

University of Pretoria

**READING 1 JOHN IN A ZULU CONTEXT:
HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES**

by

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to read 1 John, a document which was conceptualised almost two thousand years ago in a particularly different context from that of Zulu people into which this venture is undertaken. A number of hermeneutical problems are raised by this kind of reading. Chapter eight of this thesis addresses itself to these problems.

The present dissertation utilises the sociology of knowledge especially Berger and Luckmann's theory of the symbolic universe to investigate the possible social scenario of 1 John into which the conceptualisation and crystallisation of the text of 1 John first took place. The investigation has led the researcher into discovering the abundance of family language and common social conventions relating to family, which the author of 1 John found to be useful vehicles for conveying his understanding of the new situation that had come about as a result of the fellowship eventuating from the acceptance of the gospel.

The same theory of Berger and Luckmann was used to investigate the African (Zulu) scenario with the view to ascertaining whether some form of congruency could be established between the social symbols identified in 1 John and those obtaining in the Zulu context. To ensure that the results of this investigation applied to Zulu people of this day and age, the researcher conducted field research. In doing this, a qualitative approach was followed as it was deemed appropriate for this kind of study. Within the qualitative framework, the focus group interview method was employed. The results were therefore subjected to a process of comparison and synthesis with the views obtaining in 1 John and the Zulu world.

This investigation confirmed our hypothesis that there exists a major of congruency between both universes, that is, 1 John and that of Zulu people, which if properly identified, investigated and exploited, could enhance a smooth construction of a hermeneutical bridge of understanding between the two worlds and enhance a heightened relevance and significance of 1 John's message within the Zulu context. The investigation also revealed some difficulties regarding certain symbols especially those that seek to express the divine reality. The bankruptcy of language to capture and express the divine reality as people perceive it was noted. Our conclusion therefore, was this: inadequate though these symbols might be to express divine reality, at the moments they are given. For instance, within the

Zulu context, a number of symbols could be used to express the reality of the Christ-event. For instance, to mention just a few, the First born son, as well as the Ancestor symbols, both convey something of the reality of Christ but they do not go far enough to express the fullness embodied in the person of Christ.

For that reason it is suggested that we do not shy away from these symbols because of attendant difficulties, but that an informed and critical discussion seeking to reach consensus among all stake-holders be conducted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
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CHAPTER ONE

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Motivation and Background	4
1.3.	Statement of the Problem	7
1.4.	The Objectives of the Study	9
1.5.	The Hypothesis	10
1.6	Significance of the Study	10
1.7	A synopsis of the study	11

CHAPTER TWO

A brief explanation of the Berger and Luckmann's theory that will be used in this thesis.

2.1	Introduction	16
2.2	Theoretical Framework	17
2.2.1	Berger and Luckmann's conception of the Symbolic Universe	17
2.2.1.1	The Symbolic Universe	19
2.2.1.2	The role of language	21
2.2.1.3	Maintenance of the symbolic Universe	22

CHAPTER THREE

Entering 1 John's world with the view to identifying key symbols employed by the author in conveying his message.

3.1	Introduction	24
3.2	The authorship question	24
3.3	In what sequence were they written?	27
3.4	The occasion of 1 John	29
3.5	A brief focused discussion on the basis of a discourse analysis of 1 John.	30
3.5.1	Introduction	30
3.5.2	A discourse analysis of 1 John and brief comments Division One; Cola 1-3; 1 Jn 1:1-4	34
3.5.2.1	Brief remarks about the structure	35
3.5.2.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	38
3.5.3	Division Two; Cola 4-45; 1 Jn 1:5-2:17 Cola 4-17; 1 Jn 1:5-2:2	42
3.5.3.1	Brief remarks about the structure	43
3.5.3.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	44
3.5.3.3	Cola 18-32; 1 Jn 2:3-11	46
3.5.3.3.1	Brief remarks about the structure	47
3.5.3.3.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	48
3.5.3.4	Cola 33-45; 1 Jn 2:12-17	50

3.5.3.4.1	Brief remarks about the structure	50
3.5.3.4.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	53
3.5.4	Division Three; Cola 46-66; 1 Jn 2:18-27	54
3.5.4.1	Brief remarks about the structure	55
3.5.4.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	57
3.5.4.3	Cola 67-75; 1 Jn 2:28-3:3	59
3.5.4.3.1	Brief remarks about the structure	60
3.5.4.3.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	61
3.5.4.4	Cola 76-89; 1 Jn 3:4-10	64
3.5.4.4.1	Brief remarks about the structure	64
3.5.4.4.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	65
3.5.4.5	Cola 90-103; 1 Jn 3:11-18	67
3.5.4.5.1	Brief remarks about the structure	68
3.5.4.5.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	69
3.5.4.6	Cola 104-114; 1 Jn 3:19-24	71
3.5.4.6.1	Brief remarks about the structure	71
3.5.4.6.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	73
3.5.4.7	Cola 115-129; 1 Jn 4:1-6	75
3.5.4.7.1	Brief remarks about the structure	76
3.5.4.7.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	77

