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“Death and Funeral Rites of the Dagara People of Ghana in the Celebration of the Roman Funeral Liturgy: An Approach towards Inculturation”

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late parents Mr. Albano Gbal, Mrs. Clarissa Gbal and my late brother Vitalis Gbal. I also dedicate it to my sisters Emelia, Matilda and Monica. Their love and sacrifices for me know no bounds.

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I. General Introduction

The study realized in this paper focuses on a very important phase of human life, namely death and funeral celebration in the context of the Dagara people of North-West part of Ghana. Here, a typical Dagara funeral is studied in the light of the Christian funeral liturgy in view of a possible inculturated funeral rite of the Dagara people.

The discovery of Africa and other continents by the Europeans was not solely for economical and political interests but also religious. The Christian religion as brought by the Western missionaries with a matter of time has found its roots in the African soil. In other words, the Christian religion has come to stay. It has been able to win the hearts of many Africans and in so doing has affected also their ways of life. It is really a fact that Christianity was brought by foreigners to the African soil, but the Christian religion does not have to remain foreign. This implies that there is an urgent need of attention to be given to the African culture in order to aid the African Christians to engage in meaningful worship and in exercising their faith. In other words, there is the need for a meaningful inculturation of the Christian faith that will give it a true African out-look.

In reality, the process of inculturation started not just with the Second Vatican Council, or with the numerous books that have been written on the subject, but from the very day that the seed of the Christian faith was sown on the African soil. What one should not forget is the fact that the people who were converted were Africans and remained Africans and worship as Africans. Moreover, the most important tool of any culture is the language, and the language that was used in the liturgy was the local language. This goes a long way to explain the fact that from this very moment the process of inculturation started. On this we can agree with Amaladoss that: "A community that responds to the gospel does so in terms of the culture that shapes its life."[1]

It is a fact that some missionaries were very reticent to some aspects of the African culture which they erroneously thought were devilish, but that could not stop the faith from being influenced by the African cultures. Today one can see in the African Churches the use of local African materials for worship such as locally made vestments and vessels. The music is truly African with drumming and dancing. These and many others point to the fact that inculturation actually began before it was talked about and books written about it or popes and councils decreed on it. Nevertheless, a lot still needs to be done on the conscious and official level to enhance the natural flow of the process of

[1] Amaladoss M., Beyond Inculturation. Can the Many be one, Noida 1998, 16.

inculturation, as it is sad to notice that the process is rather too slow. In this light the challenge is thrown to the African people to translate the numerous works on inculturation into actual practice in their worship. Otherwise, inculturation would be a great failure if it only remained in the textbooks of theologians. Thus, the aim of this work goes beyond a theoretical discussion on the topic of inculturation. It is geared towards a pratical application of inculturation in the area of funeral among the Dagara in the Upper West part of Ghana: a people who have embraced the Catholic Christian faith but live with very complex funeral rites and traditions.

The reality of Death is no news to the human society and it seems to be the most obvious and the most dreaded phenomenon of the human experience. Death is seen as a necessary phase in the perpetual cycle of existence of man. In other words, death is an inevitable reality of the human life. No person or tribe or race can escape or brush it aside. From the moment a person is born he/she is at the mercy of the reality of death. Death therefore marks the departing stage of one's life from this physical world to another world. Thus, as is known in many cultures of the world, well organized funeral rites and celebrations are held to bid the deceased a farewell to the world of the dead, and to express one's hope and belief in eschatology. In the case of the Dagara, the belief in life after death makes these funeral rituals even more meaningful as it is believed that these rituals do purify the deceased in his or her journey to the ancestral world.

Here we discover a source of conflict between the Christian funeral liturgy and the way the local people celebrate their funerals. The Christian funeral rites in the view of these people lack some essential ingredients that will enhance the safe arrival of the deceased into the ancestral home. This brings about a tension among the converts who sometimes face serious opposition from their non-Christian family members in time of death. This tension most often promotes unhealthy amalgamation of traditional rites and Christian rites thus sometimes producing an almost syncretic funeral. Some proposal for a way out is the objective of this paper.

I.1 Methodology and Division

From the methodological point of view, the nature of this research work dictates a comparative approach. Unavoidably, therefore, we have taken a comparative study of the Dagara funeral rites and the Christian funeral liturgy. It involves a narrative and critical study of both written and oral sources of the Dagara People pertaining to the topic under discussion. The importance of oral sources in this study cannot be overemphasized. The nature of the study demands field work and learning directly from the people themselves because the rituals of the Dagara funerals are not written down but passed on orally from generation to generation.

The work is composed of three main chapters with a general conclusion of the work. The first chapter is devoted to the study of the Dagara funeral rites. It is divided into four parts. The first part takes a brief look at the Dagara people, their concept and types of death and their belief in life after death. We will also a take brief look at the link between the dead and the living. The second part handles the celebration of the Dagara funeral rites. The third part will take a look at the socio-religious dimension of the Dagara funeral. It will follow with part four which treats the current trends of the Dagara funeral celebration.

In chapter two we discuss the basic tenets of Christian funeral in two parts. The first part considers the theological perspective of Christian funerals from the early Church through to its development in the Medieval Church up to the culminating point in the Second Vatican Council in the mid twentieth century. In similar steps, the second part studies the liturgical aspect of Christian funerals. It takes a look at the development of the rites of Christian funeral from the early Church, through to the Tridentine normative rite of 1614 to the *Ordo Exsequiarum*[2] on of 1969 as produced by the Second Vatican Council.

Chapter three is the synthesis of chapters one and two. It is discussed in three parts. The first part draws up both positive and negative critiques of the Dagara funerals. The second part juxtaposes the Dagara and Christian funeral rites in a form of comparison in order to highlight the conflict areas. The third part proposes pastoral and liturgical approaches to the celebration of Dagara Christian funerals. It will then follow with a general conclusion of the work.

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[2] JOHNSON C., Christian Burial, the *Ordo Exsequiarum* 1969 with Related Liturgical Texts, Indexes and Bibliography, Vincenziano 1993.

l.2 Problems and Difficulties

l.2.1 The Danger of Syncretism

A project of this nature always faces the danger of syncretism. An uncontrolled zeal for the culture can lead to such an unhealthy mixture of the Christian rite with the traditional funeral rite that it may be difficult to affirm such a celebration as Christian. A syncretic funeral rite will simply be a traditional funeral that wears a Christian face. The Principles and Practical Norms for the Inculturation of the Roman Rite, therefore, cautions that: "The liturgy is the expression of faith and Christian life, and so it is necessary to ensure that liturgical inculturation is not marked, even in appearance, by religious syncretism."[3] The difficulty, therefore, is how to draw the line between inculturation and syncretism. Because of this difficulty many pastors have decided not to venture into it and are prepared to remain with the status quo. This in my, opinion is just playing safe and does not solve the problem. On the other hand, others are so 'progressive' that care is not taken to study the meaning and significance of some of the rites before producing their own form of inculturation. How to avoid these two extremes and engage in a true and proper inculturation is a great challenge that needs a concerted effort.

l.2.2 Possibility of Rejection

I cannot pretend that every single Catholic among the tribe under study and for that matter all African Catholics are fully in favour of the inculturation project. There are still many Catholics today who are strongly against any appearance of traditional culture, whether it has any superstitious connotation or not in the funerals. They prefer to remain strictly with the prescription of the Christian rite. For these people, the gospel message is the norm of life and the Christian funeral ritual is sacrosanct and for that matter cannot be violated by the traditional culture. Not even the provision by the Vatican document for the possibility of adapting the culture to the gospel message is enough to convince them of its necessity.

This clearly constitutes a problem in the inculturation project but it does not prevent it. We cannot afford to wait till a consensus is obtained before we carry on with such a noble task.

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[3] Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy: Fourth instruction for the right application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy, Rome 1994, no. 47.

l.2.3 Inadequate Literature

One of the greatest drawbacks in this project is the inadequacy of written literature on the funerals of the tribe under study. Not very much has been written about the tribe, especially in the area of funerals. This, therefore, demands intensive research among the people. Given the amount of time available for this project, this could not be possible for me. Therefore, in addition to my personal efforts to find materials, I did also find some people to conduct some interviews among the people for me, but due to the limited amount of time they had, they were very selective and not really deep enough. This would be a possible area to focus in any possible further research.

l.2.4 The Problem of Secrecy

The Dagara funerals are mostly shrouded in mystery and secrecy so much so that it poses obstacles to research work. Some of the rituals they perform, especially those of the dry funerals are considered to be mysterious ritual acts and are, therefore, not shared with non-initiates. Even those who would dare to talk about it would want to receive strict assurance that whatever is discussed will not go out to other initiates. Research in this area, therefore, needs a lot of tact and diplomacy if we must obtain anything meaningful. This is a genuine obstacle; nevertheless, it is not so rigid that it can render research impossible. My position as an insider already gives me a certain advantage in the research endeavour.

II. Chapter One: The Dagara People and their Funeral Celebration

II.0 Introduction

The Dagara as People have a very complex and elaborated funeral system and every stage is considered important and is well celebrated. They belief strongly in life after death, the world of the Ancestors, which is the dream of every Dagara. Well-organized and celebrated funeral rites set the dead person off to the journey to the ancestral world. For the Dagara the funeral rites ensure the safe arrival of the dead person in the world of the ancestors. In a basic sense, the Dagara see death not as the end of the human existence rather, it marks the beginning of the journey to the world of ancestors who have gone ahead of us from here. In this chapter, we are going to take a brief look at the background of the Dagara People, their funeral rites and celebrations and also their belief in life after death. We will go further to take a look at the social and religious dimension of Dagara funeral celebrations. We will then spend some time to look at the current situation of the Dagara funeral. Here we will pay much attention on the influence of Western education, Christian evangelization and cultural interaction on Dagara funeral.

II.1 The Dagara People, their concept of death and the belief in life after death

II.1.1 The Dagara People

The Dagara are a group of people living in an area known as Nandom in the north-western corner of Ghana. They belong to a wider ethnic group or tribe known as the 'Manlaale'. They developed some cultural traits which are quite different from the others and this is manifested in their funeral performances, marriage customs, music and dancing. They speak a language known as 'Dagara' and are themselves called 'Dagara'.

Indeed, in tracing the origin of the Dagara, like many other African people, it is fraught with innumerable difficulties. Clement Nangpiire underscores this point when he says "the Dagara seem to have lost their historical origins. When asked where they originally came from, some elders would say 'Tengakur' however 'Tengakur' is not known. It is a vague term associated with the immediate places of migration and not the remote places of origin."[4] Paul Bekye also support this point when he says: "the absence of documentary evidence, and the late application of archaeological methods to

[4] NANGPIIRE C., Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications: A Case Study of Funeral Celebrations in Nandom Tradition Area (unpublished Long Essay, University of Ghana), Accra 2008, 4.

the discovery of Africa´s past in general is the reason why the history of African peoples, especially their pre-history, has often been considered marginal or easy, and Africa itself treated as a cultural backwater."[5] In the course of time there have been a number of hypotheses in tracing the origin of the Dagara people. However, this is not the focus of this work. From oral traditions and the main traditions of migration in connection with origin the Dagara trace their pre-historical origin back to the Dagomba or Dagbon. Some minor traditions trace their origin to the Mossi. But the majority that is the Bekuone, the Kusiele, and the Dikpiele and their related clans can be said to have come from Western Dagomba; that is, one of the major tribes in the northern part of Ghana.[6]

Etymologically, the name Dagara is referred to "legends of rebellion *na-gaara* (cow-rebel) and *deb-gaara* (man-rebel) in connection with their breaking away from the Mossi and the Dagomba."[7] The Dagara broke away from the Dagomba between 1476 and 1492 and moved westwards. These dates are linked with the civil wars and revolts in Dagomba history which created the conditions for the Dagara to break away from their parent body. As Paul Bekye puts it:

> "calculating from the period of Nyagses´s reign, between 1476 and 1492, when the revolt took place, it is assumed that by 1493, the breakaway Mole-speaking Dagomba elements would have settled in their newly acquired homeland. To distinguish themselves from their breakaway brothers, those who remained called these others Black Dagomba, but they referred to themselves as Dagaaba or Dagara."[8]

A different perspective underscores the same fact that the Dagara were forced to break away and move westward from their mother body, the Dagomba as a result of a civil war that took place. It is believed they moved between the period 1480 and 1550 and by that they had settled already in Nandom, the area they have occupy till now, by 1660s or in the 18th century at latest. The Dagara

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[5] BEKYE P. K., Divine Revelation and Traditional Religion, with Particular Reference to the Dagaaba of West Africa, Rome 1991, 99.

[6] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 4.

[7] KUUKURE E., The Destiny of Man, Dagaare Beliefs in Dialogue with Christian Eschatology 243, Frankfurt am Main 1985, 25.

[8] BEKYE, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religion, 105.

occupy the area across the border between Ghana and Burkina Faso covering the following towns – Nandom (Upper West Region) in Ghana and Dissin, Wassa, and Maria Tange in the Burkina Faso.[9]

In the area of political organization, there has been a general belief that apart from the Mamprusi, Dagomba, Gonga, Nanumba and Wala which had centralized Governments, the rest of the Northern people, including the Dagara were acephalous societies. Bekye also confirms this when he asserts that "the Dagara never developed a centralized political organization or system of authority. Theirs is an acephalous society, a reason for which early Europeans, both the Bristish and the French, have described them as anarchic and lawless. Chieftaincy, as the Dagara have it now, is a late and a European institution, imposed by the British on the people in 1913."[10]

Economically, the Dagara gain their livelihood through subsistence farming by the hoe in difficult climatic conditions. Rains during the rainy season are usually unpredictable and often droughts occur. They cultivate cereals such as guinea corn, rice, corn etc. and root crops such as yam, groundnuts, and sweet potatoes among others. As livestock, they rear cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, fowl, guinea-fowl, ducks, and turkeys some of which they slaughter for meat or sell some to get money to buy their needs. The Dagara also undertake hunting during the dry season and collect wild leaves and tropical fruits such as dawa-dawa fruits and shear-butter fruits, the kernel of which provides them with cooking oil. Originally, the Dagara were all farmers but recently, due to modernization, some of them have entered into petty trading with some specializing in making and playing of the Xylophone, an instrument used both at funerals and at playtime of the Dagara. Some of the women have specialized in clay-pottery and the weaving of straw baskets which they sell to surrounding villages in and around Nandom. Even the educated Dagara engaged in Government or company salaried jobs still maintain a sizeable farm. Due to the infertility of the land the farms are usually very wide and need many hands to achieve reasonable harvest. This partly accounts for the interdependence and strong solidarity among the Dagara.[11]

In the area of religion, the Dagara maintain a constant link with their dead ancestors and pay great reverence to them. Because of this Anthropologists have often claimed that they are ancestor-worshippers. For the Dagara the ancestors are believed to be immortal. They live in the land of the

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[9] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 5.

[10] BEKYE, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religion, 116.

[11] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 5-6.

living dead. The belief in the continuity after death is nurtured by society and is part and parcel of their beliefs. Traditionally, as Paul Bekye puts it, "the Dagara give cult to the earth, or more correctly, to the spirit of the earth. The cult to the earth is closely associated with that given to the ancestors. The life which is sustained by the earth comes from the ancestors, and at death people return to the earth to rejoin their ancestors."[12]

What constitutes the Dagara culture is in their language, birth rites, marriage, funerals, music, dance, and ways of behaviour and patterns of living. Culture for the Dagara "is the ways in which their forefathers used to do things and which they inherited from them. What is uncultured are the new ways of doing things adopted from contacts with western civilization or from the more experienced Southern peoples of Ghana. Many of the Dagara cultural features are found in their funeral performances."[13] A lot of their cultural practices are therefore concentrated in their funeral customs. However, in recent times, the culture of the Dagara has undergone dramatic transformations partly due to the introduction of formal education and the influence of Christian religion and Southern cultures.[14] This has resulted in considerable socio-cultural and economic changes which have affected the Dagara funeral performance today.

II.1.2 The Dagara Concept of Death

For the Dagara death is an undeniable realty and phase of life that awaits each one of us. When a man is born he is at the mercy of death and must be ready to accept this reality. "Man is born to die" is a common statement among the Dagara. In other words, man is destined to die and death can strike at any time and hour. Like many other cultures, the Dagara see death as a social evil and in the event of death, the social equilibrium of the community is disturbed. The Dagara say as Edward Kuukure puts it: "only a child does not know that death is like a kite flying over the heads of the living human brood and can strike at any moment at any place. This reality is very transparent in the necrophoric names such as *Kuulaare* (death hovers over), *Kuunigne* (death lurks), *Kuubeterzie* (death has no fix place)."[15] In a very concrete sense, life itself is the preparation for both death and the

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[12] BEKYE, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religion, 119.

[13] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 6.

[14] Cf. BEKYE, Divine Revelation and Traditional Religion, 109-110.

[15] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 112.

funeral celebration, and in the eyes of the Dagara, the latter enables the individual to take up his life again in the hereafter.

Edward Kuukure goes further to express an essential element of death among the Dagara. He says:

> "for the Dagara death is not seen merely as a cessation of relations and decomposition of the body, nor simply as the end of mortal life. It is the beginning of a journey to another country, the land of the dead. The dead man is said (to have departed) (o kyen a), (to have gone home) (o kul a), (to have returned) (o leb a- said of a child). So, rather than an annihilation of the person, death is conceived of as a departure from one's (pilgrim) earthly home to his corresponding (real) home in the hereafter, from where there is no further departure. Death is a kind of a new birth into another world, where one lives on as a changed, transformed human, changed in status and power, a process assured by the funeral ceremony".[16]

The Dagara see death as a transition from this life to the world of the living dead, the world of the ancestors**.** In other words, the Dagara notion of death is a change from the physical status to a spiritual status. In this sense, it is believed that the dead person leaves this world and undertakes a journey to the next world, the ancestral world where he will live as or among the ancestors: a life in union with the ancestors. However, it is important to note that the success of the safe arrival in the land of the living dead is preceded by well-performed funeral rites and celebration. Edward Kuukure attests to this fact where he says "the primitive man confronts the problem of death with ritual, funeral rites, in concrete and efficacious acts, which enable him to look at death in the face and accept it as an ontological reality, as a passage over to another domain."[17] Although the Dagara view death as a call to the ancestral world, they however, believe that to every death there is a cause and that must be found out before or after death. This is done to find out whether the person died a good or evil death and this determine the kind of funeral for the dead person.

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[16] Ibid., 111.

[17] Ibid., 109.

II.1.3 Types of Death

II.1.3.1 Good Death

Death as it is known comes with pain and disturbs the social stability of the community. However, the Dagara talk of a Good death when the deceased is an older person, who has lived his span of life fulfilling all his customary duties and responsibilities. In other words, it is a death of an older person, who has lived a good and exemplary life worthy of emulating. He or she has lived a worthy life on earth and have left behind children who will remember him or her among the living. After such a good and hard work done on earth, the ancestors 'send for him or her' to come home and have rest with them. Kuukure observes that the Dagara believe that "the destiny of old men whose sons have themselves begotten sons is to die. They are too weak to arouse the anger of ancestors, shrines or mortals. They have won an honourable place in the community by having 'established their houses', man´s ultimate purpose here on earth. There is nothing left to be done, 'they have eaten enough'. In other words, they have completed their life-cycle; there is nothing more natural for them than to die in peace."[18] As such the death of an older is not receive much excitement or shock as a young person who is still in his or her prime stage in life with lots of potentials. The death of older persons create a vacuum in the family and the community in that they go away with their wisdom and talents which are bind forces.[19] The ancestors can also 'send for someone' who, though has not lived his full span of life, but is however needed by the ancestors. Such deaths occur with young people whom the ancestors call to send on errands. Children are also usually 'send for' for minor errands. A person who is killed (usually through poisoning) or murdered by an enemy also dies a good death. Generally, in the Dagara world view "good death is associated with any person who has not contravened any of the traditions and customs of his ancestors, who has not taken his or her own life, or who has not had a 'bad stomach' ("pufaa") towards his neighbours."[20]

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[18] Ibid, 110.

