

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

KOTCHIRE DITIME

**THE BI-KPACIILIB TRADITIONAL FUNERAL
RITES AND ITS PASTORAL CHALLENGE**

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DEDICATION

**To the Sisters of St. Catherine,
in a special way to Sr. Bernarda Kułak.**

EPIGRAPH

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the king's horses,
All the king's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

This is clearly a poem [...] about pain, brokenness and the struggle to make whole. [...] One has to ask if Humpty knew what he was doing up on the wall-top, if he knew the dangers and the risks he was taking with his own life, psyche, or soul. Was he embarrassed to have put the king's horses and men to so much trouble in a vain effort to revive him? If he had life to live, would he still choose to sit on a wall? It's not unlikely, however, that humpty, like so many others who were born into wall-climbing, never woke up to the dangers inherent in it and never even reflected on what price he and others might be paying for his 'right' to sit on a wall at all.

Matthew FOX, *Compassion*, 244-245.

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Finally, I would like to conclude these acknowledgments by expressing my gratitude to Tangaza College for enabling me to view life differently.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this Long Essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: *Kotchirey* Date: *14 Jan 2005*

KOTCHIRE DITIME

This Long Essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor

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Fr. David BLOWEY

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the northern part of Togo, people had seen and still have in mind that Christianity is a threat to social, religious and cultural values because of the negative attitudes that the first missionaries had toward the local cultures. Today there are a lot of efforts to use the local cultural values to promote Christianity. Firstly, it is in this line that I have chosen to investigate the funeral sacrifices in the Bi-Kpaciilib culture with the aim at using its cultural values to promote a process towards inculturation. Secondly, my choice is also motivated by the fact that these funeral sacrifices deal with the cosmic and social disorder caused by death and the restoration of communion among the living — on the one hand — and on the other, reflection upon the relationship between the living and the “living-dead”¹ can offer a possibility of constructive dialogue between the Church and the Bi-Kpaciilib culture.

The funeral sacrifices that are being performed from the moment of the announcement of a death until the closing of the funeral concern an adult person who had children or at least one child. In the context of Bi-Kpaciilib culture, one should keep in mind that “death is the passage from life in this world to life in the world of the spirits, the world of the living-dead.”² The study of funeral sacrifices within the Bi-Kpaciilib culture is being carried out as a contribution to the inculturation process that allows “local cultures to discover those fundamental elements that must be purified, those which need substitutes, those which have to be rejected without a substitute and those which can be incorporated in Christianity and

¹ J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 58.

² J. BRAGOTTI, – al., *We Pray and Sing to the Lord*, 183.

without change.”³ Somehow, I would like to contribute, at least in small way, to the Church’s ongoing efforts to find a more suitable way of making Gospel values meaningful to the Bi-Kpaciilib by using the values found in their own culture.

In my research, I interviewed some of the Bi-Kpaciilib in order to get to know more about the funeral sacrifices. My informants are female and male. I also read various books and articles dealing with African religions, sacrifices, and the inculturation process issue. Also, as a native and someone who has grown up in Bi-Kpaciilib culture, I will use my own experience.

I have structured my work into three chapters. In the first chapter I discuss an overall view of the Bi-Kpaciilib cultural concept of death, funerals and sacrifice, and how the people relate to and understand the world in which they live, and their view of Christianity.

The second chapter will focus on one of the Bi-Kpaciilib traditional funeral rites at the various ritual stages before and after the burial. I will show how these values and aspects can be used theologically as the means of promoting the Christian faith or can be purified in the context of the Christian faith.

In the third chapter, I will deal with the pastoral challenge that lies in the burial of a Christian among the Bi-Kpaciilib. Secondly, I will see how to use these values found in the traditional funeral rites as channels to communicate the Gospel values to the Bi-Kpaciilib, in their own culture.