3.5.5	Division Four; Cola 130-137; 1 Jn 4:7-11	78
3.5.5.1	Brief remarks about the structure	79
3.5.5.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	80
3.5.5.3	Cola 138-153; 1 Jn 4:12-18	81
3.5.5.3.1	Brief remarks about the structure	82
3.5.5.3.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	83
3.5.5.4	Cola 154- 165; 1 Jn 4:19-5:5	85
3.5.5.4.1	Brief remarks about the structure	85
3.5.5.4.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	86
3.5.5.5	Cola 166-178; 1 Jn 5:6-13	88
3.5.5.5.1	Brief remarks about the structure	89
3.5.5.5.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	90
3.5.6	Division Five; Cola 179-196; 1 Jn 5:14-21	92
3.5.6.1	Brief remarks about the structure	93
3.5.6.2	Descriptive identification of important themes	95
3.5.7	Summary	96

CHAPTER FOUR

A systematic description of the symbolic universe of 1 John and the symbols used by the author in communicating his message.

4.1	Introduction	104
4.2	John's view of the cosmos	105
4.3	The use of symbols and symbolic language	112
4.4	God as a symbol representing the Ultimate reality	116
4.5	Family in the ancient Mediterranean world	117
4.6	God the Father	121
4.6.1	The Father-Son relationship	124
4.6.2	Fellowship with the Father and the Son	129
4.6.3	God and eternal life	133
4.7	God is Light and believers must walk in the Light	135
4.8	The children of God	140
4.8.1	Birth (gennēw)	142
4.8.1.1	Birth in the ancient Mediterranean world	142
4.8.1.2	Birth in 1 John	143
4.8.1.3	What does the statement in 1 John 3:9 mean?	148
4.9	God is love and believers must love one another	150
4.10	How do believers deal with the problem of sin?	155

4.10.1	What is sin?	155
4.10.2	Sin according to 1 John	155
4.10.3	'E ḡn ḡ mol og ḡmen t ḡς ḡ mart. aς ḡm ḡn (1 Jn 1:9)	157
4.10.4	The centrality of blood in the removal of sin	160
4.10.5	Confession of sin	162
4.10.6	Jesus the Parḡkl htoς (1 Jn 2:1), and the fl asmoς (1 Jn 2:2).	163
4.10.7	Witchcraft accusation	166
4.11	The Holy Spirit	169
4.12	Summary	174
4.12.1	Schematic representation of summary	179

CHAPTER FIVE

Schetching briefly the contours of what might be called the symbolic universe of Africa.

5.1	Introduction	180
5.2	What is culture	181
5.2.1	Definitions of culture	181
5.3	The Zulu Conception of God	184
5.4	God in African mythology	190
5.5	The Community	192
5.5.1	The basic importance of the family	192
5.5.2	Birth and belonging	193
5.6	The Ancestors – the Living Dead	197
5.6.1	Respect for the living dead	199
5.6.2	The need for an intermediary/mediator	203
5.6.3	The creation of an ancestor cult	204
5.6.4	The Ukubuyiswa Ceremony	207
5.6.5	The role of the ancestors	209
5.6.5.1	Ancestors as mediators	210
5.6.5.2	The significance of blood in the ancestor cult	211
5.6.5.3	The symbolic use of blood as a means of effecting communication	211
5.6.5.4	The blood of reconciliation	212
5.7	Dealing with sinners	214
5.8	The role of Izinyanga and Izangoma	215
5.9	Summary	218

CHAPTER SIX

Method of data collection and discussion and synthesis of findings

6.1	Introduction	221
6.2	Why have I chosen the qualitative approach?	223
6.2.1	Population Size and Delimitation of the Study	224
6.2.2	Sampling Procedure	224
6.2.3	Method of Data Collection	224
6.2.4	The Instrument	226
6.2.5	A Questionnaire	226
6.2.6	Permission and Ethical Considerations	228
6.2.7	Pilot Study	228
6.3	Discussion and synthesis of the findings	228
6.3.1	Introduction	228
6.4.A	FAMILY	
6.4.A.1	How would you define a family?	231
6.4.A.2	What influence does the family have on the lives of its members?	233
6.4.A.3	What are the functions of a family?	234
6.4.A.4	Do you think it is important for people to belong to a family? If yes or no, why?	234
6.4.A.5	How does one become a member of a family?	235
6.4.A.6	‘Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu’ What does it mean for an individual’s position in the family of community?	237
6.4.B	FATHER	
6.4.B.1	What is the role of the father in a family?	240
6.4.B.1.1	Education of the children	241

