The Category 'Christian' as a New Race:
Theological and Sociological Examinations of the Structure and Practice of the Common Humanity

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INTRODUCTION

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Eph 2:14-16).[1]

The theological point that when people come to Christ, they become a new people or humanity in him is foundational, based on passages such as Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 2:14-16. While Scripture upholds this for all Christians as a promise that is fulfilled and a concretized reality, what does it sociologically mean to be one people in Christ? How and in what substance or form is this new humanity conceived in real life where people of different ethnicities, class or religious backgrounds become a new humanity? Is it a new species of human beings or a new race, i.e., an otherworldly sort of being? Is this humanity even a new *physical* (not just spiritual) creature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17)?

This article discusses the relationship between the theological and sociological aspects of this new humanity in Christ to explicate its concretized sense so that we might see and realize how it testifies to a fuller unity and reconciliation with one another in real relationships on earth. It is an inauguration of our embodied promised and reconciled life that God in Christ is our peace who has broken down every wall of hostility and division, and reconciled us all to God.

[1] All Scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

In what follows, I will (1) discuss historical and sociological understandings of race and ethnicity, (2) sketch a theology of race and inclusion (3) examine race and ethnicity in Christian mission then and today (with special reference to Malaysia) and (4) show how Christians are a new race to draw lessons for how believers can live out that kind of reconciled community of Christ-followers and be witnesses in our world today.

A. Historical and Sociological Understandings of Race and Ethnicity

According to Adrian Hastings, "ethnicity is a group of people with a shared cultural identity and spoken language [that] may survive as a strong subdivision with a loyalty of its own within established nations" (1997, 3). For Max Weber, ethnic groups are

> those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs of both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists (1996, 35).

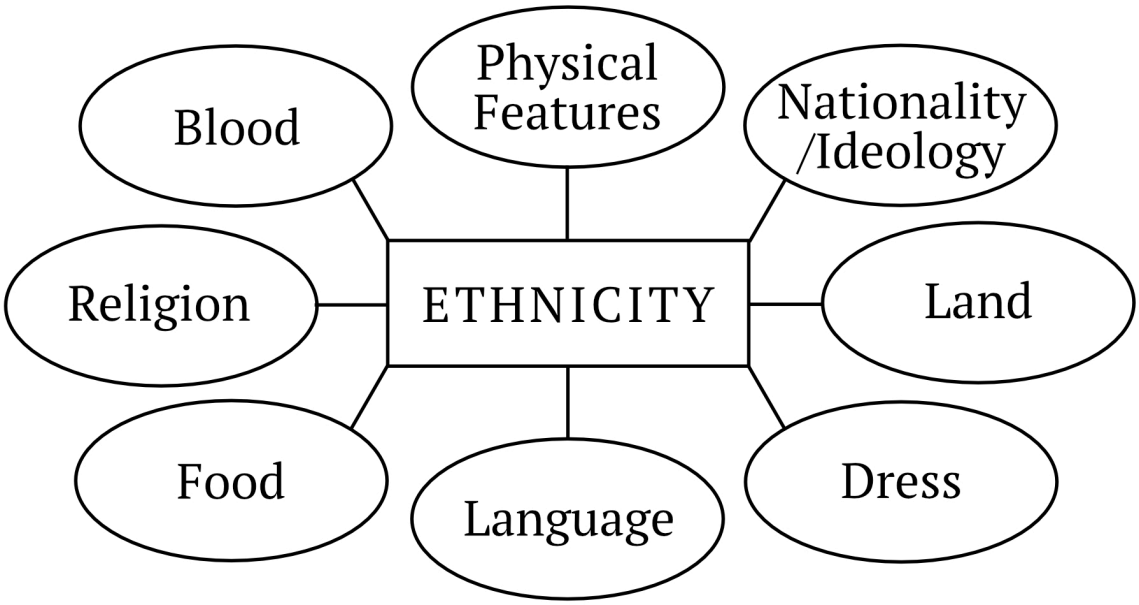
Christian anthropologist Eloise Meneses states that the term "ethnicity" is "usually used to stress the cultural rather than the physical aspects of group identity. Ethnic groups share language, dress, food, customs, values and sometimes religion. These are things that can change easily and do historically" (2007, 34).

