Race And Ethnicity: Biblical or Social Constructs

Samson A Iliya

Baptist Theological Seminary Kaduna,Nigeria

samson-iliya@btskad.edu.ng

Abstract

Race and ethnicity are gifts of identity in global society. On the contrary, racism and ethnocentrism are perennial threats to the identity of human existence, equality, societal development, and national and international relations. The onus of this article focuses on whether race and ethnicity are Biblical or social constructs. The approach used in this paper is dialectic in nature. This approach is used to affirm that racial and ethnic diversities are gifts from God that beautify our communal identity, but it also confirms that racism and ethnocentrism are equally evil dispositions of humanity towards other races and ethnic groups. Thus, the paper provides a theological response to the problem of racism and ethnocentrism in the church and society, using the Christo-creation framework to refute racism and ethnocentrism. Thus, any societal or religious stratification that prioritises one racial, ethnic, or gender supremacy over others is evil. This article argues that racial and ethnic superiority over others is not a Biblical structure but a socio-cultural construct and pseudoscientific stereotype that devalues other racial groups. This article concludes that peoples' worth, value, dignity, and sanctity of life should not be based on racial and ethnic phenotypical categorisation. Instead, it should be based on the universality of God's image in human beings as the common point of convergence so as to end the global spiral of racism and ethnocentrism.

Introduction

The world is now a global village. This suggests an interface that transcends geographical borders, racial lines, friendships, and relationships among

peoples and nations orchestrated by hyper-technological transportation and advanced communication systems. This being good news, the world is equally becoming more fragmented due to the perennial challenge of racism and ethnocentrism today. The struggle for existence, survival, and equality devoid of racism and ethnocentrism has been perpetual among humans.

On 28 August 1963, Martin Luther King Jr led a protest with a population of three-quarters of Afro-Americans to Washington DC, in a struggle for survival and racial equality. This protest has remained significant to the global history of racism. He envisioned that

> one day the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood […] injustice and oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice (Stott 2006:269)

Perhaps the ascendance of Barack Obama's political hegemony as the first black president in America fulfilled this dream. Despite this development, Manickam (2007:326) states that the issue of racism remains in the minds of racists. The superiority of one race or ethnic group over others is yet reckoned with in society at institutional, communal, and personal levels.

At the time of this research, I watched two video clips that depict the current reality of racist acts by both white and black people. One of the acts was in Ireland at a gymnastics medal ceremony where a white lady denied a black girl a medal and skipped her in the queue.[1] The other act of racism was in a video sent to me by a friend. In that video, the black person intentionally expressed racist acts by hugging only his fellow blacks and only shook hands with the whites, including their children.[2] While the racist act of the black person could be existentially reactionary, I think it is not worth it because two wrongs do not make a right.

Today, even the church is caught up in the web of racism and ethnocentrism. The church is a firsthand suspect of the conspiracy of silence or inaction, even of complicity in all of the above, because of the failure to achieve its primary

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSZRDAjZLfU
[2] http://youtu.be/nopWOC4SRm4?si=McUfPz-xsWc188dU

purpose of existence by helping to establish conditions and structures that promote justice and life and not oppression and death (Gwamna 2004:50). The church's lackadaisical attitude concerning race and ethnic superiority over others in the past and still today raises the question of whether racism and ethnocentrism are Biblical or social constructs. Gwamna (2004) and Maigadi (2006) testify to how Hutu pastors participated in the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi ethnic group due to socio-political and ethnic diversity. Some practising Christians have used the Bible to defend race and ethnic superiority over others. Now, in matters of faith, what one believes is crucial. Our understanding of race and ethnicity can inform our belief in the perfection of God's creation, which, if wrongly perceived, could contradict the Christian doctrine of humans created in the image of God.

This paper engages a dialectic approach. Dialectic is an approach in theology that helps navigate the opposing forces in a situation. Dialectic is a situation where two seemingly opposing things are true simultaneously, like the varied reports of what an elephant is by four blind men. By engaging a dialectic approach in this research, the argument will be that race and ethnicity as Biblical constructs and racism and ethnocentrism as social constructs are both true. By providing a theological response to the problem of racism and ethnocentrism in the church and society, the Christo-creation framework will be utilised (a brief exposition of this framework will come later under the theological rebuttal in this work). The paper maintains that racial and ethnic superiority over others is not a Biblical structure but a social, cultural, and pseudo-scientific construct that stereotypes people by devaluing their sanctity, dignity, and God's image. However, the peculiarity of racial and ethnic diversities without predilection over others is affirmed as blessings God gives to beautify unity and communal living. This paper considers the conceptualisation of race, ethnicity, and social construct, the challenge of race and ethnicity in the contemporary world, the Biblical view of race and ethnicity, race and ethnicity as a social construct, and a theological rebuttal.

Conceptualising Race, Ethnicity, and Social Constructs

Understanding the meaning of concepts is essential for better comprehension of every discourse. In the context of this paper, the concepts of race, ethnicity,

social construct, and Biblical construct need conceptualisation for proper understanding of the paper.

