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Handout on Being Human

CL 8530: Gospel and Cultures

Dwight N. Hopkins. *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

Introduction

Dwight N. Hopkins explores what it means to be a human being in our strife and changing culture in relation to God our creator. There are various ways of defining human being, the author uses his familiar contextual, experiential location (African American group) as a lens to look at such several ways. He tries to give an overview of the developmental history of the world and human society.

He sets out to search for the God-human (especially black) relationship, for authentic theological/anthropological conversation without contradictions in theory and praxis. He said U. S. A.'s theological anthropology is demonic individualism, and blank. It does not like any threat; it uses all forms of media, culture, resources, missionaries, and military to protect such a system of individualistic theological anthropology. The system promotes business and economy at the expenses of others, but with compassion everything should focus to empower and alleviate the poor and the marginalized. He traces a long history of oppression by systems and structures constructed.

Chapter one

He uses several theological anthropological paradigms in his description of what it entails to be a human being. The indigenous people who are not Europeans had a close connection with the spiritual and natural world in understanding their being human, that there is a divine behind the existence things than just the individual or group.

For him the progressive liberals use the experience of the present to see the kingdom of God, which is an influence of the enlightenment. This view was questioning the literary interpretation of the Bible and focusing more on the secular knowledge and power. The west invites others to participate in the anthropological conversation, but there are boundaries created to protect the core interest of the west, and will resist any force or threat to that will affect the system.

For him the post liberals, religion is understood in person's context or culture not by transporting something foreign that has been constructed in a skillful manner. Yet, the use of such diverse way of interpretations can be used differently, and sometimes can be missed understood or misused. Feminists, also discovered that the two arguments above do not give objective realities, hence they all use one patriarchic dominant culture, something is still missing, it is not complete, the inclusiveness is essential so that no group is left out or marginalized.

Under liberation: the contemporary theological anthropologies began as a result of diverse movement of liberation theologies among the people of color. The thoughts of James Cone saw liberation and freedom intertwined in God's saving work in Christ. Christ divinity and humanity serve as a starting point for freedom. Cone indicates that to be free is to be oneself in every form. There is also segregations among people of color

themselves, but liberation theologians focus on issues of marginalization of the whole human person.

Chapter two

Here culture depicts the whole life of people, their beliefs, moral behavior and social life, and government. There is interconnectedness of the spiritual, material, and emotional realities in human activities that form culture.

Hopkins says folktales are major sources of his theological anthropology, it requires to be explained as it connects to other fields. Such folktales provide an understanding of human nature and condition. Culture as a product of human energy, creativity and struggle in both individual self and group selves, this describes real connection between daily life and material possession. He looks at the positioning of ones power in distribution and use of both human and natural resources.

The author points out how network of class relation and culture are connected with ownership of resources, in which class, social, economic, and political differentiations are visible. He said, historically every culture has been modified due to interaction with foreign cultures.

Chapter three

He addresses the issue of self/selves in understanding a person as human being. Descartes says 'I think, therefore, I am.' While the African says 'I am related, therefore we are' / 'I am, because, we are.' Culture is a human production or activity, how it relates to the individual and corporate, an individual is not understood in isolation only, but in relation to group/communal/selves. Christ incarnation into human society of the oppressed is to liberate them. Valuing the other as yourself, helps remove the sense of competition/struggle and prejudice.

However, he recognizes the implications of the idea of community life in the political and economical application, the power to determine who possess what. Theologically, he asserts that God created us and entrusted to us the resources for our collective ownership. He looks at the inseparable African view of the soul and body to see the relationship of divine and human, the divine is interested in person's whole life not jus a part.

Chapter four

Hopkins goes into the in-depth of what the term race implies as understood and used by many people in various contexts. He started with the history of white Christians who came and began to categorize people according to racial groups and hierarchical order by Christians who enslaved others. He said, politically the white majority established a system of supremacy to control others both resources, and sense of worth. Economically they control factories, farms, banks, businesses corporations. Geographically they chose better regions that suit them with cold climates. Biblically for they use Genesis chapter 9 to justify how others are created as sub humans.

The author traces one biological history of human race, by making references to scholars who show that history indicates that human race is traced back to Africa. But

where in Africa precisely is what is unknown. For him race in the US denotes both biological and sociological connections for difference, and also sociological construction aspects are used to draw a line and maintain white supremacy.

He says human history is an idea developed long time in Greek and Roman ancient history, philosophers saw black as inferior, subhuman, unintelligent to claim white supremacy, and was cemented in current civilized society as divinely created. They associated black with chaos, evil, sin, madness and disorder even today.

Philosophers, anthropologists and missiologists maintained the same ideology and went to civilize, educate, and evangelize the rest of the world. An Anglican rector says “Blacks are [were] imperfect in their faculties, strange and barbarous, restless in spirit and indolent, operating by instinct not by reason, all alike savage[sic] and near to animals, serviceable, stupid and squalid,” (155).

Chapter five

To answer the question, what does it mean to be a human being? Partly, his answer is drawn from the pool of different fields of knowledge and every day life of black theological anthropology. Everyday experience in African stories is searching for Christian stories of freedom. Even with the trace of origin, human origin coming from Africa, for him “definition of race goes beyond the one generic earthly human race...race is a shifting signifier based on cultural contexts and the power to define” it (165).

In our modern time power and white supremacy is able to construct a system of philosophy, anthropology, and missiology to convert the world and have a globalize world or village. African Americans formed their African religious cultural folktales to understand the Christian message in everyday life.

For African American despite the evils, hardship, and negative self-esteem, still hope for better future. They see their liberation struggle as a call by God to achieve the original state of human being. Yet, the white continues to deprive the black from accessing or sharing the economic and political power by being on top and the black down blow. Both, the oppressed and the oppressors need to be liberated, when the oppression system is removed. He argues that all human beings are created ‘with a spiritual purpose’ the resources belong to all, not to any one group, and it is ‘nonnegotiable principle’ (168).

Folktales have strong/positive wisdom related to poor and sacred vision, he uses four folktales: = trickster, conjurer, outlaw, and Christian witness. These are healthy theological anthropology to understand what human beings are created to be and do. The stories offer critique of others and the self as well. From these stories of struggle of the weak under the powerful, brings full understanding of what it means to be fully human being.

He was convinced that the spirit of liberation and spirit that opposes liberation affects human situation, it comes in various ways within and outside Christian circle. Being in the image of God enables us to do God’s mission faithfully. We are all created with spiritual purpose to be stewards of God’s creation collectively. God is spirit liberating, for freedom and to live out his image and carry out his mission in the world. Sin gave birth to individual monopoly, to marginalize the majority population. He pointed out how in Genesis God entrusted the garden Eden to us as stewards.