Most anthropologists, sociologists and historians in ethnic studies agree that it is better that each community discusses and defines who a person's ethnic identity is (i.e., an emic perspective) rather than outsiders doing so. For example, Gabriele Marranci, an anthropologist of religion, states that religious followers should ask respondents whether they self-identify as followers of a particular religion and ethnicity (2008, 1). Denise Buell adds that one should include "discourse as 'ethnic' rather than some other cultural discourse" (2005, 40).

From these social science and historical understandings, what emerges is an intra-community understanding as to what binds and constitutes their common peoplehood. In an emic view, combinatorial markers of food, language, religion are usually (but not always) emphasized, as opposed to external phenotypical markers such as height, eye, or skin colour (which were colonial, etic markers). The constellation of these markers may be pictured in Diagram 1 below. However, it is also the constant participation or performance of these elements in everyday discourses, practices or rituals that shape or

reinforce such identities as each community contests, revises or confirms who they are and what they must be (Buell 2005, 40).

Diagram 1: ***Elemental markers typically used to signify ethnic identity***



The idea of people being defined and formally categorised by race in the modern age was birthed from the Enlightenment, developed in colonial history, and survived in post-colonial nationalism. The concept of race was created to dominate a conquered nation via the colonial will and ability to impose hegemonic power over people (Meneses 2007, 40). It was to "wield dynastic legitimacy" (Anderson 2006, 150) by asserting its ability to count and classify people, animals and objects in order to administrate and deploy them for colonial enterprises (Anderson 2006, passim).

Each conquered nation under the colonialists operated by their assumptions of what constituted the identities of a "people" or "nation." German Romanticism held to a primordialist view of people and advanced the idea of a *volk* (people) defined on the essentials of a native language (Hastings 1997, 108). The British went further by specifying physical traits as key identifiers of "race" such as skin and hair colour, facial features, body height and size that could all be objectified, quantified and classified (Anderson 2006, 168). From this emerged the modern census wherein racial groups were enumerated within a sovereign (colonial) territory to ascertain available economic surplus and labour for the colonialists (Anderson 2006, 168). Elsewhere, social Darwinianism influenced Americans to adopt craniometry, blood typing and IQ tests as

key markers of (racial) intelligence and biological purity. The Nazis advanced this logic by asserting (White) Aryan superiority against the Jews and other marginal peoples on the basis of race and eugenics (Meneses 2007, 41-42). Ultimately, Anderson observes: "The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of *class*, rather than in those of the nation" (2006, 149).

In the historical landscape of the conceptualization of race as a category to identify people, its beginnings were sordid and its effects devastating. From using language as a marker, to external biological physiognomies of people, what the higher powers viewed and decided who indigenous peoples were supposed to be, came from them, not the latter. This etic (external) view of peoples was superimposed upon them but the sad consequence of post-colonial nations mostly showed that many underlying sociological assumptions and constructs about race were "retained and even concentrated after independence" (Anderson 2006, 165). Thus, whether colonial or indigenous powers, each society continues to essentialize people's identities into the old hardened, non-permeable categories that fixed race or ethnicity into a particular, permanent combination.

In Malaysia, essential racial markers and categories define the Malays as a person who professes Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, and practices Malay customs.[2] In Singapore, it is merely "any person whether of the Malay race or otherwise, who considers himself to be a member of the Malay community and who is generally accepted as a member of the Malay community by that community."[3]

When nations (and their people) fix specific markers such as language or religion to a specific ethnicity, it often creates divisions for it creates a *difference* that distances groups from one another that formerly may not view them as such (Meneses 2007, 44). Thus, while Islam and Christianity are inclusive of all race and ethnicities, by ascribing a Malay to be a Muslim, most Chinese in Malaysia refuse to embrace Islam because doing so is considered entering into Malay society. Conversely, when Malay Muslims embraced Christianity, they were asked by Chinese Christians if they had now tried eating pork (Cheong 2012, 276-278)!