[19] ATINGA S. A., Death and Dying: A Study of the Mortuary Rites of the Frafra of Northern Ghana in the Light of the Christian Funeral Liturgy, an Attempt at Inculturation, Leuven 2006, 100.

[20] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 28.

II.1.3.2 Evil Death

Evil death is any death seen as punishment from the ancestors. Punishment resulting from a crime committed in the family or in the community. It is seen as a death inflicted by the ancestors through lightning, death connected with every type of suicide, death as a result of theft and death in connection with certain types of diseases such as leprosy, tuberculosis and dropsy.[21] Consequently, this kind of death is treated and buried differently. It is not buried in the family graveyard or in the community cemetery. In some cases, there are some rituals are performed before and after burial. This is done in order that the punishment or the curse of the ancestors doesn't affect other relatives.

II.1.4 The Dagara concept of Life after Death

What any culture cannot deny is the reality of death characterized with its horror without any other way out. It is a universal phenomenon with a painful reality to the existence of man. It is an unavoidable reality in the human history. Its occurrence disturbs the social life and the stability of the community. However, the natural instinctive reaction of man is to cling to life with all his might. Edward Kuukure observes the reaction of the modern society to death and had this to say:

> "The horror of death is a universal fact among mankind, a horror resulting often in an obstinate disbelief of the necessity of death and the disastrous experience of a failure to make any escape. Nor has this distaste for, fear of and flight from death in a way decreased in the technically and technologically modern cultures. The contrary is true. Ironically this kind of progress and development has shown as containing in itself progress in suffering and into the shadows of death by developing death instruments and extra death conditions. Dying is more gruesome in many ways, more lonely and impersonal, mechanical and dehumanized. The patient is treated like a thing, an object of great concern and a great financial investment. The irreligion of the society has only increased man´s anxiety before the reality of death, by depriving him of the belief in the meaning of suffering here on earth and a reward in a hereafter. Man is thus deprived of the hope and purpose offered by religion"[22]

This painful and horror reality of death sets humanity thinking and asking questions. Is death the end of one`s life? For the Dagara, death is not a merely the end of the mortal existence of the

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[21] Cf. ibid., 28.

[22] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 108.

human life rather the beginning of a journey to the world of the ancestors. This alone goes a long way to express the Dagara belief in life after death. For the Dagara, the belief in life after death is not "a matter of speculation and a hypothesis of hope and of fear, it is a positive certainty that the individual does not dream of doubting no more than he doubts the reality of his conscious existence. He accepts it without examination and conforms his acts to it without hesitation, as if it were about truths, the best verified by human experience."[23] This can be said of the Dagara, whose customs and rituals are all coloured by this conviction. The examination of their conception of death and of the ways they dispose of their dead leaves no doubt as to their belief in life in the hereafter. Samuel Atinga he says: "the belief in life after death seems to be the most soothing answer for all cultures to this fundamental question on the dilemma of our human existence. This has given rise to ritual action, particularly funeral rituals to ensure the continual happy existence of humankind even after the biological cessation of life here on earth."[24]

At death, the dead man takes the form of a spirit and undertakes a journey into the world of the ancestors who have gone before him. He is welcomed home, and through different acts of initiation, he takes the form and powers of an ancestor. On the other hand, the one who did not live a worthy earthly live is punished and thrown into *Dazugevuu,* a place of punishment for the wicked, of great capacity and with intense fire. The Dagara call the world of the ancestors, i.e., the living dead *Dapar:* a place of peace, full of every good thing, good food and plenty rest.[25] In any case, however, both the funeral ceremonies and belief in life after death reflect the moral judgments made in the Dagara society. Those who disobey the basic norms of the society are treated as outcasts at their funerals and are punished in the hereafter.

II.1.5 The Link between the Dead and the Living

By all indications, the Dagara concept of death, their funeral celebrations and their belief in life hereafter prove that death is not the end rather, there is more after death. After death: the dead person in a form of a spirit goes to the world of the ancestors. Indeed, death does bring about physical separation between the living and the dead; however, it does not do away with family ties and

[23] Ibid., 119.

[24] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 100.

[25] Cf. KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 125.

relationship. As a matter of fact, the living and the dead live in symbiosis. They are interdependent and are able to communicate with one another. The dead are said to have gone home where they attain supernatural status and power, they are closer to God and have indeed, the interest of their living family at heart more than ever, and will intervene to help, protect, warn or punish.[26]

The living, in consequence, appeal to the authority of the living dead for maintaining and reinforcing the social order, customs, traditions long established by them, and keep continually in touch with them precisely to ensure their help and protection and to appease them when they get angry. The symbiosis that exists among the living and the dead in the Dagara society is seen more and more as a cult and it is a family and lineage affair. The "cult of the dead implies not only the idea of survival, but also an active participation of the dead in mundane affairs. It is their intervention, in the past or in the future, that requires the living to propitiate the dead by the offering of goods, services, words and other gestures to secure their favour."[27] Particularly, the intervention of the ancestors is sought for in crucial moments such as marriage, birth, death, etc. This intervention is mediated through invocations, blessings, curses, prayers, libation and sacrifice. Beside the sacrifices required at family events, there are regular sacrifices for asking and thanking the ancestors for specific favours.

It is very interesting to note that the Dagara place more emphasis on ancestors than God and for that reason one can arguably call them ancestors worshipers while God has no place in the Dagara world view. But is that really the case? The Dagara say the ancestors are never worshipped in isolation from God and in no way are they seen as replacing God in worship. They are seen as powerful family intercessors and intermediaries through whom and with whom God is worshipped. Their celebrations and venerations of the ancestors are all occasions for some performances or sacrifices whose ultimate object is God. For Edward Kuukure, "the Dagara cult of the ancestors is closely linked with God, seen as having all power and jurisdiction, without whose permission nothing is possible. God is not mentioned only in performance connected with the ancestors that do not involve a sacrifice. God, the ancestors and the Earth Shrine enter into sacrifices of all kinds."[28] In the eyes of the Dagara, the cult of the dead is not seen as an affront to nor as a diversion of anything from

[26] Cf. KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 123.

[27] Ibid, The Destiny of Man, 123.

[28] Ibid., 124.

God. Rather, the cult of God and the cult of the ancestors in reality go hand in hand, since all ultimately go to God the creator.

II.2 The Dagara Funeral Rite

II.2.1 At the Hour of Death

When a person is about to die, he or she is moved from his sleeping room into the 'byre Kyaara'. This is a very large hall that used to provide, in former days, common meeting place for the household. It is the symbol of unity of the household. Each person entering and leaving the house passes through this hall. This is the place where the living community of the household and the dead ancestors meet because the sticks of the dead ancestors are placed together in this hall. Thus, the moving of the sick person into the byre marks the beginning of the end of his association with his living community and the subsequent beginning of his journey to the world of the ancestors.

In the byre, the sick person is attended to by elderly women in the house. These are joined by his sisters who are old enough to attend to a sick person. Among the Dagara, a dying person is never left unattended for fear that he might die lying down. This is because only slaves are allowed to die lying down. To die lying down on one's mat is a shameful death abhorred by all traditional Dagara. However, in modern times, when most people die in hospitals, this custom of not letting a person die lying down has become a thing of the past.[29]

Normally, men are not allowed into the dying man's room except when he sends for them. This is when he is about to breath his last and wants to give his last will. In this case, the elder's son and the elders of the house go into receive the last will. Otherwise, the men are seated together, under a tree waiting for the announcement of his death. When the sick person breathes his last breath, the attendants lie him down and the eldest of them announces the death to the men outside.

The men then go into consultation with the eldest son or brother of the dead man to know his last will. What he wants done at his funeral, the number of cows to be killed, and the clothes to be put on him and who is to inherit him. They also go into the ancestral byre to make sacrifices to the ancestors. This is to find out the cause of death, because among the Dagara death is associated with a call by the ancestors or with some evil cause. For the Dagara, the ancestors can 'send for' a living relation either because they want him to come to them because he is considered to have lived his life-span on this earth for instance, an elderly person, or his services are needed in the world of the

[29] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 26-27.

ancestors for example a child or a young man whom they want as their messenger. The ancestors can also 'send for someone' because his continued existence on this earth is a disgrace to the clan for instance a thief or suicide.[30] These are the two greatest social evils among the Dagara customs. This is because suicide is a crime against the earth and thievery brings dishonor to the lineage, clan or family. They believe that such crimes are punishable by a tragic death such as lightning or by a bad disease such as ascetics. The other cause of death is poisoning by an enemy or someone or a member of his relations. This is quite common among the Dagara. It is believed that the sacrifice to the ancestors will therefore reveal the cause of death. Sometimes a diviner is sought for this purpose. The sacrifice is also to consult the ancestors to find out whether a funeral should be performed for the person or not, for if a person dies an evil death no funeral is performed for him.

In contemporary times dying men are not moved to the ancestor's byre 'kyaara'. These types of large rooms are no more factored into the modern building designs. Moreover, "the advent of hospitals, education and Christianity makes it possible for many Dagara to seek medical treatment at hospitals. So the idea of holding someone to die, moving him to the ancestral byre, sacrificing and divining to find out the cause of death have faded out."[31] The Dagara however, maintain that suicide is a crime against the earth and thievery brings dishonor to the lineage, clan or family among others.

II.2.2 Preparing the Dead Body for the Funeral

Preparing the dead body involves a number of complex customs which are performed by males and females who are considered to be 'men', that is, women who have passed child-bearing age. Before a dead person is finally brought out for the funeral, it is handled by persons who are considered 'clean'. That implies, "a woman in her menstrual period is considered unclean and this is why only women in their menopause are allowed to take part in the preparation of the dead body for the funeral."[32]

Among the Dagara, the preparation begins with the ritual cleaning of the body and ends with dressing it up for staging for funeral. Cleaning is an act of purification and not the actual cleaning of the body even though this is done and bathing the body of the dead person. This ritual shaving is

[30] Cf. ibid., 27.

[31] Ibid., 27.

[32] Ibid., 29.

done with a razor in the form of a sharp knife. Whilst shaving, the hair is caught in the hands of some of the women attendants as it is not supposed to touch the earth. The believed is that, it will render the earth barren if allowed to touch the earth.

The shaving is followed by "bathing" of the corpse. This bath is both a ritual and physical bathing. It is for purifying the body spiritually and physically for his journey to the ancestors. This is why water is not used for the bathing but "Kambur" i.e., the residue left after the preparation of shear butter that is, cooking oil made from shear nuts. Chewed groundnuts pastes are also used to do this ritual bathing of the corpse. To complete this ritual bathing, the eldest of the attending women anoint the corpse with some shear butter. After this, the men come in to dress the corpse with smocks before the funeral can start. Edward Kuukure summarizes the whole procedure very precisely:

> "When death has occurred it remains to be determined in the first place whether the deceased deserves a public ceremony, for all deaths are mourned in public. The first requisite is to find out the cause of death by divination. Old women proceed to perform the customary rite of shaving the head and washing and anointing the corpse, which is then dressed up in beautiful finery. This dressing up in fine clothes is meant to honour the dead and it emphasizes not only the distinctiveness of the occasion but also the occurrence of a change of public import and the achieved status of the dead."[33]

In fact, at the beginning only the corpses of wealthy people were treated with such clothing. Now all dead persons wear these costumes. However, the number and beauty of the smocks depend on the social status of the dead person or of his relations. Now most corpses whether male of female are seated on arm chairs with very important people (VIP) corpses being laid in state on specially designed funeral stands, depicting the culture of the experienced Southerners or the educated elites.

In recent times also pomade is used instead of the 'kambur' and chewed groundnut paste. With some of the corpses, their heads are not shaved and others too are bathed in the morgue with women only following formalities at the house. Apart from these few changes, the preparation still begins with the ritual cleaning of the body and ends with dressing it up for staging on the funeral stand.

In dressing the body, one of the first things the men do is to loosen up the joints of the corpse. This is done by bending the knees and elbows of the dead body in preparation for the staging on the funeral stand. A man sits cross-legged on the funeral stand while a woman sits with her legs

[33] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 113.

stretched out and her arms crossed on her lap. In the Dagara society this was how a woman sat even in her life time.

Traditionally, the dress for a dead person is a small piece of cloth known as "lie" or "vamuo". This is worn around the waist to cover the sexual organs of the dead person. Every dead person wears the "lie". But in the case of a woman a "vamuo" is worn before the "lie" is put on her. This "vamuo" is a triangular piece of cloth. These were precautionary measures especially to the grave diggers as it was believed that any liquid coming out of the sex organs causes perpetual and incurable barrenness to any person it touches. Originally, this was all that was put on any dead body for the funeral and for burial. As time went on other clothes were worn. This consisted of a "big, pantaloon 'kurlan' which is worn around the waist and covers the rest of the body downwards. On top is worn a small smock and a number of bigger smocks, depending on the social status of the dead person or his family."[34]

II.2.3 Starting the Funeral

Generally, funeral is a large gathering of relatives, friends and sympathizers to mourn and celebrate the last moment of a person's life on earth. Only "a man can begin a funeral."[35] He does so by "shouting and crying, while invoking the ancestors thus 'saa woi' (alas my father) 'Saa' here actually refers to the ancestors and not to the biological father."[36] This is a desperate, emotional and painful cry. Busia says:"death is a separation, and to those who are closest to the deceased, it is a painful one"[37]. This emotional expression of pain is immediately taken up by relatives and friends of the dead person who must have gathered in the house awaiting the funeral which from now on lasts for three or four days, depending on the social status of the deceased.

II.2.4 Announcing the Funeral

Death is a matter of public concern and characterizes a big social occasion. Thus, a wide publicity is always very essential. Funeral celebrations are of prime importance for the Dagara and as such demand a great social and public participation within the settlement and beyond its boundaries. At the hour of death and at the

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[34] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 31-32.

[35] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 114

[36] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 32.

[37] Busia K. A., The Challenge of Africa, New York 1962, 27.

"sound of the loud wailing of the women, the playing of xylophones and drums and the firing of guns, the members of the settlement are alerted and obliged to attend and assist. Distant kinsmen receive the obligation to attend, except in the case of physical impossibility - old age or sickness. In this case, a representative must be sent. Geographic distance is no excuse. Funerals are the most obliging and most distressing rites (yel-fera and yel-tuo) respectively per excellence and they take absolute precedence."[38]

It is indeed, very important in Dagara society to show up personally at the house of the deceased to mourn and also to share in the grief of the family. It is never too late to show up personally at the deceased house at least to 'greet the funeral' (puor a kuor) as a sign of expressing one's sympathy and condolence.

In modern days, announcing funerals has taken a different dimension. Most people announce their funeral through radio, television and the media press. Announcing funeral through these mediums is indeed, expensive however, it is believed to be much effective and also give more detail about the deceased and the bereaved family.[39]

II.2.5 The Grave Diggers (Bog Tugre)

After all the initial customs and mortuary rites are over, and the dead body is properly prepared for the funeral, it is brought outside to the front of the family byre where it is arrayed in a mat with his back against a wall. At this point, the grave diggers take over the dead body until the day of burial. Normally, it is the elders of the 'house' who informs the burial group that the body is ready for mounting on the funeral stand for the funeral proper. The chief grave digger of the group is summoned before the elders and presented with the tools for digging the grave, such as an axe, a hoe, and a cutlass. The chief grave digger immediately summons his fellow grave diggers and they go out to cut some wood from a dawadawa tree or from any other tree except the ebony tree. The ebony tree is sacred for the Dagara and is considered as the tree of the earth.

Funeral stands are made in the form of an arm chair, but raised high enough from the ground such that it can be seen from afar by people arriving at the funeral. It is covered on the top by a straw mat. Pieces of traditional clothes are also used to cover the mat and the sides to provide shade for the dead body. Funeral stands of "men usually face the east, where the sun rises whiles that of

[38] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 112.

[39] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 33-34.

women face the west."[40] This emphasizes the different social roles played by men and women in the Dagara society. A man rises with the sun to go to his farm whilst sunset marks the period of the preparation of food for women. Food is usually prepared at sunset when both men and women would have returned to the house from the farm. This is why the women's funeral stand is erected facing the west to enable her to know that it is time to start cooking.

II.2.6 Arraying the Corpse

As the grave-diggers finish making the funeral stand, they remove the body from in front of the byre and array it high up in the funeral stand. From then on the style of mourning changes. The wailing, crying and shouting ceases. The small xylophones (logyile) are replaced by two bigger ones. The tunes are different from the smaller ones. While the body is being put on the funeral stand, relatives of the dead throw cowries at it. This is a symbolic gesture of appreciation of the services of the grave diggers.

Those who get to the funeral as new arrivals also throw cowries at the dead body. All these are collected by the grave diggers and shared equally between them. This is because they do not receive direct cash as pay from the relatives of the dead body. Meanwhile, "the bigger xylophones are played; the mourners now cling round the xylophone in front of the funeral stand. Two funeral chanters now intone funeral chants alternatively with the mourners responding after each chant with renewed energy. Occasionally, the xylophones stop, the chants ceases abruptly."[41] The process is repeated three times for a man and four times for a woman. At the end of this, the mourners retire under tree shades and the whole process is repeated from time to time especially when there are new arrivals at the funeral ground. The few changes under the arraying of the corpse are the throwing of coins and cedi notes instead of the usual cowries.

[40] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 115.

[41] Ibid., 115.

Picture no. 1. A Picture of a Dead Body in Stage.

II.2.7 The Funeral Chants (Langne)

Funeral chants are a kind of dirges sung by professional funeral chanters (Lang konmhe). They become professionals by constant practice. On his way to his farm the prospective funeral chanter would enchant to himself some of the funeral songs he might have heard at a number of funerals. He does this over and over again. When he is fully confident of himself, he makes his first appearance at a funeral in his own house a few times before doing it outside.

Some funeral singers 'eat medicines' (fortification) to protect them from evil spirits and enemies. Funeral chanting as Clement Nangpiire sees it "is a dangerous profession as enemies of the chanters can, under the cover of the large crowd at the funeral, poisons a chanter through mystical poisoning."[42] It is believed that a person can be poisoned from a distance by means of poisoned needles and cowries (Iobe). These could be thrown at an enemy from a considerable distance, and they enter into his body unseen by anybody. The sign that one is being thrown at is a sharp pinch on the part of the body where the needle or cowry has passed into the body.

[42] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 41.

These days, most often than not, the dirge singers quarrel among themselves for chances to intone the chants because of the value of the cedi and coins which are legal tenders. Some people have taken dirge singing as their profession and they earn part of their living from it. They move from funeral from funeral to another to chant for money. Because of Christianity, many of them do not 'eat medicine' as they used to do. The belief that a person can be poisoned from a distance by means of poisoned needles and cowries (Iobe) is fading out.

II.2.8 The Labeling of the Bereaved

Customarily, when a person dies, his close relatives are marked by some labels which are done by either putting strings round the waist or wrist or by the rubbing of ashes on various parts of their bodies. "The direct and close relatives are marked out for all to see by a long strip of hide on the wrist. Other close kin have cords of fibre or string around the waist, wrist or ankle."[43] Some of the labels are meant for restraining and some for marking out the closest relatives of the deceased. Labeling is a mark for making out those most affected by the death. In this way, they are easily recognized by people who have come to the funeral from afar who might have known the dead person but not his relations. Thus, this helps such people to know whom to give their sympathies and their funeral gifts. This labeling is also used as a restraining measure because a loss of a relation is a complete disaster to his living relations who, very often are driven to acts of extreme violence such as running about, jumping about, violently throwing themselves on the ground among others. It is for this reason that as soon as there is death, people are assigned to every close relation of the deceased, such as the wife or husband, father or mother, sister or brother as soon as death occurs. The designated person's task is to prevent the assigned relative from such violent acts.[44]

In modern times, "the act and spirit of labeling are still being held by many Dagara. It is only the rubbing of ashes on various parts of the bodies of bereaved members that is said to have out-lived its usefulness among many Dagara societies."[45]

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[43] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 114-115.

[44] Cf. ibid, 115.

[45] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 44.

Picture no. 2. A Picture of Bereaved Family Members who are labeled.

