditions were so inhumane that millions of them did not survive the journey. Some estimate 30 millions lives were lost in the slave trade.

Tradition of racism

Racism was created because of a system of economy that required cheap labour. It was only with the ideology that one race was superior to another and that people of African decent were not really human, that made slavery able to continue and expand. In time the practice of slavery was challenged by persons who considered it barbaric, inhumane, immoral and sinful. The more slavery was attacked by those who wanted to end it, the more it was necessary to entrench racism in people's minds to justify what was going on. Racism soon became a broader tool than just one to support slavery. It became a tool to make one race feel better about itself. It became a part of the educational system and the acculturation of a total society. Racism became the tradition of the south in the US and around the world. Even persons who had never encountered a person of African decent personally, had heard the damaging reports about people of colour. The conclusions that were drawn and the comments that were made were presented to a world wide public as fact rather than ideologies. Laws were made to protect the tradition of racism and each racist considered it his or her responsibility to teach their own children how to be good racists.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the economical system changed slightly; it changed from a system of slavery to serfism. The term for serfism in the United States was "share cropper". A share cropper was one who worked on a plantation owned by someone of the other race and would grow crops in the field. During the planting season, the share cropper would be loaned the seeds and tools for growing the crop in the field. Sometimes it was necessary to accept food on account while they waited for the harvest to come in. At harvest time the share cropper was allowed to retain a certain portion of the harvest as his own. However, before he was allowed to realize anything for himself and his family, he would have to pay off the account that had developed as he needed supplies to grow the crops. In

most cases there was nothing left and the share cropper had to work the land another year to pay what he owed. This cycle went on and on to no end.

Reconstruction

There was a period of reconstruction in which the government sent troops to the south to protect the rights of the former slaves and other black people in the south. Once blacks obtained the right to vote, they were able to make laws that brought justice to them for a short period of time. By now racism was so entrenched that the whites were not willing to accept blacks as equals. Within ten to fifteen years the troops were removed and the political system was corrupted sufficiently to exclude most of the blacks from voting and consequently retained the power of the whites in the south. While blacks were in the majority by far, they met with resistance to exercising their political rights.

Some of the ways in which whites control the system was to establish a pole tax. Unless the blacks were able to pay the pole tax, they were not able to register to vote. Another way was to require blacks to answer a questionnaire, which would determine whether they were literate enough to vote. Since they had been denied the right to read and write in slavery, many of them were unable to even read the forms much less fill them out. Even for those who were literate, they could not answer the questions on the form because in many cases there was no answer to the question. For example, one of the questions was, "How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?" So while reconstruction seemed to offer great promise to black people for a very short time, by the turn of the century those gains had been taken away and controls had been established to maintain the tradition of racism in America. Jim Crow laws were established to maintain racism.

Where ever whites failed to gain the advantage that they wanted through legal, political and economic means, they resorted to horrendous violence. The Ku Klux Klan, an organisation of people who covered themselves in white sheets and hoods and roamed at night, used armed force to resist any efforts on blacks to gain equality in the United States. The KKK became a national organisation and because their identity was not known, included people of high standing in the community and who held high political offices. While their symbol of terror was to burn crosses in the yards of black people, they were known to burn down people's houses, shoot them down in cold blood, lynch them by hanging them from a tree limb, drown them in ponds and rivers, mutilate their bodies, especially by castration, rape women, and generally terrorise them in any way they could. Whenever blacks tried to defend themselves, they became the victims of viscous lies which welded the white community together against them which was responsible for the death of many blacks. Most of the atrocities that blacks experience in this country right up to the 1950s resulted in little or no legal action against the perpetrators of the evil.

Industrial period

In the early part of the 19th century we entered into an industrial period in the United States. Now the labour was needed not in the cotton fields in the south, but in factories in the north. Many blacks migrated from the south to northern cities where they found employment in the most deplorable situations imaginable. They

worked in factories all day like they used to work in the fields, but they were paid a wage and were protected by the law from being split up from their families. But the tradition of racism made an adjustment during the industrial period. The question of whether a black man was a man in the eyes of the law had been answered. But their lingered the question as to whether a black man was inferior to a white man. Because the later attitude was accepted by most, blacks were allowed to work in the lowest, most menial jobs that were available to anybody. Under rare circumstances were they ever able to work their way up to a higher position. While racism continued to be blatant in the south, it was covert in the north. However, racism was the same attitudinally wherever a black person would go.