In this way, postcolonial states perpetuate the colonialist's mindset or habits onto the local population; these forms of colonialism still occur because their minds have been colonised (Rynkiewich 2011, 90-196). If nations were not spared from such beliefs

[2] Article 160 of Malaysia's constitution.
[3] Article 19B.6 of Singapore's constitution (amended in 2016).

about race, neither were Christians. For example, Bible commentators such as Arthur Pink, Keil and Delitzch, and books like the *Preacher's Homiletic Commentary* asserted a "biblical" view that the world population could be classified into three major categories of people (with emphasis on skin type) that descended from Noah: Shem, Japheth and Ham (European, Semitic and Afro-Asian) (Hays 2003, 53-54). Though this view has been largely discredited, this belief lingers among Christians who read these early twentieth century sources.

Thus, one of our tasks is to decolonize our minds in order to find new ways of thinking, seeing and relating to one another so that we can be freed of these mindsets, repent of these sins, make amends and be reconciled to one another. To do this, I next examine how the Bible presents the theological and sociological restructuring of relationships between ethnic others that forge godly and equitable treatment.

B. Race and the Inclusion of Others in the Bible

Race and Inclusion in the Old Testament

In Scripture, Genesis 1:28 declares all peoples are created in the *imago Dei* because "the quality that distinguishes humankind from the animals and from the rest of creation is shared by all the races of the earth" (Hays 2003, 50). Even though God's plan to form a common humanity through Adam and Eve was broken by the fall and the sinful gathering of a monolingual people to build a tower for themselves in Genesis 11:1-9, God was not frustrated. Through the calling of Abraham's family, God would work out his covenant plan to redeem and reconcile all peoples of the world if they came into his covenant community and sought YHWH.

In its early formational identity as a distinct group, the use of the word "people" in conjunction with Israel suggests, according to Kenton Sparks, "a sociocultural entity that called itself Israel and that worshipped … the high god El" (2005, 122). *El* is supremely important because he is the central unifying element that allows ethnic others to become part of Israel's community. We see this in the Pentateuch when "foreign peoples are blended into the stream of the 'people of God'" through faith, intermarriage[,] naming [and] the other avenue is eschatological: a future, glorious

inclusion of the nations into the people of God, an inclusion based on faith" (Hays 2003, 130). When foreigners enter Israel's community, they must be treated like fellow Jews (Ex 22:21, 23:9; Lev 19:18b; Deut 10:19). Kenton Sparks observes:

> Deuteronomy especially "embraced a very supportive stance toward foreign "sojourners" (גרים) .... As a result, non-Israelite sojourners were able to assimilate to the Israelite religious community rather easily. [Additionally] in Deuteronomy the primary criterion for community membership was religious – a commitment to Yahweh – and not ethnic, and this explains why foreign sojourners could so easily be assimilated.... Ethnic exclusivity came to the fore only in a few legal statutes that excluded "foreigners" (that had no interest in community participation), nonassimilating sojourners (גרים within Israel that had no interest in community participation) and "bastards" (ממזר that were born of foreign cultic activities). Deuteronomy invited religious and cultural assimilation as long as one was interested in doing so and as long as one avoided contact with foreign deities and foreign religious practices (2005, 283-284).

Practically, how Israel then had to treat strangers in their midst were noted in specific ritualistic details and practices. Table 1 on the next page illustrates these sociological and theological elements.[4]

Sociologically, the net effect of consistently participating or practicing these acts would serve to unify and bring together ethnic others into Israel and prevent maltreatment or discrimination against them.[5] In this way, Israel's laws regarding the stranger (and slaves) distinguished herself from ancient Near East neighbours as she was commanded to uphold an ethic that was inclusive and humane, life-giving and faith affirming (Tsai 2014).