³ J.M. WALIGGO, “Rethinking the Church’s Mission,” 127.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BI-KPACILIB PEOPLE: THEIR CONCEPT OF DEATH, FUNERALS AND SACRIFICES

1. Introduction

Even though culture is a complex phenomenon that refers to a particular group of people and their dynamic activities (such as art, language, religion, values and so on), we cannot deny the fact that cultural values are transmitted and embodied in the symbolic meanings, which communicate and even perpetuate certain social behavior towards life as a whole. Culture shapes people and their response to contexts, challenges and new circumstances. It gives an identity to a particular people and by this process the culture is shaped by people. The complexity that lies in the very nature of a culture can be known from within and from outside a social environment. The first offers to the members of a specific culture a scale of values; the latter gives to the society the possibility of interpreting the symbols expressed in the context of a dynamic continuity over time. A culture does not die, it gives up its values that become meaningless in the course of the changes that occur within it. The culture, then, is open to the future because of its explicit and implicit patterns that are meant to meet changes and make new adaptations. In this line, the Bi-Kpaciilib as a people have their own conception of the world, and in order to clarify the meaning the Bi-Kpaciilib give to it, I will present some aspects of their world view.

2. Presentation of the Bi-Kpaciilib People

The Bi-Kpaciilib live in Kpachilé, which is one of the Bapuré's villages. Bapuré is one of the districts that form the prefecture of Dankpen, with Guérin-Kouka as headquarters. Guérin-Kouka is a small town in northern Togo, a West African country. The Bi-Kpaciilib live alongside with many ethnic groups such as the Konkomba, Losso, Mossi and the '*Bassar from below*'⁴ among whom they are to be classified.

Among the Bi-Kpaciilib, agriculture is the main, communitarian activity, and there are specific ceremonies that are connected with the feasts that mark the consummation of yams and the millet harvest. The Bi-Kpaciilib provide for their daily needs through farming activities, which they carry out as a clan-community activity. They are also stockbreeders of cows that are entrusted to care of a Fulani or Peulh (nomadic people) whose profession consists in keeping the animals. In addition, the Bi-Kpaciilib raise farmyard animals such as goats, sheep, pigs and birds, for example chickens, guinea fowls and ducks. Normally, the sheep and goats are not left rambling during the rainy season whereas the birds do throughout the year, dry and rainy seasons alike.

Although there is no monarchical structure in the Bi-Kpaciilib society, this does not lead to the conclusion that they have no political structure. The one that exists is the eldership. The leader of the Bi-Kpaciilib is the oldest among the elders, and because of the social status of an elder one can foresee a failure in imposing upon them any other political structure beside that of eldership.

⁴ *Bassar* designates at the same time the people and their language, and within the Bassar, and because of the geographical zone where they live, there is a regional variation of Bassar as language. For this reason, we have the Bassar 'from above' and 'from below.'

This hierarchical system is based solely on age, it has nothing to do with the skills and the insight that one needs to be a leader. All the decisions to be taken for the good of the society are firstly discussed among the elders. Secondly, in case they fail to come to an agreement, the elders welcome the suggestions of the youth. The strength of this hierarchical-political system is based on the respect shown to an elder, for the one who listens to him has “the possibility of managing his own affairs in such a way as to assure at least the same chances of success as the elder had in his life.”⁵

Also, because they are not living in the same area, any attempt to get them ruled by a kinship from within becomes fragile. In 1983, they tried, under the pressure of the government, to have a king who would litigate over some issues. The experiment worked for a while, but upon the death of the king, the issue of succession brought more trouble than before, since the clan had no “royal” family. In this case anyone within the Bi-Kpaciilib could aspire to be king. The kingship was seen not as a value but as a privilege. Naturally, the kingship was viewed as a challenge to the elders’ authority. Thus they did not want to get involved, and this new kingship structure became weaker and weaker. In order to resolve this division that erupted among the Bi-Kpaciilib, the government moved the kingship structure from Kpatchilé to another neighboring clan.

