

PAULINE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN EPHESIANS 2:11-22 AN ANTIDOTE TO TRIBALISM: LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The Church in Africa is challenged by the phenomenon of tribalism, although it consists of believers who are seeking to transform the country through the Good News of Jesus Christ. Africans in general and Nigerians in particular, have excluded others because of the tribe they come from and the language they speak. This has been a wall and barrier in the society and the tendency for us to carry it into the church is high. This is due to lack of proper understanding and use of our differences or diversities that are both physical and socially constructed. The Cross speaks to those tendencies and divisions created by such attitudes which we shall integrate as a theological solution to the issue. This paper integrates the theology of the Cross with the problem of tribalism for church life in Nigeria, which is our methodology, as posited by Paul G. Heibert who says. "In seminaries we need to begin by examining the worldview of the culture in which we ourselves live and how it shapes the way we think. We need to compare this against a biblical worldview in order to transform ours in the light of the gospel."¹ The paper concludes that all forms of division, alienation, barriers and walls have been annulled by Christ on the Cross. There is therefore no room for tribal of linguistic ethnocentrism. As Christians, our attitude towards others that do not speak the same language with us must transcend and be transformed by the Cross of Jesus Christ.

KEYWORDS: Christian, Cross, Church, Reconciliation, Antidote, Tribalism, Lessons, Divisions, Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

This paper underscores the importance of the role of the Cross in Paul's theology in Ephesians 2:11-22, to addressing the challenge of Tribalism in the Church in Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular. The paper states the problem, justification of Pauline Theology of the Cross in Ephesians 2:11-22 as an antidote to tribalism, causes of division, which is that differences had been turned into barriers, and the barriers lead to pride and self, prejudice, false view of ourselves, false view of others, a wrong sense of values and politics and economics. A solution is proffered, and that is faith in the cross of Christ transforms our identity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Church in Africa is challenged by the phenomenon of tribalism, although it consists of believers who are seeking to transform the country through the Good News of Jesus Christ.¹

¹ Ferdinand Nwaigbo, "Tribalism Versus Evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa" *African Ecclesial Review* 43/3 (Sept. 2005): 131.

Tribalism poses several challenges to the Church which includes among others: "Competition, exclusion, shunning, discrimination, elitism and the possibilities of either ethnocentrism or racism are all noticeable results of bad tribalistic behavior."² When the Church is divided because of tribalism, Wilbur O'Donovan states that, "Its witness will be weak, its prayer will be powerless and it will accomplish nothing for God. Its members will easily fall into temptation, sin and defeat."³ This is significant because the practice of tribalism undermines the concept of the unity of the Church, and destroys loyalty to God and the communal life of the Church.

² "Religious Tribalism: Pros and Cons," n.p. [cited 26 August 2013]. Online: www.ethicdaily.com/part-1-religioustribalism-pros-and-cons-cms-16026.

³ Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 273.

Nwaigbo gives the extent and origin of tribalism as seen in African society as follows:

Tribalism is a negative term that to be an African is to be given over to tribalism. It comes with the family and is passed on from generation to generation. Tribalism has been perceived to be the basic unifying concept of an analysis of an African's life. This view has been popularized by anthropologists, hence tribalism has been internalized in the African society to such an extent that even African's themselves now admit the dynamics of their society as being dominated by the phenomenon of tribe/tribalism.⁴

The term tribalism connotes tribal consciousness, character, and allegiance, particularly to one's tribe or a social group.⁵

JUSTIFICATION FOR PAULINE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN EPHESIANS 2:11-22 AS AN ANTITODE TO TRIBALISM

In his historical interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22, William Rader reports that Origen is "the first to say directly that Ephesians 2:11-22 involves the reconciliation of other hostilities besides the fundamental one between Jews and Gentiles."⁶ Though Origen sometimes speaks of peace in individual terms, he shows that he does not limit it to inner peace when he says that it is opposed to factions and wars. Rader also reports that from the fourth century to the close of the Patristic age, "In East and West, Ephesians 2:11-22 is used in connections with attempts to heal divisions within the Church."⁷ In his conclusion of the Eastern and Western writers of the Patristic period, Rader broadens the implication of the interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22, beyond theological differences as follows: "Both Eastern and Western writers, then, in patristic periods, relate Ephesians 2:11-22 to problems of church unity, in view of not only theological differences but also economic, social and racial differences."⁸ Basil the Great in his interpretation of the passage asserts that "It indicates awareness that unity between Jews and Gentiles is related to the unity of other groupings in the church....Paul always places Jews and Gentiles first when he lists various groupings in order to make clear that unity in Christ overcomes all human divisions."⁹

Also, Athanasius asserts in his interpretation of Ephesians what the Cross symbolizes, "The Cross symbolizes not only the reconciliation of the individual with God, and not only the reconciliation of individuals with one another but the reconciliation of different groups with one another."¹⁰ This conviction is

developed by several later Fathers, especially Augustine. In his efforts to show that the Donatists misunderstand the nature of the Church, the great African theologian Augustine makes frequent use of Ephesians 2:11-22. According to Augustine's interpretation of Ephesians 2:14, the two who are made one are the Jews and the Gentiles. That the Church is formed out of Jews and Gentiles is such a basic element in Augustine's view of the Church that he sees many types of the uniting of the two people throughout the Bible.¹¹

The cornerstone of Ephesians 2:20 is Augustine's favorite symbol for Christ who is peace because He unites two into one. He, therefore, believes that it belongs to the nature of the Church to unite groups of people as different from one another as Jews and Gentiles.¹² Augustine emphasizes this point by his repeated use of the phrase "de diverso", or "ex diverso", to describe the wall. The phrase could be translated simply "from diversity." And that is certainly one of the ideas Augustine wants to convey, that "There not only can be, there must be differences within the church, differences united in Christ. This point certainly needed to be made in the Africa of Augustine's time, where differences between landowners and tenants, town and country dwellers, African and Roman, Punic-speaking, and Latin-speaking, were powerful factors in Donatist schism."¹³ Augustine reminds his hearers that no difference between human groups was ever so great as that between Jews and Gentiles, yet it was precisely they who were united in Christ the Cornerstone. So Augustine implies and is hopeful that "As Christ reconciled the hostile Jews and Gentiles, so Augustine prays that he will reconcile the hostile Donatists and Catholics in North Africa."¹⁴

Ethnic tensions are not limited to Nigeria or Africa; it is a global phenomenon. J Daniels Hays alludes to this fact when he states that, "Serious ethnic tensions are not limited to North America, but also exist in the Church across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe."¹⁵ Narrowing down to Africa, he gives an example:

Many African national church organizations, such as the 4,000 - plus congregations of the evangelical Ethiopian Kale Heywet church, comprise numerous different ethnic groups that traditionally and historically have felt animosity toward each other. In some regions of the world, Christians of different ethnic groups have recently opposed each other in open

no longer appears ... The fact that this idea was not retained in the history of interpretation is a sad loss, for it certainly could have been helpful against temptations for the church to let racial hostility violate its unity; See also Ambroisiaster who concurs with Athanasius when he says, "This faith is therefore not only an individual matter. It has to do with the ending of group hostility," Rader, The Church and Racial Hostility, 43.

