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One in Christ? Ethnocentrism in the Kenyan Church: a Paradox of Romans 10:12

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Abstract

This article examines Romans 10:12 as a Pauline theological response to ethnocentrism. It applies this response to the Kenyan church. Although studies have addressed negative ethnicity, political tribalism, church polarisation, and ecclesial schisms in Kenya, this article offers a more focused contribution by reading Romans 10:12 exegetically and socio-culturally as a theological corrective to ethnic superiority within Christian communities. Paul's declaration that there is 'no distinction between Jew and Greek' because there is 'the same Lord of all' challenges any ethnic privilege that seeks to rival Christian identity. This article, therefore, correlates Jew-Greek tension in Paul's context with Kenyan patterns of ethnic exclusion in church leadership, fellowship, and public witness. It argues that Romans 10:12 provides a theological foundation for resisting ethnocentric superiority. It also fosters interethnic fellowship and recovers the church's mission as a visible community of reconciliation. The article further shows that shared lordship, equal access to grace, and unity in Christ undermine ethnic privilege and support practical ecclesial renewal. It therefore proposes practical ecclesial responses grounded in these Pauline themes.

Introduction

How can ethnocentric divisions have such a profound impact on a church when Paul declares that **"**there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him" (Rom. 10:12, NIV)?

Ethnocentrism is not a new issue or one that has disappeared. It remains a persistent challenge in many societies, including the Christian community in Kenya. Kenya's colonial past and ethnic conflicts have shaped society in ways that have reinforced ethnocentric attitudes. In such attitudes, one ethnic group may view itself as superior to others. This article looks at the ethnocentric tension in Kenya from a sociocultural perspective to demonstrate the presence of legacies of colonial practices in ethnic relations in Kenyan Christianity. Kenya's ethnic divisions are examined within the context of the colonial administration, which classified, dominated, and occasionally favoured ethnic groups. These practices further solidified social divides and affected access to land, education, leadership and public employment (Berman 1998; Kwatemba 2008; Ndege 2009:1–12). The colonial 'divide and rule' thinking has helped to explain the assimilation of ethnic identity into political rivalry, institutional leadership, and social integration in Kenya (Kenya Human Rights Commission 2018:14–22; Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission 2013:45–60). This larger social world in which the Kenyan church emerged meant that ecclesial communities were not free of the influences of ethnic loyalties that they had had previously. Ethnic identity has remained important in some settings. It has shaped leadership, worship practices, denominational affiliation, and fellowship. As a result, the church's public profession of unity was not always matched by unity in practice (Ekitala and Wosyanju 2015; Mutuma and Kiboi 2023; wa Gatumu 2019). Within this context, Romans 10:12 provides a theological basis for challenging ethnocentrism. It also supports the formation of a more inclusive and reconciled ecclesial community.

In recent years, the problem of negative ethnicity has also been an issue of soteriology and of the church in theological reflection in Africa. Mutuma and Kiboi (2023) offer important descriptions of negative ethnicity and schism in the Kenyan church. Their discussion goes beyond treating these issues as merely sociological. It presents them as contradictions of the saving and reconciling work of Christ. This article continues this work but focuses on Romans 10:12 and proposes that it offers an exegetical and theological tool for addressing ethnocentrism in the life of the church in Kenya.

Method

This article uses a sociocultural exegetical method. First, it situates Romans 10:12 within Paul's wider argument about Jew-Greek equality, shared lordship, and universal access to salvation (Dunn 1998:351–354; Esler 2003:211–218; Stanley 1997). Second, it examines contextual evidence from the Kenyan context. This includes public reports, scholarly literature, and ecclesial studies on ethnocentrism. These sources address ethnic identity, leadership, fellowship, and church witness (Kamara 2010:135–140; Mutuma and Kiboi 2023; National Cohesion and Integration Commission 2023:6–8; wa Gatumu 2019). Third, it helps to put the Pauline text into a controlled theological discussion with the Kenyan context. The study cannot be said to suggest that the relationship between Jews and Greeks in the first century and the relationship between the various Kenyan ethnic groups are the same. Instead, it makes analogical comparisons: both contexts indicate how social identity can be a boundary of superiority that excludes and breaks fellowship (Esler 2003:211–218; Njoroge and Kirori 2024:357–365). Therefore, the approach adopted is a Romans 10:12 theological lens for assessing ethnocentrism in the Kenyan church. It does so without making a one-to-one historical comparison.