Even so, during the post-exilic period, there were sociological markers and processes that did *exclude* ethnic others in order to preserve the potential loss of the remnant ethnic community. Israel did this this by adding special ethnic criterion markers such as participation in the exile experience (Ezek 11:14-21) and documenting pre-exilic family holdings to verify one's status as an ethnic Israelite (Sparks 2005, 315). Even so, this "did not prevent them from embracing the non-Israelites who desired to

[4] There are more verses showing how rituals meant for Israel were similarly applied to foreigners, e.g., Lev 24:16; Num 15:15-16,26, 29-30; 19:10; Deut 1:16; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19-21; 29:11; 31:12.
[5] The only exceptions were choosing a king (Deut 17:15) and lending with interest (Deut 23:20).

Table 1: ***Socio-theological markers that included foreigners into Israel's community***

Markers	Practices or processes of inclusion into Israel's community
Shared ritual	"A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land" (Ex 12:48).
Shared holy day	"… the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant …nor any foreigner residing in your towns" (Ex 20:10).
Shared food	"Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may any foreigner residing among you eat blood" (Lev 17:12).
Shared care/ affection	"The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt" (Lev 19:34). See also Deut 23:7.
Shared law	"You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the LORD your God" (Lev 24:22).
Shared celebration	"A foreigner residing among you is also to celebrate the LORD's Passover in accordance with its rules and regulations" (Num 9:14). See also Deut 26:11.
Shared safe spaces	"These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites and for foreigners residing among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there" (Num 35:15).
Shared work protection	"Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns" (Deut 24:14).
Shared money	"When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year … you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied" (Deut 26:12).

join their community … The exiles seem to have feared only those foreigners who came into frequent contact with the Israelites but who showed no signs of openness to assimilation" (Sparks 2005, 315). So long as they "separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel" (Ezra 6:21), they were welcomed.

Ultimately, as strangers entered into Israel's covenant community, their entire adherence to Israel's laws would sociologically emplace them as belonging to the same faith as Israel's laws and align them towards a covenant-keeping relationship of the worship of YHWH.

Race and inclusion in the New Testament

If the Mosaic laws evidenced the necessary sociological conditions of how foreigners or non-Jews could enter and live together as *one* community with God's chosen people, a similar functioning ethos and marker also existed in the time of the Greeks.

> [N]on-Greeks could become 'Hellenists' by turning to and practicing 'Hellenism,' so too non-Jews could probably become adherents of 'Judaism' by adopting the Jewish lifestyle. In fact, we encounter the first known examples of conversion to Judaism in the days of the Hasmoneans. They even forcefully converted non-Jews in order to secure a Jewish population majority in traditional Israelite territory .... And if Hellenism had succeeded in becoming a worldwide 'ism', why should not Judaism aspire to the same? It takes no great imagination to realize the importance of this new development as a precondition for early Christian self-understanding and mission (Skarsaune 2008, 40).

According to Palmer (2018), this reflected later developments from the post-exilic period where a Gentile could convert to Judaism by a "mutable ethnicity" which revolved around shared kinship (e.g., marrying into the community), connection to the land and the shared practice of circumcision. According to Kim, even a band of followers who followed a rabbi could be considered a type of new community with a culture of their own: "The band remained within the Jewish community [yet] had their own distinctives that set them apart ... They had their own grammar of language, social system, family formation (2016, 18).