¹¹ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 46.

¹² Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 47.

¹³ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 48.

¹⁴ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 48.

¹⁵ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 22.

⁴Nwaigbo, "Tribalism Versus Evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa," 139.

⁵Nwaigbo, "Tribalism Versus Evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa," 137.

⁶ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 23.

⁷ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 24.

⁸ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 53.

⁹ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 26-7.

¹⁰ Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility*, 25, Rader laments that after Athanasius this understanding of the symbolism of the cross

war. Often such warfare was fought along ethnic lines, thus creating deep animosity and prejudice.¹⁶

Having given the global implication of ethnic tensions and the above example, Hays agrees that the passage of Ephesians 2:11-22 can be used to address the issue of tribalism in the Church when he posits as follows: "Thus throughout the world Christian communities are struggling to overcome the historical and cultural prejudices that they have inherited and are striving to use the gospel to forge Christian unity in the midst of their cultural diversity."¹⁷ So while Hays applied the theology developed in his book to the Black-White issue in the United States, he asserts very strongly that, "The biblical principles that emerge have equal applicability in any church setting where fellow believers in Christ are being pressured culturally to divide along ethnic lines and to embrace prejudiced views toward other ethnic groups."¹⁸

Finally, for the justification of the use of Paul's theology of the Cross in Ephesians 2:11-22 to address theologically the problem of tribalism for Church life in Nigeria is Theodore W. Jennings Jr. who affirms that: "This passage which serves as a kind of summary of important aspects of Paul's thought (even if it was not written by Paul himself), affirms that the Cross of Jesus abolished the separation, and so the hostility, between Jew and Gentile, between the near and the far off, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. It does this by way of seeking to include the Gentile or Pagan into the covenant of God from which the Gentile had previously been excluded."¹⁹ He, therefore, suggest that the Cross should serve as a model for the breaking down of other forms of division, "It is the breaking down of this barrier, I will suggest, that is the model for the breaking down of other forms of division, and that in turn leads to the acclamation of Jesus as the one who abolishes all forms of division and so reconciles the world to God."²⁰

CAUSES OF DIVISION

As to the cause of division in the ancient world, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones identifies the disease and problem: "The division in the ancient world was due to one thing, and that was that differences had been turned into barriers, differences had become a 'middle

wall of partition'."²¹ He reiterates the fact that "There are differences, and it will be folly to minimize differences. Differences are facts. And even when you have true unity, differences will still remain."²² B. Ukwuegbu is on the same page with Lloyd-Jones as he states that "With the new relationship to Christ, which now belongs to all members of the community, the religious and social privileges, and disadvantages that until now were valid and had separated people from one another, are no longer decisive; even the most fundamental places of ethnicity, economic and social standing, and gender."²³ He continues that, "While Paul is not suggesting that those 'in Christ' no longer have ethnic, social or sexual identity and differentiation, he opposes the contention that these distinctions are necessary for salvation."²⁴ In other words, "Paul does not seek to 'erase' or 'eradicate' cultural specificities, but to relativize them... even in Christ there is still human difference. But the dominance of one over the other based on these differences is the reality that is abolished."²⁵ Ralph P. Martin concurs that our identities are not erased but transcended and transformed when he writes, "Neither has forfeited its identity except to have it transcended and subsumed under a higher name, 'one new person' (2:15)."²⁶ Putting it in terms of unity, Benjamin H. Dunning writes, "Unity for Ephesians does not mean the ignorance or erasure of all difference but rather its organization and control."²⁷ Banks further agrees with these positions when he writes:

Also, Paul's remarks do not imply that differences between groups disappear as a result of what has now happened. As his comments elsewhere indicate, even within the new community forged by Christ, Jews and Greeks continue to exist alongside one another as Jews and Greeks, as do slaves and free, men and women. He does not deny the continuing legitimacy of national,

²¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: Studies in Ephesians Chapter 2* (London: Billing & Sons Limited, 1972), 157.

²² Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 157; see also Williams who also believes that differences exist, but are not to be divisive when he asserts that, for in Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul emphasizes not that ethnic distinctions no longer exist between Jews and Gentiles, but that these distinctions no longer matter since Jesus' death "killed" the boundary markers that divided them (see Acts 13; 22; 26:19-23; 27:28), Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology*, 130.

²³ Bernard Ukwuegbu, "Neither Jew nor Greek: The Church in Africa and the Quest for Self-Understanding in the Light of the Pauline Vision and Today's Context of Cultural Pluralism," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8.4 (November 2008) :308, 305-318. Cited 27 January 2015. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742250802363768>.

²⁴ Ukwuegbu, "Neither Jew nor Greek", 308.

²⁵ Ukwuegbu, "Neither Jew nor Greek", 308.

²⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1991), 161.

²⁷ Benjamin H. Dunning, "Strangers and Aliens No Longer: Negotiating Identity and Difference in Ephesians 2," *Harvard Theological Review* 99.1 (2006:15) 1-16.

¹⁶Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 22.

¹⁷Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 22.

¹⁸Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 22.

¹⁹Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 63.