Theoretical Aspects of Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is another important concept that should be defined before implementing the teachings of Paul in the Kenyan church. Ethnocentrism, coined by William Graham Sumner in 1906, is a notion of cultural narrow-mindedness when people or communities belittle other cultures and glorify their own (Njoroge and Kirori 2024:357). The ideology encourages the superiority of in-groups, discrimination against non-in-groups, and support of one's own ethnic group, which is very close to the concept of tribalism as presented by Musvosvi (2010:45). The presence of ethnocentrism is commonly regarded as a harmful process resulting in dividing, segregating, and socially unstable situations, which are frequently followed by the aggression of strangers (Onyancha 2022:97). In Kenya, ethnocentrism manifests itself as tribalism, ethnic favouritism, and social exclusion. However, in the Graeco-Roman world, it was manifested as conflict between Jews and non-Jews. The Christian objective is not cultural assimilation, whereby communities sink into

uniformity and lose their identity, but rather reconciled diversity: ethnic identities are made subordinate to the unity of Christ as Lord.

Similar to the early church, the Kenyan Christian community struggles with ethnocentrism. Ethnic allegiance frequently triumphs over Christian brotherhood, causing divides along tribal lines despite the church's theological teaching on oneness. Scholars have pointed out that this kind of ethnocentrism in the Kenyan church affects members' spiritual lives as well as the church's mission, making it a sociocultural problem in addition to a theological one. According to Nyaundi (2015:54–84), ethnocentrism in Kenya compromises the church's capacity to serve a varied society by frequently excluding ethnic groups from leadership or positions of authority inside churches.

Ethnocentrism in Kenya and in the Kenyan Christian Community

One of Kenya's most serious societal challenges, since independence, has been tumultuous ethnocentric relations. Kenya's coloniser, Britain, utilised the 'divide and rule' scheme by capitalising on ethnic groupings to their advantage in governing the rebellious indigenous groups (Njoroge and Kirori 2024:358). Such perpetuated divisions among the indigenous groups resulted in the current chronic ethnocentrism. There is also ethnic stereotyping that has led to social suspicion among communities in Kenya. It is not necessary to rehash stereotypes of ethnic groups as such, but it is enough to say that stereotyping communities into caricatures increases mistrust. The theological interest of this article is not the number or size of Kenya's ethnic groups. Kenya has many ethnic communities, including larger groups such as the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba. The concern is the possibility that ethnic identity may become a basis for exclusion, suspicion, and superiority within the church (Mbugua 2008:3–4; Ndonye, Yieke, and Onyango 2015:45–47).

The number of ethnic group clusters in Kenya varies depending on the classification scheme, with forty-two in 1969 and over seventy in 2019. Ethnic groups are often referred to in terms of their larger ethno-linguistic groups, such as the Bantu, Nilotic, and Cushitic groups in Kenya. The associations of these classifications are important for descriptive purposes but should not be regarded as theological or moral types. The important thing to note for this

article is that the Kenyan community is diverse and is spread out across the counties, which means that the social environment in which churches practise fellowship, leadership, and witness varies from county to county (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2019:7; Njoroge and Kirori 2024:357–358).

All facets of Kenyan society are affected by ethnocentrism, including the educational system. Illustratively, unstable ethnic relations in Kenyan universities have been established regarding the admission of students, the hiring of personnel, the makeup of university councils, the appointment of vice-chancellors and chairpersons of university councils, and the distribution of universities and their constituent colleges across the nation's counties (Taaliu 2017:22). Intending to increase inclusivity, on Friday, 17 November 2023, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) launched an audit report on diversity and ethnicity in the public sector. The report showed that more than eighty per cent of jobs were held by members of ten ethnic communities. It also found that twenty-nine ethnic communities held approximately one per cent of the reported jobs (National Cohesion and Integration Commission, 2023:6). An employment diversity audit also revealed differential ethnic representation in parliament and other public institutions (Committee on National Cohesion and Equal Opportunity, 2023:195). The report also revealed that the employment distributions were highly concentrated in some counties, with Bomet county having a higher percentage (3,268 of the 3,357 workers, 97%) of Kalenjin, while Kisii had a lower percentage (26 of the 3,357 workers) (National Cohesion and Integration Commission, 2023:6). These statistics are simply included here in a spirit of comparison, not to point fingers at any community but to illustrate the overall social context of unity and leadership in Kenyan churches. Given this state of affairs, the infiltration and socio-settings in which the Kenyan church operates are antagonistic; the church has regrettably become an accomplice of ethnocentrism (Aylward 1999:28–29).