II.2.9 General Mourning

On arrival at the funeral both men and women would break into a half-run, the women wailing and mourning, while the men cry out, invoking their ancestors. Men from the same patri-clan of the deceased would cry out to their ancestors thus 'saa woi' (oh my father). This is not the biological father they are calling on. It is a general appellation of the ancestors. If the deceased is from their matri-clan, then the incantation is to the ancestors of the matri-clan 'ma woi' (oh mother). This is a cry of frustration and literally asking the ancestors why they have visited them with death.[46]

Others not related to the dead would simply cry out 'woi' (oh what a disaster) or 'Gandaa woi' which means 'alas, strong-man'. If it is the wife of an outstanding personality or a woman who is outstanding in society the cry would be 'mwan nyuura ma woi' (alas! The calabash for drinking water).[47]

The funeral songs are in fact funeral dirges and are sung in idiomatic languages which are sometimes praises and sometimes abuses. These songs are varied and spontaneous. Some of these dirges are as follows:

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[46] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 43-44.

[47] Cf. ibid., 44.

"'Be zaa wan wa yel n mwe nuru e oi.' It means, 'When the funeral was announced, I clapped my hands in distresses.' This is a praise song. 'Yuora ma woi, fu sir wa kpe bog a fuu wob yi e ti kul' This means, 'the mother of Yuora, when your husband enters his grave pack up and let us go.' This is a typically abusive one, as it means that after the death of the particular man there is nobody else in the house to look after the wife and so she should return to her father's house."[48]

This is done for the three or four days, during which the dead body remains on the funeral stand. All these customs are still followed closely apart from the throwing of coins and cedis in place of the cowries.

Picture no. 3. A Picture of me taking part in a Section of General Mourning.

II.2.10 Role Playing (Zanu Iru) and Public Declaration of Friendship (Muolu)

The role playing ritual is performed to break relationship with the dead-man. The Dagara believe that the dead are often reluctant to leave their relatives and friends behind and would attempt

[48] Ibid., 45.

to take some of them along with them. Usually, this instills fear into the close relatives and friends of the dead person. This is the reason why everything possible is done to disguise these so that the dead person cannot recognize them and pursue them. This also explains the reason why the dead person is taken out of the house in a reversal way to confuse him and to prevent him from re-entering the house.

The role playing is the "re-acting of a role, that a friend or colleague was performing with the dead person and ends up with a declaration of rejection of the dead friend or colleague as a partner in whatever they were doing in common in the following words 'Now I am alone. I cannot do anything. Let our companionship end today. Go, I will follow but not now. I am not your killer'."[49] Refusal to perform this rite, it is believed, will make a person unsuccessful with whatever venture he was carrying out with the dead person. It also endangers ones very life as it is believed that the dead person will "catch your soul" and you will eventually die. In recent times, the role play is still being practiced during funerals of elderly people.

Public declaration of friendship (Muolo) is a custom at funerals during which friends of the dead announce publicly their friendship with him and seek a continuation of this friendship with another member of the dead person's family. They are in fact declarations of affirmation of friendship with the dead person. The friend stands in front of the funeral stand and raises his hand with twenty cowries in it. He then declares how he and the dead person became friends and what they were doing to each other as a mark of mutual respect. He then ends up by throwing a challenge to the members of the deceased family. This usually calls for any of the members willing to take up the friendship to come out and accept the twenty cowries as a sign that he is going to continue the friendship in place of his deceased relative.[50] In a matter of fact it is a challenge in that "among the Dagara the exchange of gifts becomes a highly competitive affair. Failure to reciprocate degrades the social status of an individual. One must not only reciprocate what one has received but one is generally expected to return twice or more of what one has received."[51]

Some friends would normally bring a goat, sheep or a fowl and offer it directly to a member of the family of the deceased who he wants to take up the friendship. But before he does that, he

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[49] Ibid., 46.

[50] Cf. KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 116-117.

[51] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 47.

shows the gift to the other members of the deceased family. This is because the gift is expected to be paid back and in the absence of the actual receiver, the other family members are expected to pay it to the giver's family if the latter in turn dies.

Currently, most public declarations are instead written in books provided at funerals for receiving donations, gifts and other supports from friends, and sympathizers. These are later given to those whose names were associated with the donations, gifts or 'moulo' who, as custom demands would continue with the friendship till any of them dies.

II.2.11 Place of Burial and Burial Ceremonies.

All villages have their public burial grounds which could be two or more depending on the size of the village. All adults are buried there; however, a head of a family having many grandchildren is buried in the common courtyard of the house at times he is buried in the byre or in front of the family haouse.

Men are buried at dawn before sunrise that is the time he rises to go to his farm. However, women are buried at sunset when she is supposed to be cooking the evening meal for the family. The burial service takes different forms depending on the status and personality of the deceased. On the other hand, it may depend on the manner in which the individual conducted him/herself in a given role or in life in general.[52]

By the time of burial, the extreme grief, wailing and running about wildly with which the death was received, now calms down. Relatives of the dead person have now come to admit the realities. But before the burial the mourning and wailing is vigorously renewed as at the beginning. The time of departure, the time of the final break with the dead person has now arrived. Relatives are once more restrained as they shout, cry, yell, wail, and run about wildly about. The two small xylophones used at the beginning are played again and everything takes on an atmosphere of the beginning of the funeral.

Just as the wailing, shouting and playing of xylophones go on, the grave diggers approach the funeral stand virtually running. As they draw near the stand, they hurriedly surround it on all sides. The one to carry the dead body approaches the stand and quickly turns his back towards the dead body. This is considered to be the time when the dead body is most vulnerable and therefore

[52] Cf. KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 117.

everything must be fast so that he will not be able to identify any of the grave diggers. Two grave diggers climb unto the stand and hastily put the dead body with a leg on each side of the shoulders of the one in front of the stand. He instantly proceeds to the grave yard half running, followed by the other grave diggers. At this point, "there is general confusion as the grave diggers run about in a disorderly manner while shouting at each other. All this is to confuse the dead body from recognizing any of them."[53] At this time too the close relatives of the dead person are restrained to prevent them from following the body to the grave side.

When they get to the grave side the dead body is seated facing the grave. The one to do the burial jumps into the grave, holding a knife, three white stalks of straw and some leaves from a shear-butter tree. All these are said to:

> "protect the one in the grave since it is believed that the dead body can attack him in the grave. The knife is for defense purposes. White is supposed to be a colour that the dead do not like seeing because it represents light which is dreaded by the dead. So the grave digger holds the white straw. The leaves are supposed to hold magical powers to protect the grave digger. All this care, re-affirms the supernatural and magical power the Dagara give to the dead."[54]

In modern times, the burial ceremony is still done as described above except that the small xylophones (logyile) are not played again as used to be the case. These days too, many corpses are buried in coffins so there is no need for the undertakers to wild knifes, stalks and leaves for fear of the corpse hurting or attacking them in the grave. Currently, the corpse in the coffin is normally carried by four or six grave diggers for the burial. Even now, most of the coffins are kept in cars and carried to the grave yard depending on the social status of the deceased or his family members.

At this stage, the dead body is then given to the grave digger inside the grave who holds it by the arm and places it carefully in the grave. As stated earlier a man is buried facing the west (sunrise) whilst a woman is buried facing the east (sunset). From the Frafra world view Samuel Atinga confirms that this tradition is common among the different ethnic groups in the Northern part of Ghana. He says:

> "the Frafra believe that the world of the living-dead is a complete replica of the mundane world to the point that life goes on there in the same way as it goes on in this world. For that reason women still

[53] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 49.

[54] Ibid, 50.

carry out their household chores, just as the men go to the farm as they did on earth. In that case, then, women are buried facing the setting sun so that they can be reminded that it is time to prepare the evening meal, which is the major meal of the Frafra. The man on the other hand is to see that the day is breaking so that he too can get up and go to the farm."[55]

After this he cuts the clothes of the corpse. He then cuts all the pockets of his smocks to prevent him from carrying children with him in his pockets. Normally, elders of the family members take a last glance into the grave to see if their relative is properly buried according to custom. They then give permission to the grave diggers to close the entrance to the grave and put a pile of gravel on it.

The above rites and customs are meant for persons who have died a good death but different customs and rites are however performed for persons who die an evil death or for a slave. If the death is considered an evil one, only the chief grave digger goes into the grave for burial. There are even some cases when the dead body is thrown into the grave without anybody entering to bury him. These are deaths resulting from certain contagious diseases such as ascetics, tuberculosis, and leprosy. The reason for this treatment is not customary but for health reasons. Thus, it is said that, the grave of a tuberculosis patient is filled up instead of being covered with a stone before putting the gravel on it.

As the grave diggers are covering the grave, the elders of the deceased have to return to the funeral stand. The close relatives are released from their restraints. The big xylophones are played and the funeral chants are sang, three times for a man and four times for a woman. As the third or fourth set of xylophones are being played, a male member from the deceased joking relations clan turns the xylophones on their sides thus bringing the traditional mourning to an end.

In modern times, the corpses are still laid in the coffins either facing east or west depending on the sex of the deceased, but the cutting of the cloths of the dead person is a thing of the past.

[55] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 64.

Picture no. 4. A Picture of a Grave in front of the Family House.

II.2.12 The Post Burial Rites

The rites of post burial are done in stages. Some of which are directed to the living relations of the deceased but the most important of them are the rites of atonement meant to prepare and purify the deceased for his final abode, for the new type of society he is now going to join, the world of spirits.

The orphan's meal is the first. This rite exists among the Dagara but is rarely performed. It is a meal prepared by the eldest woman in the house with the entrails of the animals killed at the end of the funeral and shared among children of the deceased, signifying that, they are now orphans. Among the Dagara, children are supposed to pass automatically to the most senior of their paternal uncles. Very often, when the children are many, they are shared among the brothers of the dead father. With the inception of the Intestate Succession Law, Provisional National Defence Council Law 111 (PNDC Law 111) and modernity, the orphan's meal is reluctantly performed in some cases and the sharing of children and property among the Dagara is also dying out.

"Under the rules of PNDCL 111, in the absence of a will, the entire estate of the deceased devolves to the next of kin. The compulsory beneficiaries are the children, spouse and parents of the deceased. The fraction of the estate distributed to each heir varies according to the numbers and categories of heirs involved in the distribution."[56]

II.2.12.1 Washing and Rubbing with Clay (Rites of Purification)

The washing and rubbing with clay serves as a purification rite and at the same time as separation rite. It is meant to purify the widow or widower from 'dirt' as a result of sexual intimacy they shared with the deceased. Among the Dagara, sex, even between husband and wife is considered as 'dirt'. Although it is not illegal or immoral. Thus, when a husband dies, the wife has to be purified, that is, she must wash off the dirt she contracted from her former husband before she can have any sexual contact with any other man again. As Kuukure observes, "the bathing and washing of the widow or widower is a rite of gradual separation from the dead partner and of gradual re-integration to the community by its virtue of purification from the partner's 'dirt' and as a protection from his ghost until his rights over her are reallocated."[57] It is believed among many traditions and cultures in the Northern part of Ghana that at death, till the dead person is set off through different rites and customs to the ancestral home, he or she hovers around the community and can be dangerous to the living most likely his or her partner or children. Samuel Atinga confirms this belief in the Frafra social world in the North-East part of Ghana:

"The widow or widower who shared with the deceased in a very intimate way would probably be the first target of the deceased who may want to take her along for the companionship which they shared on earth. Connected to this is also the belief that the thread that united them in marriage is not broken by death but by the funeral celebration of the deceased. Consequently, effectively the widow or widower still remains the 'property' of the deceased spouse. It is therefore, the widowhood rite that is performed during the funeral celebration that officially severs that link that exists between the deceased and the living spouse. Once this is broken it leaves the widow/widower free to return to his or her normal life without his/her deceased partner."[58]

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[56] Global Property Guide, Inheritance Law: http://www.globalpropertyguide.com/Africa/Ghana/Inheritance (Retrieved: 12.12.2012).

[57] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 118.

[58] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 90.

This rite is performed by rubbing the body of the widow/widower with clay. The neophyte is led very early in the morning to the back of the house. There he/she is given some food to "eat". Eating here does not refer to the normal eating. The neophyte receives the food that is offered him/her in his/her hands, draws it to the nose, smells it and throws it away. This is done three times for a widower and four times for a widow. Afterwards, his/her head is shaved completely bald and whitewashed with clay together with the hands and feet. With this "he/she is not allowed to wear cloths except a loin cloth for a man, a sheep's skin hanging at his back and he holds a staff on his hand signifying his wife. A woman on the other hand wears a band of fibre strips and holds a long millet stalk which also signifies her husband."[59] This purification rite lasts for a month and the neophytes are not allowed to bath, or have sexual intercourse until the "koda tuo" (bitter pito) is brewed.

This purification rite has been overshadowed completely by Christian practices such as requesting masses for the dead and bereaved family members and the symbolic hanging of a crucifix around the neck of the bereaved wife or husband.

II.2.12.2 The Debt Rite (Kpiin-Dio Kpeb)

This rite is attached to the belief that no person can get to the ancestral home with peace unless he has been cleared of all stains from the earth below. One of the most dreaded things among the Dagara is debt, 'san'. In a society where people are completely interdependent for their living, this is unavoidable. Among the Dagara, there are two types of borrowing. The first consists of borrowing material things such as a hoe, an axe, or even a bicycle. This is quite acceptable and is rather personal. It has nothing to do with the family provided the material borrowed is returned. The second type of borrowing is that of money and clothes. Though acceptable, it is considered a disgrace to the individual and to his family. Such debt, if not paid back before one dies is considered a serious stain which will hinder a person from getting to the land of the ancestors.

The "Kpiin-dio" (debt rite) "is performed to make sure that all such debts are paid by the family of the dead. It also gives an opportunity to those who owe the dead man to own up and pay. This rite is performed in front of the ancestral byre, where the elders of the family will invite people to either pronounce debts owed by the dead person or to the dead person. The ancestors in this case

[59] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 53.

act as witnesses."[60] After the rite the family accepts no responsibilities for other debts declared later. Hence people from far away villages would usually return to the funeral place if they have any debts to declare or own up. It is believed that if any person makes a false claim he will be struck dead there and then. The rite is repeated four times to make sure all claims are made. After that the family claims no responsibility of any other debts declared.

Before the actual rite, "a fowl is killed and roasted. This is shared among the elders and all participating members of the rite as a sign of peace between debt owners, debtors and the family of the dead person."[61] The latter is now ready to undertake the last stage of his journey into the world of the ancestors.

This trend is still followed except the killing of a fowl for roasting. The new addition on the debt rite of late is the 'silver collection' by all participants for requesting a mass for the dead and the drinking of local beer (pito) afterwards. These days, this rite is only performed once instead of the usual four times.

II.2.12.3 The Funeral Beer (Ko-daa)

The Dagara believe that when a person dies he is still part and parcel of society as long as he still sits on the funeral stand and as such they address him by his name, they talk to him as if he was still living, he is asked why he has died leaving his children and wives. However, as soon as he is buried he becomes a ghost (nyaakpiin). At this point, he is neither with the living nor with the ancestors in the land of the living dead. It is believed that he tries to get his wife or any of his children to stay with him. In the couuse of this period, the ancestors meet him in a land between this world and theirs, where they tie him to the top of a tree. This is because he is still not purified enough to come to them. This is the only period that a Dagara lives out of his society. While on earth he is a member of an extended family till he enters the grave. He is then put in a place of atonement for some time. After that, he joins his lineage group of ancestors when he becomes an active member of the dead ancestors in their world. Thus, the lineage membership is only briefly broken during the period of atonement. This atonement is achieved not by the dead person himself but by his relatives through the rite of funeral beer.Two types of Funeral beer (Kodaa) are brewed. The 'koda tuo' (bitter funeral pito) and the 'koda-maar' (cool funeral beer). When the 'koda tuo' is brewed, the ancestors

[60] Ibid., 55.

[61] NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 56.

come to untie the dead person from the tree and seat him under the tree. They then shave his head and pubic hair and any other hair on him. They then drink the funeral beer and go back to their abode. When the kodaa-tuo is brewed, some of it is left outside the house in huge clay pots. Any hair found in the pot the following morning showed that the ancestors have accepted the dead person for his first bathing. This is also a sign that he has not gone to 'danzuge vuu' (hell).[62]

The physical bathing of widows and widowers takes place at this time too. This frees them the sexual ban and allow them to remarry. In other words, "the ban on sex is finally lifted from the widows and widowers, who are now bathed, purified of their dead husband's 'diet' and freed from him to remarry."[63]

After three weeks, the cool funeral beer is brewed. The ancestors then come again to do the final bathing; they drink the beer and then lead the new member to the land of the ancestors. The period of isolation is over and he now becomes a "kpiin" (a spirit). He is no longer a ghost and he is no longer fearful. He is now endowed with all the supernatural powers of the ancestors to punish and to reward.

A wooden image of him is carved and placed among other images of the dead ancestors in the ancestral byre. He can now be consulted in the ancestral byre for help by his lineage members on earth. This is his final physical break with his living community. "With the carving and solemn installment of the definitive shrine at this ceremony the dead man is finally placed among his ancestors, while the bereaved return to the community from which they have been partially separated."[64] He is forgotten unless his help is needed. This last rite is not performed for women and children. The woman, who is considered to hold a dual social status, cannot have her image among the images in the ancestral byre of her husband's family. In contemporary times the above practiced is entirely vanished among the Dagara.

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[62] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 57.

[63] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 118.

[64] Ibid, 118.

II.3 The Social and Religious Dimension of the Dagara Funerals

II.3.1 The Social Dimension

The Dagara funeral is a two-way event, social and religious. Death and funeral are seen as a social factor in that it is "an occasion where the family and entire community are brought together to express their solidarity in grief."[65] It is important to note here that the Dagara family is much more than the nuclear family. Samuel Atinga in quoting John Mbiti observes that "in traditional life, the individual cannot and does not exit alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries"[66] He goes further to say that "the life of the individual is so intertwined with the life of the community that the individual can only say, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am."[67] The Dagara family in a broader sense "includes all people who belong to the same clan and trace their origin to the same ancestor"[68] Funeral celebration as a social factor appears so important in the Dagara society for the living and the dead. It helps to reaffirm the solidarity of the family and the community at large. It also reaffirms social mores and exerts social control by the differential treatment of the dead here and in the hereafter. It provides a standardized way of expressing grief and anger at the loss of a dear one and gradually set the ghost off to the land of the dead through laid down customs and rituals.[69] In other words, it creates a room for adjusting to the new situation and the reallocating the dead person's roles, rights and duties over persons and property. To some extent, it is believed that funerals are of more importance to the dead. For the Dagara, death is a journey to the world of the ancestors. However, the deceased can only set off for the journey after the final or post-funeral rites are performed. That is, rituals and customs performed at different stages and time after the burial rites. Before the final rites, it is said that he takes the form of a ghost, not yet a spirit. In this status, "he still continues to fill his earthly roles, in particular the control over the sexuality of his wife or wives and his undivided estate. At this stage he is not only restless but can also be dangerous to the living."[70] The final funeral rites

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[65] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 28.

[66] Ibid., 29.

[67] Ibid.

[68] ASIGRE G., Towards the Formation of a Gurunse Christian Funeral Rites (unpublished Memoir, St. Victor´s Major Seminary), Tamale 1991, 3.

[69] Cf. KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 119.

[70] KUUKURE, The Destiny of Man, 120.

serve as the final separation which frees the ghost to set off as a spirit for his journey to the land of the dead.[71]

It is very important to observe that the celebration of the post-funeral rites play vital roles in the Dagara society. It ensures peace and order in the family and also in the community at large. Furthermore, it sets the ghost of the dead man off to undertake the journey to the world of the ancestors. This vital element of funeral celebration has no counterpart in the Christian funeral celebration which ends with the burial rites. In the eyes of the Dagara, the funeral is incomplete and therefore unacceptable. As a result of this, the Dagara Christian is always left at crossroads in the event of funeral.