²⁰Jennings Jr., *Transforming Atonement*, 63. Also Jennings had earlier stated that, this breaking down of the walls of separation extends well beyond the religious sphere to include the abolition of distinctive between slave and free, male and female. That the world (and the church) is structured by similar exclusions even today demonstrates that the message of the cross has yet to be taken with full seriousness, even by communities that identify themselves with the Crucified One. At the same time, the abolition of such divisions would entail a radical restructuring of our social reality.

social, and gender differences - Paul is no advocate of a universal, classless, and unisex society - he merely affirms that these differences do not affect one's relationship with Christ and membership in the community... He is more interested in the unity the gospel brings than in its equality, and in this unity, diversity is preserved rather than uniformity imposed.²⁸

This is true, as C. McGarry says in becoming a Christian, our cultural identities are not destroyed, but:

One retains his/her ethnic identity, social status, and of course gender, for these are part of the identity of each one, but the disciples of Jesus are called in the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome any divisions that these characteristics may have brought within their own particular cultures before they became Christians. Christians are therefore challenged to experience and live out the much deeper unity ... through baptism ... To be a Christian is to belong and live out the richness of one's ethnic origin, culture, education, etc., and yet to experience at the same time an even deeper unity with those of other races and cultures, because we have been called to be disciples of Jesus Christ together.²⁹

J. C. H. Smith concurs when he asserts that, "In declaring all foods ritually clean, and by traversing geographical, social and ethnic boundaries, Jesus is not declaring that such boundaries no longer exist. The point is rather that these boundaries no longer have power to limit the coming of God's kingdom into areas and among ethnic groups where it was previously presumed to be absent."³⁰

But the tragedy says Lloyd-Jones "... is that men exaggerate differences and turn them into barriers, into obstacles, into 'curtains,' middle walls of partition. That is the very thing that these Jews had been doing. The Jews were circumcised, and the others were not. But that was not to be a barrier... But the Jew had misunderstood. He had turned this difference into a barrier, and he held himself aloof and despised the others."³¹ He mentions five things which the barriers lead to pride and self, prejudice, false view of ourselves, false view of others, and a wrong sense of values.

It Leads to Pride and Self

The differences that were turned into barriers, first of all, it leads to pride. Actually says Lloyd-Jones "it is due to pride, it is due to self. That is ultimately the cause of every division and every barrier and every obstacle. It is the ultimate cause of everything that divides

people. Pride and self"³² Mathews links what transpired at the tower of Babel to pride this way, "The builders of the tower at Babel constructed it to impress future generations with their autonomy, ingenuity, and ability. But for the author of Genesis and his readers, it held significance only as a tribute to human pride."³³ In Tribalism in religious communities in Africa, Onyalla alludes to this pride of African tribes when he states that, "It is generally conceived that every tribe thinks it lives at the center of the world, the brightest star in the sky."³⁴

Prejudice

Under the influence of pride a man cannot think straightly, he becomes prejudiced. He cannot see anything truly as it is. Prejudice is one of the greatest curses in life, and it is generally grounded and rooted in pride. It is an utterly blinding force. It first of all prevents our seeing that there is not a second side, there is only one, there is not another. He is absolutely blinded. Now that was the attitude of the Jews: 'the Circumcised,' 'the Uncircumcised'! He would not recognize the Gentiles, rather he turned his back on them. Is not that the essence of all disputes?³⁵

Stanley gives an insight into how believers come to the Christian faith with their prejudices, "Both Jewish and Greek converts brought heavy loads of ethnic prejudice with them into the new Christian house - Churches."³⁶ Arnold states also that, "Newer converts presumably carried ethnic animosity into the church and fueled tensions."³⁷ Because according to him "The division between Jews and Gentiles in the first century was deep."³⁸ But the apostle Paul believes it ought not to be so. "In Paul's view, such attitudes were simply inconsistent with the Christian's new social identity in Christ, and should be laid aside."³⁹ Sparks also discusses this attitude and agrees with Stanley, "Specifically, it suggests that when rulers or peoples rise to power they will naturally tend to carry with them any preexisting ethnic sentiments and affective notions of kinship."⁴⁰ Banks also concurs when he asserts that, "More general differences also emerged between Jewish and Gentile Christians within Paul's communities. Converted Jews and Gentiles tended to carry past religious and cultural patterns of behavior into their new way of life."⁴¹ This attitude of prejudice to

²⁸Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 158.

²⁹ Mathews, *The Post-Racial Church*, 72.

³⁰ Onyalla, *Tribalism in Religious Communities in Africa*, 163.

³¹Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 158.

³² Stanley, "Neither Jew nor Greek": *Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society JSNT 64 (1996: 113) 101-124.*

³³ Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 175.

³⁴ Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 176.

³⁵ Stanley, "Neither Jew nor Greek": *Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society*, JSNT 64 (1996: 113): 101-124.

³⁶ Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*, 47.

³⁷ Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 115; Banks explains that Jews in particular, in the dispersion as well as in Jerusalem, continued to adhere to certain revered customs, such as observance of the Sabbath day and abstinence from particular kinds of food and

²⁸Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 114.

²⁹ C. McGarry, "A Community of Disciples to Witness to the Kingdom," in *Inculcating the Church in Africa: Theological and Practical Perspectives* (eds. Cecil McGarry and Patrick Ryan; Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2001), 194-5.

³⁰ Smith, "The Construction of Identity in Mark 7:24-30: The Syrophenician Woman and the Problem of Ethnicity", 477.

³¹Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 157-8.

Chester Warren Quimby is the most deadly as he states emphatically that, "Of all the walls of isolation that destroy the unity of mankind the most vicious is prejudice."⁴²

A False View of Ourselves

Then another way in which prejudice works is this - it always leads us to take a false view of ourselves. The prejudice, and the pride that leads to prejudice, not only prevents a man from seeing that there is another side; they also produce in him an entirely false view of himself. In this way, prejudice always exaggerates what is true of him. It was God's ordinance that the Jew should be circumcised, but the Jew exaggerated that into saying that there was only one real nation on earth, the Jewish. The others were 'dogs.'⁴³ Hiebert concurs with such attitude and attributes it to the fallen nature of humankind when he writes, "As fallen humans, we naturally distinguish between 'us,' made up of those who are the same 'kind' of people as ourselves, and 'others,' who are not 'our kind of people.' We naturally see ourselves as the quintessential humans, civilized and superior. Others are semi-humans, savages, and beast."⁴⁴ William S. Campbell agrees when he states that:

In the process of enhancing the portrait of Christian faith and of Paul, Judaism has become an ever-present and essential foil. In alleged contrast to the tribalism of the parent religion with its inherent attachment to a small and disputed territory, and its limitation to a specific group claiming ancestry from Abraham, the Christian faith supposedly rises above the particularity of geographical location, addresses the entire world and removes all divisions whether of class, gender or ethnicity.⁴⁵

A False View of Others

Another thing it does is to render us incapable of seeing and realizing that whatever we may be, and whatever we may have, is not due to us but to God who has given it to us. The Jew had quite forgotten that circumcision was the gift of God to him. "We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to any man"⁴⁶, said the Jews to Christ on one occasion.⁴⁷ Further, it makes us take an entirely false view of others. As it makes us exaggerate what we

drink. The distinction Paul draws between "strong" and the "weak" in Romans probably reflects this difference in lifestyle (Chapters 14-15). There he distinguishes between "one who believes he may eat anything" and "esteems all days alike" and the other who "eats only vegetables" and "esteems one day as better than another."