Kenya's post-election violence in 2007–2008 was one of the biggest episodes of ethnicised political violence any country has ever seen (Oucho 2010; Waki, McFadyen, and Kambale 2008). There were much ethnic-voting-bloc politics and increased suspicion among communities in this regard. Other media platforms were also reportedly used to spread ethnic hostility during the crisis.

These included some vernacular radio stations and emerging social media spaces (Makinen and Kuira 2008:331).

A high price was paid for the instability of ethnic relations. The immediate impact of the post-election violence was loss of life, displacement, destruction of property, and long-term social trauma (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2008:8). Evangelical churches in Kenya were also faulted for not giving an adequate united witness in and after the crisis (Nyaundi 2015:99). This has been described by scholars as being impacted by the ethnic polarisation (Aylward 1999:28–29; Kamara 2010:135). Wa Gatumu (2019:194) asserts:

> Unfortunately, negative ethnicity is also rife in Kenyan churches. […] In fact, the tendency to manipulate ethnic identities prevails in all Christian churches like in the political circles. A person not belonging to an ethnic group in a region where the church is confined does not qualify for leadership. The loyalty of church leaders usually stops within their ethnic groups rather than the Christian faith.

Ethnocentrism in the Kenyan church has been a significant challenge undermining its unity. The church in Kenya has not only been described as the birthplace of negative ethnicity (Nyaundi 2015:57), but also as ethnically polarised, with church members often unable to transcend their ethnic identities (Kamara 2010:135). Aylward (1999:28–29) states: 'The church has become both a victim and an accomplice of ethnocentrism'. Ekitala and Wosyanju (2015:56) concur:

> In Kenya as in other countries in Africa and around the world, the church is divided, compromised and at times even silenced.

Since they cannot overcome ethnic attachments, Kenyan Christians, though a group of Christians, often mirror the ethnic differences that exist in the society (Kamara 2010:135).

One of the significant impacts on Kenyan politics, education, and religion has been ethnocentrism or the belief that the ethnic group one belongs to is the

best. Ethnocentrism is not a political issue *per se*; it is a social issue that occurs in all spheres of life. The church is not exempt from these ethnocentric differences. Although the Kenyan church has taught equality and unity, ethnic differences have polarised Christian communities because of the differences that have influenced leadership, congregational compositions, and denominational affiliations (Kamara 2010:135). Ethnocentrism still influences the leadership organisation of churches, the relations between denominations, and the apportionment of resources (Oluoch 2015:136).

Ethnocentrism also impacts the life of the church through the composition of congregations, the selection of leadership, the allocation of resources, and the church's denominational identity. Previous research found similarities between churches in Kenya and the broader Kenyan environment with respect to region and ethnicity (Ekitala and Wosyanju 2015:55–64; Kamara 2010:135, 140; Lee 2000:14; Wandera 2016:783–793). The studies, however, should be used critically. They reveal trends and attitudes among groups sampled, and not evidence that all members or all congregations in any specifically named denomination are ethnocentric. For this reason, this article employs them as contextual markers instead of comprehensive empirical evidence.

First, even though the Roman Catholic Church is one of the most ancient Christian organisations in Kenya and is ethnically diverse, the ethnocentric affiliation within the church was somewhat predetermined by the missionary activity in the country. Certain missionary groups targeted the representatives of certain ethnicities, which resulted in the creation of a regional cluster of Catholic members (Oluoch 2015:134). To illustrate, central Kenya, dominated by the Kikuyu, has a more equitable Catholic and Protestant population, whereas the Luhya and Kisii of Nyanza and western Kenya have a large population of Catholics. Missionary histories shaped regional concentrations of Christian traditions in different parts of Kenya. Such regional concentration does not automatically prove ethnocentrism, but it can influence local leadership expectations, congregational identity, and perceptions of representation. Ethnocentrism is manifested in local church management and appointing leaders, and this can influence internal dynamics and representation, despite the hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church, which is meant to surpass ethnocentric identities (Gifford 2009:78–79, 211).

