

LIFE AND DEATH: A BIBLICAL VIEW IN AFRICAN CONTEXT

By Gideon Banda, DrApol

For the Church Family, Crossroads Fellowship, Nyali

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Thesis: It is here proposed that biblical Christianity is supra-cultural and ought to form the framework for interpreting all of life. The Christian in the African context is called upon to seek clarity of worldview, with a particular emphasis on the pursuit of a transformed mind that thinks biblically about all of life, and death.

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I. Introduction

a. The Necessity of this paper

In its almost twelve years of existence, Crossroads Fellowship has experienced the occurrence of death. However, in the last almost eight months prior to the writing of this paper, the church has coincidentally had three deaths. All who died were relatively young married ladies who were involved in the church at one level or another. This has raised unrest and unsettled many in the church. Rumours about devil worship and the so-called “Spirit of Death” doing round in our church started to do the rounds and hurt the bereaved deeply. As a pastoral team, we had no choice but to respond to this. We consider this a unique opportunity in God’s providence to teach the Church about thinking biblically, simple rules of Bible interpretation and so on. While so much more could be said on the subject, the scope of this paper is limited to the biblical interpretation of life and death in an African context.

b. Presuppositions of the Paper

The paper takes a biblical and evangelical stance. We come from the presupposition that the Bible is the final authority in all matter of life and doctrine. We believe in the verbally and plenary inspiration of the Bible. Because of this we have a very high view of the authority of Scripture to supersede culture. We see God as calling people from all cultures to a ‘new culture’ the ‘Christ culture’. The Christian life consists of a conscious process of shedding of cultural thinking that is contrary to Scriptural ‘culture’. It is here proposed that biblical Christianity is supra-cultural and ought to form the framework for interpreting all of life. The Christian in the African context is called upon to seek clarity of worldview, with a particular emphasis on the pursuit of a transformed mind that thinks biblically about all of life, and death.

II. Life in ATR

a. ATR

The difficulty to define ATR seems to come from the fact that its propagation is carried out by living it other than by preaching it. Its followers are more preoccupied with its practice than with its theory. In ATR, dogmas and doctrines have a very little role to play in the life of its followers. Its definition becomes even more difficult because of its integral / holistic character. There is no separation between the religious (sacred) and the profane. Its influence covers all aspects of life, from before the birth of a person to long after he/she has died. It is a way of life and life is at its centre. It is concerned with life and how to protect it and augment it. Hence the remark such as: For the African, religion is literally life and life is religion.

Indeed as Father Nnuombi rightly put it, “Whoever, therefore, is looking for a single, simple and precise definition of ATR will most likely end up being disappointed! But, it is possible to find ATR and observe its influence if one knows where to look for it.”¹

While generalizations of African Traditional religions are difficult, due to the diversity of African cultures, they do have some characteristics in common. Generally, they are oral

¹ ‘Missionaries of Africa : African Traditional Religion’
<<http://www.africamission-mafr.org/atrgb.htm>> accessed 13 May 2014.

rather than scriptural, include belief in a Supreme Being, belief in spirits and other divinities, veneration of ancestors, use of magic, and traditional medicine.²

b. Source of Life

Most African Traditional Religions believe in a supreme being and a multiplicity of divinities. This primary Supreme Being is believed in many African religions to be the creator of all things, including human life.

c. Meaning of Life

African concept of life based in Francis Njoku's four point's basis of life as follows:

- a. That God is the originator of life,
- b. The ancestors are still involved in the communal lives of their people,
- c. That life is meaningless without land
- d. That life is a communal affair which involves relationships that are based on certain laws for mutual benefits and success.³

Man is in the centre of African universe and everything seems to be related to him. Religion has then a functional value – it is to help people to acquire earthly goods and to maintain social order. Everything around man that enhances his life force is desirable and everything that destroys it or diminishes is to be avoided.

d. Destiny of Life

The goal of life in ATR is to become an ancestor after death. This is why every person who dies must be given a "correct" funeral, supported by a number of religious ceremonies. If this is not done, the dead person may become a wandering ghost, unable to "live" properly after death and therefore a danger to those who remain alive.⁴

In ATR people believed that life was cyclic. A person could be reincarnated in a child through the process of naming and in such a way he continued to exist. Hence, to be named after was very important. The living wanted to make sure that after their death, their family members would like their children to be named after them. The only way to ensure it was to live an exemplary life. If one was a bad person here on earth, after his death, the living did not want to name their child after him, since the child was believed that, through the naming process would inherit some qualities of the deceased person.