The Concept of Race
The meaning of *race* has been viewed as

> a population of a species that differs in the frequency of some gene or genes from other populations of the same species (Kraft 2003:109)

Early anthropologists sub-classified human species based on geography and physical features of skin colour, hair texture, head shape, nose shape, body type, etcetera. The most sophisticated classification has been based on blood type. The problem with such categorisation gave birth to 'individuals who did not fit the categories of light-skinned Africans or dark-skinned Caucasoids' (Kraft 2003:109). As a result, race has come to be seen as a 'social ideology of human division, sorted according to common phenotypical features' (Manickam 2008:718). The term *race* is used to differentiate the identity of people at the intercontinental level. Invariably, race becomes racism when it becomes the basis for assigning human value in society. Today, racism's unbridled power continues to haunt society and the church, specifically through its many expressions of social and political inequality (Manickam 2008:718). This is bad and condemnable by the Bible.

The Concept of Ethnicity
Ethnicity came from the Greek term *ethnos,* meaning 'a people or nation'. In the Bible, it is translated as Gentiles, nations, heathens, and people. It primarily differentiates other people from the descendants of Abraham. Gentile is used as a derogatory name for unbelievers by the Jews, but Paul's use of Gentile Christians addresses the problem of racism. Today, ethnicity refers to 'the social ideology of human division sorted according to common culture' (Manickam 2008:718).

Ethnicity is a cultural phenomenon that relates people to their roots, beliefs, and values, providing them with a deep sense of self-identity during their interaction with others (Maigadi 2006:19). This creates in a group a sense of uniqueness within a broader social context. Therefore, *ethnos* refers to how

certain people live communally (Manickam 2008:719). This indicates that ethnic categorisation emphasises the diversity of culture, which is the way of life.

Race and ethnic identity are viable means to identify strangers in society and not to oppress them. Moreover, the Bible tells us to show hospitality to strangers (Romans 12:13). Maigadi (2006: xvi) affirmed that 'Ethnicity in itself is good […] it is a gift from God and provides people with self-identity and social security'. Ethnicity depicts the difference between people of different socio-cultural and ethnic groups within a locality or a nation. He, however, noted that

> it is the divisive ethnicity (what I call in this work ethnocentrism) that is evil because it discriminates against people made in the image of God. (Maigadi 2006:xvi).

The Concept of Social Construct

A social construct is a set of ideas, moral conduct, way of behaviour, and life created and accepted by people for living in a society. It is not inherently natural but created by society. Social construct derives the standards of living from the norms of society. A social construct is a concept in social sciences that makes society unique. It is believed that social constructs shape our lives as we also shape them. Social constructs change as society changes. Social constructs are good for a society because they direct and guide life in the society. However, there are social constructs that do more harm than good to a society.

Given the above, this paper maintains that racism and ethnocentrism are social constructs created by human pride and rebelliousness. Extreme social constructivism emphasises relativism and regards gender, heterosexuality, marriage, and other Biblical norms as human constructs (Paolantonio 2016). Thus, since different societies have different norms for living, we must look through the culture of the Bible (God's word) to define the culture of living in every community.

The Concept of Biblical Construct

The Biblical construct fundamentally derives its ideas of life and morals from the Bible. The Bible, as the written word of God, is primarily about the

magnificent act of God to glorify himself, to show how people can be saved from their sins by faith in Christ and how to live all of life in obedience as the follower of God. Thus, the construct for life to live must come from the Bible. Bromiley (1999:95) states that Biblical construct 'draws its materials from the Bible and attempts to be faithful to the biblical norm'. A Biblical construct transcends just quoting and assembling verses of the Bible to interpret through exegetical consideration of the text in its historical context, for a profound 'reconstruction of theology on genuinely biblical foundations both of context and method' (Bromiley 1999:95). Therefore to be biblical in our constructs,

> we must take the Bible as it really is. We must accept it on its own terms. We must see, study and state things on its own basis and from its own standpoint. We must not force it into an alien philosophical scheme (Bromiley 1999:96).

Taking the Bible into this consideration necessitates thoughtful exegesis of the text in its historical and grammatical contexts, adequately exegeted to determine what the Bible is saying. In this light, great theological reformers, such as Martin Luther, insisted that the church should not determine what the scripture says but that scripture should determine the church's message. Hence, Luther believes that 'scripture interprets scripture' (Mueller 2017). To him, the tools for properly interpreting the Bible are contained in it, borrowing from Jesus and his apostles, who always referred to the scripture to interpret it. According to Calvin, the basic methodological principle of Biblical interpretation is that everything must be presumed in God and not in the Church's office. He added that since the Bible is the word of God, the ultimate Truth, namely God himself, then we must allow the scripture to interpret itself with consideration to a text directly and interpret it within the linguistic and historical parameters of its context and apply it to the need of the present day (Prakosa 2010:128-129). Calvin is saying that we must not allow ourselves to be directed by our own prejudice and imagination but must listen to the scripture through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to aid our limitedness. An objective reading of the Bible clearly shows that God does not endorse prejudice against another racial group. Calvin's view of biblical hermeneutics can be considered contextual, notwithstanding the accusation against its challenge of literalism. Karl Barth, among others, also endorses contextual hermeneutics.