⁴² Chester Warren Quimby, *The Unity of Mankind: The Message of Ephesians on Unity in Christ* (Anderson, Indiana: The Warner Press, 1958), 36.

⁴³ Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 158.

⁴⁴ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 288.

⁴⁵ William S. Campbell, "Religion, Identity and Ethnicity: The Contribution of Paul the Apostle," *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion and Education* 29.2 (August 2008):139, 139-150. Cited 24 January 2015. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1361760802289544>.

⁴⁶ John 8:33.

⁴⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 158.

have, it makes us detract from what they have. How we always add to our side and take off from the other side. The Jew was convinced that there was nothing of value in the Gentiles; they did not seem even to be human beings; they were 'dogs'. In exactly the same way the Greek with his learning regarded others as Barbarians and illiterates. Prejudice not only distracts and subtracts from what is true of others, but it proceeds to despise them.⁴⁸

The Jews had an immense contempt for the Gentiles - they were unclean and to be shunned. Kevin J. Hanlon shows the level of contempt when he points out, "If a Jew married a Gentile a funeral was carried out to signify that the Jew was dead to God and the chosen people."⁴⁹

Dunning pitches this otherness in relation to language and politics in this manner, "Representing otherness is a profoundly rhetorical problem, intimately connected to a question of language and politics. In other words, how an individual or a group demarcates difference and talks about that demarcation constitutes a social process, which arises rooted in a context and a network of relationships."⁵⁰

A Wrong Sense of Values

But there is a fifth great cause of division, namely, a wrong sense of values. The whole tragedy of the Jew at that time was that he had missed the real point. He was lacking in a real sense of values. He thought that it was circumcision in the flesh that mattered. What Paul and others had to teach him was that it was circumcision in the spirit that really matters; that you can be circumcised in the flesh, but be damned and lost at the same time; that the man who is right with God is the man who has been circumcised in his spirit; and that is possible to the Gentile as to the Jew.⁵¹ Jennings believes that it is at the heart of tribalism and nationalism when he asserts that, "It is well to remind ourselves that the claim to be the specially chosen of God, the special people of God, is a fundamental dynamic of human history. It is at the heart of tribalism and nationalism."⁵² It is a fact, certainly, that there are different nations and nationalities; but we tend to do exactly what the Jews did, we turn these things into barriers. Because I happen to be born in a certain nation, that is the nation. Nationality! Birth! Family! Blood! How we exaggerate these things and inflate them! How we despise others! How these things create barriers!⁵³ In the light of this wrong sense of values that tribalism brings, Nwaigbo asserts that "Tribalism contradicts basic Christian values such as the dignity of the human person, the Fatherhood of God, the unity

⁴⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 159.

⁴⁹ Kevin J. Hanlon, *Paul: Pastor of Communities for Today* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1991), 63.

⁵⁰ Dunning, *Strangers and Aliens No Longer*, 2.

⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 159.

⁵² Jennings Jr., *Transforming Atonement*, 65.

⁵³ Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, 160.

of the humanity in virtue of creation and redemption, and the Church as *koinonia* of believers.”⁵⁴

Politics and Economics

Another cause of division in the Church and society is the issue of politics and economics. It is worthwhile to quote Sparks who highlights these important factors:

To the extent that it is possible, ethnicity must be considered in its political, social-structure, and economic setting to be fully apprehended, with special care given to the issue of its relation to social and class structures. This is a natural inference from the observation that various kinds of competition contribute to and intensify ethnic sentiments because politics and economics are frequently (some would say always!) The causes of group competition. This is particularly relevant for any inquiry into Israelite society because class struggles in particular, show up at numerous points of biblical evidence.⁵⁵

Volf alludes to Sparks submission on politics and economics as a cause of division when he writes, “More often than not we exclude because in a world of scarce resources and contested power, we want to secure possessions and wrest the power from others.”⁵⁶ In the same vein, Stanley points out that, “Ethnic conflict is more likely in places where groups are competing for scarce social, economic, or territorial resources; where there are discrepancies or changes in the size or political power of competing groups; where one group has migrated into the territory of another; where there is a history of conflict between groups; or where people in the same geographical area possess discordant systems of personal and social values.”⁵⁷ Maigadi points out in his research which culminated into his book that, “Those interviewed identified three major areas in which divisive ethnicity is explicitly manifested in ECWA. The areas are election of leaders, appointments of staff, and the proliferation of administrative units such as Medical, Rural, and ECWA Productions Departments (Creation of DCC’s).⁵⁸” The quest for power that tribalism is used to manipulate during election and appointments in the Church is evil. This attitude can be attributed to the desire to seek political and economic power, so as to empower one’s tribe or ethnic group to the detriment of other members, with the view of marginalizing them. This is due to unhealthy competition among believers.

⁵⁴Ferdinand Nwaigbo, “Tribalism Versus Evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa” in *African Ecclesial Review* 47.3 (September 2005:142): 142.

⁵⁵Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*, 22.

⁵⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 77-8; Volf explains further that, the practice of exclusion and the language of exclusion go hand in hand with a whole array of emotional responses to the other, ranging from hatred to indifference; these exclusions both call forth emotional responses and are sustained by them.

⁵⁷ Stanley, ‘Neither Jew nor Greek’: *Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society*, 115.

⁵⁸ Maigadi, *Divisive Ethnicity in the Church in Africa*, 157.

Therefore, economic and political factors play a major role in tribalism thriving in the church.

Divisions in the Church of God due to tribalism have been scandalous to the witness of the Gospel. In the Church today, alongside faith, there is the myth of tribalism; along grace, there is the sin of tribalism and alongside truth of the gospel, there is the error of tribalism.⁵⁹ The Bishops of Cameroon, while commenting on tribalism made the assertion that “This evil finds fertile grounds, especially in the political interests of some ambitious citizens who stir up tribal feelings of the weaker folk to gain political power which enables them to use the common good to their own advantage. Are those preaching tribal idolatry really out to protect their tribe or to enrich themselves as quickly as possible?”⁶⁰

FAITH IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST TRANSFORMS OUR IDENTITY

The question the author seeks to explore in this section is: What has the cross done to our identity? The relationship of the Cross to our identity is correctly identified by Cousar who writes, “The message of the Cross functions as the norm and point of critique of the Church’s quest for identity.”⁶¹ Minna Shkul affirms that “Ephesians 2 encourages the community to grasp the full significance of the Christ-event, and the marvelous status transformation it brought to non-Israelites. It explains how the community is legitimated as God’s people using collective memories of what God has achieved in Christ for the community.”⁶² As seen among the factors that shape our identity are our histories and experiences, but Snodgrass believes they can be transformed, “Our histories and our experiences have shaped us, but Christians by faith have adopted a history not our own to be our own. Our true history is the history of Christ into whom we are grafted. His history, within which and to which our personal history is subsumed, is our defining history.”⁶³ Nigerians in particular and Africans, in general, have been shaped by the history of slave trade, colonialism, the missionary activities, and the tribal sentiment that has so perverted our identity which has led to tribalism. As important and devastating these histories and experiences have been, and how they have torn us apart, we can move beyond them and be transformed by what Christ has done on the Cross.