However, Jesus' community also introduced a distinct idea that pointed beyond fellow Jews: *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God* (Jn 1:12-13, emphasis mine). Here, Jesus' new community emphasized only one inclusive marker ("those who believed in his name") and three excluding ones ("not born of natural descent", "not of human decision", "husband's will"). Paul resonates with this when he writes:

> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith ... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and

> female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26-29)

For John and Paul, *faith* is the key inclusion marker. For Paul, justification by faith in Galatians 3:26-29 implicates "the equality and unity of all in Christ" over race or social status (Hays 2003, 183). Here, Paul "strikes at three of the major barrier-forming divisions in human society": ethnicity, economic status and sexuality (Hays 2003, 185-186). The barriers are obliterated while the differences are relativized in light of our oneness in Christ (Hays 2003, 186). This also occurs in language – in Col 3:11 when Paul says "there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian."[6] Bosch (1987, 167) notes:

> To the Galatians he writes in similar vein: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:27f; cf also Eph 3:6). Baptism thus consciously brings about a change in social relationships and in self-understanding. Faith in Christ makes fellowship possible. Because believers are one in Christ, they belong to one another.[7] The fellowship in Christ does not unite only Jews and Gentiles, but people from different social backgrounds as well .... The contemporary Greek and Roman associations tended to be rather homogeneous sociologically, but Paul insists that divisions be transcended.

So significant was Galatians 3:26-28 as a key theological statement for the birth of a new humanity in the early church that they took it to be their first creed and key Scripture used for baptizing new believers (Thaxter 2020).

However, inclusion by faith (to enter *in*) and the obliteration of divisions (to enter *without walls*), must have reconciliation (to enter *into one another*). Ephesians 2:1-10 indicates how Christ's new work is "the reconciliation of people not only to God but also to one another. Salvation is thus more than believers receiving forgiveness of sins [but] union with one another" (Hays 2003, 190 citing Best). When they are reconciled, "believers in Christ are now seen as part of his body and part of a new society, a new race

[6] By this, Hays (2003, 188-189) understands 'Scythian' and 'barbarian' to mean languages, not ethnicity.
[7] Bosch (1987, 167) adds: "This explains the vehemence of Paul's reaction to Peter when the latter refused to eat with Gentiles converts (Gal 2:11-21). To object to sharing the table of the Lord with fellow-believers is a denial of one's being justified by faith. Where this happens, people are trusting in some form of justification by works. The reconciliation with God is in jeopardy if Christians are not reconciled to each other but continue to separate at meals. The unity of the church—no, the church itself—is called in question when groups of Christians segregate themselves on the basis of such dubious distinctives as race, ethnicity, sex, or social status."

of men and women" (Hays 2003, 190) as found in Ephesians 2:14-16. Thus, "the cross produced an organic unity among the various groups in the Church [and] eliminated the points of hostility between the groups and reconciled them to one another" (Hays 2003, 190). Beale comments (2004, 260):

> If Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God because they are in the one Christ, then they are also reconciled to and have peace with one another because their identity as 'one new man' in Christ surpasses any nationalistic identities that formerly alienated themselves from one another (Eph 2:15-16). And if they are part of Christ and a new creation in him, they are also part of the 'one Spirit' and have open 'access' to the Father (Eph 2:18).

In Ephesians 2:15 and 19, we thus see the formation of a new race when Christ purposed "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." It is "for this reason that the early church father Tertullian called Christians 'a third race'" (Wu 2015,170).[8] When we become this new humanity in Christ, God becomes our "Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15). For Peter, this new kind of humanity was seen as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession…" (1 Pet 2:9, ESV). Clement, another church father, noted that when Jews and Gentiles were one, "what emerged is a distinctive group that is neither Jew nor Gentile but believers who soon after regarded themselves a third race or new race" (wa Gatumu 2010, 212).[9] Buell observes: "Many early Christians define Christianness as a membership in a people characterized especially by religious practices, in contrast to historical reconstructions that portray Christianness as a category that transcends or dissolves ethnoracial difference" (2005, 35). For this reason, religious practices were the "primary means" for differentiating the "three kinds (*genē*) of humans in this world: worshippers of so-called gods, Jews, and Christians" (Buell 2005, 37 citing Aristides). Sunquist comments (2014, 282):