The Bi-Kpaciilib community is based on a unilineal agnatic kinship, where the male line of descent is decisive. “All the social groups to which a man belongs are ultimately based on kinship.”⁶ In fact, kinship among the Bi-Kpaciilib’s social structure is so strong that they gather at various life-events, such as initiation

⁵ B. NOVELLI, *Karamojong Traditional Religion*, 43.

⁶ E. PRITCHARD, *African Political Systems*, 94.

ceremonies, marriages and funerals. In this society, there is no “cult of the individual” that gives privileges to a person over the group. Rather, the society as a whole is seen to be more valuable than an individual. In other words, the person is subject to the society. The members find their being and meaning in the atmosphere of community life: the society’s interest comes first, then that of an individual. That is why nobody can establish a personal relationship with another clan or clans. Any relationship between a member of Bi-Kpaciilib clan and somebody else from another clan is seen as a community affair. Here Bujo is right when he says:

Each member must be conscious that his actions contribute either to the growth in the life of the entire community or to the loss or reduction of its life, depending on whether they are good or evil. Each one who commits himself to act in solidarity for the construction of the community allows himself to be brought to completion by this same community, so that he can truly become a person. That is why nobody can establish a personal relationship with another clan (or clans) without taking into consideration the interest of his/her own clan. Any relationship between a member of Bi-Kpaciilib clan and somebody else from another clan is also seen as a “community” affair.⁷

The Bi-Kpaciilib marriage is exogamous and marriage among the clan members is considered as incest. However the notion of polygamy, which is seen as a value, is even highly appreciated because it shows the “capability” of the husband. A man can marry many women but the opposite (polyandry) is seen as a crime. A marriage may be either an individual or family arrangement, but it is to be organized by the Bi-Kpaciilib clan together with the other clan involved.

3. The Bi-Kpaciilib Cosmology and Beliefs

The Bi-Kpaciilib consider the earth as « nourishing », because it provides all that they need for life, « welcoming » because it is a home for all the living.

Ancestors are called *tiyjaab*. The Bi-Kpaciilib do believe that the ancestors are alive and consider them to be the protective members of their clan. The cult of

⁷ B. BUJO, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 116.

the ancestors finds its justification in its positive influence over the fate of the living. The importance of *tiyajaab* at religious and social levels is well seen from the fact that they guarantee the continuity of the patrilineal system, the unity within the clan-community, and the bond between the living and the dead. For this reason, the cult of *tiyajaab* is among those rituals which the Bi-Kpaciilib perform frequently. The frequency of the cult dedicated to *tiyajaab* can be explained by the fact that the living live in perfect communion with them. People can invoke them any time they feel the need to do so, just to make a request, or as an act of thankfulness in response for protection or help granted.

The Bi-Kpaciilib through a series of complex rites (hidden from the non-initiated) enter into a relationship with the spiritual inferior beings that are called *ikoolkpaamb*. *Ikoolkpaamb* are equivalent to the angels. It is believed that every member of the clan has his/her couple of *ikoolkpaamb*: male and female. They are wild and can harm the person for whom they are meant to guide if this person neglects their presence.

It is also believed that, in order to live a quiet and peaceful life, the Bi-Kpaciilib must keep alive their relationship with *ηwaa* — the divinities —, which live and manage the territorial units. This is the reason why they invoke *ηwaa* or at least appeal to them to receive the dead body in their territorial units. Otherwise *ηwaa* and *ikoolkpaamb* would see the burial of the dead in their territorial units as an invasion, since the deceased has just changed his/her state of life from physical to spiritual.

The relationship between the Bi-Kpaciilib and nature is so important that the living demonstrate the bond even in the way they position a dead body in the grave.

For instance, if it is a man, they turn the face of the dead person towards the East to symbolize that, like the sun, the dead is not yet gone; he is still living with them in an invisible way. In case of a woman, her face is turned towards the West to signify the sunset as the motherly warmth that the living will need in their daily life.