The denominational examples should thus be considered illustrative in nature, and not an exhaustive list. The issue is not whether any single denomination is ethnocentric. Rather, Christianity in Kenya exists within a wider social context where ethnic identity can influence membership, leadership, worship, and trust. Across the Roman Catholic Church, missionary history also helped to shape localised Catholic identity in some communities, and so demonstrated that the sense of belonging can at times be more geographically than theologically based (Gifford 2009:78–79, 211; Oluoch 2015:134). Sometimes in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, the ethnic clustering has been exacerbated by the founder-led nature of their institutional models, their mother-tongue worship style, and culturally oriented preaching within often fast-growing urban congregations (Gifford 2009:81). Early Africa Inland Church mission activity among the Kamba in Ukambani, and later among communities such as the Kalenjin and Maasai, influenced its membership and leadership patterns. These patterns later shaped perceptions of ethnic clustering, leadership representation, and resource distribution. The Anglican Church of Kenya, however, has had its own share of doubts regarding ethnic representation in church leadership and the governance of the dioceses, which tend to be dominated by the Kikuyu, because of its historical links with central Kenya (Githiga 2001:118; Mbugua 2008:4; Ndonye, Yieke, and Onyango 2015:45–47). Strong Kikuyu association in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, due to missionary Scots from central Kenya, has had an impact on Presbyterian membership, liturgy language, and perceptions of inclusion for non-Kikuyu believers (Gifford 2009:79; Gitari 1996:112). The examples reveal that the problem of ethnocentrism is not only political and cultural but also ecclesial, as fellowship, leadership, and representation in church may be influenced in different ways by ethnic identity, which is contrary to the church's confession of unity. The pattern is challenged in Romans 10:12, which lays the basis of Christian fellowship in the lordship of Christ rather than in ethnic identity.

Yet, stable ethnic relations in the Kenyan Christian church are paramount. The church is a community of believers of all ages, from various distinctions and expressions, and dissimilar cultural and tribal settings. Jesus established and envisioned a diverse yet cohesive and united church (John 17:22–23, 1 Corinthians 12:13) as a result of her transcendence of tribal restrictions. Jesus himself prayed for unity in his church: 'I pray that they may all be one' (John

17:21). Correspondingly, there are numerous admonitions of stable ethnic relations within Paul's epistles, e.g., the church possesses 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Ephesians 4:5), or Paul's defence of the claim that since they 'were baptized into Christ', they are all 'one in Christ Jesus', and that there is no such thing as a Jew or a Greek (Galatians 3:27–28). Further, to the Romans Paul contends that since all share and are ruled by the same lord, Jesus Christ, there ought to be no difference between Jews and Greeks (Romans 10:12). This is besides other exhortations of the local audience to regard one another as 'one body in Christ' (Romans 12:5; see also 1 Corinthians 12). Such admonitions are commonly cited as the scriptural foundation for oneness among Jesus' followers, with the intention of freeing society from ethnocentrism for stable ethnic relations.

Christ had a vision of a united church, but the relations within the Kenyan church remain unstable due to its ethnic nature. Ethnocentrism undermines the ethical authority of the church and its capacity to be an example of true unity, which casts doubt on the reality of the lived power of the redemptive work of Christ through the trials of ethnocentric divisions (Romans 10:12). The same strains had existed between Jews and Greeks in the case of Paul when he encouraged them to be united regardless of tribal lines. This study thus juxtaposes Jewish-Greek relationships in the Graeco-Roman world and modern Kenyan Christianity to bring out the parallels and ethnocentric predicaments.

The ethnocentrism within the Kenyan church is an antithesis to Romans 10:12, which postulates equality in the eyes of God irrespective of ethnicity. Rather than cutting across social lines, the church has been a reflection of the tribal allegiances of Kenya, and tribal identity has oftentimes taken precedence over spiritual identities. wa Gatumu (2019:194) notes that Kenyan Christians find it hard to detach faith and ethnicity, which is weakening the mission of the church. Based on Romans 10:12 and corresponding unity passages (John 17:22–23, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:1–6), this article presents a sociocultural critique of what causes churches to disintegrate as a result of ethnocentrism. It further suggests both theological and practical solutions to achieve convincing inclusiveness, reconciliation, and genuine unity in Christ.

Sociocultural Context of Romans 10:12

It is important to contextualise the sociocultural aspects that shaped the early Christian church to determine the meaning of the unity message in Romans 10:12. It involves examining the ethnocentric contact between Greeks and Jews in the Graeco-Roman civilisation that was marked by high degrees of cultural superiority and ethnocentric conflicts. Paul's words in Romans 10:12 are 'There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all'. It was not just a call for harmony. It was a declaration of theology, which stood in opposition to ethnic hierarchy in a socially stratified world.