Funeral as a social event is the gathering of the entire village community in solidarity with the member of the community who is bereaved. This evokes the communitarian character of the tribe. Aside there is also the desire and need for recognition in the community. In Dagara society, unless one is able to perform the funeral of one's father, mother etc, he is considered a failure in the community and for that matter will not be regarded as a responsible person. Such a person may not be given a responsible role in the community. In effect, he becomes a laughing stock in the community. Msgr. Joseph Apuri supports this idea when he says: "Africans who fail to perform the funeral rites of their dead members are a laughing stock in society. This is a very serious social degradation on the family, a sin that can never be forgiven until remedied."[72]

Another dimension of the Dagara funeral that may be considered social is the question of inheritance. Unless the Dagara celebrates the funeral of his relative he cannot inherit the property. This is because they believe that without the celebration of the funeral the deceased is still alive and consequently has a kind of connection with the living world. He, therefore, owns his possessions. Even the widow or widower cannot remarry until the funeral of his/her spouse is performed. Thus, it is the funeral rite that "breaks the cord that links the dead with the living. It is draws the curtain over the mourning period and restores a social disorder and disturbance that was created by the death of this person in the community."[73]

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[71] Cf. ibid., 120.

[72] APURI J., Proposed Christian Funeral Rites to Replace the Present Traditional Funeral Rites Among the Kasena-Nankana of Navrongo (unpublished), Navrongo 1998, 3.

[73] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 32.

II.3.2 The Religious Dimension

Underneath the social dimension of Dagara funeral is the religious dimension. As observed earlier, the gathering of the family and clan members also evokes the gathering of the spirits of the ancestors. Therefore, as much as there is a social interaction between the living and the dead members of the family, there is also a religious interaction. This interaction is done through sacrifices offered to the ancestors. That is why even before the funeral is celebrated, the family head goes to divine to ascertain the wishes of the ancestors and the deceased. Throughout the funeral there are several sacrifices that are performed to respond to the needs of the ancestors. That apart, some of the rituals of the funeral are means of keeping in touch with the spirit world. Other members of the community offer animals and chicken as gifts to the dead members of their families so that the deceased whose funeral is being performed can take it to them. The deceased then becomes a messenger to the next world.[74]

Another religious dimension of the Dagara funeral is the "ushering of the deceased into the ancestral home."[75] The Dagara believe that unless the funeral is celebrated, the deceased will still be roaming around somewhere in the next world. This is why the Dagara has a problem with the way Christians celebrate their funerals. In their view, the Christian ritual does not meet their religious dimension and the deceased will not reach the ancestral home.

II.4 Current Trend: The Situation of Dagara Funeral Today

For any given human community, what is true and undeniable about it is the fact that there is always transformation in the course of time. In the course of time, a given human community does experience certain changes and transformations through the influence of Western education, effect of urbanization and also the growth of Christianity in most parts of the world. These changes have a great effect on the social life such as marriage, naming ceremonies, funeral etc of a given community. Samuel Atinga in expressing his view on the topic says that:

> "Any culture that resists change and transformation is a culture on the way to its own demise. A living culture is, therefore, dynamic rather than static. There are many factors that bring about this transformation some of which can be very negative and detrimental to the growth and development of a

[74] Cf. ibid., 32-33.

[75] Ibid., 33.

true and meaningful culture. It is, therefore, incumbent on the people of the culture to be able to decipher which influences on the culture are helpful and which may be detrimental to the culture."[76]

Vincent Owusu expressing his view on this issue but in connection with the effects of urbanization on the Christian funeral liturgy which applies to the situation of the Dagara funeral today observes that, "the almost universal development of urban life so characteristic of contemporary civilization has left its mark on the funeral liturgy. It has led to the abandonment of processions and of liturgical action in the in the home of the deceased or at the grave sides."[77] This cry of Owusu, though in reference to the Christian funeral liturgy, is a cry that is applicable not only to funerals but also to ritual actions in general, be they Christian or non-Christian.

The celebrations of Dagara funerals today have undergone a rigorous transformation in the course of history. Due to the rigorous transformation that has taken place in the culture, what is said to be the culture of the Dagare today is in it real sense the shadow of the real. Many elders are much worried about the situation. However, Samuel Atinga sees the situation in a different way when he says that "even though, these influences become disturbing factors for the elderly, they may form a good breeding ground for inculturation."[78] As much as we accept the fact that the Dagara culture particularly the celebration of funerals has undergone a rigorous transformation, however, many of the elders' claims that the care for the dead and the rituals that accompany them can be traced back as early as pre-history times.

II.4.1 The Effect of Education and Evangelization on the Dagara Funeral

Today one can easily observe the changes that have taken place in the Dagara funeral celebrations and many attribute them to the coming of Western Education and the Evangelization endeavours of the early Christian missionaries in our part of the world. In talking about civilization in the Northern part of Ghana, much appreciation will be given to the early Christian missionaries, notably the Missionaries of Africa (the White Fathers) who first arrived in Navrongo from Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, in 1906 with the mission of spreading the Word of God. In order to achieve an effective evangelization, the Missionaries thought it wise and helpful to

[76] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 96.

[77] OWUSU V., The Roman Funeral Liturgy. History, Celebration, and Theology, Nettetal 1993, 212.

[78] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 96.

improve upon the life situation of their prospective converts through western education and western way of living. In regards of this motive, they built schools, health centers and other infrastructure and organizations. They taught religious studies and catechism in their schools. Aside these, they also gave lesions in arithmetic and English. In this way, it was clear that the Missionaries were not only interested in achieving their aim of converting the local people but also sougth to improve their living condition.[79] Donald Dorr, a formal missionary in Africa attesting to the fact that western education was not solely brought to Africa by the colonial master but also by the missionaries, observes that,

> "During the heyday of the modern missionary movement the Christian churches expanded very rapidly in most of sub-Saharan Africa, in the pacific and several Asian countries. Despite the great differences between these areas there was a remarkable similarity in the methods of evangelization used by the pioneer missionaries in the various countries. In almost all cases the missionaries spent a great deal of time and energy in establishing a system of western education and developing Western- style hospitals and health services."[80]

It is very evident that the white Missionaries were not only concerned with the evangelization of the local people but were also much concerned to make them literate. In this way, Abasi sees the mission of the Missionaries in twofold and that is "to instruct the native, not only in matters of religion but also in order to make him literate"[81] From this perspective, one can argue that the strategy of the Missionaries in its very nature is positive. However, there are many critics who, as much as they appreciate the effort of the Missionaries in giving the local people western education, wish to argue that the mentality, the content of the catechesis and the way and manner they viewed and interpreted the culture of the local people was negative. Not only did not see anything good about the culture but also saw it as diabolic. Msgr. Joseph Apuri observes that, "When the White Fathers first arrived in Navrongo, they found everything wrong and diabolical in the Kesena-Nankana funeral performances. Through no fault of theirs, they did not quite yet understand the customs and culture of

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[79] Cf. GBAL F. T., The Mission of the Church in Ghana, the Element of Self-Reliance (unpublished Memoir, St. Victor´s Major Seminary), Tamale 2003, 6.

[80] DORR D., Mission in Today´s World, Dublin 2000, 222. See also ATENGA, 96.

[81] ABASI A., Truly Christian and Truly African: A Study of the Inculturation Project of Afer (unpublished Licentiate Thesis), Leuven 1987, 13. See also ATENGA, 97.

the people. So they condemned everything about the traditional performances. Furthermore, they had nothing Christian to replace the traditional funeral rites."[82]

Even contrary to the highly evident religious nature of the African, some missionaries still thought that the African had no religion. Augustine Abasi has observed that Prof. Mudime, while studying reports of some Italian Capuchin missionaries sent to Europe about the Congo

> "discovered that the African was spoken of in negative terms. Their world, their person etc. were described in a way that portrays them as sub-human. Their customs were considered outlandish, their ways as devilish and their understanding limited, making them in a sense like animals. Their world also does not escape being described as contrary to reason and the people themselves have to be led from animal to human behavior, from barbarism to civilization, from the deceit of witchcraft and idol worship to the light of reason and faith."[83]

From all indication, it is clear that the early Missionaries without understanding the culture of the people had a negative mentality towards it and saw nothing good in it. Such was the mentality of many of the early Missionaries who came to Africa from about the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. It is, however, important that these Missionaries who tried to live out the mentality of their age were working from the background of the theology of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. The Church was viewed as a lifeboat that had the responsibility of saving the drowning and perishing souls of the so called heathens. It is from this background that one can admire the zeal and sacrifice of these early Missionaries who gave up all they had, including their lives in order to bring this about. This point is strongly supported by Samuel Atinga when he says:

> "These missionaries were children of their age. Armed with the theology of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* together the Scriptural injunction which had Jesus Saying "… no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6), the devout missionaries arrived on the African continent with the full intention of not only converting the native people to Christianity but also saving their souls from peril and from perishing perpetually in the fires of hell. The Church was viewed as a lifeboat that was meant to save the drowning souls of the heathens. The natural consequence of this was that some missionaries viewed many aspects of the African way of life as completely negative and a haven for perishing souls."[84]

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[82] APURI, Proposed Christian Funeral Rites, 3.

[83] ABASI, Truly Christian and Truly African. 14.

[84] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 44.

The consequence of this was that the educated African was made to hate his/her own culture and consider it as actually devilish. With the spread of schools and as many more Africans obtained Western education, the Western culture became the measure of success and a mark of civilization. In Ghana, for instance, until the recent promotion of cultural consciousness, to be an official meant to dress in suits with a tie and it was quite disturbing to see for instance bank officials sweating almost to suffocation in the hot sun because they have to put on tie.

As much as we could say that western education and the evangelization activities of the missionaries brought some transformation into the Dagara culture, it is important to note here that not all did embrace it. As a result, in a given Dagara community, there are believers and non-believers as relations. In the event of funeral celebration there is always the question of where do I belong? Such a question arises because, for the Dagara, there is the need to ensure the safe arrival of the dead relative in the ancestral home. Thus, there is the need of a well celebrated funeral and a well celebrated funeral goes without series of traditional ritual performances which in the eyes of the Christian is seen as devilish and will hesitate to participate in it. However, as Samuel Atinga puts it, "many are those who find the Christian funeral ritual as not satisfactory enough despite the fact that the theology of the Christian funeral liturgy abounds in its expression of the theme of the resurrection and of life after death."[85] As a result, in the event of funeral celebration the Christian is faced with a double standards attitude and it is this situation that Msgr. Joseph Apuri laments when he assets that " many old Christians surreptitiously and in clandestine manner performed the traditional funeral performances and then go to confession afterwards."[86] Julius Ogongà makes the same point in another way about the Luo of East Africa, when he says:

> "This lack of communion between the dead and the living caused a religious fear to spring up in the mind of the community. Any disaster was interpreted as a repercussion resulting from the negligence of the traditional religious beliefs. Most people did not know how to handle the situation. Others, to please the preachers of the new religion, received Christian names as a mode of new fashion. But when an occasion occurred calling for religious attention, the native people turned to their ancestors."[87]

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[85] Ibid., 97.

[86] APURI, Proposed Christian Funeral Rites, 4.

[87] ONGONGA J., The Lou Concept of Death, A Study of Beliefs and Ceremonies of Death in the light of the Christian Massage (unpublished Doctoral Thesis Pontifical University of Urbaniana), Rome 1979, 29. See also ATENGA, 47.

This dismal situation brings a conscience problem to many Daraga Christians. The question that many Christians ask themselves is whether they are Christians or traditional worshipers or even both? Since they cannot be both, they either must choose to remain true and honest Christians or true and honest traditional worshipers. The mid way is to choose to remain a hypocrite and play a game between the two faiths. This seems to be the path many take because they are afraid to resist the pressure from their own culture and yet at the same time they want to remain Christians. Having said this, it is important to state that there are many Dagara and indeed Africans who are convinced of the Christian faith and are prepared to face the odds and the pressure bravely and remain faithful to the Christian faith and doctrine. However, for a way out of this problem Samuel Atinga had this to say:

> "with the inception of the Second Vatican Council, the attitude of the Church towards other cultures has changed dramatically for the better. Inculturation has become a key concept in contemporary Catholic theology and quite famous among both African and non-African theologians. Yet a lot more needs to be done to reverse the earlier unfavourable attitude to the culture if inculturation will make any impact in the Church in Africa."[88]

II.4.2 Effects of Cultural Interaction and Cultural Borrowing on Dagara Funeral

The dawn of modernity, Christianity, Southern Ghana influences and the introduction of western ways of living through education have made the Dagara funeral rites and customs to undergo considerable changes. The areas that have suffered these changes are numerous but the Burial and the Post-Burial Rites are the worst affected. In fact these two areas have almost completely lost the true traditional rites and customs even among the pagan groups of the society. This is because of the constant and inevitable decrease of the pagan population who are strict adherents of the culture, whilst Christianity and education gain more and more ground. Thus Christians are now involved in the burial of pagans and vice versa. These days the grave diggers no longer approach the funeral stand with fear and superstition. The dead body is no longer carried astride on one of them but is carried in a coffin by four or six men or even some are carried to the grave side in cars depending on the social status of the deceased or his relations. In recent times, burial usually starts after a mass is celebrated at the funeral stand, all mourning and weeping cease, some prayers are said and songs

[88] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 45.

sung while the people go in procession to the grave yard for the burial provided the deceased was a devoted Christian.[89]

Previously, the Dagara buried their dead in chamber-like graves with an arrow round entrance. Now with the introduction of the coffin, burial is in trench graves, the size of the coffin. Such trench graves were previously used in burying slaves. Thus, this new invention has in a way breached the social gap in the burial of the free man in the Dagara society.

The introduction of the coffin has economic consequences on the people. It is now more of a fashion than a necessity. It is an area for competition among the Dagara for fame and glory. The price of a coffin is now between 100 and 800 Ghana Cedis. For some educated elites and business men, this is alright. But for a typical subsistent, peasant farmer, it can have great economic consequences on the family of the deceased. Most of the time, the family has to struggle to get the money for a coffin and suffer the consequences, sometimes for months or years.[90]

All the burial rites at the grave side are now being replaced by religious ceremonies such as "the sprinkling of holy water over the grave and the burning of incense amidst hymns. When the coffin has been lowered into the grave, the eldest of the family is given a shovel and he throws the earth over the coffin."[91] This is totally against the Dagara custom as a Dagara is never allowed to bury his own relative. Even more grievous is the fact that, most of the ordinary people who troop to the grave are also allowed to fetch some gravel and throw it on the coffin. This is unimaginable as far as the Dagara customs and rites are concern. These days' grave diggers no longer eat the 'grave medicine' as the Christian teaching has "stripped the dead of all the magical and supernatural powers assigned to them in former times. People now approach the dead not with fear but with respect."[92]

As a result of Christianity, masses are celebrated at funerals before the burial. Even after the funeral, bereaved family members, age mates and others request masses to be celebrated for the repose of the soul of the deceased instead of the 'funeral pito' (ko-daa) which was meant to usher the soul of the deceased into the ancestral world. Of late, a bereaved partner is given a big crucifix to

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[89] Cf. NANGPIIRE, Contemporary Funerals and their Socio-Economic Implications, 62.

[90] Cf. ibid., 62-63.

[91] Ibid., 63.

[92] Ibid., 63.

hang on his/her neck, unlike the traditional believers who smear clay on the bereaved couple to symbolize that the individual has lost a partner.

One of the changes is that, these days elders die lying down which used to be abhorred in the Dagara culture. This is because many of them die at hospitals where there may not be any close relative to holding them at the time of death. As a result of this, many elders die without giving their last words to their close relatives as to how their funerals should be celebrated, where certain property are, and how these property should be shared. This generates conflicts between the nuclear family and lineage members as to who inherits the deceased movable and non-movable property. Thanks to the intestate succession Law (PNDC Law 111) this problem has been mitigated to a large extent.

The usual divinations to find out the cause of death and the performance of sacrifices have become a thing of the pats. This, according to the Dagara Christian "is helpful as they no longer have to buy fowls, goats, and sheep or in some cases a cow for sacrifices to pacify the gods before a funeral can start."[93]

A significant modification in the Dagara funeral arrangement is how funerals are announced in recent times. Many people in the study area use the local FM to announce funerals to their relations. They no longer send messengers to move from one village to the other to announce funerals. It is a fact that the FM stations make funeral announcement easier however, radio announcement is quite expensive. "Wailing, crying and the playing of the xylophones are still used to announce funerals to the nearby houses. In some instances, a gun is shot to announce a funeral or to signify that the corpse is about to be buried."[94]

Serving of food (take away) and drinks have also emerged as a new trend, where people who come to sympathize with the bereaved family are served with food and drinks of different kinds, which in its real sense is not part of the Dagara Culture. This practice is copied from the Southern part of Ghana. In the South, it is the practice that guests at funeral celebrations are served with meals and drinks, and those who are served with meals or drinks at funerals, donate a realistic amount of money to the bereaved members to help defray the debts incurred during the funeral. For Arhin, whereas one can safely argue that funerals have assumed unwarranted transformations, "performing

[93] Ibid., 64.

[94] Ibid., 65.

these does not generally result in a loss in the form of excess of expenditure over donations"[95]. The economic evaluation is even positive among the Ashantis but this is hardly the case among the Dagara.

Of late, the use of iron stage has also surfaced. Instead of the usual wooden stages which promote deforestation, some villages are contributing money to buy iron stages for funerals in their villages. For some of them, it is expensive and goes against the Dagara culture but for others, it prevents deforestation and makes things easier when making the stage. One of the positive effects of funeral celebrations is that, "the increase in the quality and scale of the funeral rites has stimulated the carpentry (coffin and seats), brewing, distilling and paint trades, and has promoted such service industries as those of the mortician, the suppliers of canopies and seats, and music and dance or cultural groups"[96]

The number of days funerals used to last has also been reduced from three or four days to one or two days. This, the elders agree, is helpful because if the funeral is staged for a long time, it affects their farming, trading, church and economic activities. It also makes the bereaved family very exhausted, thus this change is a move in the right direction.

Another new trend in the Dagara funeral celebrations is the hiring of chairs, canopies and in some cases generators. This is done to provide shed, light and facilitates seating at the funeral grounds. Although, this art is conceded a good practice, however, many are worried about the cost it brings to the bereaved family. It is also observed that, there has been an increasing use of black and red cloths and the printing of T- shirts for funerals instead of the usual smocks and hand woven cloths (funeral cloths) used at Dagara funerals. Dagara women are said to be the promoters of this change, in that, just a glance at funeral grounds would reveal that many women wear red or black cloths whilst most men continue to wear their traditional smocks. They blame this alteration on Southern influence. This change for them has brought additional cost to the Dagara funeral celebrations.

One of the major changes in funeral celebrations is the keeping of corpses in morgues, popularly called 'fridge' funerals. This is where most families will want to take their time to plan for

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[95] ARHIN K., **"**The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites", in: Africa: Journal of the International African Institute 64/03 (1994) 307-322, here: 318.

[96] Ibid., 318.

the funeral their deceased relative. They want to celebrate the funeral with the dead body in their midst and with the morgues system, it makes their wish a reality. However, many Dagara People are of the view that this practice is not helpful based on the poverty situation in the area. They argue that there is a lot of cost involved in transporting the corpse to and fro the mortuary and they believe that this practice is brought by the educated elites, Priests and Religious and those living and working in the Southern part of Ghana. Money which could be used for feeding, trading, paying of school fees among others is diverted to pay for funeral expenses.

Most of the changes identified are cost related and any activity during funeral celebrations that brings debt to the bereaved family is frowned upon. This is because for the Dagara, the death of a relative is a great lost i. e., a debt. So to add another debt in terms of money is never appreciated. They believe that one cannot plan for death like wedding or festivals, so when it occurs, there should not be any cause to spend the little they have on funerals.

lI.5 Conclusion

Even though, the Dagara funerals have currently been much influenced by contemporary trends, they still remain serious obstacles to many Dagara Christians. As already observed, in the face of death, the Dagara Christian finds him/herself at a crossroads. With the best of intentions he/she may want to remain faithful to the Christian teaching, yet he/she is also confronted with the demands of the culture. What do they do at this crossroad? This is a very difficult question for many. For the outsider, it is quite easy to say just abandon them and be faithful to your faith. But for the people involved, the solution is not just as easy as that, in that, abandoning them means abandoning their whole social and familial relations. This is why some people just simply fall away while others try to play it safe by combining the two and this eventually brings about their frustration. With the growing number of Christians today, a reconstruction of the culture and the Christian funeral rites has become more urgent than ever.

lII. Chapter Two: Basic Tenets of the Christian Funeral Liturgy

lII.0 Introduction

The Christian theology of death and the liturgical practice has a strong link to the person, death and resurrection of Christ. In the early Christian Church, Christ was the center of their life and these really identified them as an organized destine group. They saw death as dying in Christ with the

hope of resurrecting again in him. The Christian theology of death is strongly connected to eschatology. As such it is to note that the Christian Church has lived this basic element of theology of death in different epochs among pagan counterparts.