In Africa, Byang Kato is among the leading theologians who uphold contextual hermeneutics with exegetical enthusiasm to avoid parochial subjectivism in interpretation capable of breeding prejudice. Similarly, Elizabeth Nburu, an African New Testament scholar, believes interpreters must consider historical conditions, grammar, and content in their hermeneutics. She noted

> one key factor among others that must serve as a foundation for the entire process: All conclusions regarding the text must be rooted in an understanding of the culture and worldview of the Bible (Nburu 2019:7-8)

to avoid super-imposition of the meaning of a text. Therefore, any construct that is Biblical must speak what the Bible says, based on the text, context, and content, and apply to the current context for it to be a Biblical construct.

The Challenge of Race and Ethnicity in the Contemporary World

From time immemorial to contemporary times, racism and ethnocentrism have threatened the human race due to the perceived consciousness of supremacy. The reason for superiority consciousness possibly arises from the clash in worldview, practice, language, and lack of tolerance to accommodate and live with various cultures, to appreciate each other's work and peculiarity (Audi 2004:36). This wrong perception of superiority has triggered the challenge of prejudice among racial groups, resulting in violence, killings, and the destruction of 'inferior' racial or ethnic groups as witnessed today. The reoccurrence of xenophobic attitudes against Nigerians and other Africans in South Africa justifies this claim. The law for abolishing racism in America and other parts of the world does not seem to be realised because of increasing vestiges of the segregation of different nationalities in places of employment and accommodation in America and elsewhere. This is because racism still occupies the minds of racists. Locally, say Africa and Nigeria in particular, ethnocentrism and tribalism have retarded national and continental development. Every governmental sector has become racially and ethnically polarised. For instance, Muhammad Buhari was elected the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2015 and 2019 based on religious and tribal bigotry but under the mantra of change in disguise.

The allocations into diplomatic offices under Buhari's administration were highly ethnocentric rather than quality-based. This indicates that issues of ethnocentrism and racism are still very much alive in the minds of racists and tribal bigots. Thus, Freed (2017:54) observed that 'the church as the hope of the world' is becoming more complicated. The leadership appointments in some denominations in Africa, Nigeria in particular, are based on ethnic categorisation and dominance. Maigadi's research, *Divisive Ethnicity in the Church in Africa* (2006), using Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria shows an archetypal menace permeating Christian religious and non-religious organisations.

Another challenge is that it has caused a setback in Christian evangelism. Race and ethnic superiority make racists view other races as less human because of phenotypical features and cultural distinctions. This is a challenge to the Christian faith because when a supposedly Christian racial group metes out prejudice to an unbelieving racial group in the name of being better or superior culturally, such affects the reception of the gospel in the area. Hall observes that

> invariably with other issues of race comes the exposure of slavery […] some atrocities meted out by white Christians to black slaves while the church largely remains silent (2001:84)

which was a setback to mission endeavours in some parts of the world.

Race and ethnic superiority pose a challenge by promoting injustice in the society. In such a society, employment is offered not based on performance but on the value of race and ethnic group to which one belongs. This can lead to underdevelopment in the nation, causing a high poverty rate, criminality, corruption, conflict, and crisis. These challenges are all religiously, culturally, and socially inclined in nature. Therefore, there is a need for a theological response against racism to guard our culture, symbiotic relationship, and ultimately the gospel from the dominant culture, socially constructed ideology seeking to destroy peaceful co-existence in the world.

Race and Ethnicity as a Social Construct

Debates as to whether race and ethnicity are Biblical or social constructs abound. In this debate, many scholars have lent their voices to the issue. Immanuel Kant believed in the superior intelligence of the white race over the black. He stated that 'the Negroes of Africa have received from nature no intelligence that rises above the foolish' (Kant, 1965:110). He added that

> the difference between the two races is thus a substantial one;
> it appears to be just as great in respect of the faculties of the
> mind as in colour (Kant, 1965:111).

He further affirmed that the 'Negro' race has a 'silly natural aptitude […] no real character' (Kant, 1965:111). This is unfortunate for Kant to believe that the black race was less intelligent and inferior to the white race.

David Hume reasoned in the same manner as his contemporary, Kant. He submits that

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes are in general and all the other
> species of men to be naturally inferior to the white. There was
> no civilised nation of any other complexion than white or even
> any individual eminent in action or speculation. (Hume,
> 1969:415).

Blacks, Hume concluded, have 'no indigenous manufacturers among them, no arts, and no sciences' (Hume, 1969:415). Hume seemed to have inadequate knowledge about Africa because Egypt, in particular, is now globally attested as the earliest civilised place where the iron wheel, architecture, shipping, and astronomy were discovered long before European civilisation. The Nok culture, the earliest known society in western Africa, modern-day Nigeria, existed from around 500 BC to 200 AD and used iron tools, pottery, and several other artefacts. They would not have had such early civilisation if they were less intelligent as some Europeans had claimed. Perhaps Kant's and Hume's erroneous categorisation of prevalent human differences in many countries as natural endowment is the foundation of modern racism.