The pervasive ethnocentrism of the time was forcefully challenged by the apostle Paul's argument that Jews and Gentiles had equal standing in Christian society. The Jewish people considered themselves superior to other ethnic groups, especially the Greeks and gentiles, because of their special covenantal relationship with God (Sanders 1977:178). Jewish laws, religious traditions, and customs, which distinguished them from the rest of society, supported this viewpoint (Dunn 1998:351). However, the Greeks also considered their culture to be the best one. This was because of ancient Greek philosophy and the historical context. As a result, they tended to dismiss other ethnicities as barbarian (Hall 2002:57). This profound rift had an impact on the cohesiveness of early Christian society.

The early church had a hard time accommodating the gentile believers. This was because most of the Jews were insisting on the observance of Jewish rituals, which included circumcision, prohibited foods, and other practices (Acts 15:1–21). The Jerusalem council arose due to this dialogue and brought the challenges of integrating multiple ethnicities and cultural orientations into the same religious group (Witherington 1995:105). In his letters, especially in the letters to Romans and Galatians, Paul says that righteousness rests with faith and not by adherence to the Mosaic law. Galatians, for example, underlines that faith in Christ exceeds such cultural and ethnocentric fences (Galatians 3:28; see also Romans 3:29–30).

This means that the ethnic wrangles between the Greeks and Jews were a threat of serious consequences to the cohesiveness of the early church. Without these differences being resolved, the purpose of the church was

under threat by not being a community of believing people who trusted in Christ. The message that is important in the rejection of these ethnocentric divisions and the enhancement of a church that appreciated unity in diversity was contained in the message of Paul in Romans 10:12 (Esler 2003:211). This is a biblical idea of unity that creates an essential basis for resolving similar ethnocentric aspects in modern Christian communities, including the Kenyan church. Difficulties faced by early Christians in solving the ethnocentric tensions can be similar to those existing in Kenya today, since the sense of ethnicity is likely to affect social and political interactions (Githiga 2001:89). Romans 10:12 calls for the rejection of ethnocentric boundaries that treat cultural difference as a basis for superiority, exclusion, or unequal access to Christian fellowship. The teachings of Paul are still applicable in contemporary society in promoting unity among various Christian groups when the social-cultural setting of the early church is reviewed.

Jew-Greek Ethnocentric Relationships in the Graeco-Roman World: Towards an Analysis of Romans 10:12

One of the greatest challenges the early church faced was its growth from a Jewish foundation to reach a greater extent of the gentile population. Due to this development, as argued, the Jews and Greeks were subjected to serious cultural and ethnic challenges because they had distinct views regarding racial and cultural superiority. Jews even had an ethnocentric nature that demeaned the gentiles, given that they held that they were the chosen people of God. The history of Jewish isolation and their personal connection with God were other factors that supported this stance, especially the law that God gave to Moses and the covenant between God and Abraham. Equally, many Greeks influenced by Hellenistic culture adopted ideas of the superiority of the Greek language, education, and civic ideals and often referred to non-Greek peoples as culturally inferior (Milton 2009; Stanley 1997).

This Jewish-Greek rivalry in early Christian culture is widely recorded in the New Testament. This is illustrated especially in Acts 15, where a quarrel arose over whether the Gentiles who had been converted to Christianity should follow the Jewish traditions. The Greek Christians were the ones who did not believe that they should abide by the Jewish traditions, such as circumcision, to fully fit into Christian society. One of the major changes that took place

against the ethnocentric perspective of the Jews was the fact that the Gentiles did not need to be subjected by force to behave as Jews.

Paul addressed this issue directly in Romans 10:12 by saying there was no difference between Jew and Greek. This is a radical reconsideration that is necessary regarding ethnic relations within the church. Paul issued a declaration that stressed the equality of all believers as the body of Christ, irrespective of their nationality. Furthermore, he avowed that faith in Christ relativises ethnic, cultural, and national boundaries. As a result of the intense ethnic separations among the members of the early Christian community, this needed unity was associated with significant social and cultural implications as well as theological ones.

