

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 chiasmic 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 C₅ 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.



Nürnberg, 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

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traditionalism and post modernity. Culture changes and, according to the author, theology have not kept up with the changes. This book is an attempt to catch up with the debate.

Chapter one provides a broad scope of what the author attempts in this book. The terminology is defined in order to prepare the playing field. The book consists of two parts: Part one deals with Traditionalism and the second part addresses Modernity.

In chapter two the author reviews the main aspects of what a traditional African worldview comprises. The traditional African worldview can be described as dynamistic and animistic. The whole universe is filled with an impersonal power influencing the existence of all things. The spirits of ancestors take a prominent place in this invisible spiritual world. All people are dependant on the ancestors' care, protection and advice. All actions taken in life ought to be directed towards the ancestors and guided by them.

This worldview, which is inherently part of African culture, makes it difficult for Christianity to get a foothold. Christ is presented as the ultimate authority and head of his body the church. For Africans it is unthinkable that the ancestors can be replaced, be it by the Son of God.

Although the author endeavors to present a solution to this impasse, he tends to get stuck in the traditional understanding of traditional African spirituality. The author mentions early on in his work that culture changes and this change also happens in African culture. Traditional African spirituality is then merely one (old) layer within the diachronic study of African culture. African culture has been exposed to Christianity for quite some time now. This exposure must have contributed to the change African culture has undergone. This process is not fully taken into account in this work.

In chapter three the author offers what to my knowledge is the best Biblical perspective on the function and role of ancestors. It is clear from Old and New Testament accounts that although ancestors were acknowledged in those times too, they did not take on the status the ancestors do within an African context. The key measure by which the author determines the position of ancestors is to consider the authority they exercise in the lives of their descendants. He reaches the conclusion that ancestors can be recognized, respected and can even serve as a source of inspiration. However, ancestors can never be allowed to intervene in the lives of their descendants. He mentions that in Africa theologians attempt to reconcile Christ's absolute authority with the role of the ancestors by calling Christ "brother ancestor". The author disagrees with such syncretism, but allows it as a metaphor for understanding Christ from an African perspective.

Chapter four turns to a perspective offered from a Lutheran point of view. The Reformation is based on the absolute authority of Scripture, grace and faith in Christ. The dead do not play any role in salvation, nor even in a life of piety. The dead can never usurp the position of authority Christ has.

The author then resorts to a critical discourse with Catholic theology. He criticizes the position of the Pope and the concept of churchly hierarchy. The position and function of the saints are also criticized.

In Part two a perspective from the point of view of modernity is given. It discusses how authority functions within a modernistic world. The author commences chapter five by discussing the main characteristics of modernity, putting the emphasis on the rise of individualism over against the acceptance of objective authority. The clash between traditionalism and modernity is then discussed with special attention being given to the influence on social structure and the position of women. As a conclusion to the chapter the author indicates possible religious reactions to modernity.

Chapter six is an endeavor to provide a key-hole perspective of what lies ahead. Along the lines of economics, sociology and religion the author indicates how modernity eventually leads to post modernity and what effect it has on traditionalism. The conclusion he reaches is that the church is in need of a dynamic theology.

In the last chapter the author provides guidelines on how Christianity should respond to modernity and traditionalism. Not only insights from the past are necessary to understand the position ancestors have in the traditional African worldviews, but the reality of the present and the trends of the future all need to shape Christian thought. From the author's remarks it is clear that he cannot but implore traditional Africans to choose between Christ and the ancestors. Christ is the final and absolute authority. On the other hand, the author challenges Western Christians to open their minds to realize the value of mourning rituals as acknowledgement of the passing away of the deceased.

The value of this work lies in the fact that it presents a balanced evaluation of the position of the deceased in Christianity. Ancestor worship is not dealt with as a simple theological issue that can be neglected. It discusses the complexity and implication of the position of the deceased and presents challenges to all Christians.



Anderson, B W 1988 – *The unfolding drama of the Bible*

Publishers: Fortress. Pages 93. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Dr F J Boshoff (Ermelo)

This booklet is intended as a study guide to assist the reader to fully understand the Biblical message from beginning to end. The study guide originally appeared in 1953 and was reprinted in 1957 and 1971.

Bernhard W Anderson, emeritus professor of Old Testament Theology at the Princeton Theological Seminary distinguishes between two types of Bible study. On the one hand there is what he terms the academic approach, in which the Bible is viewed from the outside as if by an observer.

Then there is the other approach which he advocates, in which the world is observed almost from within the Bible and through the window of Biblical faith. He approaches the Biblical message as a drama in three acts, with a prologue in the beginning and an epilogue as a conclusion. After the prologue, which deals with creation, the genesis, follows the first act which he calls: The *formation* of God's people. This act deals with the exodus from Egypt and the institution of the Covenant. The people's disobedience, decay and injustice signal the end of the first act.

He calls the second act: The *reformation* of God's people. This act deals with the exodus and the return from exile in Babylon. Ezra and Nehemiah take a prominent place on the stage and there is strong emphasis on observance of the Law and of religious rituals. The third act is called: The *transformation* of God's people. This act traces the development of traditional ethnic people into the Christian community of saints and religious people the world over. And so the Church of Jesus Christ appears on the stage. The Acts of the Apostles, in particular, report on the rise and expansion of the Church.

According to Anderson, this Biblical drama does not only have a beginning and a climax, but also a conclusion. All things, history and nature, heaven and earth form part of God's plan, of Him who is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega. The original Paradise is recreated when the Lord says there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Anderson presents this study guide in the form of eight lectures. At the end of each lecture topical questions are listed which lend themselves to discussion in the context of Bible Study.