The sophisticated theory of evolution developed by Charles Darwin has been used by many people to advance racism. For instance, Herbert Spencer used this evolution theory to develop Social Darwinism (history.com 2018), which favoured the idea of racism. The theory encouraged natural selection, which he used to justify certain political, social, and economic views. The theory believes in the 'survival of the fittest'. Social Darwinists believe certain people become powerful in society because they are innately better. Given this, the theory has been used to justify imperialism, racism, eugenics, and social inequality over the years (history.com 2018). This biological view of race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was misled by pseudoscience that concluded that there are five major races and smaller subsidiary ethnic groups (Spickard 2007:264). They believe race is about biology, genes, and phenotype, and the body is physically inherited, immutable, and distinct (Spickard 2005:11). Karl Linne, a Swedish botanist, founded a pseudoscience that categorised organisms according to their species, including humans, as if it were scientific. This pseudoscience asserts that 'there are several distinct races of humankind, each with a separate physiognomy, intellect and moral character' (Spickard 2005:11). Other pseudoscientist racialist speculators who built upon this idea included George-Louis Leclerc. As a naturalist, he believed in the monogenism of the human race, but he developed the idea of race to distinguish people of different skin colour and physical features. He affirmed that Nordic Caucasians were the original human beings through whom people of dark skin came into being due to the harsh climate. He believed that a cooler climate could make their skin lighter. Beauty, for him, plays a major role in the hierarchy among the races. He believed in the idea that species change over time (Harpham 2023). Johann Friedrich Blumenbach separated the species of humankind into five races: Caucasian or white race, Mongolian or yellow race, Malayan or brown race, Ethiopian or black race, and American or red race. He argued that physical characteristics like skin colour, cranial profile, etcetera, depended on geography, diet, and mannerisms. He emphasised the 'degenerative hypothesis' of racial origins, where he claimed that Adam and Eve were Caucasian inhabitants of Asia through whom other races developed by degeneration from environmental factors such as the sun and poor diet. He believed this degeneration could reverse the original Caucasian race in proper environmental control. Though he believed that Africans were not inferior to the rest of humankind in the healthy faculties of excellent natural talents and

mental capacities, other people used his position for scientific racialism (Johann-Friedrich-Blumenbach Institute no date).

George Leopold Cuvier, a French naturalist and zoologist, claimed that all men descended from Biblical Adam and Eve, who were originally Caucasian. He used physical differences (colour, beauty, and ugliness) and quality of civilisation for his categorisation of races, which comprise Caucasian (white), Mongolian (yellow), and Ethiopian (black) (Isaac 2004:105). A. H. Keane, the Irish Roman Catholic journalist and linguist, affirmed human unity but still used human typologies to emphasise linguistic data rather than human physiology as the basis for hierarchy (Spickard 2007:263). Although these naturalists believed in human beings' monogenic origin, their views encouraged racism due to their categorisation of race according to hierarchy.

Apart from the use of naturalism for labelling racism, others have backed Hamitic theory as the aetiology for racism, claiming that Hamites were black savages, 'natural slaves', and Negroes. This theory identifies the Hamite with the Negro, a view that served as a rationale for slavery and racism using biblical interpretations in support of their tenets from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century (Sander 1969:524). They believed that the black race was cursed through Ham, who mocked his father's nakedness. This view of the Hamite's image deteriorated such that negroes were excluded by whites from the brotherhood race. European thinkers in the fifteenth century initially explained the existence of dark-skinned people of Africa within the biblical framework to justify the subservient status of Africans (Felder 1990). Norman Cohn (1996) affirmed that black Africans descended from one of Noah's sons, Ham, whom Noah cursed for disparaging the nakedness of his father. Daniel Hayes (1996:396-409) concluded that Cush, who are referred to as people of dark skin, are the black Africans. David Goldenberg (1997:21-55) describes black Africans in a derogatory way, characterising them as: 'Physically and intellectually inferior, cursed by God, oversexed, more animal than human, ugly, smelly, and associated with the devil'. This claim belied the Biblical description of humanity by a prejudiced subjective view of the African race.

The Bible invalidates the Hamitic theory because the curse on Ham is not connected with his intelligence. The curse theory of black Africans through Ham is contradicted by the innate theory of Kant, Hume, and Social Darwinism.

The Bible does not record that Cush and his descendants were cursed by their grandfather Noah but that Canaan was (Gen. 9:25-27). Genesis 9:18 shows Noah had three sons: Shem, Japheth, and Ham. Ham had four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan (Gen. 10:6). Canaan was cursed because his father had seen Noah's nakedness (Gen. 9:25). Noah said:

> Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brother.
> He also said praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem. May God
> extend Japhet's territory; may Japhet live in the tents of Shem,
> and may Canaan be the slave of Japhet. (Gen. 9:25-27, NIV).