Sociocultural Analysis of Romans 10:12: A Strategy for Unifying the Church and Addressing Ethnocentrism

In this sociocultural discussion, the way through which Paul attempted to conquer ethnocentrism and create unity in the early church is discussed in Romans 10:12. This discussion provides the context of the teaching of Paul in this passage and shows how it can be applied as a model to fight ethnocentrism in contemporary Kenyan Christian society. Paul's interactions with Jewish and Greek mindsets throughout the first century are examined in this study, which provides insightful guidance on fostering inclusion and unity in a multicultural setting (Whiteside 1961:218), such as the modern Kenyan Christian community.

Exegesis of Romans 10:12

The denial of ethnic distinction in Romans 10:12 should be read alongside Romans 3:22–30, where Jews and gentiles are equally in need of God's saving righteousness in Jesus Christ. It should also be read in relation to Romans 4, where Paul appeals to Abraham's faith before ethnic identity markers. This wider Pauline argument is echoed in Galatians 3:25–28. The claim is not just an isolated slogan of tolerance, but is closely connected to Paul's argument that salvation in Christ makes ethnic privilege look ridiculous and, in the end, constitutes one people under one Lord.

Romans 10:12 in Greek reads: 'οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολὴ Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἕλληνος, ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων, πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν'. A direct translation of this would be:

> For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek,
> for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

According to verse 12, Paul's opening phrase is 'οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολὴ Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἕλληνος' ('for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek'). The word *for* (*γάρ*) links this verse to the preceding verse. In verse 11, Paul cited Isaiah 28:16, which states that 'everyone [*πάς*] who believes will not be ashamed'. Everyone from every nation and family, irrespective of ethnicity, is incorporated by the word *πάς*. This implies that faith-based freedom from shame wasn't exclusive to Jews. Then Paul proceeds in verse 12 to further clarify and explain this idea by stating unequivocally that there is no distinction (*διαστολὴ*) between Jews (*Ἰουδαίου*) and Greeks (*Ἕλληνος*).

The word *διαστολὴ* denotes difference, distinction, eminence, excellence, or disparity, which also implies something outstanding or unique (Bauer et al. 2019:207). When it comes to salvation or justification before God, there is no superiority or eminence that the Jews have over the Greeks. The ethnocentric hierarchy of the first century is being challenged by Paul's claim that there is no difference between Jews and Greeks in terms of salvation (Whiteside 1961:218).

The argument that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek ('οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολὴ Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἕλλ ηνος') was designed to destroy ethnocentric relationships between Jews and the gentiles. The term 'Jews' refers to people who are subject to the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic law. 'Greek[s]' are non-Jews who were influenced by the culture and language of the Greeks. In sum, 'Jew and Greek' functions as a representative pair for humanity in Paul's argument. Both covenant insiders and gentile outsiders stand in equal need of the same Lord. Paul confirms that all have the same conditions to receive salvation. This was a threat to Jewish beliefs about covenantal privilege and the superiority of the nation. Jews had also prided themselves on superiority due to their covenantal position (Whiteside

1961:220). The apostles intended to create this new reality of inclusion (Acts 10:9, Galatians 3:28).

Romans 10:12 eliminates any difference in terms of descent or carnal privilege and past religious decrees. According to Whiteside (1961:218), although the Mosaic law separated Jews from the gentiles, this separation was only temporal. It was a greater plan of God to unite the two factions. Jews and gentiles needed to be one in the body of Christ by removing the law (Ephesians 2:13–18). Jewish privilege was on the basis of covenantal and legal privilege. Associating with the prestige of Hellenistic language, education, philosophy, and civic life, Greek identity could also be a source of disparagement towards non-Greek peoples. Paul provides a solution to both in Romans 10:12. He appeals to unity, inclusiveness, and joint lordship in Christ. This is a message that challenges the social and theological obstacles of the first century. It also fosters peaceful ethnic coexistence as opposed to ethnocentric superiority and separatism.