Christians, to use the expression from early detractors of Jesus people, were labeled a "third race." Christians did not disagree with this name calling, but they understood it differently [for] Christians do not follow local customs regarding family and sexual ethics, but all Christians, in no matter what country or nation, follow the same customs following Jesus Christ.[10]

[8] Wu notes that "in speaking of a 'third' race, Tertullian differentiates Jews and pagans." (2015, 239 f.231)
[9] Wa Gatumu, *The Pauline Concept*, 212. He cites Clement, *Stromateis* 6.5.41.6; *Epistle to Diognetus* 1.
[10] Sunquist, *Explorations*, 282.

What were these religious customs? If circumcision marked the Jews as a people, the new Christian practice belief was the circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:29). If Christians indeed are the third race, in which Jews and Gentiles, slave or free, Scythian or Barbarian can enter in to become one, it had its own functional sociological religious markers that allowed foreigners to enter this new community in Christ as that kind of a "race" (see Table 2):

Table 2: Socio-theological markers that brought Jews and non-Jews into a new race

Markers	Process or rituals of creation into a new race
Shared ancestry	"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20-23)
Shared history	"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior" (Col 1:21).
Shared birth	Shared birth "...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit ...So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:5-8).
Shared adoption	"...the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom 8:14-17).
Shared ritual	"For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free" (1 Cor 12:13)
Shared family	God is our "Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15).
Shared faith	"...one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5).
Shared speech/ language	"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths..." (Eph 4:29) See also Eph 4:15, Tit 3:1-2, Jas 1:12.
Shared food	"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:23-25).
Shared future	"...looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10-11).

In these ways, the New Testament laid the socio-theological foundations that indicate how Christians became a new race in the history of the world and a new creature in Christ. At the same time, even as new believers could enter into this new ethnic space to become a new people, "early Christians frequently portray religiosity and ethnicity/race as mutually constituting and, like their contemporaries, treat ethnicity/race as both fixed and fluid" (Buell 2005, 36). In this way, early Christianity accomplished four things: "to assert the fixity of ethnoracial differences between groups, to accomplish ethnoracial fluidity (as a means by which one can change membership), to make links between two or more distinctive ethnoracial groups, and to make differentiations within a group" (Buell 2005, 36). In other words, just as a new race (of Christians by the practice of such new religious customs) was created, it retained enough fluidity to permit newcomers to enter into this new humanity that neither erased their preexisting ethnic identities. In this way, Christianity was both welcoming and outreaching toward ethnic others. "If God is to be more than a tribal deity, then God must be one for all humans... But this particularity... is not rooted in an ethnic or a cultic difference, but in a shared humanity through which God seeks to reach all people" (Johnson 2001, 197). We next examine how the mission enterprise to reach all peoples related to race.

C. Race in Christian Mission Then and Today

The influence of the colonial enterprise and its discourses, structures and practices in racializing society have deeply affected missions. Some mission enterprises perpetuated it while others masked longstanding animosities. For example, in Rwanda (lauded as the most missionized nation in Africa), old tribal animosities between the Hutus and Tutsis resurfaced, resulting in the ethnic genocide of millions (Rutayisire 2012, 243-248). In South Africa, indigenous people were given British names when studying in mission schools (Mandela 1995, 12-14). In the Philippines locals had to dress and behave as Whites as part of the missionary's civilization project. Even in America, Christian ministry and evangelism was stained with racism as churches created and maintained racist ideas, policies, and practices from colonial America up to the twentieth century civil rights movement (Tisby 2019).

In Malaysia, when mission schools enrolled students and entered them into school registrars, they were categorized following the colonial constructs of race that originated from census forms (Chew 2000, 97-99; Hirschmann 1987); students were classified as Malay, Chinese or Indian, mostly omitting the categories for the indigenous people of the land.