In this chapter we are going to concern ourselves with the Basic Tenets of the Christian funeral liturgy in the different epochs. It is divided into two main parts. The first part we will focus on the theological perspective of Christian death and funerals. It takes a brief survey from the early Church usually referred to as the Church of Martyrs, through to the shift of emphasis in the Middle Ages to the theological restoration of the Second Vatican Council. We shall then take a look at the liturgical component of Christian funerals. Here the focus will be on the liturgical celebration of funerals in the Early Church through to the Tridentine rite of 1614 and concludes with the *Ordo Exsequiarum of 1969*, the reformed rite of Vatican ll. The theological and the liturgical are intrinsically connected for, in the liturgy, we celebrate what we believe.

lII.1 Theological Perspective

lII.1.1 The Period of Martyrdom

The Christian theology of death cannot in principle and in practice be detached from the theology of eschatology and after life when everything will be gathered together to the Lord. This can already be seen in the rudimentary form in the early centuries of the Church, which is sometimes referred to as the Church of the martyrs. As the sources indicate, Christians during the first two or three centuries could neither organize any elaborate funerals nor possess Christian cemeteries where their dead could be buried. Consequently, Christians were buried in the public cemeteries as everybody else. However, even in these early stages of the faith they marked out their graves with decorations, which seem to portray their theology of death. Richard Rutherford makes reference to Van der Meer-Mohrmann who shows that for Christians their dead "were no mere shades whom they remembered with sadness and resignation. These were the ones who had gone before to Paradise of the Shepherd, to the 'place of refreshment', light and peace."[97] Even during the meals at the funeral, which was a common practice and part of the rituals of their pagan neighbors, the Christians took it as an ordinary meal and "linked it with another meal that is the Eucharist, the Food of life."[98] From

[97] RUTHERFORD R. and BARR T., The Death of a Christian. The Order of Christian Funerals, Collegeville 1990, 6

[98] Ibid.

their funerary decorations, the Christians of the early Church have preserved for us the main thrust of their conception of death. Already at this teething stage of the faith, they expressed a theology of death, which in a great measure forms the nucleus of the Christian teaching on death.

The Christians who suffered Martyrdom at this time proclaimed, by their readiness to die a "belief that the life entered at baptism and nourished at the Eucharist is of a different order, which is in no way affected be physical death."[99] Their focus already at this time was on the death and resurrection of Christ, which became for them a symbol of their own death and life in Christ attained through baptism. This paradigmatic event in their lives led the Christians to consider the day of death as the day of birth. Therefore, "the celebration of the mystery of the death of a faithful Christian is ultimately the celebration of that person´s *dies natalis* into paradise."[100] Logically then most of the feast days of the martyrs and saints were fixed and celebrated on their days of death. The early Christians believed that "Jesus' resurrection is a promise that ultimately we will not be abandoned, but not a promise that God will remove our suffering, pain and death"[101] The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross clearly indicates that He does not offer palliative for death. This understanding encouraged the early Christians to embrace martyrdom with joy. For Cyprian, "martyrdom of constant Christian commitment should be a source of deepest consolation to the living…"[102]

This understanding promoted a certain attitude among Christians, which may be interpreted today as insensitive or fundamentalistic. Christians were encouraged to be joyful at funerals presumably because the deceased was simply changing to a location, which is better and purer. This could be seen in the way they organized their funerals. During the middle of the second century, Aristides of Athens is said to have "defended the way Christians behaved at the death of a *just* Christian; they rejoice and give thanks and accompany the corpse for he has migrated from one place for the other,"[103] Following Aristides, a century later, Cyprian "urged …his people not to fall back into pagan ways of mournful despair at the death of their dear ones."[104] In light wailing or crying was

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[99] Ibid., 6-7

[100] SMOLARSKI D., Sacred Mysteries, Sacramental Principles and Liturgical Practice, Mahwah 1995, 138.

[101] RICHARD L.,Death. Theology of, in: The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship, ed by P. Finks, Collegeville 1990, 324-331, here: 326.

[102] RUTHERFORD and BARR, The Death of a Christian, 11.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

not recommended and as such viewed as an insult to the dead and defeats the purpose of bringing in singers and priests.[105] This attitude can be understood in the context of the pagan manner of exaggerated and violent mourning. For them "immediately after death and the laying out of the body, the mourning was began in the presence of the corpse. This comprised words, and gestures of sorrow."[106] This even developed to a situation where they hired professional mourners for the purpose. The early Fathers who were responding to Paul´s admonition to Christians not to mourn like the pagans could not accept this kind of mourning in the Church. From this perspective, the sources indicate that Christian funerals involved among other things processions whereby the faithful wore "white garments, sang psalms and alleluias of victory. Palm leaves were carried, together with lights, and incense was burned, all expressing the idea of triumph over death."[107] In effect, Paul´s denial of the sting of death in 1 Corinthians 15 was carried to the limit.

In short the nascent Church faced with a hostile environment, developed a theology of death, which was soothing enough for them to face the persecution. The Pascal Mystery of Christ was the center and the focus of their theology. Just as Christ did not remain in death but rose from the dead, they too were sure of everlasting life. The iconography and decorations of their tombs to a great extent testify to this.

The problem with the attitude of the Christians to death and funeral is that, by insisting and encouraging a joyful mood at the death of a member, they overlooked the emotional demands of the bereaved who may wish to really mourn for a deceased relative. Grief and the expression of sorrow at the death of a dear one are natural sentiments which, if well directed, can be a good source of healing. "Grief is necessary and should be allowed to run its natural course. We are then better able to regain our balance and continue to live our lives in a healthy manner."[108] The fact that I can weep and openly show my grief at the death of my relative does not in any way diminish my faith in the resurrection.

The Medieval Church tried to move away from this attitude but unfortunately went to the other extreme. This, notwithstanding, the early Church, basing herself on scripture, laid a solid

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[105] Cf. RUSH A., Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity, Washington D. C. 1941, 155-156.

[106] Ibid., 163.

[107] NEWS B., Burial, in: J. G. Davies (ed.), A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship, Suffolk 1989, 117-119, here: 117.

[108] GARLAND J., Pastoral Letter on Christian Funerals, in: Origins 31/27 (2001) 457-460, here: 458.

foundation of the Christian theology of death, which characterizes our contemporary Church theology.

III.1.2 The Medieval Church and Funerals

Although the Medieval Church did not make a significant shift from the theology of the early Church, its theological reflections and attitude to death and funerals portrayed a major move from that of their ancient counterparts.

Rather than expressing the joy and hope in the resurrection and the goodness of God so characteristic of the early Church, the rites of the Medieval Church were "consistent with a theological perspective that emphasized human failure and divine justice, rather than human goodness and divine mercy, and emphasized the sacrificial death of Christ, rather than Christ's victory over sin and death."[109] This often created a feeling of unworthiness and fear of damnation on the minds of the faithful.

With this emphasis of the Medieval Church on the sin of humanity and divine justice, there was engrained in the minds of the faithful that even if the dead were worthy to enter heaven "they likely would suffer the pains of purgatory for quite a while, or if they had committed a mortal sin and had not confessed it they would be condemned to fire of hell for eternity."[110] This attitude was very much alive in their rite, which often created a grim and somber atmosphere at funerals. The color used for the funeral liturgy at this time was black, giving an impression of a despairing mournful atmosphere rather than an expression of hope. Among many other prayers and songs prescribed in the Roman missal at the time was the lengthy sequence, *Dies Irae*, before the gospel, which explicates the medieval theology of death. This *Die Irae,* was composed somewhere around the twelfth or thirteenth century "to modify somewhat the atmosphere of joy and hope so characteristic of the ancient funeral liturgy, which looked forward to the resurrection of the body and entrance into God´s kingdom."[111] Moreover, the *Libera me*, *Domine* went further to deal a telling blow on any expression of hope and the goodness and mercy of God who created the world good. In general, if there was anything that gave solace to the faithful in the theology and liturgy of the Medieval Christian funeral, it was the Gregorian chant; otherwise "the customs and prayers in the liturgical

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[109] SMOLASKI D, Sacred Mysteries, 139.

[110] Ibid., 140.

[111] NEWS B., Burial, in: J. G. Davies (ed.), A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship, Suffolk 1989, 119-120, here: 119.

books did not give much witness to the Christian belief of sharing in the promise of the resurrection of Christ."[112] It is difficult to perceive how and why the Medieval Church made this direct switch from the Early Church´s emphasis on the resurrection to an emphasis on human sin and justice.

Much as we need to guard against a presumptuous attitude in our relationship with God, the medieval theology of death and its funeral liturgy went a step too far in emphasizing divine justice and sinful humanity rather than the mercy and goodness of God. The effect of this theology was the development of all kinds of penances and the quest for indulgences that we witness during this period of the Church´s history. Such a theology denies the ontological goodness of humanity, which is part of the goodness of God´s creation and his love for sinful humanity. It was the love of God for humanity that brought about the incarnation. A balanced theology of death is required to bring meaning to Christian death and the Christian funeral liturgy. The Church had to wait till the second Vatican Council to bring this about.

lII.1.3 The Second Vatican Council

The second Vatican Council saved the theology of death from the shackles of the austere attitude of the Medieval Church to death and funerals. The council restored the connection of Christian death to the resurrection of Christ so much emphasized by the early Church. Therefore, for the Council, Christian death and funerals are to be seen from the point of view of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Accordingly, the Council states: "the funeral rites should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death, and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions of the individual party of the world. This also applies to the question of liturgical colors."[113]

One of the early documents that came out of the Council was the *Ordo Exsequiarum in 1969.*[114] This document gave a great impetus to the development of our contemporary theology of death. What stands out very strongly from the norm of this rite is a good "balance between acknowledging human grief, begging forgiveness for sin and imperfections, and proclaiming faith in

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[112] SMOLASKI D., Sacred Mysteries, 141.

[113] Vatican Council ll, Sacrosanctum Concilium. Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, in: N. Tanner, (ed.) Decrees of Ecumenical Councils, Vol. ll, London 1990, no. 81.

[114] OWUSU, The Roman Funeral Liturgy, 37.

God´s mercy and Christ´s victory over death in his resurrection."[115] This healthy balance appears in our time to be a more realistic way of experiencing death. It brings about a recognition of the need to grief, the realization of our imperfection and our need for God´s forgiveness and yet at the same time expressing our hope in the resurrection. This threefold combination is an improvement over the Early Church´s plays down on grief, and the Medieval Church´s emphasis on human sinfulness and divine justice.

The Council even touched on the use of colors at funerals as stated in above. As the liturgical books suggest today, violet is recommended for funerals, but the color significance of the different regional Churches may dictate otherwise. In my opinion, white may be more appropriate to express the Risen Jesus and more significantly, our resurrection with Him. Besides, it re-echoes the practice of the early Church.

Since the end of the Council, theologians and liturgical movements have emphasized on the Paschal character of Christian death. According to Richard Rutherford, "the Christian death is … a celebration of the paschal mystery, a profession of faith in the hope of sharing Jesus´ own resurrection to the fullness of life in God."[116] In the same vein, Vincent Owusu holds that the "Paschal Mystery of Christ constitutes the culminating point of the biblical promise about our own death. To say that the Christian life is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is to strongly affirm one´s faith in the face of death."[117] Put in another way, Ray Anderson contends; "The New Testament´s answer to the problem of our death is that the victory over death which was achieved in the resurrection of Jesus was a victory for all persons who are related to God through Jesus Christ."[118] The basis of this theology is the fact of our baptism in Christ, which is very much supported by scripture. This is precisely what Paul means when he states, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."(Rom. 6:3-5). Baptism in Christ is the basis of death with him and consequently a resurrection with him.

If Christian death and funerals are detached from the Paschal Mystery, then the pain of death can become so intense not only for the dying but also for the living, there will be no source of

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[115] SMOLASKI, Sacred Mysteries, 142.

[116] RUTHERFORD and BARR, The Death of a Christian, p.123.

[117] OWUSU, The Roman Funeral Liturgy, 170.

[118] ANDERSON R., Theology, Death and Dying, Worcester 1986, 99.

consolation for the living and the pain of loss will be greatly felt. For the dying, death will become the terminus of life and this may give rise to despair and fear. This is why the option for the alleluia chant, instead of the *dies irae* of the Medieval Church becomes fundamentally meaningful and a great insight of the Council Fathers. The fact remains that:

"Notwithstanding the pain and grief, a general tone of serenity and hope prevails in the new funeral ritual and this is perhaps the most positive aspect of all. Since fear and punishment have largely disappeared as themes, thus enabling Christian funeral to be a source of true consolation to the bereaved, the gift of life of the risen Jesus gives meaning to the present, the past and the future life of the deceased."[119]

In short a true and meaningful theology of death is the Paschal Mystery of Christ. This is the core of the Christian faith and this is what brings meaning to Christian death and Christian funerals.

lII.2 The Rite of Christian Funerals, the Liturgical Component

The theology of Christian funerals and their belief in life after death is celebrated concretely in ritual form in the funeral liturgy. The Christian symbols, prayers and attitude displayed by the funeral rite portray to a great extent the Christian theology of death. Just as the theology of death has undergone different phases of development, so also the accompanying rituals that express this theology have also undergone various stages of development.

lII.2.1 The Formative Period: The Early Church

Christianity is rather a relative young religion which traces its root to Judaism. The early Christians lived among their Jewish and pagan counterparts, especially among the Hellenistic cultures that have already developed their own way of celebrating funerals. In connection with this Richard Rutherford say, "Jewish funerary rites seem always to have reflected the realism and simplicity that characterized the present-day liturgy."[120] For Geoffrey Rowell the very simplicity and the directness of the Jewish practice "points to a basic practice pattern of strong biblical prayer,

[119] OWUSU, The Roman Funeral Liturgy, 171.

[120] RUTHERFORD R, The Death of a Christian, the Rite of Funerals, New York 1980, 6.

accompanying the few necessary actions of burial, which may be summed, with the necessary Christological additions, to reflect what is most likely to have been earliest Christian practice."[121]

Nevertheless, Rutherford maintains that "the early Christian eschatology and the early Christian funeral were peculiarly Christian."[122] In throwing more light on this, he says

> "long before medieval theologians began to write tracts on the four last things. Christians had been expressing what they believed about death and about life after death in the care which they showed their dead. That the followers of Jesus took reverent care of the bodies of their dead and held their memory in honor was, of course, nothing out of the ordinary. They were simply continuing the customs of the culture into which the Church was born. Funeral ritual belongs to the very heritage of the human community."[123]

Furthermore, with the words of Margaret Mead he says "I know of no people for whom the fact of death is not critical, and who have no ritual by which to deal with it."[124] Unlike their pagan counterparts who were inspired by fear of apprehension by their dead thus, the funeral rites did appease them. The early Christians were motivated in the light of the promise of the resurrection of the dead and also of the affection of the diseased.[125] On the other hand through the influence Judaism the early Christians did bury their dead in the light of duty and also as a work of mercy.[126] Rutherford confirms the above mentioned motivations when he says "our data from the past impress upon us that care for the deceased was an integral part of the daily Christian life from the beginning. Earlier literature and iconography especially mirror the faith that found expression in an ever-developing Christian liturgy surrounding death and burial."[127]

It is very evident that even from these rudimentary stages, the funeral formularies were already forming a foundation upon which the future funeral rites would be based as Samuel Atenga

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[121] ROWELL G., Liturgy of Christian Burial. An Introductory Survey of the Historical Development of Christian Burial Rites (Alcuin Club Collections 59), London 1977, 9.

[122] RUTHERFORD, The Death of a Christian, 7.

[123] Ibid., 3.

[124] Ibid.

[125] PEREZ A., Ritualising Death. An Analysis of the 1970 Rite of Funerals and the 1985 Order of Christian Funerals, (unpublished Licentiate Thesis KU), Leuven 1993, 26.

[126] Ibid.

[127] RUTHERFORD, The Death of a Christian, 37.

points out with the words of Rutherford "it is no wonder therefore that one discovers formularies for funeral liturgy among the oldest extant manuscript witnesses to Western liturgical practice. These earliest extant examples of funeral formularies mark the beginning of an order of funerals"[128] "Much as these beginnings cannot in reality be considered normative rites; their influence on later rites cannot be overemphasized."[129] Before the reign of Pope Gregory the Great, there was no much writing culture as far as funeral practice are concerned, thus during his period saw "Christians more and more began to set down in writing specific aspects of their funerary practice"[130] These were based on a model funeral of the past or pattern to be followed by a cathedral chapter. For Rutherford, "it would be anachronistic to consider such early manuscript witnesses of funeral liturgy to be normative in any modern sense, nevertheless, they reveal a great deal about the developing Roman Rite of Funeral."[131]

In the ninth century witnessed different liturgical traditions and terminologies such as Roman, Gallican, Visigothic and the alike so far as funerary sources are concern. In the view of Rutherford "taken together, they enable us to describe the most significant characteristic of the Christian funeral in Western Europe during the first phase of documented liturgical history.[132] For Samuel Atenga this already "points out that funerary practice in the West was not a uniform phenomenon but differed from region to region, place to place and possibly person to person."[133] Perez observes that these different rites "amalgamated to form the model that would be characteristic of the Christian funeral in the West."[134]

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[128] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 116. See also RUTHERFORD, The Death of a Christian, 37.

[129] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 116.

[130] RUTHERFORD, The Death of a Christian, 37.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid., 39.

[133] ATENGA, Death and Dying, 117.

[134] PEREZ, Ritualising Death, 43.

III.2.2 The Normative Ritual of 1614 (*Rituale Romanum*)

As has already been observed, the Catholic funeral liturgy has seen several stages of development right from the early Church to the present day. Each phase developed a funeral liturgy that seemed to respond to the demands of the faithful and also the development of the theology of death. As the faith was spreading and making its mark all over Europe and the Americas, each local community deemed it necessary to develop a rite of funerals for themselves. That gave birth to the various diocesan pastoral rituals. Therefore, until the appearance of the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614, we witness a period of a variety of funeral ritual in the different regional Churches. From this point of view, we cannot talk of a normative funeral ritual for the whole of the Roman Church before 1614.

It is remarkable that despite the fact that this ritual originally was not intended to be a normative ritual, it eventually overtook the local diocesan rituals and became a reference point for all other rituals. Although Pope Paul V. who promulgated it, intended to allow freedom to other rituals, in reality and in practice it became a normative one. This was probably because "the post conciliar years (the period of counter reformation) was an age in need of norms."[135] Besides, the normative character of the ritual was precipitated by the centrality of authority in Rome and also at this time Roman norms were quite prestigious, especially among the clergy. Consequently, other local rituals that even formed the basis of the basis of the formulation of the Roman ritual found themselves being set to conform to it. It became in a sense, the measuring rod.

In this normative ritual we witness two main processions of the funeral liturgy. First there was the procession from the house to the church and a second procession from the church to the grave for burial after the service. The rite however "did not conceive of a long distance from the church to the grave"[136] The priest went to the house of the deceased where he sprinkled the body with holy water while they recited psalm 130, "out of the depths I cry to you, o Lord…" After this the body was brought out of the house for the procession to the church. Here the priest intoned the processional hymn. In addition, psalm 51 was sung. In the church provision was made for chanting the office of the dead after which there was the solemn celebration of the mass. Sometimes the body could remain in the church until the next day when mass could be celebrated. After the liturgy in the church, the body was carried to the graveside presumably within the churchyard with prescribed antiphons. The

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[135] RUTHERFORD and BARR, The Death of a Christian, 94.