Then Paul goes on to offer two reasons why ethnocentric superiority has been dissolved. First, for the same Lord is lord of all ('ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων') and, second, 'πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν' (is rich to all who call upon him). For Paul, the shared lordship ought to be the basis for diminishing the ethnocentric superiority of either Jews or Greeks. Asserting that Jews and gentiles have equal access to redemption, the term 'the same Lord' (*ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος*) highlights the shared lordship of Christ. The Jews are no longer given special favour because of their race or observance of the Mosaic law, which is a fundamental principle at the heart of Paul's teaching. The theological foundation for unity is the shared dominion (Bauer et al. 2019:348; Whiteside 1961:222). Paul's assertion that 'the same Lord is Lord of all' serves to affirm that all believers, regardless of their ancestry, have the same connection with God. This religious solidarity aimed at overcoming the cultural differences and building a new world in which individuals of different origins were accepted instead of being demeaned. Paul urged his Christians to embrace a common doctrine of lordship that transcended ethnic boundaries. The church was to serve as an example of harmony, embodying the gospel's inclusiveness. This could be in agreement with Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

The remote context for this argument is Romans 3, which argues that both Jews and Greeks are sinners in need of salvation through Christ. In Romans 3:22 and 29–30, Paul claimed that there was (and still is) no difference between Jews and Greeks due to sin. Every person is a sinner who is guilty before God. Equally, salvation for both is only by Christ and by faith alone. There is therefore no distinction in this case between individuals or nations since salvation is contingent solely upon faith, which is necessary regardless of whether it is possessed by a Jew or a gentile. In Romans 10:12, Paul directly confronts ethnocentrism by stating that there is no difference between Jews and Greeks because they are both equal in the eyes of God. He underlines that everyone can be saved through faith in Christ, not by following traditional or ethnic customs.

Consequently, that saviour is 'the Lord of all' (*αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων*). This *κύριος* is Christ. That is to say, through redemption, he has bought with his blood all, both the Jews and the gentiles, so that the shared *κύριος* has the same equal propriety in one as another, and they (both Jews and gentiles) have the same claim to him, and the same encouragement to believe in him, for righteousness and life. Meaning, there is no lord (*κύριος*) who is kinder, more loving, and friendlier to Jews than to gentiles; rather, he is the same to everyone (*πάντων*), a common father to all men.

Besides the shared lordship, the second ground for dissolving ethnocentric superiority is that the same Lord 'is rich to all who call upon Him' (*πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν*). Whether a Greek or a Jew, the same Lord is rich to everyone who calls on him. 'Rich' (*πλουτῶν*) is an abundant state, usually associated with riches; nevertheless, when applied to God, it denotes an abundance of kindness or benevolence towards others (Ephesians 2:4, 1 Timothy 6:17, 18). Paul emphasises the necessity of a faith-based unity that cuts beyond racial or cultural barriers by insisting that salvation is inclusive (Whiteside 1961:225). In this context, most properly, because of his abundance of kindness and mercy towards everyone in the salvation plan, God is thus considered to be rich towards humanity, Jews and gentiles inclusive. He is gracious, generous, and unrestricted in giving everyone who approaches him forgiveness, justification, and sanctification. All who call on God will receive their needs, for he can supply them. As a result, there's no cause for Greeks or

Jews to be envious of others' blessings, as if anything were lost as a result of other ethnicities' inclusion.

To summarise, Paul's anti-ethnocentric argument continues in Romans 10:12, where he makes three related claims. First of all, *οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολὴ* is an assertion that there is no salvific difference between Jew and Greek. Second, *ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων* establishes Christian unity as sharing in the lordship of Christ. Third, *πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν* reminds us of the overflow of God's grace towards everyone who calls upon him. These claims break the Jewish belief of covenantal superiority and the Greek mindset of cultural pride, placing the basis of salvation in Christ and not in ethnic, cultural, or inherited privilege.

In short, the following are the four main terms and implications of Romans 10:12. First, the Greek phrase *οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολὴ* ('there is no difference'), which is connected to Romans 10:11 with the usage of *γάρ*, was intended to highlight the openness of salvation to everyone and rejection of the ethnocentric hierarchies of the first century. The second phrase is *Ἕλληνος τε καὶ Ἰουδαίου* ('Jew and Greek'). This was a designation of the two ethnicities, Jews, who were under the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic law, and Greeks, who are the representatives of the gentiles. However, it does not give any pretence of the superiority of Jews. The third phrase, *ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος ράντων* ('because the same Lord is Lord of all things'), assents to the universality of Christ and the theological unity that it creates. And the fourth phrase is *πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν* ('is rich to all who call upon him'). This affirmed that their belonging to the covenant was faith-based rather than based on their ethnic superiority.