According to Snodgrass, “Conversion is the acceptance of a new identity, of deriving our identity from someone else’s story, of transferring, defining power from our personal history and self-presence to Christ’s history and presence. While we cannot change our histories, we do not have to live them or give them ultimate

⁵⁹Nwaigbo, “Tribalism Versus Evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa,” 142.

⁶⁰Northwehr, *That They May be One: Catholic Social Teaching on Racism, Tribalism, and Xenophobia*, 130.

⁶¹ Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross*, 183.

⁶²Shkul, *Reading Ephesians*, 79.

⁶³ Snodgrass, *Introduction to the Hermeneutics of Identity*, 14.

dividing force.”⁶⁴ The call then is, “... we are called past our histories - not out of them - to live in Christ.”⁶⁵ Therefore, “Our relation to Christ determines us but also sets us in relation to all others in Him and to all of humanity. As much as we may love our historical families, our true family is the family of God (Mark 3:31-35; Eph2:19-22).”⁶⁶

The issue of land is so important because there are no people without land. We are committed to a location. If we are defined to some degree by the place we live, Christians must know their location is in Christ. Geographically we belong in Christ and are defined by Him; He is our environment. He is the sphere of influence within which we live. No part of Christianity is more powerful than the idea of life in Christ.⁶⁷ Out of the twenty-four tribes or ethnic groups of the Church of Christ in Nations enumerated, twenty-two migrated from somewhere and settled where they are; so almost all came from somewhere, so while we discriminate against others, because of land, we need to remember that we also migrated from somewhere. The law of the outsiders or strangers has been adequately addressed by the Old Testament. In the light of this understanding the issue of a pastor being discriminated upon not to work in a particular local church council because he is not an indigene does not arise.

R. Kysar has reiterated the importance of what the gospel has done to our distinctions as seen by Paul in Ephesians 2, “Paul claimed that the gospel shattered the consciousness of social distinctions, most especially that between the Jew and the Gentile. It evoked a vision of a new society in which the Christian participated by virtue of Christ. To be ‘in Christ’ meant for Paul the acceptance of a new consciousness that transcended the social margins of his day.”⁶⁸ That is the call also today that being in Christ should transcend all social margins of today including especially tribalism, to have God’s new society. John Stott agrees when he writes, “For the sake of the glory of God and the evangelization of the world, nothing is more important than the church should be, and should be seen to be, God’s new society.”⁶⁹ Therefore, Jeremy Punt concludes that “It can safely be said that identification with Christ was the center of the new identity promoted by Paul.”⁷⁰ In this regard, “Jews and Gentiles once were separated and hostile to each other, but Jesus’ work on the cross reconciles them to God and to each other.”⁷¹ Therefore, to us as Gentiles, Africans, and the Nigerian Church, we need to know that, tribalism has been dissolved in Christ, “Jesus creates a new humanity. One new man out of the two, and if that’s the case between Jew and Gentile, how much more is it the case between us Gentiles. If this work

dissolves that hostility; it breaks down every barrier between people.”⁷²

Turaki has summarized how Christ destroyed the walls, barriers of enmity between Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2:11-22:

Here the Apostle Paul states the fact that Christ in His body on the cross destroyed the enmity, which existed between Jews and Gentiles. The wall of division and enmity did exist between Jews and Gentiles. But the wall of division and enmity, which existed between them, has been destroyed and abolished by Christ in His body on the cross. The cross of Christ has broken all walls, barriers, boundaries, and frontiers which humanity has erected against both itself and God. After Christ’s destruction of the walls of divisions and His abolition of all enmity, He reconciled them (both Jews and Gentiles) by making them one in Himself. This oneness is the result of Christ’s new creation. Humanity has been recreated in Him, thus becoming a new creation and a new humanity. The cross of Christ is the foundation and basis of this new creation and new humanity, unity, and oneness.⁷³

Leonard Griffith concurs with Turaki on what the Cross has done to our walls, barriers, and division when he writes:

But the situation has changed radically. God has sent the mediator, Jesus Christ, who through his wise counsel and more especially through his death on the cross has brought Jews and Gentiles together, united them in his own person, broken down the walls of their hostility, annulled the legalistic religions that kept them apart, created out of the two a single humanity, killed their enmity by reconciling them to God and given them in his living spirit a common access to God. So the Gentiles are no longer outsiders but insiders.⁷⁴

But how did Christ effect and proclaim peace to the warring factions that were divided, according to our passage? The answer declared Markus Barth is manifold and he states it as follows:

‘In the blood,’ says 2:13; ‘in his flesh’ (2:15); ‘in one body ... through the cross’ (2:16); ‘in himself’ (2:15-16); ‘in one spirit’ (2:18). The words ‘blood’ and ‘flesh,’ ‘one body,’ and ‘one spirit’ circumscribe nothing else but Christ ‘himself.’ But we must specify what is meant when Paul says ‘Christ himself.’ It is not primarily the words of Christ, his example, his suffering, or his miracles. It means his whole humanity, and more specifically it means his death on

⁶⁴ Snodgrass, *Introduction to the Hermeneutics of Identity*, 14-5.

⁶⁵ Snodgrass, *Introduction to the Hermeneutics of Identity*, 15.

⁶⁶ Snodgrass, *Introduction to the Hermeneutics of Identity*, 15.

⁶⁷ Snodgrass, *Introduction to the Hermeneutics of Identity*, 15.

⁶⁸ R. Kysar, *Called to Care: Biblical Images for Social Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 115.

⁶⁹ Stott, *God’s New Society*, 83.

⁷⁰ Jeremy Punt, *Paul, Hermeneutics and Character: Implications for Scripture and Identity*. *Scriptura* No. 79 (2002:128) 122-148.

⁷¹ Beynon, *God’s New Community*, 29.

⁷² Beynon, *God’s New Community*, 29.