[136] Ibid., 101.

grave was blessed before burial. After the burial there was another antiphon that was recited while the people returned to the church.

Besides the fact that some of the prayers in the ritual drew a healthy balance between the paschal faith and exaggerated expression of human weakness and the vengeance of God, it also in away promoted a prayerful mood throughout the celebration. Nevertheless, this balance did not stretch far enough since the rite still maintained some serious emphasis on sin, guilt and punishment that seemed to blur the Paschal hope to the resurrection. Prominent among these is the retention in this rite of the *dies irae me domini*, together with the prescribed black vestments.

III.2.3 The Reformed Rite of 1969 (*Ordo Exsequiarum*)

At the inception of the Second Vatican Council around the middle of the twentieth century, it was obvious that the rite of 1614, *Rituale Romanum,* that had been the normative ritual for the Roman Church for several centuries, needed reform. This Tridentine ritual which had a slant towards a grim picture of death and judgment was no more satisfactory enough in view of the strong desire by the Council Fathers to return to the theology of death that reflected the Paschal character of Christian life and death. This gave birth to the *ordo of 1969*, otherwise known as the *Ordo Exsequiarum* of 1969.

Consequently the basic character of this ritual is the obvious shift of emphasis from human sin, and divine retribution to one of hope in the resurrection and divine mercy. In line with this, the Council Fathers "removed such familiar and even beloved texts as the *Libera me Domini*, the *Dies irae*, and the others that overemphasized judgment, fear and despair."[137] These were replaced with texts that were more expressive of hope and faith in the resurrection. In fact these changes were more meaningful because they explained "the closer and more organic connection between the funeral and the Eucharistic celebration of the new rite…"[138] Furthermore, the Introduction to the *Order of Christian Funerals* states: "Christian hope faces the reality of death and anguish of grief but trusts confidently that the power of sin and death has been vanquished by the risen Lord"[139] Another positive shift of emphasis in the new rite is the communitarian character of funerals. It "urges the

[137] BUGNINI A., The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975, Collegeville 1990, 773.

[138] Ibid.

[139] INTERNATIONAL COMMISION ON ENGLISH IN THE LITUGY (ICEL). The Order of Christian Funerals, Collegeville 1989, 3.

participation not only of the family, friends and relatives of the deceased but of the entire community."[140] In accordance with this, the Order of Christian Funerals states once again in its Introduction that "those who are baptized in Christ and nourished at the same table of the Lord are responsible for one another… So too when a member of Christ´s Body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they have loved"[141] This is in line with the call of Paul in first Corinthians 12:26 that "if one member suffers in the body of Christ which is the Church, all members suffer with that member." This therefore, means that in the event of a funeral, "people are required to respond by their total involvement both outwardly – by their response and affirmation of the liturgy in which they join the priest in celebrating."[142]

This underscores the fact that the new rite does not conceive of a funeral as just a farewell ceremony where we simply dispose of the body and forget about it. In reality the "Catholic order of Christian funerals embraces a broader understanding of *obsequies* that includes all the rituals surrounding human death, from the time of death itself to the final leave-taking with accompanying expression of (Christian) consolation."[143] Besides that, "contemporary Catholic pastoral care extends beyond the funeral to include commemoration within each Eucharistic prayer… monthly and annual memorials, All Saints Day…"[144]

This is a very important development in the reformed rite and in contemporary Church practice. If our funerals will be reduced to just a mere farewell service, then death will become a very painful experience both for the dying and for the relatives of the deceased. Therefore, the practice of memorials and commemorations of the dead are not only a Christian responsibility to remember the dead but also underlines the very core of what Christians profess in the creed, we believe in the Communion of Saints, It is gratifying to know that the community will remember one after death. This, in a sense, lightens the process of death and prepares the dying to face the reality of death courageously and in readiness to meet the Lord.

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[140] BUGNINI, The Reform of the Liturgy, 774.

[141] ICEL, The Order of Christian Funerals, Collegeville 1989, 3.

[142] PADDY J., the Order of Christian Funerals. People Edition, in: Liturgy 15:3 (1991), 134-136.

[143] RUTHERFORD and BARR, The Death of a Christian, 117.

[144] Ibid., 117.

III.2.3.1 Model of the Rite

As a liturgical practice, the reformed rite has three different models. The first model is where the principal celebration of the funeral takes place in the Church. It goes through three stages. The first stage is the rite at the home of the deceased; the second stage is the principal celebration in the Church with the celebration of the Eucharist and the third stage is the rite of committal at the cemetery or the crematorium. These three stages present to us two processions. That is the procession from the home of the deceased to the church after the rite at the home and the procession from the church to the burial ground.[145] In the view of Samuel Atenga, "in our contemporary time, however, it is not practically possible to realize this model fully. This is due to the growth of cities and urbanization with its attendant traffic congestion on the streets thereby rendering any meaningful procession completely impracticable."[146]

The second model is simple and the most preferred for its practicability. It goes through two stages; that is the celebration in the cemetery chapel and the celebration at the graveside. The third model is where the principal celebration takes place in the home of the deceased. This model is created to take care of pastoral difficulties. There are many situations where the home of the deceased is far away from the church or the cemetery in which case the movement of the body to the church will either not be possible or will involve very difficult and complicated arrangements. In such a situation it is practically and pastorally prudent to celebrate the entire rite at the home of the deceased.[147]

It is very important to note here that the reformed rite is in no way creating a room for pastoral maneuver and adaptation to fit particular pastoral situations. In it real sense, the reformed rite is developed to response the current living situation and pastoral difficulties of time and also to underscore the fact that our Christian ritual care "is a living tradition, capable of adapting to various cultures as well as pastoral needs."[148]

What is characteristic of all the three forms is the fact that all have the rite of final commendation and it can be celebrated at the end of the Eucharistic liturgy or the liturgy of the Word in cases where there is no Eucharist or it may take place at the conclusion of the entire funeral rite at

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[145] Cf. ATINGA, Death and Dying, 143.

[146] Ibid., 143

[147] Cf. ibid.,144.

[148] Ibid., 144.

the cemetery. The celebration of the rite of final commendation is not to be seen as purifying the dead person in order to make him or her fit for the kingdom of God. In it right sense, the celebration of the rite of the final commendation is where the Christian community takes a farewell departure with their dead faithful. In other words, it is the celebration of a valediction where the Christian community confides a dead member to the heavenly Church at the moment of interment.[149]

III.2.3.2. The Vigil

Prayer vigil as a liturgical action had been an ancient practice of the early Church. This has been attested by the Church Fathers of both the East and West that goes back to about the fourth century. The structure of these vigils was basically readings, songs and prayers. The psalms were the most predominant[150]. The old Tridentine ritual overlooked this rite. It was restored by the reformed rite of 1969 probably due to the recognition of the pastoral value of the vigil in the celebration of funerals. The structure of the vigil is quite basic, simple and straightforward. It includes the "introductory rite, the liturgy of the word, prayers of intercession and a concluding rite."[151]

The rite takes place between the time of death and the celebration of the funeral liturgy. The 1969 Order of Christian Funerals considers it "the principal rite celebrated by the community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy…"[152] The rite presents two forms of the vigil. These forms are the vigil for the deceased without reception in the Church and the vigil for the deceased with a reception in the Church. The value of the rite of the vigil is seen in what is stated in number 52 of The Order of Christian Funerals. It states,

> "The time immediately following death is often one of bewilderment and may involve shock or heartrending grief for the family and close friends. The ministry of the Church at this time is one of gently accompanying the mourners in their initial adjustment to the fact of death and to the sorrow this entails. Through a careful use of the rites contained in this section, the minister helps the mourners to express their sorrow and find strength and consolation through faith in Christ and his resurrection to eternal life"[153]

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[149] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 144.

[150] Cf. BUGNINI, The Reform of the Liturgy, 775.

[151] ICEL, The Order of Christian Funerals, no. 57.

[152] Ibid., no. 54.

[153] Ibid., no. 52.

The above quotation summarizes the importance of the vigil. Seen in this light, though very important, the vigil is not to be perceived as the key celebration of the Christian funeral. Therefore, care has to be taken to avoid any exaggeration in such a way that it will overshadow the principal celebration of the liturgy.

III.2.3.3 The Funeral Mass

Even though historically the funeral mass with all its formularies, prayers and readings is a latecomer in Christian funerals, it has become the most central part of the Christian funeral liturgy, because of its focus on the Paschal Mystery of Christ. If the Christian funeral is a celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, then naturally the celebration of the Eucharist as part of a Christian funeral cannot be a cosmetic dressing. Understandably then, the reformed rite focuses on the Eucharist as the principal celebration of the Christian funeral liturgy. In line with this the Introduction to the *Order of Christian Funerals* states; "Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God, the author of life and the hope of the just. The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral."[154] In this connection the appropriate prayers of the funeral mass express in a very strong way this Paschal character and the hope in the resurrection. Besides that, the Eucharist is a prayer par excellence for the dead in that it is an effective way to express our love and give spiritual support to the deceased with the hope that they may be released from their sins and attain eternal life.

It is in this light one should understand the Catechism of the Catholic Church when it makes reference to an old practice of the Church by stating that, "From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God."[155] Such a presentation, however, in my view may give the impression that the Eucharist per se can a priori cleanse people's sins and fly them straight to heaven. Such an impression will portray the Eucharist as a magical formula that works automatically. In such a case if the Eucharist is not celebrated at any funeral, then that particular deceased will have less chances of attaining the forgiveness of God. The attainment of

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[154] Ibid., 3.

[155] APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION, FIDEI DEPOSTIUM, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nairobi 1994, 1032.

the beatific vision remains the absolute priority of God who cannot be manipulated by humans. As humans, however, we believe that our prayers can aid the dead to reach the heavenly home and it is in this context that the Eucharist, which is the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, becomes the highest form of prayer for the dead but not in a magical and manipulative way.

lII.2.3.4. The Rite of Committal

The rite of committal forms an integral part of the funeral liturgy. It takes place at the place of committal after the funeral liturgy. The new rite allows entombment, burial in a grave or cremation. These three modes respond to the cultural practices of the different regions of the Catholic world. It is also a further expression of the Christian and cultural responsibility to bury the dead. It is the "conclusion of the funeral rites … the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member"[156] The rite also expresses the Paschal Mystery of Christ and the belief in the resurrection of the dead. With the belief in the resurrection of Christ, we do commit the body of the deceased to the earth from which it came with the certainty of hope that it will rise again and we shall reunite in heaven. That is why the prayers offered as the body is committed to the grave at the concluding rite of a Christian burial in its real sense express our belief in the resurrection of our Lord. One of the prayers provided by the rite runs as follows

> Almighty and ever-living God,
> in you we place our trust and hope,
> in the dead, whose bodies were temples of the spirit find everlasting peace.
> As we take leave of N,
> Give our hearts peace in the firm hope that one-day he/she will live
> In the mansion you have prepared for him/her in heaven.[157]

The above prayer and many other options provided for this rite emphasize and conclude the Christian hope in the resurrection and the fact that Christian death is closely connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The *Order of Christian Funeral* provides two forms of committal. The first is the rite of committal and the second is the rite committal with commendation. The first "is used when the final

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[156] ICEI, The Order of Christian Funeral, no. 204.

[157] Ibid, no. 218.

commendation is celebrated as part if the conclusion of the funeral liturgy."[158] On the other hand, the second form "is used when the final commendation does not take place during the funeral liturgy or when no funeral liturgy precedes the committal rite."[159]

The structure of both forms is very basic. It includes invitation, Scripture reading and prayer over the place of committal if that was not already done. However, the first form goes on with the words of committal, intercession and the Lord's Prayer, while "the rite of committal with final commendation continues with an invitation to prayer, a pause for silent prayer, the sprinkling and incesing of the body … and the prayer of commendation"[160]

The value and significance of the rite if committal is seen in the fact that through it "the community of faith proclaims that the grave or place of interment, once a sign of futility and despair, has been transformed by means of Christ's own death and resurrection into a sign of hope and promise."[161] This clearly points to the Paschal character of this rite.

lII.3 Conclusion

Between the early Church and the Second Vatican Council, we witness a progression of the reflection on the theology of Christian death and the liturgical practice of the Church. The theology of the early Church and their liturgical practice emphasized the resurrection of Christ. Death for them was a going home, an event that was greeted with a joyful celebration. This version was antidote to the pain of martyrdom. Martyrdom was the highest expression of Christian witness. The Church Fathers at this period even defended a joyful atmosphere during funerals.

Around the middle Ages there was a twist in the theology and liturgical practice. During this time, there was more emphasis on human sin, divine justice and judgment. Their liturgical practice and prayers at funeral painted a very grim and somber picture. The black vestment as a prescribed colour for the funeral liturgy so characteristic of this period dealt a telling blow to the hope of the resurrection very well articulated by the early Church.

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[158] Ibid., no. 205.

[159] Ibid., no. 205.

[160] Ibid., no. 208.

[161] Ibid., no. 209.

The Second Vatican Council drew a healthy balance between the theology of the Early Church and that of the Medieval Church. In a certain sense we may say that the Second Vatican Council has presented a realistic theology of death. It emphasizes the fact that the Christian funerals are a celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. It returns to the strong hope of the resurrection that was expressed by the Early Church. However, it also acknowledges the fact of the reality of the human sin and their need for the mercy of God and His forgiveness. The liturgical practice, therefore, moves the faithful to come to this reality. The Vatican council is more pastoral in its approach and enhances a true celebration of Christian death.

In sum, Vatican ll has shown that there is always room for improvement. It certainly does not have the last word. As the Church grows and develops, her vision and theology develops as well and this is a challenge to the regional Churches to take advantage of the healthy climate created by the council to develop a theology that answers their need.

IV. Chapter Three: Analytical Considerations between the Christian Funeral and the Dagara Funeral Rites: an Approach towards Inculturation

IV.0 Introduction

This final chapter is devoted to comments and comparison between the Dagara funeral rites and the Christian funeral liturgy. It is divided into four brief parts. It deals with some critiques of the Dagara funeral rites from both positive and the negative perspectives. This is followed by a comparative presentation between the Dagara funeral celebrations and the Christian funeral rites, including the belief in life after death. Here some similarities and differences are brought out. Based on this, some concrete proposals from the points of view of pastoral and liturgical approaches with the possibility of inculturation are made.

IV.1 Critique of the Daraga Funerals

IV. 1.1 Positive Critique

IV.1.1.1 The Communitarian Spirit of the Dagara People

In our exposition of the Dagara funerals, what stands out very strongly as can be surmised is the communitarian character of the Dagara. It must be noted from the outset that the communitarian life of the Dagara is not just limited to funerals but their entire social, religious and economic life. It is, however, more pronounced in situations of special need such as funerals or some other misfortune

that may befall the community. From the stand point of Samuel Atinga, "the finality of human life on earth in death is such an overwhelming event that the response of the living community demands both a theological and anthropological/sociological analysis."[162] Furthermore, he stresses that:

> "human beings by nature are social beings an important passage in the life of the individual necessarily evokes a community response because it is an event that affects not only the individual and family but also the larger family/community in which the individual lives. It is in this light that death is an event that evokes the gathering of the community. The driving force behind this in our opinion is both socio-cultural and faith/religious demands."[163]

Any tendency of individualism is frowned at, scorned and even considered as an expression of greed. Members of the community who portray such a tendency may be isolated and in a situation of particular need, may not receive the needed communitarian support. The communitarian character of the Dagara operates on the principle that, "my neighbors´ joy and their sorrow are also mine."

This is why in a situation of funerals among the Dagara, and in fact among other African tribes, all relatives are informed and they in turn are bound to come to the funeral. All the neighbors also show their solidarity by being present and sharing in the sorrow of the deceased family. It is quite remarkable that in such a situation, not only do the relatives and neighbors come to the funeral but they also come along with their contributions for the funeral. No landlord or landlady in reality comes to the funeral house empty handed. However, much as these contributions are important and very much appreciated, the most important is the physical presence of the neighbors and the relatives. That is why when somebody is genuinely prevented from being present he/she will have to send representatives.

For the Dagara and also for many African communities, this communitarian spirit is not only limited to the living but also to the dead. The Dagara traditional religious belief has it that just as we, the living gather at the home of the deceased to express our support and condolence, our ancestors in the underworld are also gathering to welcome the deceased who is coming home and to receive messages from their living progeny. This points to the fact that the dead are not just isolated figures but are still effective members of the family and have a great influence on the day to-day life of the family. It also points to the fact that the Dagara do not dichotomize the sacred and the profane. In

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[162] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 187.

[163] Ibid., 187-188.

many cases, even one or two weeks after burial, the neighbors, both men and women still come to the funeral house to stay with the family. The men stay and sleep outside while the women stay and sleep inside the compound. In the case of elderly people, during and after the accompanying period they organize periodic entertainments in the house of the deceased.

IV.1.1.2. The Value of this Communitarian Spirit

The value of this communitarian spirit is obvious and cannot be overemphasized. Death is a painful reality that brings in its train grief, pain and sorrow, especially when if strikes young people. This can sometimes be very unbearable. Not even the Christian belief after death and the resurrection of the body in Christ is enough to take away this grief and pain of loss, for even "the Christian in the face of death remains human even though fully aware of the hope in the resurrection"[164] It is usually at this time that relatives of the deceased, especially those who are close to them, need the direct and immediate support of the community. This is why older women among the Dagara are made to sit around the widow(s) while older men sit around the widower to console them and to give them the reassurance of the community´s support. The very presence of people expressing their condolence goes a long way to reduce the tension and the pain of loss so that through the normal process of grief the relatives of the deceased are able to overcome the initial shock and come to terms with the situation.

That apart, the material support for the deceased family during the funeral is quite commendable. Besides the physical presence of the neighbors and relatives, they show in a concrete way their communal support by bringing material things that may be needed for the funeral. Even though some of these items are interpreted as gifts for their deceased relatives, in reality and in practice they are the material contribution for the funeral celebration.

Moreover, this spirit enhances a peaceful coexistence and friendliness. People find out that they are interconnected in one way or the other and therefore, share a common destiny. Even when there is a conflict, occasions such as funerals evoke an opportunity for reconciliation. This is the time we do away with our differences and support one another. Thus funerals aside the pain and grief, it's

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[164] JOHSON C., The Ordo Exsequiarum, 1969, with Related Liturgical Texts, Indexes and Bibliography, Vincenziano 1993, 11.

also foster the reality of reconciliation in the community. It brings out an atmosphere of reassurance that when one is in any particular need, the community is there to lend a hand.

IV.1.1.3. Restoration of Social and Religious Equilibrium

Undoubtedly, life proves that death is the most unwelcome guest in the human society. Among the Dagara it brings about a rupture and a destabilization of the social and religious equilibrium. The normal life of the community is completely destabilized. In a way, a conflict is evoked. There is a conflict between the day-to-day life of the community and the reality of death that has brought about the rupture in their daily lives. The social life completely comes to a halt, especially if the deceased is a young person. On the religious plane many questions are asked: where did we go wrong? Who is behind this death? etc.

All these call for a radical action to restore the equilibrium. There is no doubt that rituals are very important in such situations. Rituals accommodate conflicting structures by resolving them in symbols which are multivocal and thus able to 'speak' to conflicting structures equally. In this light the funeral rituals are the most effective means by which the social and religious equilibrium are restored. After the funeral is celebrated, a situation of normalcy returns and the balance in the societal equilibrium is restored. Whatever differences may have arisen from the death of the member of the community, these are resolved and the wounds are healed. This is why morning or weeping or is completely forbidden after the official close of the post-funeral celebration.