Depending on how one lived his life, the funeral would be conducted in such a way as to make it easy for the dead to 'come back' or not. Many African people have a custom of removing a dead body through a hole in the wall of a house, and not through the door. The reason for this seems to be that this will make it difficult (or even impossible) for the dead person to remember the way back to the living, as the hole in the wall is immediately closed. Sometimes the corpse is removed feet first, symbolically pointing away from the former place of residence. A zigzag path may be taken to the burial site, or thorns strewn along the

² 'Traditional African Religion - Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia.htm'.

³ 'Njoku, F.O.C. Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology. Owerri: Clacom, 2002. - Google Scholar' <http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&q=Njoku%2C+F.O.C.+Essays+In+African+Philosophy%2C+Thought+And+Theology.+Owerri%3A+Clacom%2C+2002.&btnG=&as_sdt=1%2C5&as_sdtp=#> accessed 13 May 2014.

⁴ 'African Religions - Rituals, World, Burial, Body, Funeral, Life, Customs, Beliefs, Time' <<http://www.deathreference.com/A-Bi/African-Religions.html>> accessed 13 May 2014.

way, or a barrier erected at the grave itself because the dead are also believed to strengthen the living. Many other people take special pains to ensure that the dead are easily able to return to their homes, and some people are even buried under or next to their homes.⁵

III. Death in ATR

a. The Association of death with evil

The origin of death is described in many African myths. In most of them death is conceived as something that came as a result of some mistake. Death was not supposed to be a part of human life. The blame for it is laid on some animal, on people or on some spirits.⁶ In general death is not considered as a natural event but tends to be seen as 'caused' by some external forces such as witches, spirits or curse.⁷⁸ The first instinct in ATR is to question the source of death. This is especially true when death appears to be sudden or perpetual.

b. Life After death

In ATR those who die go on to become the living dead and later on ancestors. There are good and evil living dead and ancestors all depending on how they lived their lives on earth. Dr. Gehman explains:

Wherever the living dead are, their abode is modelled after the pattern of the living. The herd-boy herds the goats and sheep, the women hoe their gardens and reap the crops, the men delight in their cattle, the villagers gather for discussion in the evenings... There is no division of the dead on the basis of character. Apart from witches and outcasts, all the living-dead, good and bad, live together in the world of spirits. Their character is much the same as in this life, partaking of jealousies and offended feelings like the living. Although the ancestral spirits partake of increased power and knowledge, the state of the ancestors is nothing to be desired... A Tschwi proverb states 'One day in this world is worth a year in Srahmandazi (the underworld)', Gehman (1989, p. 140).

God is beyond and in African concepts there is neither hope nor possibility that the soul would attain a share in the divinity of God... Death is death and the beginning of a permanent ontological departure of the individual form from mankind to spirit hood.⁹

More than any other force, the ancestors are the protectors of the society as well as its most feared direct critic and source of punishment. Above all, they are the direct watch-dogs of the moral behaviour of the individual, the family, the clan and the entire society with which they are associated. No serious misbehaviour or anti-life attitude among their descendants, in thought, word and deed, escapes their gaze. The ancestors are in a real sense "authority figures, who maintain the norms of social action and cause trouble when these are

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mbiti, J.S, *Introduction to African Religion*. (Second, East African Educational Publishers, Ltd 1975). pp. 116-117.

⁷ Ibid. p. 118.

⁸ Gehman, R.J, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*. (East African Educational Publishers, Ltd 1989).p. 54.

⁹ Mbiti, J.S (n 6). P. 163. 165

not obeyed.” There is no end to the interwoven relationships. It is a continuous process that has no end.¹⁰

c. An Evaluation

Because of the centrality of human existence, death and what follows it is not desired because the life here on earth is at the centre of human existence. This is accentuated by the association of death with evil.