⁷³ Turaki, *The Unique Christ for Salvation*, 169.

⁷⁴ Leonard Griffith, *Ephesians: A Positive Affirmation* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1975), 43.

the cross, his sacrifice. Therefore 'the cross' is mentioned in 2:16 as the means of reconciliation.⁷⁵

The Cross is the means of our reconciliation and "in Jesus Christ, there are no outsiders."⁷⁶ F. G. Huegel agrees with Griffith as he states that, "The cross of Christ is a circle of infinite dimensions that embraces all."⁷⁷ He adds, "Here we see that so potent, so all-

⁷⁵ Markus Barth, *The Broken World: A Study of the Epistles to the Ephesians* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959), 46; see also Andrew T. Lincoln & A.J.M. Wedderburn, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 106, who posits that, as the writer elaborates the past act of reversal, his emphasis is on Christ as the main actor whose work has made this possible and he provides the only extended reflection on Christ's death in the letter (cf. "in the blood of Christ: (2:13), "in his flesh" (2:15), "through the cross" (2:16). Through his death Christ can be said to have made Jews and Gentiles one by demolishing the dividing wall and source of hostility between them, that is, by abolishing the law and all its regulations. Christ's death terminated the old order dominated by this law and by mutual hostility and introduced in its place a new creation with its 'one new person.' On the horizontal level, Christ's death brought peace between the two alienated groups of Jews and Gentiles and was the creative power which reconciled them in the one body of the Church; again see C. Marvin Pate, *Apostle of the Last Days: The Life, Letters and Theology of Paul* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Academic, 3013), 245, who summarizes the Gentiles and Jewish positions of being in Christ, thus, in Christ, Gentile believers participate in the new covenant (vv.11-13). In Christ, the Gentile church is united to Jewish Christians to form the new creation of one man. This is because Jesus' death removed the Torah that had separated the two people groups (vv. 14-18). In Christ, Gentile and Jewish believers form the new temple of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Not a building, but the body of Christ is the true temple of God's residence (vv. 19-22).

⁷⁶ Griffith, *Ephesians: A Positive Affirmation*, 43-4, Griffith here mentions the various dimensions of the cry of outsiders to include political, racial, economic, social, moral and spiritual. That is the cry of the outsiders, and there are so many of them in the world today that they constitute almost a second human race. There are political outsiders like the Arab refugee, people without a country who carry no passports and look wistfully across a border at the lush, green fields of secure citizenship. There are racial outsiders who are in a country but not of it because written and unwritten laws exclude them from neighborhoods and jobs and recreational privileges. There are economic outsiders who make up more than half the world's population, looking at affluence like a hungry child peering through the window of a bakery. There are social outsiders who feel excluded from human friendships; moral outsiders who feel excluded from the society of decent men; spiritual outsiders who feel excluded from the loving concern of God.

⁷⁷ F. G. Huegel, *The Cross Through the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 121.

inclusive in scope, was the cross of Christ that not only was man reconciled to God thereby, but reconciled to all men (Jews and Gentiles, the wall of separation broken down)."⁷⁸ Griffith continues that, "Christ does reconcile people. He makes enemies into friends. He brings the most widely differing people into the presence of God where their differences disappear. He unites them in mind and spirit, even though other forces drive them apart."⁷⁹ There is a sense of Gentiles being outsiders in verses 11-12; then reconciliation in Christ from verses 13-18 and then finally are insiders from verses 19-22. So there is a movement from outsiders to reconciliation and then insiders, all because of what Christ has done on the Cross. Therefore Ephesians 2:11-22, "Stresses the Cross of Christ and the blood of Jesus as the means by which Gentiles could experience a relational closeness to God and Jewish believers."⁸⁰

Reconciliation has been made possible by the blood of Christ. Arnold also asserts very strongly that, "The blood of Christ is the basis for reconciliation to God and the source of peace for the new community."⁸¹ Paul firmly roots peace with God and peace with one another in the work of Christ: "by the blood of Christ" (2:13), "by his flesh" (2:13e), and "through the cross" (2:16a). He asserts further that, "Christ is the one who created the new humanity, who reconciled us to God (and to one another), and who serves as the foundation stone of the new temple. And now Jesus is actively engaged in proclaiming this good news of peace with God through His messengers with a view to building the temple into an even greater structure."⁸²

The power of the Cross to break all walls, barriers, and divisions, which include tribalism, has also been underscored by Hastings when he writes:

There is nothing in the world that levels like the Cross of Jesus Christ. It simply declines to regard any of the artificial distinctions that men make. It is profoundly true that it breaks down the middle walls of partition. It is the death of Christ that breaks down the middle walls. It recognizes no differences between the Jew and the Gentile, the Englishman, and the foreigner, the bond and the free, the aristocrat and the tramp, the man, and the woman; nor has it respect for any of the artificial distinctions which men have created.⁸³

Therefore Barth says, "To confess Jesus Christ is to affirm the abolition and end of division and hostility, the end of separation and segregation, the end of enmity and contempt, and the end of

⁷⁸ Huegel, *The Cross Through the Scriptures*, 122-3.

⁷⁹ Griffith, *Ephesians: A Positive Affirmation*, 45.

⁸⁰ Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 174.

⁸¹ Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 177.

⁸² Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 177.

⁸³ Hastings (ed.), *The Epistle to the Ephesians: The Speaker's Bible*, 107.

every sort of ghetto!”⁸⁴ For this research, it definitely includes tribalism which hinders fellowship and growth in Church life in Nigeria and society in general. He continues that, “To say ‘Christ’ means to say community, co-existence, a new life, peace.”⁸⁵ This community, co-existence, a new life, peace is accomplished by the atoning death of Christ which had a double consequence as stated by Nils Alstrup Dahl, “In any case, the text of Ephesians 2:11-22 implies that the atoning death of Christ had a double consequence: the exclusion of the Gentiles came to an end, and both they and the Israelites were created a new and transferred from an earthly existence ‘in the flesh’ to the new age of the Spirit.”⁸⁶ Therefore the need for the Church in Africa to live as a community, together, having a new peace and ambassadors of peace in the Church and the society.