The process of restoration of this equilibrium through the funeral ritual is very detailed and meticulous almost to the point of magical formulae. Every aspect of the different rituals must be strictly followed and done in a particular way or else the desired results may not be obtained. This desired result would be the full restoration of the equilibrium. If the ritual is not properly followed the living will be punished and in that case the social and religious disequilibria of the community will persist until an appropriate ritual is carried out to reverse the situation. It in this light we agree with Mbiti that: "meticulous care is taken to fulfill the funeral rites and avoid causing any offence to the departed"[165]

From this point of view, the manner of the Dagara funeral is quite appreciable because on the psychological level it remains a powerful tool for easing the tension in the community that is caused

[165] MBITI J., Introduction to African Religion, London, 113.

by the death of its member. It also gives them a certain satisfaction that the deceased has reached home since the funeral for them is a means to usher the deceased into the ancestral home. Besides, as an opportunity for reconciliation, the funeral ritual becomes in a certain sense therapeutic for the community. Of course this does not apply to certain special situations. In the case of suspicion of witchcraft or sorcery, the situation is handled differently. The suspected witch/wizard or sorcerer is punished either by ostracization or isolation. The family and relatives of the deceased will be satisfied that the one or those who have caused them so much pain have also been punished.

IV.1.2 Negative Critique

IV.1.2.1. Critique of the Communitarian Spirit

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of the communitarian character, there is a certain logic in this communitarian spirit in all sectors of life of the Dagara but most especially in the area of funerals that may not be so commendable. It is a system that goes by the logic "tit for tat". People, who do not attend the funerals of their neighbors or are known to be indifferent towards the funerals of others, are usually repaid in their own coin. The funerals of such people or their relatives are usually poorly attended. Very few people will attend the funeral but even then they will disappear shortly after the burial. Only the family members and very close relatives may stay longer. In view of this, people respond quickly to funerals sometimes not so much because a member of the community is in need but also for the fear that people may stay away when they are met with a funeral.

In spite of this, we must admit that this communitarian spirit of living is very commendable because it has helped to keep many communities together and has eased a lot of tension in times of funerals or some other difficulties. Unfortunately, economic pressure and the wide spread of consumer society are influencing this noble phenomenon that is characteristic of the African society and giving way to individualism and greed.

IV.1.2.2. Possibility of Social upheaval or division in the Community

As has already been observed, divination or soothsaying forms an integral part of the Dagara funeral celebration. As far as the burial funeral is concerned, the divination is not to find out the cause of death but what sacrifices are to be performed and the manner in which the funeral should take. However, with the final or post-funeral rites, the motivation is different. For this part of the funeral the main reason for soothsaying is to find out the cause of death. This is where the core of my

critique lies. The supposed revelation of the death by the soothsayer can have serious repercussions. The tense situation of death usually escalates and may result in physical action of punishment if the diviner diagnoses witchcraft or sorcery. This is mostly in the case of young and inexplicable death. In that case the particular suspect or suspects are humiliated and punished sometimes by being beaten, banished from the community, or face they silent isolation. This phenomenon is not limited to the Dagara but seems to be the general practice among many African communities as Mbiti who writes about African Religions confirms:

> "People believe that sorcery, witchcraft, or evil magic cause death. Therefore when someone has died, people try to find out who used sorcery, witchcraft or magic against the dead person. Someone is often blamed for it, and in some cases the suspect may be beaten to death, fined or thrown out of the district"[166].

Such people are considered evil and a danger to the survival of the community and, therefore, must be eliminated. The problem is that, in such a situation, a serious unmendable gulf between the family of the deceased and the family of the suspected witch/wizard or sorcerer is created. This promotes hatred, division and sometimes vengeance in the community. This affects not only the immediate families involved but also the extended families since extended familial ties are still very strong among the Dagara communities. In the case where the suspect is a woman, it affects even the family of her father´s house. This situation, in my opinion, completely negates the principle that the funeral ritual would lead to the restoration of the social and religious equilibrium. This increases the pain of the bereaved family because they live with the knowledge sometimes erroneously, that the loss of their beloved is not out of a natural cause but through the evil machination of somebody.

It is important to note here that the cause of death is not generally seen from the medical point of view but supernatural. If the deceased dies for instance from malaria, they know that he died from malaria and they know that malaria is caused by mosquitoes but if that ends in death despite the treatment given, there must be a supernatural reason, especially if the fellow is young. This supernatural cause could range from punishment from the ancestors or some other spirit, to sorcery or witchcraft. To a certain extent, we may say that for these people, both the medical and the supernatural causes of death are interconnected. One cannot be separated from the other. This goes to

[166] Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 111.

confirm the fact that the Dagara does not make a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Even accidental deaths must have some supernatural causes. The Dagara also know that there can be a natural cause of death because they know that some people are not born to live long here on earth. But generally natural deaths are associated with old people. All these things are brought out during the divination, the outcome of which calls for appropriate steps to remedy the situation through sacrifices.

This attitude generally speaking is counter-productive because it prevents the people from looking for any medical reason for deaths in the community. This is very detrimental in the sense that it does not bring about a precaution to prevent certain diseases that may cause death.

IV.1.2.3. Number of days taken before burial

Upon the death of older people, especially family heads, the Dagara people are usually not in a hurry to bury. Sometimes the body can be kept for three or four days before burial. This situation is something to worry about because under such tropical heat, dead bodies cannot be preserved for long without any effective cooling system. Sometimes the bodies begin to smell or even decompose before burial takes place. This situation does not seem to be a common practice among many African tribes since many African communities bury their dead shortly after death whether old or young. One obvious danger to keeping the body for long is the strong possibility of the outbreak of diseases since in many cases they do not even know the actual medical cause of death. Happily, however, in recent times, due to criticism from the youth and many educated people there is a change of attitude in many places. They would quietly bury the body a day or so after death before the official burial rites which may take a few more days. In such a situation they would not say that they have buried the body but that they have "hidden it". This is not usually announced and it is done without ceremonies. This curtails the problem of keeping the body for many days before the time of the actual burial ceremony.

IV.1.2.4. Economic Factors

There is no doubt that the Dagara funeral celebration is very expensive. It involves lots of animals, birds, cereals and money. Even though neighbors contribute in one way or another to support the funeral, the bulk of the items obtained for the celebration come from the immediate family of the deceased. It is usually an economic strain on the son in-laws especially. They are required to contribute a good quantity of everything that is needed for the funeral. This brings about

undue and sometimes unhealthy competition among the daughters who have married in different places. Besides that, families that are very capable sometimes have the tendency to exaggerate thereby creating a problem for those who are less capable. There are many people who keep postponing the post- funeral celebration of their dead because they cannot afford to provide some of the needed materials for the funeral. This brings about some psychological stress on them because they feel guilty that they have not been able to perform the funeral of their dead relatives.

There is the need for a change of attitude in this area because sometimes the family spends so much for the funeral that they find it difficult after the celebration to provide for the daily sustenance of the members of the family.

IV.2 A Brief Comparison between the Christian Funeral Liturgy and the Dagara Funeral Rite

Christianity and most especially Catholicism is very much respected in most parts of Ghana even by people who have probably never stepped foot in any church building and may never do so. This is because the Catholic Church has had a great influence in the lives of many communities. The Church is a champion in the provision of quality education in the country. In the Northern sector of the country, especially, it was the Catholic Church that took the lead in the provision of schools led by the White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa). Today, besides education, the Church is involved in the provision of health care especially in very rural areas, agricultural and irrigation projects and care for the underprivileged etc. This has won the church a high degree of respect, honor and admiration among the people. Yet when it comes to the question of ritual the situation is different. In the case of funerals, many traditionalists will fight against the Church´s rites even though while the deceased was alive they did not oppose to his/her belonging to the Church. The question is: why is it so? Probably a comparison of the two rites may provide an answer to this question.

IV.2.1 Key Elements of the Christian Funeral Liturgy and the Dagara Funeral Rites

As has already been presented, the Dagara funerals are very elaborate with lots of rituals each of which must be strictly carried out. Any lack in this direction will incur the wrath of the deceased or even the ancestors. At death the family celebrates the physical cessation of life and integration into the family and the community of the ancestors. “Death marks a physical separation of the individual from other human beings. This is a radical change and the funeral rites and ceremonies are intended

to draw attention to that permanent separation."[167] This is considered a very important transition in the life of the individual since it is the climax of growth and therefore, anything that will hinder this growth and transition must be avoided at all cost. This is a strong and deep-seated belief among the Dagara people.

From this perspective we may notice that the Christian funeral rites lack what may be considered essentials of funerals as far as the Dagara are concerned. The Christian funeral rites do not foresee any elaborate post-burial funeral celebration. Consequently no post-burial funeral rites have been formulated in the history of Christian funerals. The current order of Christian funerals that is used in the church ends with the burial rites. With the new rite, at the place of committal the Minister's words, "Go in the peace of Christ" and the people response "Thanks be to God" concludes the entire Christian funeral. For the Dagara this is woefully inadequate. Unless it is followed by a post-burial celebration, the person is considered as having been thrown away. It is true that the Christian tradition foresees memorial celebrations but these memorial celebrations are not funeral celebrations as such. For the Dagara the Christian funeral rites have left out what is for them the most essential aspect of funerals and that is the post-burial celebration.

Another area worth comparing is in the actual exercise of the ritual itself. Whereas the Dagara burial rite involves a lot of ritual action such as the killing of animals, the parting gifts and other accessories such as the traditional dance, dirges etc., the Christian rite is very simple and straightforward. This is a cause of worry for the Dagara. The point of convergence, however, is the provision in the new rite of a vigil that is so much a part of the Dagara funeral for elderly people.

The very manner of burial may be another point to note. The nature of the grave is an important factor. For the Dagara and for many African tribes the grave is seen as a house for the dead. This is partly seen in the fact that "the ceremonies performed during and after the digging of the grave are very similar to the building or founding of a new house. In the building of a new house, the land owner performs the rite of marking out the land and soliciting the earth, the groves and ancestors."[168] This fact is even more established when we realise that young people do not have graves of their own because they are not mature enough to possess a house. In addition the very

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[167] Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 113.

[168] ABASI A., Death is Pregnant with Life. The Funeral Practice Among the Kasena of North-East Ghana (unpublished Doctoral Thesis, KU), Leuven 1993, 222.

nature of the grave speaks for itself. It is constructed exactly the same way that they build their houses. They do not bury with the coffin. The practice of burial with coffin is simply foreign to them and they believe that the ancestors do not appreciate it. Burying with coffin is the influence of contact with other cultures. Men are buried facing the east while women face the west. The Dagara worldview envisions hat life continues much the same way in the ancestral world as it does on earth. Therefore, men face the east so as to be able to see the first sign of dawn so that they can wake up to open the gate, let out the animals and go to the farm. Women on the other hand must see that the sun is setting so that they can cook the evening meal, which is the major meal for the Dagara.

With this we can already find source of conflict with the Christian manner of burial. In the first place, the Christian practice of burying with the coffin and the person fully dressed and placed regardless of sex already brings out a point of disagreement. The nature of the grave does not connote a house in the mind of the Dagara and even the prayer over the grave does not give any suggestion that the grave is a home but only a resting place till the resurrection

> Lord Jesus Christ,
> by your own three days in the tomb,
> you hallowed the graves of all who believe in you
> and so made the grave a sign of hope
> that promises resurrection
> even as it claims our mortal bodies.
> Grant that our brother/sister may sleep here in peace
> until you awaken him/her to glory.
> For you are the resurrection and the life.[169]

On account of this the Dagara believe that the Christian manner of burial is a gross denial of a home to the deceased and consequently they will suffer in eternity without a home and in the absence of the ancestors.

IV.2.2 Belief in Life After Death

Indeed many cultures and many world religions believe that death is not the end of one's life. Life continues in another form and in another state mostly pictured as quite different from the earthly life. The conception of this belief varies from culture to culture and from religion to religion. With the Christian tradition the notion of afterlife strongly hinges on the resurrection of Christ or put in

[169] ICEL, The Order of Christian Funerls, no. 226.

another way, the entire Paschal Mystery of Christ since the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus are all together one event in the history of salvation. In the words of Dermot Lane, "The resurrection of Jesus is the other side of the death of Jesus and, therefore, should not be separated from the cross."[170] Further on he notes that "the death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead was experienced in the early Church as a decisive eschatological action of God in history."[171] In this light the Church has found it necessary to "maintain that death is not simply the end of the human story. For this reason, it has found it convenient to use also the doctrine of the immortality of the soul."[172] The usage of the term immortality of the soul is not to be understood in terms of 1Tim. 6:16 where immortality is an attribute of God. The notion of immortality as understood by the Church is obviously linked to the resurrection of Christ, Rom. 6:9. It is something that we look forward to, in hope that we will possess by virtue of the resurrection of Christ.

In general the New Testament expresses in a very strong way a "sense of hope for the human person and for the future of creation. Central to this hope is the life and ministry of Jesus but above all his resurrection."[173] Cummings further maintains that "the meaning of Jesus' resurrection for New Testament authors is not confined to the person of Jesus alone, but has serious implication for all humankind." This assessment is supported by the fact of the numerous references in the New Testament that connect the resurrection of Jesus to human life after death.

In addition, for Christians and particularly for Catholics there is a connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the hope of the resurrection and everlasting life after death. According to Dermot Lane:

> "it is within the celebration of the Eucharist that the historical drama of Christian eschatology unfolds uniting past, present and future; it is in the Eucharist that eschatological significance of the death and resurrection of Christ is represented; it is in the Eucharist that the eschaton becomes sacramentally operative in the lives of individual communities. Above all it is the celebration of the Eucharist that keeps hope alive within the Christian community and the world."[174]

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[170] LANE D., Keeping Hope Alive. Stirrings in Christian Theology, New York 1996, 100.

[171] Ibid, 113.

[172] OWUSU, The Roman Funeral Liturgy, 188.

[173] CUMMINGS O., Coming to Christ. A Study in Christian Eschatology, Lanham 1998, 55.

[174] LANE, Keeping Hope Alive, 194.

The above quotation summarizes in a very succinct way this connection between the Eucharist and the eschatological significance of the death and resurrection of Christ as portrayed in the New Testament and the Christian tradition. This is very much in line with the minds of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council as they state in the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; "In the liturgy on earth, we are sharing by anticipation in the heavenly one, celebrated in the holy city, Jerusalem, the goal towards which we strive as pilgrims..."[175] In the Eucharistic liturgy heaven and earth are drawn together so that whereas the earthly liturgy points to the heavenly liturgy, the heavenly liturgy celebrates the fulfilment of the aspirations of the earthly liturgy.

In a more concrete way "the Church's celebration of death becomes a truly complete eschatological feast when the Eucharistic sacrifice is offered which proclaims the death of the Lord and transforms the just sentence of death into a cup of blessing."[176] Taking all these together, it is quite understandable that the celebration of the Eucharist at the funeral of a Christian is not only fundamental to the Catholic belief in the afterlife, but more so very significant as a celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ which is already eschatological by nature. Owusu contends that: "The importance of the Eucharistic celebration in the funeral liturgy cannot be overstressed. It is not a simple appendage, decoration or prestige or a mere intercession that can be celebrated at another time."[177] The Eucharist, therefore, inaugurates here on earth the life of the world to come.

If we may then compare the Christian belief in life after death with that of the Dagara, what is clearly common between them is the fact that both believe that death is only a cessation of the physical life on earth and that life still continues in its perfect form after death. The conflict comes in the form of this belief and the rites that must take place to entrance the fulfillment of this belief.

IV.2.2.1 Dissimilarities

As far as the Dagara belief in life after death is concerned, there is a strong attachment to the ancestral world. The ancestral world is perceived to be the perfect world where everybody is expected to go after death to be with the ancestors. If we put the Christian notion against that of the Dagara, we may find out that there is very little in common. In the Catholic tradition, there are three

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[175] VATICAN COUNCIL II, no. 8.

[176] OWUSU, The Roman Funeral Liturgy, 190.

[177] Ibid., 215.

important elements connected with the afterlife, namely Heaven, Purgatory and Hell. The just will go to heaven where they will enjoy a state of serenity in the presence of God referred to in theological terms as the Beatific Vision. Purgatory is a state of purification for those who do not deserve condemnation to hell and yet at the same time are not pure enough to enjoy the Beatific Vision immediately. Hell, however, is for the unrepentant; people who persistently reject God and die in their sins. We cannot elaborate on this teaching here but we notice that the idea of the Christian heaven does not coincide with the Dagara notion of the ancestral world. Whereas the idea of the Christian heaven has a connotation of a direct life with God, the Dagara notion of the ancestral world is rather indirect. The ancestors and the dead are not perceived as living directly with God but in a way have a direct access to God since they can send sacrificial offerings from their relatives to God on their behalf.

Also, for the Dagara there is a strong connection between their belief in life after death and the celebration of their funerals. The Dagara believe that it is the proper celebration of the funerals and other sacrifices for pacification as the case may be, that can ensure the safe arrival of the deceased to the ancestral world. Therefore, their funeral rituals portray this. This is in line with the assertion of Amaladoss that "the rituals connected with death evoke the beliefs of the community with regards to life after death."[178] Here we find another point of divergence in the Christian tradition. Even though there is a strong connection between the Christian funeral and the Paschal Mystery of Christ, Christians do not believe that it is the celebration of the funeral per se that earns the deceased the Beatific Vision, but the love and mercy of God whose wish from the dawn of creation has been that humanity may not be lost but find complete fulfilment in him. The human being complements this wish of God by accepting God's offer of love and cooperating with his gift of grace. In this light, the funeral, which is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, celebrates this love that is concretized in the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Christians, however, do believe that their prayers and the offer of the Eucharistic sacrifice can aid the dead in their arrival into the presence of God. This, in any case, from my point of view should not be stretched too far or even exaggerated since that can promote some magical tendencies towards the Eucharist and the Christian ritual of death.

[178] AMALADOSS, Beyond Incluturation, 83.

IV.2.2.2 Similarities

A fact that may find similarity with the Christian teaching is the Dagara belief that although the dead are physically separated from the living, in reality they are still full members of their respective families and communities and have a great influence on the living. They are supposed to be interested in the welfare of the living and the living invoke upon them in times of need. This has a direct convergence with the Catholic teaching on the communion of saints. The dead still remain members of the Christian community even though they are not physically present. On this the *Order of Christian Funerals* states: "Though separated from the living, the dead are still at one with the community of believers on earth and hence benefit from their prayers of intercession."[179] In the Catholic theological reflection this amounts to the Church being in three states of her existence; The Pilgrim Church — the Church of the living on earth still journeying towards fulfilment; the suffering Church — the Church under purification in Purgatory; and the Glorified Church — the Church in the glorified presence of God. This theology envisages an interrelationship of these different stages of the Church. The pilgrim Church intercedes for the suffering Church while the Glorified Church in her turn intercedes for the Pilgrim Church. It is in this same context that the earthly liturgy becomes an enactment of the heavenly liturgy.

From this brief comparison we may understand why the Dagara is uneasy about the Christian funeral rites. Their rejection of it is not so much that Christianity is a foreign religion, even though that cannot be ruled out, but the deeper reason is out of concern that the ancestors will reject their dead relatives. It is, therefore, naturally a genuine worry for them to think that their relatives will suffer in the next world simply because their funerals have not been properly celebrated.

IV.3 Pastoral and Liturgical approaches to the Celebration of Dagara Christian Funerals

IV.3.1 Inculturation

The term inculturation was first introduced into the church document by Pope John Paul ll who admitted the term as neologism, "expresses one of the elements of the great mystery of the

[179] ICEL, The Order of Christian Funerls, no. 6.

incarnation."[180] Samuel Atinga observes that "the Pope is right in referring to the term inculturation as a neologism not as a reality in practice but as a theological term describing the reality that has always been with the Church. Inculturation is a neologism as a term in the sense that it is a new comer in Catholic theological literature."[181] The term inculturation is a late comer as a theological term and as such many theologians have proposed different definitions, however, they express the same sense. A Shorter, inculturation is "the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures."[182] For Waliggo, the term inculturation is "an honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understandable by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It means the reformation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought-pattern of each people. It is the conviction that Christ and his Good News are ever dynamic and challenging to all times and cultures as they become better understood by each people."[183] Crollius and Nkeramihigo define inculturation as "a dynamic relationship between the local Church and its culture."[184] Pope John Paul ll. Sees incluturation as "the incarnation of the Gospel in autonomous cultures and at the same time the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church"[185] Thus, he defines the term inculturation as "intimate transformation of the authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the implantation of Christianity into different human cultures."[186]

What is characteristic of the above mentioned definitions is the fact that inculturation has the basic concept of reciprocal integration of pertinent elements between Christianity and culture. In applying the concept of inculturation to the liturgy Chupungco defines liturgical inculturation as "the process whereby pertinent elements of a local culture are integrated into the texts, rites, symbols, and institutions employed by a local church for its worship."[187] The fruit of inculturation will be where a

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[180] CHUPUNGCO A. J., Liturgy and Inculturation, in: Handbook for Liturgical Studies ll ed by A. J. Chupungco, Collegeville 1998, 337-375 here 337.