Moreover, African eschatology as encapsulated in ancestral belief and worship is borne in two principal ideas (i) that "those who have gone before" have a continuing and beneficent interest in the affairs of the living; and (ii) more widespread, uneasiness or fear of the dead, with practices to placate them.¹¹

IV. The Biblical View of Life

a. The Source of Life

All things were created and brought into existence by the will of God (Rev. 4:11; Eph. 3:9; Gen. 1:1). As the maker is master of what he has made, so God is sovereign over the whole of his creation. Created reality is the expression of the divine will, and in its cosmic perfection it reflects the perfect order of the divine mind. As, moreover, nothing that God does is aimless or futile or without purpose, so creation, designed in accordance with the will of God, is conformed to the purpose of its Creator.¹²

b. The Meaning of Life

Scripture informs that God created man in his own image and likeness thus giving humans as the highest place in earthly creation. As summarized in the shorter Westminster Catechism, the chief end of man is to know God and to glorify him forever.¹³ Knowing God entails coming into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, God’s Son and God’s Ultimate revelation of Himself to humanity.

c. The Destiny of Life

Bible history indicates that the goal of history is the restoration of all things to the will of God. After the fall of man that brought corruption in all areas of life in the universe, God embarked on the revelation of his restoration plan. The destiny of human life is eternity either with God or away from God in eternal damnation. Through a relationship with Christ, one acquires new spiritual life, eternal life (John 5:24).

¹⁰ ‘AFRICAN ESCHATOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF THE COSMOS’
<<http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/raymond/Journal%20of%20Arabic%20and%20Religious%20Studies.htm>> accessed 20 May 2014.

¹¹ ‘African Eschatology and the Future of the Cosmos by Raymond Gunade - Google Scholar’
<http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=African+eschatology+and+the+future+of+the+cosmos+by++Raymond+Gunade&btnG=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5> accessed 13 May 2014.

¹² ‘The Sovereignty of God - Philip Edgcumbe Hughes’

<<http://www.thehighway.com/articleMay99.html>> accessed 13 May 2014.

¹³ ‘Westminster Shorter Catechism - Google Scholar’
<http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Westminster+Shorter+Catechism&btnG=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5> accessed 13 May 2014.

V. The Biblical View of Death

a. What it is

Death means “separation” regardless of the type of death involved. Death is never cessation of existence, nor is it cessation of consciousness.

James 2:26 says: “the body without the spirit is dead.” Whenever there is a separation of the spirit of a man from his body, at that moment death takes place. Just as long as the spirit of a man inhabits the body and is not separated from it, there is life.

In Luke 16 we read the account of the rich man who died and went to Hades. There in Hades (i.e. his soul was in Hades and his body was buried in the ground) he was in torment. He realized also that the beggar that sat at his gate and ate the crumbs from his table was in Abraham’s bosom. He could reason and think. He desired water and someone to return back from the dead to warn his brothers of this place. There was full consciousness of being, thinking, feeling, and remembering.¹⁴

There are three important types of death in the Word of God: spiritual death, physical death and eternal death. Each death is separation, is the result of sin, and has its remedy in Christ.

i. Spiritual Death

Spiritual death is “separation from God in time.” The moment Adam and Eve sinned they died toward God. Adam and Eve died spiritually right away and this is seen in the fact that they hid themselves from God. They had a nature that was contrary to God’s nature and that nature, now fallen, found no fellowship with God. The life Adam and Eve possessed did not respond to the life possessed and enjoyed by God. God had not died. Man had died spiritually. No longer did he have spiritual life; he was spiritually dead.

God’s work is to undo the work of sin and death, and the remedy for spiritual death is spiritual life. The word “quickened” is an old English word meaning “to make alive.”

Ephesians 2:1, “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

Ephesians 2:4-6, “We who were dead, have been “made alive.” Salvation is the work of God. Only God can give spiritual life in the place of spiritual death.”

John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from [out of] death unto [into] life.”

Once we were in the state of death, but by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ we leave that sphere once and for all and we enter into life with God and all that it entails.