6.4.B.1.2	Protection of children	243
6.4.B.1.3	The priesthood of the family	244
6.4.B.1.4	Dispute regarding the father's role	246
6.4.B.3	Could this role be associated with being light?	247
6.4.B.4	What are the implications of seeing the father as light?	247
6.4.C	CHILDREN	
6.4.C.1	What role do children play within a family?	250
6.4.C.2	What, if any, are their obligations as children?	250
6.4.C.3	What do you think would be expected of children or any other member of the family regarding family norms and values?	251
6.4.C.4	Within a family, is anyone allowed freedom to differ? If yes or no, Why?	251
6.4.C.4.1	Children and their responsibilities towards parents	252
6.4.D	DEALING WITH DEVIANTS	
6.4.d.1	How do families deal with those who are disloyal and do not act within the set boundaries?	254
6.4.D.2	What word would you use to describe a 'disgusting action'?	255
6.4.D.3	What would be required of a member who wants to be restored into fellowship?	256
6.4.D.4	Why would the confession of sin/deed be required of him/her?	257
6.4.D.5	What is the value of confession?	257
6.4.D.5.1	The problem of sin	258
6.4.D.6	If an offence is of a very serious nature, what would be required of the offending party?	260
6.4.D.7	What is the significance of the blood of a slaughtered animal in the restoration and mending of broken relationships?	261

6.4.D.7.1	The importance of blood	261
6.4.D.8	How do you understand salvation in your society?	262
6.4.D.8.1	Salvation in traditional Zulu society	262
6.4.E	AMADLOZI/ABAPHANSI/ ABAXHUMANISI	
6.4.E.1	Who are the ancestors?	264
6.4.E.2	What was/is their role?	264
6.4.E.3	Some people call ancestors their gods ‘onkulunkulu bethu’ what do you think of this view?	264
6.4.E.4	What are they to you?	265
6.4.E.5	Are there special occasions when they get involved with the living or do they do that on a continuous basis?	265
6.4.E.6	Do ancestors play any mediatory role for the living?	265
6.4.E.6.1	Christian participation in ritual sacrifices	269
6.4.E.7	What role do ancestors play in the forgiveness and restoration of one who had sinned?	273
6.4.E.8	What kind of behaviour would be expected of those who would be ancestors?	274
6.4.E.9	What is the place or role of the following in your culture and to you as an individual, Deviners (Izangoma) and traditional doctors Izinyanga)?	274
6.4.F	GOD	
6.4.F.1	Who is God to you?	277
6.4.F.2	What are the qualities of God which are associated with a conventional symbol represented by the father in your cultural context?	278
6.4.F.3	What is the significance for all humanity fo viewing God as Father?	280
6.4.F.4	What doe the word love mean to your and why would you associate God with love?	282

6.4.F.5	What are the implications of viewing God as love?	283
6.4.F.6	Why do people associate God with light?	283
6.4.F.7	What are the implications of viewing God as light?	284
6.4.F.8	Who is Jesus to you?	284
6.4.F.9	What conventional symbol do you think would best represent Jesus within your culture?	284
6.4.F.9.1	The Black Messiah	285
6.4.F.9.2	The Elder brother	289
6.4.F.9.3	Christ as proto-ancestor	291
6.4.F.9.3.1	A need for a strong alternate symbol	292
6.4.F.10	Who is the Holy Spirit to you?	294
6.4.F.11	What conventional symbol do you think would best represent Christ in your culture?	296
6.4.F.11.1	The symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit in Zulu society	296
6.5	A nagging question	302
6.6	Some preliminary observations on the two symbolic universes	304
6.7	Summary	308

CHAPTER SEVEN

Hermeneutic issues raised by our reading of 1 John in the Zulu context.

7.1	Introduction	310
7.2	Who is the reader?	312
7.2.1	The first reader	313
7.2.2	The second reader	315
7.2.3	The third reader	317
7.3	Hermeneutics in context	319
7.4	Describing the process	322
7.5	Which dominates the reading experience, the text or reader?	323
7.6	Language as a hermeneutic requirement	327

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Recommendations 337

Bibliography 339

Annexures 379