

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.

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