Many individuals who have been born once never realize that they are dead toward God. But whether they feel it or not, they are—and God says they are.

¹⁴ ‘The Death of Death | Bible.org’ <<https://bible.org/article/death-death>> accessed 13 May 2014.

ii. Physical Death

Physical death is the separation of the spirit and/or soul from the body. James 2:26 says, “The body without the spirit is dead.” Whenever the soul leaves the body, physical death ensues.

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,” (Romans 5:12).

Physical death in the world is the result of the sin of one man—Adam. To be “in Adam” is to be under the sentence of death. The genealogy of Adam is given in Genesis 5. “This is the book of the generations of Adam” (v. 1). As we read on in this book we read over and over that short phrase: “And he died.” This is the book of death.

But there is another book. In Matthew 1:1 we read the only other time the same phrase occurs: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ.” To be “in Christ” is life and peace. As in Adam all die; in Christ all shall be made alive. Listen to these words of Paul: “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). Because Jesus Christ lives, we shall live also (John 14:19). Even though we may die, we await that future day of our resurrection or the complete redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). God’s remedy for physical death is resurrection.

iii. The Second Death or Eternal Death

This death is spoken of in Revelation 20:12-15, and it refers to “eternal separation from God.” This state is spoken of as that of perishing.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14-16).

1. It is spoken of as hell or gehenna. It is a place of torment prepared for the devil and his angels—a lake of fire—where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

2. It is spoken of as a place of utter darkness (Jude 13).

3. It is a place where in eternity will be found “the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters and all liars, [all of these] shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 22:8).

b. How Death came about

From the Biblical perspective, death occurred because “sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Rom 5:12). In phenomenological terms, death is therefore the loss of the function of the conscious spirit due to

separation. And earlier noted, Physical death, spiritual death and second death are the ways the Scripture illustrates the mortal destiny of human beings.¹⁵

Death was not in God's design. John Lawrence ably explains this:

Death was something totally foreign to God's creation. God is life and He had constructed the world in accordance with His own nature of being. The world that God had made was "very good"—a statement that could not be made when death entered upon the scene. What a change was brought into the world by man eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil! God has said, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." "At the moment in time that you do what I have commanded you not to do, dying you shall die." Death was the instantaneous result of disobedience.¹⁶

c. The Defeat of death

In Biblical thinking, death is overcome, it no longer frightens or baffle the believer in Christ. When Jesus Christ went to the cross, He did a perfect work in reference to death. His death was to ultimately be "the death of death."

First of all by partaking of the death of separation from God, He tasted death for every man. No man need taste the fires of hell. The lake of fire was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). Second, Christ went through death in order to be the victor over death.

While everyone else was a slave to death, He conquered death so that death was subject to Him and not He to it. Death is now the Lord Jesus Christ's servant, and He is its Master and Lord. This was not always true. This is why we read in Hebrews 2:14, "For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).¹⁷

d. The current function of death

The Apostle Paul saw death as a 'departure' (Philippians 1:23). He does not see death as annihilation. Death is not someone being snuffed out. "I desire to depart," says Paul. The word is used of soldiers striking camp, packing up their 'earthly tents' and moving on to their final destination. They once were staying at that spot, but now they have gone – somewhere else. It is not that they have ceased to exist. The word 'depart' conveys the idea of leaving something permanently behind... Paul suggests that ... Christians break camp to be with Jesus, while all that is not useful lies behind – all of the sin, all of the pain, all of the care and anguish of this world." So Paul's longing was to 'depart' from this uncertain earthly pilgrimage to his home: "Man goeth to his everlasting home" (Eccles. 12:5).¹⁸

It will suffice briefly to indicate here some of the blessings also associated with death:

¹⁵ *Eschatology in an African Christian Perspective. Jean-Marie Hyacinthe Quenum, S.J.(Academia.edu)*

¹⁶ 'The Death of Death | Bible.org' (n 14).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ (James Montgomery Boice, "Philippians," Baker Books, 1971, p.82)

