

# Is The Bible The “White Man’s Book?”

By Rev. Sylvester Herbert

From time to time we hear the statement that the Bible is the white man’s book or that Christianity is the white man’s religion. People who say this may mean any or all of the following (1) the Bible was written by white men (and that usually means Europeans); (2) the message of the Bible is skewed in favour of the white man; (3) the white man has used the Bible to oppress other races such as American Indians, African Americans and Afro-Caribbean people; (4) the black presence in the Bible has been suppressed and modern portrayals of biblical characters are made with a decidedly Eurocentric bias.

These issues are significant and deserve to be examined not only for the sake of those persons who have rejected the gospel because of the aforementioned reasons, but also for the sake of the person in the pew whose faith in the Bible is being shaken.

## Was The Bible written by the white man?

Even a cursory study of history reveals that the Bible was not written by Europeans. All the men God used to write the Bible were from Asia. (There were at least 40 different authors over a period of some 1600 years).

Further, an important distinction must be made between writing the Bible and translating the Bible. The writing of the Bible ended in the first century A.D. (the last book to be written was the Revelation of John which, according to scholars, was written no later than AD 90). Down through the centuries, however, many different individuals and groups of people have translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek in which it was first written into the spoken language of their day. For example, the King James Version was translated by a group of 54 scholars (King James authorized that the translation be done but he himself was not among the translators).



## Does the message of the Bible favour the white man over people of colour?

Those who answer ‘yes’ should be prepared to explain the following verse of Scripture: “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works

righteousness is acceptable to him.” Acts 10:34-35. Note also that the Bible lumps everyone together when speaking of sin (Rom. 3:23), salvation (Acts 17:30-31), and judgment (II Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:27)

## Has the white man misapplied the Bible?



The answer to this question is “Yes”. Many white slave owners claimed to be Christians and used the Bible to justify the enslavement of people of colour. It is a historical fact that some of the churches of Christendom collaborated with them. However, we must be careful not to conclude that because the Bible has been misused its message should be rejected. If the whole truth is told we would learn that down through the centuries the Bible has been appropriately used to liberate the oppressed. The Quakers (a religious group) used it to fight slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1789 William Wilberforce gave a 3-hour speech against slavery in the British parliament. He was an evangelical Anglican Christian who belonged to the Clapham sect. Significantly, the very last letter John Wesley wrote was to Wilberforce telling him, “O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.”

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Martin Luther King used the Bible to fight for civil rights in America.

## Is there a black presence in the Bible?

Yes, there is. This should be reflected in the ministry of those who teach and preach the Word in an attempt to dispel the myth that the Bible is the “white man’s book.”



- Moses was married to a Cushite woman (Num. 12:1). The land of Cush in Scripture is most commonly linked to the land of Ethiopia south of Egypt. The word Cush means “black,” and, historically, the Cushites have been dark-skinned.
- The Ethiopian Coptic Church traces its origin to the Ethiopian official who got converted under Phillip’s ministry and “went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:26-39)
- One of the prophets and teachers of the Early Church was Simon also called Niger (Acts 13:1). The name ‘Niger’ means ‘black’ and refers to someone with dark complexion and/or of African descent.

In the final analysis we all need to keep in mind that the Bible is not the “white man’s book” or the book that belongs exclusively to any particular race or ethnic group. As the Word of God, it is the foundation of the Christian faith and applies to everyone everywhere.