

2007 **The living dead and the living God**: Christ and the ancestors in a changing Africa (For bibliographical detail see list of publications)

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It is well known that ancestor veneration, belief in spirits and traditional approaches to healing play a significant role in mainline churches in many parts of the world. Because such beliefs are usually hidden or repressed, they are causing agonies of conscience and theological confusion among lay members and church leaders alike. We must take this dimension of spiritual reality more seriously, overcome prejudices and taboos, bring secret practices into the open and find theological solutions to the underlying problems.

Having worked in a predominantly African church for a considerable time of my life, I have taken a keen interest in the relation between African spirituality and the Christian faith. I have also worked extensively on the basic assumptions of modernity and its socio-economic consequences.

Concern for cultural identity is certainly not irrelevant. But culture is not something static. Modernity has hurled us into a process of accelerating change in all spheres of life. Theology appears to have been left behind at the airport, while the Jumbo is roaring away. That is why the book has two parts: one on traditionalism, focusing on submission to authority, the other on modernity, focusing on rejection of authority.

In the first part I listen to African spirituality, the biblical witness and the Reformation. My conclusion is that the missionary gospel did not respond adequately to African spiritual needs. Because Christ is remote ancestors continue to be the last resort in times of crisis. In the second part I listen to modernity and postmodern trends. I argue that traditionalism is an obstacle to the modern urge to conquer the future rather than preserving the past.