- 1) Death is a blessing to the Christian because, through its contemplation, his sanctification and purification in this life is carried forward. This contemplation of it includes all aspects in which it presents itself, whether painful or otherwise.
- 2) It is a blessing because in it he looks forward to the attainment of final freedom from sin and to perfect sanctification.
- 3) It is a blessing because he recognizes it as the portal to the possession of eternal life.
- 4) Death is a blessing because it gives him an opportunity of giving strong testimony in favour of Christ and his religion.
- 5) It is felt to be a blessing because it opens the doors to immediate conscious personal presence with his Saviour.¹⁹

VI. The Sovereignty of God over Life death

The sovereignty of God is the absolute authority, rule, and government of God in the whole of that reality that exists distinct from Himself. It respects His relation to other beings and to all other being and existence.²⁰ As John Calvin so eloquently taught, all events are governed by the secret counsel and directed by the present hand of God, and that God's omnipotence is not the vain and idle possession of potency but power that is "vigilant, efficacious and operative", "a power constantly exerted in every distinct and particular movement".²¹ "Whence we assert", he continues, "that not only the heaven and the earth, and inanimate creatures, but also the deliberations and volitions of men, are so governed by his providence, as to be directed to the end appointed by it."²²

The meaning of sovereignty could be summed up in this way: To be sovereign is to possess supreme power and authority so that one is in complete control and can accomplish whatever he pleases.

A number of similar definitions of sovereignty can be found in books on the attributes of God:

"The dictionaries tell us that sovereign means chief or highest, supreme in power, superior in position, independent of and unlimited by anyone else."

"Furthermore, His sovereignty requires that He be absolutely free, which means simply that He must be free to do whatever He wills to do anywhere at any time to carry out His eternal purpose in every single detail without interference. Were He less than free He must be less than sovereign.

Grasping the idea of unqualified freedom requires a vigorous effort of the mind. We are not psychologically conditioned to understand freedom except in its imperfect forms. Our concepts of it have been shaped in a world where no absolute freedom exists. Here each natural object is dependent upon many other objects, and that dependence limits its freedom."

¹⁹ 'Founders Ministries | Boyce's Abstract of Systematic Theology--Chapter 39' <<http://www.founders.org/library/boyce1/ch39.html>> accessed 13 May 2014.

²⁰ 'The Sovereignty of God by John Murray' <http://www.the-highway.com/sovereignty_Murray1.html> accessed 13 May 2014.

²¹ 'The Institutes of the Christian Religion - Online Library of Liberty' <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/calvin-the-institutes-of-the-christian-religion>> accessed 13 May 2014.

²² Ibid.

“God is said to be absolutely free because no one and nothing can hinder Him or compel Him or stop Him. He is able to do as He pleases always, everywhere, forever. To be thus free means also that He must possess universal authority. That He has unlimited power we know from the Scriptures and may deduce from certain other of His attributes.”

Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares: ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’ (Isa. 46:10); ‘He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand’ (Dan. 4:34). Divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the Throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things ‘after the counsel of His own will’ (Eph. 1:11).”

“God’s supremacy over the works of His hands is vividly depicted in Scripture. Inanimate matter, irrational creatures, all perform their Maker’s bidding. At His pleasure the Red Sea divided and its waters stood up as walls (Ex. 14); and the earth opened her mouth and guilty rebels went down alive into the pit (Nu. 14). When He so ordered, the sun stood still (Josh. 10); and on another occasion went backward ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz (Isa. 38:8). To exemplify His supremacy, He made ravens carry food to Elijah (I Kings 17), iron to swim on top of the waters (II Kings 6:5), lions to be tame when Daniel was cast into their den, fire to burn not when the three Hebrews were flung into its flames. Thus ‘Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places’ (Psa. 135:6).”

Accordingly, we find that as Creator God also sustains his creation. Not only were all things brought into being through the Word, who is God the Son (John 1:3), but the Son also upholds the universe by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3—where the sense of the Greek verb is not static but dynamic: he bears the universe onward to its destined goal). A father who begets a son also cares and provides for him; how much more does God care and provide for his creation! This is what we mean when we speak of divine providence; for providence is the corollary of creation. The whole created order is totally dependent on God not merely at the moment when it is brought into being, but at every moment for the continuation of its existence. The psalmist expressed this truth in the following words:

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy creatures. . . . These all look to thee to give them their food in due season. When thou givest to them, they gather it up; when thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good things (Ps. 104:24, 27f.).²³

In view of such a high view of the sovereignty of God, death has been completely changed for the believer, not only because Jesus Christ conquered death and is sovereign over death, but because now, in the life of the believer, it could actually be said that Jesus Christ is the cause of death. You may ask: “How can this be such a wonderful truth?” First let us see that it is true in Scripture, and then contemplate why it is so very precious.