Interestingly, it was the descendants of Cush that the Bible records had dark skin (Jeremiah 13:23), though they were not cursed. Therefore, to conclude that Africans are inferior to whites because they were cursed through Ham, the father of Cush, their supposed ancestor, is not valid. The reason is that Canaan and his descendants, not Cush, were cursed. Interestingly, by geographical location, African ancestry is traced to Cush, not Canaan, present-day Israel, Gaza, Jordan, southern Syria, and Lebanon. The Cushite dark skin was not a result of the curse because Cush was not cursed but Canaan. Therefore, any conclusion that Africans are black due to the curse laid on Canaan is a contradiction. Supposing this Hamitic theory of race is valid, the good news is that Christ came to set free the entire human race cursed through Adam (Gen. 3:17) and every other curse, including the hypothetical Hamitic theory of race. There is no curse that Christ has not reversed.

To this end, it is expedient to explore the social construct theory as the basis of racism and ethnocentrism. However, racial labelling and ethnic profiling as social constructs are new ways of thinking about race and ethnicity (Emerson and Smith 2000:6). While race and ethnicity are not evil, racism and ethnocentrism originate in the modern social construct of race and ethnicity. Those who hold this view argue that a set of people in the modern period who attempted to explain the varieties of people that Europeans and Euro-Americans encountered worldwide intensified some racial groups' ethnic and racial stereotypes. Manickam (2007:327) insists that, in the sixteenth-century Western Enlightenment era, philosophical, theological, and scientific theorists converged to create the myth of white superiority over members of other races.

Racism and ethnocentrism are not essentially natural but socially constructed classifiers that do not support multiple identities but classify them based on superiority (Woldemikael 2005:338). This implies that the concept of race is the classification of human societies into clearly defined racial and ethnic groups based on purely physical attributes. This means that ethnicity and racial grouping are not primordial essentialist and natural groupings but culturally and socially constructed social formations. It is good to note that systemic institutionalisation, ideologies, and classification of people, colonisation, political domination, and slavery are factors responsible for the social construct of the superiority of ethnic and racial identity.

The various existing racial groups worldwide are socially constructed due to their typical dynamics. Spickard noted that

> wherever there are peoples in one social space, they develop a language of hierarchy that one may call 'racial' or 'ethnic' and such hierarchies are connected to colonialism and impositions of power of some group over others, as well as defensive oppositions pursued by the less oppressed. (2005:23)

The fact that race and ethnicity are construed as social constructs means the culture of supremacy must be rejected and the dominant social structures must be dismantled and replaced with a new paradigm of plurality, equality, and mutuality to address the prevailing practices of a dominant racial hierarchy that presumes the superiority of white over black (Battalora 2002:317). Race and ethnicity have no biological differentiation among people groups but reflect social construction depicting a complex social achievement through its classification. To say that race is a social construct does not mean that physical differences are not readily apparent (Emerson and Smith 2000:6). The use of scientific, biological, and social phenotypical approaches, as seen above, has failed to address the challenge of racism and ethnocentrism, hence the need to search the Bible for a proper theological answer.

The Biblical View of Race and Ethnicity

The Bible affirms that 'God created mankind […] male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:27). This statement suggests physical diversity that God uniquely

endowed humankind with, a gift to be appreciated from the beginning. This form of variety was not a curse but a blessing to humanity. God said, multiply and fill the earth. Such dispersal under God's blessing inevitably resulted in the development of distinct cultures, though quite different from the later confusion of languages and the scattering of people under God's judgment at Babel. Since the fall of man and the dispersion of humanity from the Garden of Eden, race has transcended phenotypical diversity to phenotypical superiority. After that, prejudice reared its ugly head when Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1ff). Subsequently, in Genesis 6:1, the physical differentiation became more apparent

> when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had
> children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

They were persons of great physical stature, different from other people.

Apparently, the diversity of physical characteristics was given by God, the creator. God also gave humans free will to make choices and create culture, but the cultured form of racism and ethnocentrism arose from the corrupt human minds and subsequent development of languages and traditions through the influence of the environment in which humans lived. In other words, the ability to create cultures was based on the free will God gifted humans, but humans' interaction with their environment further informs the social structure and racial superiority.

Apart from the phenotypical diversity deducible from the creation of humans, Genesis 11:1 records that the world had one language and a common speech. If the world had one language and common speech, why is there such diversity of languages today? Further reading of Genesis 11:2-9 presents the rebellion of humans conspiring revolt against God's mandate to be fruitful and fill the earth necessitating a confusion of the language of the whole world. God scattered humanity across the whole earth so they could fulfil his mandate to fill the earth.

Race and ethnicity are a product of God's judgment against human disobedience. In God's judgment, he was graciously merciful, such that he did not destroy the people; he only confused their language and scattered them

to fulfil his purpose. The judgment was not one of destruction: as with Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:22-24), God's judgment at Babel dealt with the immediate sins and helped prevent future problems.