Romans 10:12 also makes the argument of anti-ethnocentrism by Paul, who openly opposes the Jewish principle of ethnic and covenantal superiority. The fact that Paul included Greeks (gentiles) in the scheme of God saving everyone is extreme because it asserts that salvation is based on faith in Christ, the lord of all, not within racial and cultural backgrounds. Based on the belief that all are equal in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28), Paul denies the possibility of an ethnic distinction (*διαστολὴ*) in the saving purpose of God (Whiteside 1961:227, 229). Jews and Greeks, thus, are on par before God, and they require

the same grace through faith in Christ, as Paul tries to break down the social and theological barriers that classified them.

Implications of Romans 10:12 for Overcoming Ethnocentrism in the Kenyan Church

The interpretation of Romans 10:12 offers an important theological ground on which to deal with the issue of ethnocentrism in Kenya, where tribalism remains a cliché that cuts across society and the church. Paul provides a basis that will help in destroying ethnic divisions and encourages Kenyan Christians to accept equality, just as he did to the Jews and the Greeks by stating that there is one Lord and that everyone should have equal access to God (Whiteside 1961:238). Unlike the ethnocentric practice in society and the church, Romans 10:12 focuses on faith and salvation but not on ethnicity. It challenges the Kenyan church to embrace inclusiveness through interethnic fellowship, good leadership, and biblical teachings. It further demands conscious opposition to tribal favouritism to allow the church to portray true oneness in Christ.

Romans 10:12 also significantly conveys a lot of values to the Kenyan church in fighting ethnocentrism. The first one is equality in Christ. According to Paul, there is no ethnic superiority in terms of spirituality. And, as such, there is no distinction between Jews and Greeks. This makes the notion that certain tribes are more blessed or favoured by God questionable in Kenya, where social and political affiliations are often based on tribal affiliations. Every believer is equally given an opportunity to be saved, irrespective of tribe.

Second, it is the universal lordship of Christ that, despite ethnicity, ought to be a source of unity to the entirety of Kenya. Christ governs all the ethnic groups, as is outlined in the statement that 'the same Lord is Lord of all'. The Kenyan church and its leadership need to resist the inclination to open tribalistic churches that serve to divide the church ethnically even more, instead of establishing unity in the body of Christ. Moreover, none of the tribes can boast of owning the gospel.

Third, the grace of God should unite all believers in Kenya, regardless of ethnicity, as it is inclusive. God, according to Paul, has an abundant grace for

everyone who addresses him, and the richness of the divine grace is available to all. In Kenya, where tribal affiliation sometimes plays a role in the distribution of resources and leadership roles in churches, this fact is a reminder to the congregants that the benefits of God are granted to those who trust in Christ. Nothing should be ethnised.

Fourth, unity based on faith must be prioritised over ethnicity in the Kenyan church in an attempt to overcome ethnocentrism. Romans 10:12 challenges Christians to place their faith over their people and ethnocentric notions of their culture when ethnic pride is sometimes more vital than being Christian. The church must ensure it clarifies that there is a common identity between believers in Christ that transcends national and ethnic borders.

Practical Strategies for Overcoming Ethnocentrism in the Kenyan Church

Four ecclesial responses may be drawn from the theological logic of Romans 10:12. First, churches should teach that ethnic superiority is incompatible with Christian confession, because the same Lord reigns over all believers irrespective of ethnicity. Second, leadership selection should be based on spiritual maturity, integrity, and competence, not ethnic loyalty, regional pressure, or clan patronage. Third, worship and fellowship should intentionally build interethnic belonging through shared services, cross-community discipleship, and multilingual sensitivity. Fourth, the church should practise reconciliation by acknowledging ethnic prejudice, confessing communal failure, and cultivating a shared mission. These responses do not deny cultural identity. Rather, they place ethnic identity under the lordship of Christ and the unity of the gospel. In this way, the Kenyan church can model Christ-centred unity, interethnic fellowship, reconciled leadership, and national healing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Romans 10:12 provides a Pauline theological basis for confronting ethnocentrism in the Kenyan church. Paul's declaration that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek rests on two central claims: the same Lord reigns over all, and divine grace is rich toward all who call upon him. When applied to Kenyan Christianity, this text challenges ethnic superiority,

leadership exclusion, regional loyalties, and fellowship patterns that weaken the church's witness. The article has argued that the church's response must be both theological and practical. Shared lordship must shape preaching, leadership selection, worship, discipleship, and reconciliation. In this way, Romans 10:12 calls the Kenyan church to become a visible community of reconciled diversity, where ethnic identity is not erased but brought under the lordship of Christ and the unity of the gospel.

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