During the great depression, persons who had wealth and lost it often committed suicide. Blacks, who were used to not having anything anyway, continued to do their menial tasks and survive during the depression. When the first world war began, there was a decision not to give weapons to blacks on foreign soil because they may have sided with the enemy. Racists have always believed that if blacks were ever allowed to gain any power, that they would immediately turn against their white oppressors in response to all of the hate and destruction we have suffered. Because of the necessity for soldiers however, black units were developed that fought bravely in the first world war. By the time of the second world war, not only did we have black units fighting in the war, but a black unit of air fighters was created. It was not long after that that the US Military was integrated, but racism continued to exist even with the integration.

Integration

During the 1950s a strong move by the NAACP to integrate all America began. it was understood and accepted by many blacks in the country that the total problem of racism was due to segregation. If everyone was integrated, racism would have to die. It was during the 1950s that Martin Luther King Jr. began to move against racism in favour of integration. This integration movement spilled over into the 1960s in which a liberal agenda began to be raised. This liberal agenda sought to gain everything from repayment for slave labour through the centuries, all the way to total equality for blacks in the country and access to everything that existed. You watched on television how the efforts of the civil rights marches and agendas were resisted by fire hoses, dogs, police brutality and the Ku Klux Klan. By the 1970s a number of doors and windows in the society had been sprung open for anybody, including, and in some cases especially, blacks to go through. Access to educational institutions, access to career opportunities, access to houses in neighbourhoods that had been closed to blacks, access to political office and access to dreams of the future were enjoyed for a while.

By the 1980s a conservative movement had begun which sought to undue all of the gains that had been made by black people in America from the 1960s and forward. Efforts that had been made to accommodate blacks who had been unfairly denied privilege in early years, were turned back by those who felt that enough had been done to make up for past injustices. It was during this period of time that Dr. Batts developed her theory of the new racism.

New face of destructivisms

Dr. Valerie Batts suggests that racism is only one of the destructive “isms” in our country; just as destructive as racism is classism, sexism, ageism, and ethnocentrism. She says because the new isms are not personal but institutional, three problems exist that make racism worse today than it was years ago: 1) it is harder to identify the perpetrator, 2) there is no personal guilt or responsibility, and 3) it is more difficult to change.

Batts suggests that the new racism is a co-operative system. In this co-operative system both the oppressor and the oppressed are participants in keeping the system alive. It is true that racism has been the standard for so long that many victims of racism believe in it as truth. Because of the ideologies surrounding the new racism it is easy to see how the system perpetuates itself with the assistance of both the targets and the oppressors. Batts suggests five dynamics of oppression that are responded to by five corresponding dynamics:

OPPRESSOR

dysfunctional rescuing

blaming the victim

avoidance of contact

denial of cultural differences

denial of political significance of cultural differences

TARGET

system beating

system blaming

anti-white, avoidance of contact

denial of blackness

not understanding or minimising of political significance of racial oppression

What needs to be done

What we can do is listed under three headings. 1) Individual, 2) institutional, 3) societal.

As an *individual* there are two things we can do, one is to change our personal attitude. However, a change of personal attitude does little to change a system of racism. It is important that each individual not only change his or her personal attitude, but also influence changes in the institution with which they are connected: such as school, church, work, government, community and social affairs.

Speaking *institutionally* the kinds of changes that need to be made is a change of policies and/or enforcing the policies that already exist. Another institutional change that is necessary to eliminate racism is affirmative action. Often people define affirmative action as exclusive opportunity for blacks to gain access to something from which they have been denied. That is true in part, however, the overarching definition of affirmative action is opening up the system to everybody and accepting the best qualified person. The need for affirmative action is due to racism and the “good old boys system”. In the good old boys system opportunities that become available are not advertised publicly and only a select few people are aware that the opportunity even exists. Even if others become aware of the opportunity and make effort to take advantage of it, the good old boys system is one of accepting friends, those to whom we owe favours, persons like themselves or

anybody that is not black. Affirmative action is a correction to this kind of system and makes the system more fair and equitable for everyone.

The way to change racism in our *society* is to use all of the power we have in the political system to demand that laws be passed that will eliminate racism. The US is a system of laws and persons do not change unless the law requires them to do so. In spite of all of the education that has been done around the benefits of wearing seat belts while riding in an automobile, many people, including myself, did not wear seat belts on a regular basis until wearing a seat belt became the law. The same thing is true about racism. People do not change their attitudes unless the law requires them to. The next thing we need to do on a societal basis is to educate ourselves and especially our children. Racism has been able to continue because parents have passed it down to their children, teachers have passed it on to children in school, pastors have passed it on to congregations and community leaders have passed it on to those who follow them. We need to re-educate our society, especially in our homes where children are young enough to learn the difference in love and hate.

Racism began 500 years ago because there were people who benefited from it economically. It continues today because there are still people who benefit from racism. Plato said, “what is honoured in the country will be cultivated there.” Racism will continue to exist as long as our greed is more important than our morality.