> By confusing their language and scattering them over all the earth, God graciously spared their lives and gave them the opportunity to return to Him. He could have destroyed the builders, their city, and their tower, but He chose to let them live (Warren 2004:62)

Thus, the disobedience of humanity, confusion of their language, and their scattering greatly influenced cultural diversity. Ashimolowo summarises the Biblical narrative concerning the emergence of racial superiority thus:

> The fall of man, the scattering of all generations, and the subsequent confusion of language at the tower of Babel brought about various cultures, traditions and conformations [...] most of these forms have taken people away from the purpose of God for their lives. (2007:21-22)

Throughout Biblical history, there has developed an idea of racism and ethnicism because of society's multi-racial nature. For instance, the Jews considered themselves better than other races or ethnic groups before God. However, the Jews seemed not to understand that they were only elected to serve as a light to the world to reconcile other nations and racial groups to God. Not only did the nation of Israel entertain a prejudice against other racial groups, but nations such as Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Rome, etcetera, who became world powers at one point or another, were chauvinistic too. Never at any time did God approve of this ungodly attitude against any nation; instead, God only uses them to punish those who sinned against his holiness and bring to pass his ultimate purpose. Therefore, God's acknowledgement of Cyrus as his servant shows his love for all nations and disapproval of racial superiority.

The racial prejudice in the New Testament is an extension of the Old Testament problem (1 Kings 12:16ff, 2 Kings 17:24ff). The Jews with Samaritans, as well as with other nations, would not mingle or associate because of their attitude of superiority. Jesus dismantled this prejudice, as evident in his interaction

with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1ff). Jesus's interaction with the Canaanite woman, a Syrophoenician by race, seems to suggest his preference for Jews over other races and ethnic groups (Matt. 15:25-28, Mark 7:24-30). However, a critical look at the passage only demonstrates Jewish hardheartedness towards other races, about which Jesus wanted the disciples to learn a lesson that he came not for the Jews alone but for all regardless of their nationality (Dickson 2011:1103). Evidently, Jesus finally met the need of this Gentile woman and also commended her faith, a faith that Jews lacked. The Great Commission commanded in Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:17 testifies to Jesus's love for all nations. Paul also did the same in his famous sermon to Athenian philosophers (Acts 17:22-31). There, Paul proclaims the unity of the human race and the diversity of ethno-cultural identity (Acts 17:26, cf. Deut. 32:8). He affirmed the finality of Jesus Christ, the God of redemption, as the meeting point of all racial groups. He repudiated the religious pluralism of Athens because of its effect on the particularity of the Christian faith. Cultural diversity/pluralism is not equal to religious pluralism. Paul noted the glory of the Church through the redemption that Christ offered on the cross to create a new and reconciled community, the Church, irrespective of race and ethnic identity (Stott 1984:205-208).

Reading through these passages of the scriptures (Gen. 11:7-9, Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 17:26, Rev. 5:9-10,7:9-10), there is no suggestion in the Bible that God considers any one cultural group superior to all other cultural groups. When God disregards other nations, it is not necessarily on racial or ethnic bases but faith in God. Nations or racial groups who would join themselves to God, he will not reject them (Isa. 56:6). God warned Israelites not to intermarry with other nations in the Old Testament so he could preserve them as a newly created nation through which his redemptive plan would be accomplished for the whole universe. Allowing them to intermarry with unbelievers poses the danger of compromising their faith in God alone. According to Roger E. Dickson,

> The principle that is being taught here is that the believers must be taught to maintain his/her faith by marrying one of the same faith. (2011:115)

(See Ex. 34:16, Deut. 7:3, Josh. 23:12, Ezra 9:12.) He further stated that when one marries one of another belief, they will often adopt the beliefs of their mate. If a believer marries a person who believes in another god, they will often become unfaithful to the true God of heaven (Dickson 2011:115). King Solomon failed to abide by this order; he intermarried with the pagans' women who led him astray according to their abominable practices in disobedience to God (1 Kings 11:1-5). Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 6:14 not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers was also a warning not to intermarry with unbelievers to avoid being led astray, as well as to avoid false teachers who deny the fundamental teachers of resurrection and apostolic authority. This implies that the racial and ethnic difference was not the basis for the partnership choice but the faith affiliation. The Israelites, as a racial or ethnic group, according to O'Donovan (1992:298), were only privileged to be chosen (Rom. 9:4-5). They were not better than others (Deut. 4:37-38). Hence, racial or ethnic superiority is an idea coming from the pride of humanity because, in Christ, God sees us the same; we are just forgiven sinners (Prov. 16:5, Rom. 3:23-25, Col. 2:13).

Race and ethnicity are significant to the world's diversity, interaction, and unity. We can learn unity in diversity from the doctrine of the Trinity. The trinitarian nature of God indicates that God enjoys diversities. The doctrine of the Trinity is the sole claim of Christians who view God as three in one. The term *Trinity* was coined by Tertullian from the Latin *trinitas*, meaning 'threefold' or 'three in oneness'. It is used to summarise the teaching of the scripture that God is three persons yet one God in essence (Grudem 1994:226). In the Trinity, God has revealed himself in three persons in the economy of salvation and affirmed the essential nature of one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It does not connote the worship of three gods but that God is one in essence and three in persons. It designates the mutual relationship of the consubstantial hypostases or the persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This immanency of the Trinity is a crucial model for the unity of race in the Christian faith. Looking at the theological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity to the Christian faith, M.J. Erickson claims that

perfect love and unity within the Godhead model for us the oneness and affection that should characterise our relationship with the body of Christ. (1998:367)

The Trinity depicts God's appreciation of social and cultural peculiarities of immediate contexts, beautifying communal and global relations.

