

Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews

Gerhard, J J, SJ 2006 – *The miraculous parallelisms of John*

Publishers: The Orlando Truth. Pages: 168, Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Prof D van der Merwe (University of South Africa)

John Gerhard, a Roman Catholic priest, is a former professor of theology and Biblical studies at St John's University in New York City and has dedicated more than 30 years of full-time research to the analysis of the literary structure of the Fourth Gospel. His analysis was primarily directed at discovering and identifying parallelisms in this Gospel and this book is the result thereof.

The book directly challenges the historical critics and endeavors to demonstrate "that their subjective opinions fail of persuasion". This Gerhard does by trying his best to prove "with detailed and comprehensive objective evidence" that the Fourth Gospel contains an extraordinary display of parallelisms, literary patterns and symmetries. According to him, this demonstrates the brilliance of the author's poetic and literary genius and demonstrates that the claims of the historical critics are in serious error. Gerhard is of the opinion that the continuity of the text of the Fourth Gospel is well ordered and consequently that no dislocations or redactions by editors have destroyed the original continuity of the text.

The book consists of seven chapters preceded by a frontispiece, acknowledgements, author's preface and the actuary's preface. In the "Author's Preface" Gerhard spells out his warrant for writing this book. It was due to the reference of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that the so-called "historical critical methodology" had serious limitations which opened the way for a more literary methodology. Through this book Gerhard tries to bring the historical critical method to trial. He was influenced by the work of J L Kugel who, in 1981 wrote *The idea of Biblical poetry: Parallelism and its history*, in which he explains parallel structure as the uninterrupted flow of text broken into continuous sections of five successive parts, known as pericopes, printed on two horizontal parallel lines. The first three of these are on the top line and the last two along the bottom line of the horizontal parallel lines, as shown in the following example:

Ex: 1_____ / 2_____ / 3_____
4_____ / 5_____

Through his study, Gerhard shows that John not only composed his Gospel in a 3/2 parallelism mode, but that the pericopes (Biblical text) are connected by matching words in a precise manner: Pericope 1 matches pericope 3

Pericope 1 matches pericope 5
Pericope 2 matches pericope 4
Pericope 2 matches pericope 5
Pericope 3 matches pericope 4

The matching words create a literary pattern, a "cyclic net of 5", known as a C_5 pattern. "This demonstrates the elegant complexity of John's literary style. The patterns, each of which looks like a star, and the comments below the patterns, teach us the author's method of composition. Note that the 5 pericopes are unified in the complete pattern, and that the 3/2 parallelism is the surveillance technology for discovering this 'cyclic net of 5' literary pattern, which we have identified as a C_5 pattern for the convenience of reference" (p 11). The "Key Observations to Understanding the Patterns" are spelled out on pages 63 and 64.

In chapter one Gerhard analyzes the literary structure of the Fourth Gospel. Chapter two sketches the historical development of parallelism in the Fourth Gospel. Gerhard describes the symmetric patterns which appear in the Fourth Gospel in chapter three. In chapter four he presents his observations that enhance appreciation for the elegance of the symmetric patterns in the Fourth Gospel. Chapter five includes an actuary's report on the significance of symmetric patterns in the Fourth Gospel. Chapter six, by far the longest chapter, is divided into two sections. Section A comprises the "Foreword to the Symmetric Printing of John Presented in Section B of this Chapter 6" and section B "Evidence Demonstrating the Consistent Appearance of the Symmetric Patterns Throughout the Entire Gospel". Chapter seven closes this discussion with reference to how the symmetric patterns facilitate the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Unfortunately, there is no concluding chapter in which one would expect final conclusions to be made and there is no complete bibliography either. Throughout the book references (e.g. pp 18, 19, 26, 27, 60, 62) have been sporadically added.

Although Gerhard has good intentions, the reviewer unfortunately cannot share in the fantasy and outcomes of this book. Far too many questions remain unanswered. It is true that parallelisms, literary patterns and symmetries frequently occur in the Fourth Gospel (see, for example, the prologue, ch 9 and 17 on chiastic structures), but nowhere does Gerhard define the criteria used to demarcate throughout the Gospel, as he did in chapter six, the five pericopes that form the C_5 pattern. When the five groups of words or phrases that link the pericopes are compared, there is no pattern or logical relationship between them. There is also no consistency in the length of the pericopes; they simply differ too much in length, at times from thirty-nine verses (e.g. p 103) to one verse (e.g. pp 118, 133). If such structures are interpreted as divine inspiration and the inerrancy of the Fourth Gospel, then what about the rest of the New Testament? This, Gerhard does not discuss at all.

It is true that many times scholars who consistently work with the historical critical method take it too far by dissecting Scripture, thereby doing an injustice to the interpretation of its message. Still, the historical-critical method cannot be disregarded because it still has a complementary role to play *together with* other exegetical methods in the process of reading and understanding the text and message of the New Testament.

Unfortunately, this book is disappointing. Its value lies in learning from it how not to force an invaluable device, such as parallelism, on the *whole* of a book. It also emphasizes that in the exegesis of historical texts literary investigation is critically important to do justice to the interpretation and understanding of the text.

Nürnberger, K 2007 – *The living dead and the living God: Christ and the ancestors in a changing Africa*

Publishers: Cluster Publications. 312 Pages: Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Dr J Beyers (Pretoria)

This publication is the result of a lifetime of work by the author in a predominantly African church. His keen interest in the relation between African spirituality and the Christian faith becomes evident in this work. The author attempts to address the interaction between traditionalism and modernity from an African perspective, as well as the interaction between