

Book Review

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***The Widening of God's Mercy: Sexuality within the Biblical Story.* By Christopher B. Hays and Richard B. Hays. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2024. 288 pages. Hardcover. \$28.00.**

Richard B. Hays, a favorite mainstream New Testament scholar among conservative-leaning biblical students, including the undersigned, now argues that members of the LGBTQ community can find a place in the church alongside those who oppose their way of life. There were negative reactions to his *The Moral Vision of the New Testament Community*, which set forth the traditional biblical view of how men and women relate to one another.¹ Careful readers, he now says, would not have taken what he wrote as a wholesale repudiation of the alternate morality. Both views have a place in the church. *The Widening of God's Mercy* is autobiographical in relating how his son's teaching position at Fuller Theological Seminary led him to reevaluate his views. Those who were once excluded from the church can be included. Hence the title, *The Widening of God's Mercy*, suggests that this book is first of all a theological treatise, to which the biblical evidences are added. For example, the council of Jerusalem removed the requirement of circumcision for Gentile believers seeking baptism. So, he concludes, prohibitions against same-sex relations need no longer apply. In the Old Testament it was required only of those Gentiles who wanted to participate in worship practices that God commanded of the Israelites. Most of Hays' arguments are expositions of those pericopes where once those who were excluded are not included. This is DEI in spades. Left untouched are the critical passages in Romans, which he may have handled in *The Moral Vision*. In several places Hays insists that his views have not changed. Readers, even friends, might be unconvinced. By the Yale University Press providing previews of the book six months before publication, the level of anticipation among Hays' admirers was high as to what the scholar would say, and he says little more than that we should live and let live Christians with different attitudes to

¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

sexual alliances. Richard Hays died on January 3, 2025. One would hope he now has renewed clarity on moral issues.

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