This implies that race and ethnic diversities are God's plan for humanity to seek the right ways to unite in obedience to God's purpose in a way he intended for humanity. Fortunately, Christ shows this way of better unity among racial and ethnic groups, especially for those who believe in him.

A Theological Rebuttal of Ethnicism and Racism

This section provides a theological response to the problem of racism and ethnocentrism in the church and society using the Christo-creation framework to refute racism and ethnocentrism. Since scientific, biological, and social categorisation have failed to resolve the problem of racism and ethnocentrism, the Christo-creation framework can be a viable method to follow. The term *Christo-creation* comprises two words, *Christ* and *creation*. From the creation narrative, we can draw insight from the fact that all God created was good and should not be despised. So, no human race is inferior to others. The second term in the framework (*Christ*) presupposes that no one will despise any people if we follow Christ's teaching based on his love and redemption. We can also draw insight from supposing there to be a curse for any racial group; Christ's redemption for humanity reverses every curse. By this, the Christo-creation framework affirms Christ's teaching in light of God's creation of humans as equal and the redemption of God's image in humans, transcending racial identity for the unity of brotherhood.

Emphasis on Human Source from Creation Perspective
Drawing a good dose of insights from creation can invalidate racism and ethnocentrism in society. God's creation depicts humans sharing their common source, worth, and value in God regardless of their wide-ranging identities of skin colour, culture, and other human dissimilarities. 'God created man in his own image' (Gen. 1:27) depicts that the value God places on humans is equal and expects humans to view others equally regardless of race,

ethnicity, and gender identity. In this common image of identity exists dignity and sanctity of life, identity, and meaning or purpose from God and with God. Only humans possess and bear the *imago Dei*. The order of superiority goes from the Creator (God) to man/woman (*imago Dei*) from every race and ethnic group and to other creatures (no *imago Dei*). This order is deep-rooted in the scripture:

> fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. (Gen.1:28)

Man was to subdue, dominate, and rule over other creature but not fellow humans, notwithstanding their diversity. Unfortunately, the fall of man in Genesis 3 has distorted the order, hence the reason for prejudice and bigotry over racial and ethnic identity today.

Racism and ethnocentrism are social ideologies that believe one race or ethnic group is superior to others. They are not Biblical constructs. They did not originate from God, given that the reality of cultural diversity is denied. Everything that is is by him. However, it is not every action of humans recorded in the Bible that God sanctions and approves. Hence, it is right to stress that God's creation of humans with free will allows for diversity of culture and, to an extent, physical peculiarity since humans were created male and female. The ability for humans to produce culture to enable social life in our immediate environment is attached to the human intellectual ability of free will God gave them to 'subdue (control, tend, care and keep) the earth' making it productive for our good (Gen. 1:28).

Racism and ethnocentrism are bad, but race and ethnic identity are Biblically and theologically acceptable human identities we cannot deny. Before the entry of sin and after the inauguration of the new Jerusalem, Manickam (2008:723) asserts that 'the expression of God's intentional desire for diversity among God's created' is an indisputable reality we must accept, and live together in unity.

Christ is the Centre and meeting point for racial unity

The idea of unity affirms the beauty of the diversity of race and ethnic identity. However, to achieve this oneness in diversity, Christ must be the centre and the cornerstone that holds all people together. Thus, a sound theology of race, ethnicity, and gender must focus on Christ and his redemptive work on the cross to restore humanity from wrong perceptions and acrimony against each other. Christ's redemption on the cross was for all humankind because all have sinned, causing a fracture between humans and God and fellow human beings. This has affected our relationships and perceptions about one another's identities. Christ died for universal redemption to restore the fractured identity of humankind on the cross. Neal (2012:26-43), as he cites Jürgen Moltmann, asserted that the cross is now the rallying point of unity for all Christians. There, the cross levelled and placed all races and ethnic groups in need of Christ. On the cross, the Christian community, irrespective of race, ethnicity, and gender identity, sees and understands each other and their needs. Our unity, togetherness, oneness, and acceptance of each other depend on our oneness with Christ. Moltmann (1976:315) succinctly and more precisely surmises that 'the nearer we come to the cross of Christ, the nearer we come together'. Jesus is the meeting point to cure the problem of race and ethnicity. The church must desist from building racial and ethnic walls, which Christ broke to make us one as fellow citizens upon the foundation of the prophets, apostles, and himself, the chief cornerstone of the building of oneness. The cross remains the inroad for unbelievers for salvation and unity with believers (Eph. 2:14-22).

Emphasis on Universal Solidarity of Human Rights

Human rights are moral standards, principles, and norms that guide human behaviour to protect life from social abuses to ensure universal freedom, equality, and fairness. Human rights are integral laws for all humankind, regardless of language, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or other social sorting. Human rights developed from the understanding of God's justice, God's image in man, human free will, Biblical teaching on love for the outcast and even enemies, and the golden rule in Matthew 7:12: do to others what you would have them do to you, which expresses the right of equality. Galatians 3:26-28 affirms that for those who are in Christ, the barrier of language, race, ethnicity, gender, and class no longer exists. They now possess

equal rights, which all apparent inequalities – 'race and religion, cultural or social status, and gender lose their validity' (Stanssen 2008:411).

