

HAYS ESSAY: FROM EVERY PEOPLE AND NATION

In Chapter Two, Hays notably mentions the motion picture *The “Ten Commandments”* starring Charlton Heston. I reminisced about first watching this movie. I was quite surprised and mesmerized by the fact that a young white boy says to his grandfather during the “Exodus,” “Look Grandfather, Nubians.” This scene was my very first introduction to the black presence in the bible. The director, Cecile B. DeMille, may have conferred with biblical scholars regarding the diversity of the Israelites. Hays cites the scholars T.B. Maston (*The Bible and Race*); Dwight McKissic (*The Black Presence in the Bible*), and Millard Erickson (*Christian Theology*) who previously addressed this issue. It was so refreshing to read “From Every Tribe, Every Nation and to see this issue of the “theology of race” being reintroduced into the mainstream church. Daniel Hays, biblical scholar, promotes the tradition of inclusive theology using the historical-critical method in a 21st century church context.

The first biblical quote in the book that resonated with me was Genesis 9:18-27. Verse 9:25 states “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” Hays states “It is necessary to correct one of the most serious and damaging misinterpretations of this text.”¹ Hays cites various 19th century scholars who espoused the erroneous view. He also commended a 19th century biblical scholar, David Barrow, who stated “I am convinced that no passage in the sacred volume of revelation has suffered more abuse than “Noah’s curse or malediction.”² As a young collegiate, I saw a televised debate between a black minister and a white atheist. The white atheist stated, “How can you believe in a book that justifies and condones the enslavement

¹ Daniel J. Hays. *From Every People, Every Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Intervarsity Press: Downer’s Grove, Illinois), 2003.

² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

of Africans?” This debate intrigued me for many years. I vowed to attend Bible Study so I can teach and inform generations younger than myself how to properly interpret this text using sound exegetical analysis. I can proudly state that I am fulfilling my mission. In a 21st context it is imperative to cognizant of Genesis 9:25 which states “Cursed be Cannan” when evangelizing to black youths and young adults. I am also cognizant of informing young Latino, Asian, and Native American Christians about diversity in the bible. Hays does an excellent job of explaining the ethnic origins in the bible. It is pertinent to emphasize the fact that we are all children of Abraham. Hay’s book is a great teaching tool. I would like to use with young adults of all races when teaching bible study.

Hays states “Cultural pre-understanding,” apparently influences many of us in the academic guild even though we often piously claim to historically objective.” Moreover, Hays cites Priest, an 1853 biblical scholar whom he paraphrases as espousing “The truthfulness or infallibility of God’s word’s prophetic statements as contained in scripture is hinged on the acceptance of Negro slavery as the necessary fulfillment of the curse of Ham.”³ As seminarians, we are taught to adhere to “orthodoxy” This includes not interjecting our cultural context into the interpretation of scripture. The book’s recurring theme addresses historical relations between white and black parishioners. In North America. The author acknowledges the fact that they are also ethnic issues in the mainstream church in Africa, Asia, Latin American, and Europe.

The second biblical quote that resonates is Genesis 10 which shows the “Table of Nations.” Hays states “this depicts how the nations of the world descended from the three sons of Noah: Shem Ham Japheth. He states “Most scholars believe Japheth represents the white race, Ham the

³ Daniel J. Hays, p. 53.

black race, and Shem the Semitic race.”⁴ Hays warns against oversimplification regarding race which leads two opposing polarized racial views. Hays viewpoint is well-balanced. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King warns that “black supremacy is just as dangerous as “white supremacy. This is a talking point I use in my ministerial praxis when teaching youths and young adults about the ethnic diversity in the bible. “Throughout the Christian world, Christian communities are struggling to overcome the historical and cultural prejudice that they have inherited and are striving to use the gospel to forge Christian unity in the midst of their cultural diversity.”⁵ It is indeed difficult to encourage unity and inclusion throughout the mainstream church. Hays does an excellent comparative analysis of the Cushites to other ethnic groups mentioned in the Old Testament. Hays solidifies his viewpoint by citing examples of black biblical characters and also refers to Cushites as “Nubians.” Ebed-Melech the Cushite (p. 130); the Ethiopian Eunuch (p. 121); Zephaniah and the Cushite (p. 121) are examples of references to blacks in the bible. In addition, in my Old Testament Studies, the biblical scholar Victor Sassoon, writes an exegetical analysis entitled “Solomon and His Dark Lady.” Other images of black woman in the bible are, Zipporah, the wife of Moses. Hays contends that this shows interracial marriage is permissible. Perhaps, I can use these examples to teach congregants to more accepting of interracial relationships.

The third biblical quote which resonates is taken from Pauline theology. In Galatians 3:28, the Apostle Paul, states “There is neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free, male or female in Christ Jesus.”⁶

⁴ J. Daniel Hays. *From every People, and Nation*. (Intervarsity Press: Downer’s Grove, Illinois), 2003, p. 56.

⁵ J. Daniel Hays. *From every People and Tribe*, (Intervarsity Press: Downer’s Grove, Illinois), 2003, p.

⁶ Holy Bible, New International Version.

Hays does admit that his book should be more inclusive with details regarding Asian and Latinos in the 12th century context. Hays does mention that immigrant churches are thriving. Many churches are interested in diversifying. Hay's recurring theme of diversity in the bible is well-balanced. Hays keeps this in mind and tries to unite the church with beautiful mosaic of Christian love and fellowship. He begins with Genesis and concludes with Revelation. It is so wonderful to read Hay's voice of civility resonating in the unity of the "Holy Spirit" in the Christian Church. Hay addresses three important issues at the conclusion of the book. First, all people are created in the image of God. (p. 202). Second, there are multiethnic elements in the overarching plan of God. Third, God's revelation includes unity across ethnic lines. He states the White Church does not define Christianity. Neither does the Black, Latino, Asian, or Native American Church define Christianity.

Finally, Hays states, "it is incumbent upon us to promote the gospel message through inclusion truly creating what Revelation calls a "New Heaven and a New Earth." This takes work on all levels in the church. Perhaps, we can benefit from the new understanding of the Bible and learn to love each other unconditionally regardless of race. It is interesting that children who are biracial can see how both sides are equally racist. The Apostle John writes "To everyone who believes." Hay's dynamic book helps the gospel message resonate with every nation and every tribe. and admonishes us as ministers, and congregants to do the same..

It is important to note that Hays addresses the issue of explicit bias in the mainstream church. I would like to expound upon the recurring theme in Hay's book It is also important to address an issue that I have been trained on more than once. This is implicit bias. In my ministerial praxis, I would use the 21st century church context to train youths and young adults

on implicit bias. This would be conducted through seminars, questionnaires, workshops, and peer groups.

Finally, I have waited years to hear the mainstream church address the “black presence in the bible.” Hays accomplishes this task with sound exegetical analysis. The establishment of churches that promote cultural inclusion is pertinent in the 21st century is pertinent. However, one must be realistic. There are many who seek to maintain cultural homogeneity in their churches. If some are not receptive, to inclusion, we can do what Matthew 10: 14 says, “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.”⁷ Hay’s book serves a great exegetical tool regarding the “biblical theology of race” and should be a required reading so we can truly become the “Beloved Community” , Jesus Christ preached about in his ministry. I will certainly use this valuable book as a teaching tool in my church on all levels.

⁷ Holy Bible, New International Version.