This truth that the Lord Jesus, and not Satan or any evil force is responsible for the death of believers is verified not only by His having the keys of death but also by what we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. We read in verse 13 that we are not to sorrow for those who have fallen asleep in Christ as others do which have no hope, “for if we believe that Jesus died and rose

²³ ‘The Sovereignty of God - Philip Edgcumbe Hughes’ (n 12).

again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” The phrase that is so important is “sleep in Jesus.”

The Revised Version margin reads: “through Jesus” and does so because this is the literal rendering of the phrase in the Greek. Paul knew the preposition for “in” and he could have certainly used it here if that was what he intended, but he did not. He plainly said these who are believers “sleep through Jesus.” This signifies causative action. Jesus is the one responsible that they fell asleep before He returned. He is, moreover, not just indirectly responsible, but directly responsible for their death.

This is the way all of the early Greek writers understood the phrase, and they certainly knew their language. Later in church history men wanted to find some other way of rendering this Greek construction, because to understand it as “through Jesus” made Jesus Christ responsible for the believer’s death. Yet it is a parallelism: “God will bring with Him—those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.”

What men have failed to realize is that if Jesus Christ is not responsible for the believer’s death, then there is only one other who can be, and that is the devil himself. While the devil was responsible for causing death at one time (John 10:10), this is no longer so for the Lord’s child. By the authority of the Word of God, any believer who dies, regardless of how he dies, dies because “Jesus” took him home to be with Him.

This precious truth should give us a whole new understanding of death for the child of God. Satan is not responsible for the death of believers. Fate is not the cause for a person dying. “Jesus” is.²⁴

VII. Conclusion: A call to biblical thinking

a. Introspection of worldview

A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it. This vision may be so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned; it may be greatly refined through cultural-historical development; it may not be explicitly developed into a systematic conception of life; it may not be theoretically deepened into a philosophy; it may not even be codified into creedal form. Nevertheless, this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged, the standard by which reality is managed and pursued. It is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.

A call is made here to make a conscious effort on the part of the reader, especially to Evangelical African Christians to evaluate whether there still remains some ATR presuppositions that inform how they feel, act say in the face of death. Indeed, Unless people are able to refocus and make sense of reality again, whether through new understandings, revisions of old views, or by adopting a new vision, they are likely to suffer breakdown by changing worldviews, and yet the Gospel is so powerful that in it comes grace that makes the

²⁴ ‘The Death of Death | Bible.org’ (n 14).

transformation of our minds possible and not damaging to us, rather edifying and enlightening.

b. **Renewal of minds: Romans 12:1-2**

It's all in the mind, it all starts in the mind. The human mind is such an important factor in spiritual life that mind-related words are used hundreds of times in the Bible:

- Mind/Minds 111 times
- Thought/Thoughts 139 times
- Think/ thinks 82 times
- Heart/ hearts 963 times

In reference to Romans 12:1-2, presentable bodies come from changed minds because the mind controls the body. Verse 2 gives the means by which we can carry out the sweeping exhortation of 12:1. There are two commands, one negative one positive. In 12:2a Paul continues his thought from 12:1 by using the word “and”: “And do not be conformed to this world.” The term “conformed” (suschematizo) literally means to be moulded or stamped according to a pattern. The verb is passive, implying that if you don't actively and intentionally resist this age, you will be conformed. As the Phillips translation reads: “Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.” Paul's use of “world” is not a reference to planet earth, but rather to the world system (lit. aion = “age”). Being conformed to this age refers to having the same type of thinking as this age. Age could be the socialization, culture, upbringing, or anything else that influences our worldview that is contrary to biblical thinking. This is a call to transformation to biblical thinking particularly about death.

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