God is a God of justice. As the creator of life, God expects that every life must be protected, irrespective of the race and ethnic group to which it belongs. In his support for human rights, Bonhoeffer avowed, as cited by Stanssen (2008:411), that human rights should not be 'my rights' individualistically and possessively, but about standing up for 'those whose rights are being violated'. Therefore, to cure the world of racism and ethnocentrism, universal solidarity is needed to promote human rights and justice. The solidarity must be based on the human race's identity.

> Solidarity of the race is a theological construction to teach the
> biblical idea that all humans are of the same species, with
> Adam as a common ancestor (Van Gemeren 2001:1125)

We must affirm that God's image in us is higher in status and integration and greater than the linguistic and cultural diversity that makes us different (Tachin 2014:68). The struggle must be directed against structural forces or evils of the social construct itself. The United Nations, founded in 1945 and organised in 1948, is committed to ensuring that all nations subscribe to the international body of human rights to protect life, peace, and security. They defined these rights as internationally accepted, including civil, cultural, economic, political, social, gender, race, and ethnic rights (United Nations no date). The fact that humanity is poised for such a project shows that racism and ethnocentrism are evil creations of humans. Just as God values race and ethnic identity, humanity must not do differently.

Emphasis on Love for Universal Race as Love for God
The discriminatory treatment of other races as less human undermines the love of God. Love for God is love for man because you cannot truly love God and not love man (1 John 4:20-21). Godly love can overcome racism and ethnocentrism because prejudice and godly love cannot co-exist. We must also know that prejudicing other ethnic and racial groups is a sin. God hates partiality (James 2:9). The church must be countercultural like the early church in order to break down social, class, racial, and ethnic distinctions that still exist in society, including the church today. Just as God has no greater love for one

ethnic or racial group over another but relates to each accordingly (Gal. 3:28), every person who claims that he/she loves God must love people not of their ethnic group equally well without favouritism or partiality.

Emphasis on Social Darwinist Theory as Pseudoscience

The Social Darwinist theory that emphasises racism is now regarded as pseudoscience. In biology, it has been discovered that humans have retained the same blood type over the years. Only blood group types exist but cut across all the world's races. A Nigerian citizen can donate blood to an American citizen; the reverse can be the case elsewhere, provided they share the same blood type. A race may be perceived visually but, according to genetic scientists, race does not exist genetically (Manickam 2007:326-327). The claim that the black race is less intelligent is not justifiable because the black race has proven themselves to possess high acute knowledge in science, social science, philosophy, and theology. From 1920 to 1940, pseudoscientific ideas about one race's superiority over other races were refuted head-on. Frank Hankins' publication in 1926, *The Racial Basis of Civilisation: A Critique of the Nordic Doctrine*, used social sciences to establish culture as the basis of racial differences (Spickard 2007:272).

Given the above, it should be noted that the spirit of racism thrives on misinformation and stereotyping. Instead of portraying people in the image and likeness of God, it seeks to devalue the worth of people that are different from us or as 'not being as good as we are' (Ashimolowo 2007:195). The narrative of Cornelius' and Peter's vision in Acts 10 demonstrates that God does not segregate any nation. Peter confessed,

> You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. (Acts 10:27- 29)

Therefore, every racist or ethnic bigot ought to realise their pitfalls and echo Apostle Peter's confession,

> I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. (Acts 10:34-36)

This Biblical revelation must be upheld and should be the confession of every human who claims to love God.

Conclusion

Race and ethnicity have been affirmed as gifts from God. There is nothing wrong with ethnic and racial identities, provided such are checked and do not promote prejudice. The problem arises when race becomes racism and ethnic identity becomes ethnocentrism. This means valuing one's race and ethnic identity over and above others. The crux of this paper presupposes that God created man in his image and that all races and ethnic groupings descended from that same image through one man, Adam. The wrong understanding of the *imago Dei* in humans is the causal factor of racism and ethnocentrism today. Thus, only theology that is true to the Biblical revelation of the image of God can cure humanity from racial and ethnic pride, bigotry, and prejudice that devastates human peculiarities, relationships, and inter-dependence. The paper acknowledged that physical diversity is a gift from God, the creator, and God created us in his image without superiority of any kind. It was also noted that cultural diversity is a contingent possibility since humans were created with free will to make meaning out of their environment. Thus, it is fitting to conclude that racism and ethnocentrism are social constructs from human pride and view of the race. God is interested in the redemption of every race and ethnic group. Jesus asked his disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28:1-20), irrespective of race and ethnic identity. In the vision, John saw

> a great multitude … from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10)

signifying the gathering of racial and ethnic groups unto God as the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of all made in his image. God loves the diversity of race and ethnic identity but hates racism and ethnocentrism because of the propensity therein to divide and set humankind against God and each other.

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