Jesus has created a new community; he came not only to die on the Cross for our sin, but also to form a new community of people bought by His blood. Paul speaks of this new community as the body of Christ (2:16a) or as “one new man” (2:15b). He also refers to believers as fellow citizens of a new kingdom (2:19c), as members of the household of God (2:19c), and a living stone that comprise the new temple where God dwells (2:21-22). This new community has the potential for being perfectly unified because Christ has taken away the principal source of enmity and has created the conditions for peaceful coexistence.⁸⁷

Jesus has created a new humanity, “The church is a new creation which replaces the old order’s divided humanity of Jew and Gentile. The new person is not merely an amalgam of elements of the old in which the best of Judaism and the best of Gentile aspirations have been merged. Instead, the previous ethnic and religious categories have been transcended.”⁸⁸ For this reason, “In this way, the readers are reminded that the community of which they are a part is a new third entity, in which the fundamental division of the first-century world has been overcome and which by its very nature embodies the principle of unity.”⁸⁹ Spickard puts it this way, “There is no dividing line between you and them. There is no you and they.”⁹⁰

In line with this position, Arthur G. Patzia writes, “In this passage, Paul shows that the church no longer is to be perceived as a body of Jewish and Gentile believers; rather, it is a completely new

⁸⁴ Barth, *The Broken World: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 43.

⁸⁵ Barth, *The Broken World: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 44.

⁸⁶ Nils Alstrup Dahl, “Gentiles, Christians, and Israelites in the Epistle to the Ephesians,” *Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 79 Nos. 1-3 (1986:36) 31-39.

⁸⁷ Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 176.

⁸⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln & A.J.M. Wedderburn, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 94.

⁸⁹ Lincoln, *New Testament Theology*, 94.

⁹⁰ Spickard, “Working with Race, Ethnicity, and Tribe in the Nigerian Church”, 15.

creation, (“one new man” or “people”) in which all racial barriers and prejudices are obliterated.”⁹¹ He stressed further that, “The new thought in Ephesians is that these ‘new beings’ in Christ now constitute a single new humanity as the body of Christ, the Church.”⁹² That explains why M. Sydney Park states that, “The long-standing historic enmity is now resolved not because either sought out the other or asked for forgiveness, but because hostility is resolved based on the cross alone.”⁹³

Barth declares based on Ephesians that:

He (Christ) is the end of division and enmity. Christ is he who has made something new of the two: the near and the far, the insider and the outsider. “In Christ, those afar have become such that are near” (2:13). Christ is that reconciliation which is greater and stronger than the hostility of either or of both. He is the gift of God to both. If he “is peace” (2:14), then he is by nature a social, even a political event, which marks the overcoming and ending of barriers however deeply founded and highly constructed.⁹⁴

Volf makes this powerful statement that assists us to transcend and transform our worldviews regarding tribalism for Church life in Nigeria in the light of the Cross this way, “When God sets out to embrace the enemy, the result is the Cross.”⁹⁵ He explores what it takes to overcome the polarity of “either us or them” and live as a community and came to the conclusion, which is important to us in this research that, “God’s reception of hostile humanity into divine communion is a model for how human beings should relate to the other.”⁹⁶ In other words, we are to do to others what God has done for us. He gives four positions as follows, “repentance,”⁹⁷

⁹¹ Arthur G. Patzia, *New International Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1990), 187.

⁹² Patzia, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 187.

⁹³ M. Sydney Park, “Theology of the Household of God: Identity and Function of Christ’s Body in Ephesians” in *Honoring the Generations: Learning with Asian North American Congregations* Edited by M. Sydney Park, Soong-Chan Rah, and Al Tizon (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 7.

⁹⁴ Barth, *The Broken World*, 44-5.

⁹⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 129; See also Jennings Jr., *Transforming Atonement*, 28, who writes, “Jesus dies with arms outstretched in order to signify the inclusion of all.”

⁹⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 100.

⁹⁷ Volf emphasizes that Jesus called to repentance not simply those who falsely pronounced sinful what was innocent and sinned against their victims, but the victims of oppression themselves. Put more generally and more theologically, victims need to repent because social change that corresponds to the vision of God’s reign – God’s new world- cannot take place without a change of heart and behavior. Rather, talk about the need for victim’s repentance has to do with creation of the kind of social agents that

“forgiveness,”⁹⁸ “making space in oneself for the other,”⁹⁹ and “healing of memory”¹⁰⁰ as essential moments in the movement from exclusion to embrace.

As Christians in Nigeria, our attitudes towards others that do not speak the same language with us must transcend and be transformed by the Cross of Jesus. In Ephesians, as Yee shows the attitude of Jews towards Gentiles “... were perceived by the Jews through the grid of covenantal ethnocentrism in which identification between Jewish ethnic group and the Jews religious identity is far too close.”¹⁰¹ He explains further, that “It is

are shaped by the values of God’s kingdom and therefore capable of participating in the project of authentic social transformation. Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation, 114, 118.

⁹⁸ *We admit wrong doing, justify ourselves, and attack, all in one breath. Deep within the heart of every victim, anger swells up against the perpetrator, rage inflamed by unredeemed suffering. The imprecatory Psalms seem to come upon victims’ lips much more easily than the prayer of Jesus on the cross. If anything, they would rather pray, “Forgive them not, Father, for they knew what they did!” ... if perpetrators were repentant, forgiveness would come more easily. But too often they are not. And so both victim and perpetrator are imprisoned in the automatism of mutual exclusion, unable to forgive or repent and united in a perverse communion of mutual hate. Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation, 119-20.*

⁹⁹ *Forgiveness is the boundary between exclusion and embrace. It heals the wounds that the power-acts of exclusion have inflicted and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. Yet it leaves distance between people, an empty space of neutrality that allows either to go their separate ways in what is sometimes called “peace” or to fall into each other’s arms and restore broken relationships. Peace is communion between former enemies. Beyond offering forgiveness, Christ’s passion aims at restoring such communion- even with the enemies who persistently refuse to be reconciled. At the heart of the cross is Christ’s stance of not letting the other remain an enemy and of creating space in himself for the offender to come in. Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation, 125-6; see also Yee who writes, the ultimate goal in his overall argument in Ephesians 2:11-13 is to construct a new “space” for the Christian Gentiles who had been marginalized by the Jews. Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 72.*

¹⁰⁰ *After we have repented and forgiven our enemies, after we have made space in ourselves for them and left the door open, our will to embrace them must allow one final, and perhaps the most difficult act to take place, if the process of reconciliation is to be complete. It is the act of forgetting the evil suffered. A forgetting that therefore ultimately take place only together with the creation of “all things new.” Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation, 131.*

¹⁰¹ *Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 71; see Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 112, who says further that, covenantal ethnocentrism interposed itself between Jews and*

covenantal in the sense that its framework is based on the Jews understanding of their privileged status in the covenant; and it is ethnocentrism that it is a closed ethnic religion, referring to the Jewish evaluation of other human groups (and their cultures and practices), from the perspectives of the Jews own. It also includes the dismissive attitude of the faithful members of the covenant people towards non-Jews. In principle, such judgments may be positive or negative but will entail misunderstanding, social barriers, and even hostility.”¹⁰²

It is common to hear Christians in the Church, the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), members telling one another and often with some mild arguments that, “It is my language that will be spoken in heaven, therefore learn it.” This we shall call “linguistic or tribal ethnocentrism” where such believers have elevated their tribal means of communication above all others and see it as a form of pride and upliftment of the individual and the social group which they come from. The implications of such a statement is much because one is placing himself/herself and their community above all else.