If the Malays, Chinese or Indians intermarried, their offspring did not fit into neat Western racial categories because hybrid identities resulting from intermarriages were erased or absorbed into these categories. Consequently, the Peranakan (Malay-Chinese mix), Chitty (Malay-Indian) and Chindian (Chinese-Indian) were excluded from the census forms and marginalized in schools that were later established for only the three races. In the 1970s, the indigenous people, even the Orang Asli, Kadazan and Iban peoples were clumped into one catch-all term, *bumiputra*, meaning 'sons of the soil' or indigenous.

By the 1970s, a recovery by missiologists of such hidden or marginal peoples other than the main racial groups began when the people group concept and the 10/40 window emerged. The recognition there existed diverse ethnolinguistic peoples in every country other than the main 'races' thus raised their profile as distinct people who needed to be reached for the gospel, to be economically empowered and linguistically recognized. The last spurred organisations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators to map such groups that existed and to survey the state of gospel penetration, the translations of Bibles in their language and the existence of churches among them. In this way, missions begun remediating the history of their marginalization.

Even so, the recognition of such groups coincided with the homogenous unit principle – the theological-missiological strategy for evangelism and church growth (McGavran and Wagner 1990, 69-71). The history of its formulation generated heated debates in missiological circles due to the affirmation that monoethnic churches grew the fastest because it naturally drew similar people into their congregations. It was critiqued as such because it was believed to give new Christian sanction to implicit racist ideas of segregated congregations.

While those debates have abated, a new concept, diaspora missiology has now emerged to engage ethnic migrants who reside abroad (Wan 2011, 123-126). Though the charge of racism against diaspora missiology is largely absent, missiologists and practitioners who labour here must avoid the pitfalls of the HUP lest they unwittingly support building only ethnically homogenous migrant churches where whole groups of migrants and their identities are again essentialized as being only of one race and thereby support implicit segregated congregations that are imbued with racism.

Today, even as missionaries enjoy the amenities the globalized world has provided for them to travel affordably, communicate instantly and network effortlessly, globalization also problematizes or dissolves colonial constructs of race such as the people group concept (Park and Lee 2018). As ethnolinguistic groups (once tied to strict

nation-state borders) travel or reside overseas for long or frequent periods to work, study or marry outside their homelands, their overseas born children feel less connected to their parents' homeland, language, food and customs (all of which constitute key elements of ethnic identity). For example, a Malaysian-born Indian who marries a White Australian may have a child who never speaks Tamil but is more fluent in English. Thus, even if we desire to preserve an (idealized) view of pure ethnolinguistic groups among the locals or the diaspora, these understandings are increasingly untenable.

Consequently, we must be cautious to not reify fixed notions of race and ethnicity into our own ideas of evangelistic strategies, church planting and growth. Related to this, contextualization efforts to promote Asian, African or Latin American theology must also be critically analyzed and not assume that cultures are fixed and thereby end up contextualizing stereotypical versions of what these kinds theologies are or must be. If we do this and ignore overlaps or cultural or ethnic hybridizations within or without such groups, we may unwittingly end up with (racist?) essentialized versions of local theologies.

D. How Christians Can Live as the New Race

If Christians are to avoid the sins of the past, we must learn to *be* and *live* as the new race in Christ. Earlier, I remarked that (1) theologically and objectively, we are already one, as a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) and that (2) sociologically and subjectively, there are specific and common practices or rituals that enable us to become one. If such socio-theological markers functioned to structure the formation of a new community in the Old and New Testaments, we can learn from these examples to construct find similar functional rituals and practices that forge the experience of a new race. If these habits are lived in the daily acts of our experience, the reality of a new life together as a new race or peoplehood may be more visibly seen and realized among us (see Table 3 on the next page).