[181] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 226.

[182] CHUPUNGCO, Liturgy and Inculturation, 338.

[183] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 228.

[184] ATINGA, Death and Dying, 228.

[185] CHUPUNGCO, Liturgy and Inculturation, 338.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid., 339.

given local church has been able to "integrate local rites, symbols and festivals, after due critique and Christian reinterpretation, become part of their liturgical worship."[188]

It is a fact that Christianity was born in a certain cultural context, the Judeo-Hellenistic cultures. It was in these cultures that the faith grew and cut across all boundaries of the world. The early converts were the Jews and their Greek-speaking neighbors. On account of this it is not a mistake to assert that inculturation of the faith started already at the birth of Christianity because it was faced with the already existing cultures and was, therefore, naturally influenced by these cultures and also influenced the cultures. Christianity in this perspective is not a religion that is particular to any culture and for that matter should be able to present itself through the lenses of the culture in which it finds itself. However, its contact with any culture can transform that culture and yet at the same time be enriched by it. It should be able to integrate the good cultural values that may enhance the gospel message among the people to whom it is preached. It may also be able to purify those aspects of the culture that may appear detrimental to the gospel message. Therefore, the process of "inculturation facilitates the integration of cultural values but also the purification of those elements not in keeping with the exigencies of the gospel."[189] From this point of view we can say that inculturation is a two-way traffic.

If we consider that in the history of Christianity the faith has made use of certain cultural values and these values have become part of the meaningful celebration of the Church's liturgy today, the fact that the African culture can also enhance our liturgical celebration could not be weightier. As far as funerals are concerned, besides many influences of the Greco-Roman world, the practice of keeping the wake is one obvious adaptation from the cultures in which the faith found itself as noted by A. Rush:

> the converts from Judaism took over with them into Christianity the Jewish practice of having the body exposed for some time after death before being brought out to be buried. Converts from paganism who, before entering Christianity were well acquainted with the practice of waking with the dead, must have in the same way continued the practice when they became Christians.[190]

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[188] CHUPUNGCO, Handbook for Liturgical Studies, 339.

[189] Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa. Instrumentum Laboris, Rome 1993, no. 50.

[190] A. RUSH, Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity, Washington D. C. 1941, 154.

The practice of wake keeping has become an integral part of the Christian funeral liturgy today, but of course with a theological reflection that connotes the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. It is in accordance with this that the Christian faith has no other option but to make itself meaningful in the new cultures that it faces on a daily basis. Inculturation is, therefore, not an option among other options to be chosen but a necessity and an obligation. This "will help the African Christian resolve the tension between the two ways of living and to accept what it costs to abandon beliefs and practices that are incompatible with the gospel. Without inculturation the faith of the African will remain fragile and superficial, lacking depth and personal commitment."[191]

IV.3.2 Solution to the Conflict

So far we have been acquainted with the genuine difficulties that the Dagara Christians face on account of the conflict between their traditional funeral rites and the funeral rites of the Christian faith, which they have embraced. The magnitude of this conflict cannot be overemphasized and it raises, as we have observed, serious problems of conscience and guilt feelings. What is the way out of this conflictual situation? It is important, however, to note here that any attempt at inculturation must maintain the Paschal character of the Christian funeral. Any deviation from this character will produce a rite that is far from the Christian rite.

IV.3.2.1 The Two Dimensions of the Dagara Funerals

As has already come out clearly in our presentation the Dagara funeral has two dimensions, the burial rites and the final or post burial rites which are intended to usher the deceased into the ancestral world. These two parts in the mind of the Dagara are integral and one does not replace or negate the other. Therefore, any meaningful inculturation must take these rites into consideration. As has already been noted earlier on, the Christian rite ends only with the burial of the deceased but does not foresee any post-burial celebration. This does not adequately take care of the cultural and spiritual needs of the people. My proposal is, therefore, that the Local Church takes cognizance of this need and come out with a post-burial rite for her faithful. On account of this I make the following concrete proposals while taking into consideration the need to maintain the Paschal character of Christian funerals.

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[191] Synod of Bishops, Instrumentum Laboris, no. 53.

IV.3.2.2 The Need for Dialogue

To succeed in any meaningful inculturation there must be a dialogue between the leaders of the Church and the family of the deceased. This is very necessary because among the Dagara, many Christians are living with their non-Christian family members and relations who have the rightful ownership over them especially at death. If there is no good rapport between the family of the deceased and the Church, there can be a serious conflict. The advantage of this dialogue is that it can offer an opportunity to the Church to be able to explain the meaning of the Christian funeral and what the Christian funeral rites stand for. This may allay the fears of the family of the deceased that their relatives will not reach their ancestors. Any attitude of triumphalism or derogation of traditional cultures must completely be avoided.

As regards the manner of this dialogue, each parish community will have to find out the most convenient way of doing it, but it is also important that those Christians who are living with their non-Christian relatives should begin to dialogue with their own relatives even before they die.

IV.3.2.3 Parish Funeral Committees

There is also the need for every parish to form a parish funerals committee as a subcommittee of the parish liturgical committee. Members of this subcommittee should be made up of well-seasoned, knowledgeable, experienced and respected members of the parish. The function of this committee will be to engage in the dialogue with the deceased family, take care of all the organizational aspects of the funeral with the family members and in consultation with the parish priest or the priest in charge of liturgy in the parish. It will also be their duty to see to it that the funeral goes on smoothly without any disturbance. At no stage of the funeral should the family be left out. This will promote a cordial relationship between family and Church. In the event that the committee meets a serious resistance from the family of the deceased as it is sometimes the case, they should not go to ‘war’ with them. The family should be allowed to celebrate the funeral the way they want it. In that case the faithful could still express their Christian charity by being present throughout the celebration of the funeral but without performing any Christian ritual.

IV.3.2.4 The Burial Rite

IV.3.2.4.1 Wake keeping

The fact that the new rite makes provision for the wake keeping ceremony lends itself for acceptance by the local people. The Dagara and their neighboring tribes also have wake keeping for their dead, especially the old people. The problem now lies in the manner of the celebration. Admittedly, there are some of the rituals at this stage that though meaningful to the Dagara worldview, however, do not square with the Christian message and therefore may not be appropriate at the funeral of a Christian. These may include the killing of the parting gift and the rite of interrogation, which is to exonerate the deceased and free them from carrying any guilt into the next world. From the Christian point of view the dead do not need animals or any material things for survival in the next world. Besides, interrogation and judgment belong to God, the author of life. For that matter human beings have no power to exonerate their fellow humans in matters pertaining to the spiritual benefit in their next world.

To have a cultural feel for the celebration, the wake keeping should be a little elaborate to include some cultural aspects. Besides the readings, psalms, homily and intercessions provided by the rite, the funeral of old people may include traditional drumming and dancing and possibly the funeral dirges that belong to the non-sacrificial and non-superstitious aspects of the Dagara funerals. For young people, cultural sensitivity should be respected. If there is any possibility of a night wake before burial, this should strictly take the form of a night watch of payer. The celebration of the Eucharist for both young and old should be the culminating point of the funeral. Here I may propose that unless in the case of pastoral necessity such as distance from the church, absence of a coffin or some other pastoral difficulties, the funeral mass should be celebrated in the church. In my opinion the funeral mass in the church is very significant. It is in the church that the deceased came often to meet with faithful brothers and sisters to worship. Therefore, it is the most natural and appropriate place where the community can say good-bye to him or her. The *Order of Christian Funerals* notes this important point when it states:

> Funeral mass should take place in the church. The church is a place where the Christian life is begotten in baptism, nourished in the Eucharist, and where the community gathers to commend one of its deceased members to the Father. The church is at once a symbol of the community and of the heavenly liturgy that the celebration of the liturgy anticipates. In the act of receiving the body, the members of the

community acknowledge the deceased as one of their own, as one who was welcomed in baptism and who held a place in the assembly.[192]

Besides, sometimes the situation in some of the homes of the deceased is not always the most conducive place for the celebration of the Eucharist. In the event that the entire celebration of the funeral is to take place in the home, the committee in charge of funerals must make sure that they create a conducive environment for a proper and meaningful liturgy. It is a fact that the new rite has made provision for the possibility of the entire rite to be celebrated in the home of the deceased but this is in response to a pastoral necessity and should not just be an easy option to remain with even when those pastoral necessities do not apply.

IV.3.2.4.2 Place of Burial

Before Christians were free to organize their own funerals and to found Christian cemeteries, they buried their dead among their non-Christian neighbors. But even then they could mark their graves out with Christian symbols. Since the founding of Christian cemeteries, however, they have become the symbolic places of burial for Christians. In many places today cemeteries have become places of prayer where many Christians gather at least once a year on all Souls Day to honor their dead and to pray for them. Besides, the cemetery as envisaged by *The Order of Christian Funerals* is a place "where death is accepted as a reality and final hope in the paschal mystery is professed."[193]

This point to the importance of Christian cemeteries and the need to encourage burials in those cemeteries as a continuation of the ancient practice of the Church. However, from the cultural point of view, it may be possible to think otherwise without damaging the significance of Christian cemeteries. Among the Dagara, the presence of the grave close to the house and on the land of the ancestral family is very significant. The children of the deceased should be able to point at the grave of their father or mother. This is why the graveyards of the Dagara are based on the clan or family system and always near the homes. To be buried away from home is an anomaly that calls for a second burial of people who may have died away from home and are buried there. Considering the fact that Christian cemeteries are located in the parish centres and most often far removed from the

[192]ICEL, The Order of Christian Funerls, no. 131.

[193] RUTHERFORD and BARR. The Death of a Christian, 202.

domicile of majority of the Christians, burying everybody in the parish cemeteries irrespective of distance can be a source of worry for many people who may not be Christian. From this perspective people can be allowed a burial in their homes if they so wish, even if they wish to be buried in their ancestral graveyards among the dead members of their families. This will curtail the desire of the family members to organize any second burial. Besides, if people so wish to be buried without the coffin, their wish should be granted them because burial with a coffin simply has no religious significance and is in no way connected with the Paschal Mystery.

In connection with private burials, Vincent Owusu makes a very important caution when he observes that: "The growing social disproportion and evermore rapid decline of the Christian community in certain areas have been signalled by the exhibitionism of 'single' competitive and expensive tombs. Private tombs have become elephantine expressive signs of human greatness. In our day a funeral can sometimes be characterized as a witness to materialism."[194]

This is certainly a valid and important caution but I do not agree with him that the show of materialism and human greatness is due to the decline of Christian communities and the use of single tombs. This is because even in places where the Christian communities are very strong and people are buried in public Christian cemeteries these competitive and huge expensive graves are used. We do witness in some cases where huge tiled graves are used to bury people in the cemeteries and not in their private places. In my opinion, this is an evolution arising from our materialistic and consumerist society where human greatness is measured by material possession. The Church has a duty to discourage this attitude, irrespective of whether people are buried in their private tombs or in public Christian cemeteries.

Moreover, the new rite gives room for cremation as one of the official means of disposing the body of the deceased faithful whose cultures accept it or who so wish it. When these bodies are cremated their ashes are kept by their relatives in their homes where they may have the feeling of the nearness of the fellow and posterity can see and feel that this is the ashes of so and so. It is with this same principle that the Dagara wish to have the graves of their relatives around their homes. This cultural sensitivity has to be respected by the Church. This will go a long way to curtail the incidents of second burial.

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[194] OWUSU, The Roman Funeral Liturgy, 216.

IV.3.2.5 The Post Burial Celebration

The post-burial celebration is the most controversial when it comes to the Christian funeral. The fact that the Christian funeral rite lacks any post-burial ritual in itself poses a very serious draw back for Christians of many African cultures. As we have seen, for the Dagara, without this post burial celebration no funeral has been performed yet. This is an area that the local Churches have to address if the Christian message has to be meaningful. As far as the Dagara are concerned it is obvious that the funeral rite cannot just end with the burial rite as provided by the Christian funeral rite. That means some form of a post burial rite has to be formulated by the local Church to answer the needs of the faithful.

The post-burial funeral celebration is so complex with many symbolic rituals that it needs a much deeper study to unravel the full meaning of the symbols and the rituals for any possible and meaningful inculturation. There is always the danger of a possible syncretism in inculturation projects and this must be avoided. I will, therefore, make the following cautious suggestions without going deep into the rituals.

The Local Church should organize a system of post-burial celebration for all her deceased faithful. This funeral may contain certain cultural elements that may not be against the Christian faith. These may include the wake keeping, the war dance and the traditional drumming and dancing that go with it.

Besides, to cut down cost, the funeral in all cases both old and young should be three days. The typical traditional meals for funerals could be prepared on the final day together with other dishes. The first two days should include moments of biblical readings, homilies, intercessions etc. The final day should be considered the climax of the funeral and this should be concluded with a mass. This time the mass should take place at the home of the deceased. The committee in charge of funerals should make sure that the atmosphere and the environment are good enough for the celebration of the liturgy. This should be followed with the meal shared to everybody present.

IV.4 Conclusion

The Dagara funeral rite is neither completely opposes to the Christian faith nor to the general religious and social life of the people. On the contrary, it has very useful and meaningful elements that help the people to come to terms with the ravages and dilemma posed by death. All the rites and rituals are geared towards the re-integration of the community whose social and religious equilibrium

is disturbed by death. In a certain sense this is also the goal of the Christian funeral rite because whether one is a Christian or not, death is disturbing and affects every fabric of life. Therefore, Christian funerals as well as the Dagara funerals are as much for the dead as for the living. Nevertheless, in our comparison we realize that there are certain aspects of the Dagara funerals that are completely incompatible with the Christian theology of death and in which case cannot be possible candidates for an inculturation project. The aspects that could possibly be incorporated in the Christian funerals are brought out in the proposal made for possible inculturation.

V. General Conclusion

Our study in this paper has revealed the many and complicated facets of the Dagara funerals. Death for the Dagara is the most mysterious phenomenon in human existence. It brings along with it pain and grief and it leaves behind a train of unanswered questions. It is in this light that funerals become very important not only for the Dagara but also for the entire human society. For the Dagara this mysterious event of death requires an equally mysterious funeral celebration, which must be carried out meticulously. As a consequence, the Dagara have developed an elaborate system of funerals: the burial funeral rite, a rite to bury the dead and the post-burial funeral rite, a rite to usher the deceased into the ancestral world.

For them the careful and systematic observation of the various parts of the funeral is very vital for the safe arrival of the deceased into the ancestral world. Like many tribes and many world religions, the Dagara believe in life after death. They believe that the dead live in an invisible world, which is located somewhere in the underworld. This, they call the ancestral home. This is where all the dead will go. However, the safe arrival of the dead into this ancestral world is aided by a proper funeral celebration with all the rituals fully carried out. The dead in general for the Dagara remain members of their families and their communities and have great influence on their lives since for them the ancestral world is simply an extension and a perfect form of the physical world. That is why it becomes important for the Dagara to take the necessary steps to bring the dead into this ancestral home through the funeral celebration.

The Catholic tradition on the other hand sees Christian death in the light of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus becomes a focal point in Christian funerals. In Romans 6:3-5, Paul says: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that,

just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." The Christian is baptized in Christ, and therefore, dies in Christ and consequently rises in Christ. This very important theme runs through the Christian funeral liturgy. The rituals and all the prayers during the funeral liturgy including the care for the body of the deceased are built around this singular event in the life of Christ. Though the Christians believe that their prayers for the dead can win for them the favors of God, unlike the Dagara, they do not believe that their prayers and the funeral celebration per se are that which will bring their dead into the heavenly bliss.

Our study in the first and second chapters has revealed the key elements of the two funerals. In this study we discovered a serious conflict, a conflict that becomes a problem for the Dagara Christians in the face of the death of their relative. The Christian funeral ritual that is rich in meaning from the Christian perspective does not seem to satisfy the demand of the Dagara culture. At the same time the Dagara funeral that is equally rich in symbolism has certain features that appear superstitious and, therefore, are incompatible with the Christian funerals. The Dagara Christians who are still very much part of their culture find themselves in the midst of this conflict without knowing the most appropriate step to take. The answer to this conflictual situation is a possible inculturated rite that will take the cultural needs into consideration without doing harm to the Paschal character of the Christian funeral rite. In our comparative study in the third chapter we realize that this project is possible, but since an inculturation project remains a project not for an individual theologian but for the community, the proposals here remain simply suggestions and recommendations.

This project is, however, not conclusive. There are still many key elements in both the Dagara funerals and the Christian funerals that have not been assessed.

From the point of view of the Christian funerals, an in-depth study of the history and development of Christian funerals and its theology, the question of after life; its history and development from the Jewish context to its full development in the Christian theology, and finally a critical study of the funeral liturgies durig the various ages of the Church with emphasis on the 1969 *Order of Christian Funerals* will be required.

From the perspective of the Dagara funerals, areas that will be considered will include an in-depth study and assessment of the different categories of their funerals such as old people, young people (married and single) and the situation of bad death. There will also be the need to consider the

problem of the widows/widowers and the widowhood rites, the problems and challenges of the proliferation of the Charismatic/African independent churches to the Catholic attempt at inculturation and finally the proposal of the appropriate Catholic response towards inculturation.

These will form the study area in any possible future research. Some of them have already been touched, but it is only in a very succinct form because of the limited scope of the paper. It is our fervent hope that this project will go a long way to contribute effectively to the inculturation project that has always been very much part of the African Church.

Durch die Aktivitäten früher christlicher Missionare und den Kontakt mit unterschiedlichen Kulturen leben heute nicht selten Christen und nichtchristliche Anhänger traditioneller Kulte miteinander in einer Familie. Dies hat beeinflusst auch ihre Bestattungspraktiken, da das christliche Begräbnis nach Ansicht traditioneller Dagara nicht dem von den Vorfahren überlieferten Verfahren zur Bestattung entspricht: eine Quelle von Konflikten bei jedem Todesfall. Das Hauptergebnis der vorliegenden Arbeit ist die daraus folgende dringende Notwendigkeit einer Inkulturation des christlichen Begräbnisritus als Weg, diesen Schwierigkeiten zu begegnen.

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Attachments

Abstract

The Dagara tribe located in the north-west part of Ghana like many African religions strongly believe in life after death. Death with its pain and grief is the most mysterious phenomenon in the human existence. However, on the other hand, it marks the beginning of a journey into the world of the ancestors, our real home which is the dream of every Dagara. Thus, they have developed an elaborated funerary system: the burial funeral rite, a rite to bury the dead and the post-burial funeral rite, a rite to usher the dead into ancestral home, so as to attain this goal.

Through the activities and encounter of the early Christians Missionaries and different cultures, the Dagara family today is experiencing the situation where Christians and Non-Christians (traditional worshipers) alike are living together. This reality also affects their funerary practices which in the view of the traditional Dagara is not the kind of funeral practice handed over to them by their ancestors. Thus, in time of death arise always conflicts and as such there is the urgent need for inculturation as a way out and this is the focus of this work.

Abstract in German

Der Stamm der Dagara im Nordwesten Ghanas ist durch einen starken Glauben an ein Leben nach dem Tod gekennzeichnet: Tod, Schmerz und Trauer sind das geheimnisvollste Phänomen der menschlichen Existenz; andererseits aber markiert der Tod den Aufbruch in die Welt der Vorfahren, unsere Heimat und damit das Ziel unserer Sehnsucht. Aus diesem Grund entwickelte sich ein komplexes Bestattungssystem, das sich aus dem Leichenbegängnis, der eigentlichen Bestattung des Toten und dem einige Zeit danach folgenden Geleitritus für den erfolgreichen Weg des Verstorbenen zu seinem Ziel, der Heimat der Vorfahren, zusammensetzt.

V. 4 Curriculum Vitae

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