Just as “... the Jews who perceived themselves as the people of God have, in their attempt to preserve their ethnic and religious identity in distinction from the Gentiles, erected eventually ethnic and religious boundaries between themselves and the Gentiles.”¹⁰³ So also those Christians who make such statements are ethnocentric in their thinking and will definitely show in their attitude and behaviour towards believers they make such claims.

The metaphors of the “one new man” and “one body” says Yee, “Are both society-creating and community-redefining metaphors; they are meant to reframe the notion of the people of God and to undercut the Old ethnic forms of self-identification and allegiance as they replace them with a new identity in Christ.”¹⁰⁴ This is transformation that has occurred that gives us a new identity in Christ because of the Cross. Despite our different languages and tribes, we are a new man and one body in Christ. There is a redefinition and transformation of the self-understanding of the Jews, “The Jews had reinforced their identity as the people of God on the basis of the division between ‘us’/the ‘circumcision’ and ‘them’/the ‘uncircumcision’ and prevented the Gentiles from being part of the people of God.”¹⁰⁵ Surely a redefinition of the corporate identity of God’s people against the self-understanding of the Jews was necessary, and Paul introduced precisely the imagery of “One new man” to subvert the social implications embedded in the Jewish notion of humanity. He claims from a Christological perspective (that is, “in Christ”) that the Jewish Messiah has opened up the possibility of a new beginning for humanity in His creation.¹⁰⁶

Gentiles, creating as its net result a social distance between Jews and Gentiles.

¹⁰² *Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 71-72.*

¹⁰³ *Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 71.*

¹⁰⁴ *Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 126.*

¹⁰⁵ *Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 164.*

¹⁰⁶ *Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation, 164-5.*

The transformation that has taken place is further explained by Williams:

Because Jesus died as a sacrifice of atonement to Jews and Gentiles, his death reconciles both groups to God and to one another when they come to faith in Jesus. Jesus' death shattered all ethnic boundary markers between the two groups and then recreated them into one new man. This reconciliatory act of God has power not because it has made Jews and Gentiles no longer different or has caused them to surrender their ethnic identities, but because both groups (though different) are one and their differences are overcome by the power of the cross since God has reconciled them by faith through Jesus' death. Therefore, notwithstanding their ethnic distinctions and individual idiosyncrasies, God recreates Jews and Gentiles into one new man in Christ.¹⁰⁷

Jennings further reiterates this point when he writes, "It is the perception that lies at the base of the supposition that in Christ, God was reconciling the world, overcoming all barriers to unity and peace, putting an end to hostility and enmity. The end result of the cross in this sense is the logical conclusion that God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28), that no separation will withstand the power of that which finds expression in the cross."¹⁰⁸ This social identification is pronounced in Ephesians and emphasized by Shkul, "In Ephesians the community (or its writer) celebrates Christ-followership as the primary communal self-identification that defines people into 'us' and 'others' and thus provides them with distinctiveness and communality."¹⁰⁹ Further, he affirms that "The writer builds an ideological bridge upon which 'those who were far off have been brought near,' eradicating the nation's social distance 'in Christ' and 'by his blood' (2:13). The widely established early Christian symbols of Jesus' death, his blood, and his cross are retained in Ephesians' communal memory, but here they become symbols of ethnic reconciliation and solutions for social conflict (2:13-15)."¹¹⁰

B. J. Oropeza has stressed the intention of Paul for those who are in Christ as regards ethnic factions in this way, "Our author may be reinforcing the churches in Asia Minor to maintain unity among their Jewish and Gentile ranks. There should be no ethnic factions among believers, for they have all become one body in Christ."¹¹¹ Nowhere else in the New Testament does the basic equality of all people before God come so vividly into focus as with Paul. Donald Guthrie concurs when he states that, "All distinctions of sex and nationality and social status are swept away. Admittedly this happens only in Christ, but the fact that it happens points to an

important element in Paul's basic conception of man. Such distinctions were powerful divisive factors on Paul's world, but he recognized them as unacceptable. In this, he showed remarkable insight into the nature of man, which has become blurred through human prejudice."¹¹² In response to ethnocentrism, Paul does not regard Jews as morally superior to Gentiles just because the Jews possess and practice the law. Yet one thing that most Jews prized as central to their cultural identity - specifically, the way of life specified by the law - is no longer a defining mark of Paul's identity. For proof, one has only to look at Philippians 3:2-11, where he says that he now counts his former Jewish identity in the law as "garbage" because of the superior value of knowing Christ.¹¹³

CONCLUSION

Tribal and linguistic ethnocentrism ought not to be found among those who are in Christ who understand what the Cross of Christ has done in Ephesians 2:11-22. Our differences, especially where we come from, our origin, family ties, and the language we speak, that is our tribe is not a difficulty to be overcome but celebrated. For Revelation 7:9 tells us all ethnic groups, tribes will be represented in heaven. Therefore, being in Christ does not mean the erasure of our differences but we transcend them and are therefore transformed. It is this transformation power that has been made possible and available by the Cross. It brings outsiders inside, those excluded are included, those who were strangers and aliens are now citizens, those far off have been brought near, and we have the same access to the Father. Hostility, enmity, prejudice, is gone, peace has been given, and the one giving the peace is Christ Himself. All forms of division, alienation, barriers, and walls have been annulled by Christ on the Cross. There is therefore no room for tribal or linguistic ethnocentrism.

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¹⁰⁷ Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology*, 132.

¹⁰⁸ Jennings Jr., *Transforming Atonement*, 81.

¹⁰⁹ Shkul, *Reading Ephesians*, 26.

¹¹⁰ Shkul, *Reading Ephesians*, 89.

¹¹¹ B. J. Oropeza, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Opponents of Paul: The Pauline Letters (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2012)*, 233.

¹¹² Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1981)*, 177.

¹¹³ Charles H. Cosgrove, "Paul and Ethnicity: A Selective History of Interpretation" in *Paul Unbounded: Other Perspectives on the Apostle Edited by Mark D. Given* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 96.

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