If such a vision and motivation to live as Christians exists in our lives, we must also realize that in order for it to flourish, the larger community in which we are embedded (i.e., Christians in our near social context, churches and other institutional/ organizational supports) is an important factor that creates an environment for its life. Just as the Jews had a covenant community, and the Christians a supporting *ekklesia* of believers, believers today must create a web of relational and socio-religious structural supports for its enablement. If such an atmosphere and life of the new race could

Table 3: Socio-theological markers and practices of peoplehood that are paralleled in Christianity today

Markers	Practices of the 'new race'
Shared ancestry	Treat each other as fellow humans made in the *imago Dei*
Mutual history	Share testimonies and stories of the old life and the new in Christ
Common birth/ birth ritual	Invite Christians of another ethnicity to celebrate birth ceremonies
One family	Refer to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ
Mutual faith	Pray and worship together
Same language/ speech	Study and read Scripture together Speak the language of Christian love, peace and encouragement
Common land/ shared future	Hold loosely national citizenship; look to a shared heavenly future
Same food	Eat together often with others Serve communion one to another (i.e. to ethnic others)
One festival	Invite others to commemorate or celebrate Easter and Christmas together

emerge, grow and become a witness of the new kingdom life in the midst of a hostile empire among the early Christians, there remains hope for Christians today. In whatever circumstances, whether of anti-Christian secular nationalism, ethnoreligious opposition or systemic racist structures, we can draw encouragement and strength that the battle to realize our common community and life in Christ was no different then as it is today.

E. Conclusion

I have discussed how a shared identity is not only theologically established in Scripture, but indicates sociological aspects of how it is structured to forge this shared life and identity. If Christians may act in such ways daily, a renewed vision and evidence of that transformed and reconciled life together in Christ can happen. How we live that out will show which is deeper – our Christian or ethnic identity – and indicate the true foundation and compass of our life.

Christian mission and history also show that missionaries and ministers who affirmed the faith have also failed to live up to its tenets. Indeed, it is our fallenness and inability to treat one another as we would treat ourselves that indicates a right understanding of the theological foundation of our oneness becomes ever more important as a call for repentance, rebirth and renewal among us. Paul writes: "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it in the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). If we cannot complete this work in our strength, we must trust that this is something only God can ultimately do: "And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:22, emphasis mine).

Without the Holy Spirit, such sociological markers and structures to become the new race are merely fleshly acts for the sake of superficial unity. As Christians, we must thus rely on the new power and life given to us by God's Spirit who birthed this new community in Christ at Pentecost; it is this everyday life in the Spirit that sets us apart from others as that new race. However, as a new race, we are also tasked with a new mission (italics my emphasis):

> … you are a chosen race … *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (1 Pet 2:9, ESV).
>
> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and *gave us the ministry of reconciliation … And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation* (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Bosch comments (1987,168):

> In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a new age has dawned, in which Jew and Gentile are joined together without distinction in the one people of God.... And Christ's work of reconciliation does not just bring two parties into the same room that they may settle their differences; it leads to a new kind of body in which human relations are being transformed. *In a very real sense mission, in Paul's understanding, is saying to people from all backgrounds, "Welcome to the new community, in which all are members of one family and bound together by love"* (italics mine).

As a new race called to shine his marvelous light and to reconcile others, our mission begins by reaching out to others in humility, repentance (where our wrongs, past or present, have harmed them) and by doing acts of justice, mercy (Mic 6:8) and reconciliation. By this, we become a unified and transformed community, a people that

answers the prayer of Jesus: "… that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21, emphasis mine).

This transformation does not mean that race no longer matters. It still does, for each of us cannot escape the fact that God has created out of all humankind the diversity of the human race. However,

> [h]uman identity cannot be grounded ultimately in race. The human being is essentially constituted by its relationship to God as the creature, reconciles sinner and glorified child or God. Who we are is determined in and through this relationship and on the basis of this identity we are called to relate to others as those who also belong to God in this three-fold way (Hays 2003, 63 citing Deedo).

And it is for this reason that God chose us to be in Christ in order that we are a chosen race to bear witness of the inauguration of this new kingdom life on earth.

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