God as Supreme Being is called *Unimbor*, which etymologically comes from two words *nwiin* (light, life and designates also the sun) and *ubor* (ruler), and literally the combination of these words (*nwiinbor*) means Chief Sun, Transcendent One, or Supreme Being. The Supreme Being *Unimbor* is unique and has no plural. *Unimbor* is “creator of the earth, heaven, spirits, people and all things;” he is “considered to be the raingiver.”⁸ Even though traditionally the Bi-Kpaciilib view *Unimbor* as an inaccessible and all-powerful Being, they believe that *ηwaa* are the right channels to reach him. In this case *ηwaa* — understood as small and inferior deities — play a mediatory role between the Bi-Kpaciilib and *Unimbor*. Given that there is no direct contact between the Bi-Kpaciilib and *Unimbor*, the view of Ikenga-Metuh is confirmed that sacrificing “is the cult of the deities not of the Supreme Being which is the center of African religiosity.”⁹

4. The Diviner and His Functions in Bi-Kpaciilib Society

Strictly speaking the term *ubua* refers to a seer or soothsayer, but designates somehow the notion of a diviner. In English there is no appropriate word that would carry the full meaning contained in the ‘*Bassar from below*’ word, *ubua*. An *ubua* is someone who has a personal gift or ability to enter into a relationship with all sorts of spirits that dwell in the invisible world. The *ubua* reads the divinatory symbols like the position of the cockle-shells and interprets them without being instructed in

⁸ H. ZIMON, “The Sacredness of the Earth”, 422.

⁹ E. IKENGA-METUH, *Africa Inculturation Theology*, 101.

advance. To be *ubua* means the person has passed successfully some ritual test that has nothing to do with the *ubua*'s initiation. The candidates to be *bi-buaab* (plural of *ubua*) are confined in a room. Next, after the ceremony (*tibuaal*), a member of the clan hides the legs of a chicken, guinea fowl and goat in different places, in the presence of the clan-community without the knowledge of the candidates. Usually the legs can be hidden anywhere in the compound where the ceremony is taking place. The candidates are asked to come out one by one and to discern the location of the legs in the presence of an elder, who has been thus assigned by the *ubuakpil* (the chief diviner) of the clan and who knows the places where the legs of the goat, chicken and guinea fowl have been hidden. The candidate who succeeds becomes *ubua*. This profession of *ubua* is only reserved to men.

*Ubu*a is not a mediator between the living and the invisible world of spirits, ancestors or divinities. He is somehow their messenger, and he can guess the reason why something bad is going to happen or is happening to the whole clan or even to an individual. An *ubua* sees what is beyond common understanding. He can tell what kind of sacrifice should be done to spare a misfortune or to restore a broken relationship. In every social or personal event (such as marriage, illness and poor harvest) if the *ubua* is consulted he can tell the type of sacrifice that needs to be performed: "When the individual is at a loss to remedy any situation, the diviner can help solve the problem and put him or her to the rights with the world by uncovering the 'real' source of sickness or misfortune."¹⁰

For social cohesion, the protective presence of the ancestors is needed and the whole Bi-Kpaciilib society depends on the *bi-buaab*, because "they stand

¹⁰ A. J. GITTINS, *Mende Religion*, 182.

between the living and the ancestral spirits.”¹¹ In the event that a taboo were to be broken or a shrine defiled,¹² the *ubua* as “the diviner is regarded as the specialist in diagnosis and in general ritual directions. He is expected to reveal the mystical cause of a particular trouble, illness or death, and to show the ritual remedies.”¹³

5. The Bi-Kpaciilib Concept of Death

In African traditions, there is a pyramid-shaped scale of values on top of which are laid all the emphases of life. Every event that occurs within a community is set by the people in the realm of the celebration of life. Among the Bi-Kpaciilib every celebration centers on life and their concept of death is in relation to their concept of life. Adoukonou finds that:

The fundamental attitude in relation to existence, the option taken from the base in comparison with life qualifies death, in such a way that from the manner in which a particular people lives, one can read their option in the face of the death, and in the manner in which one consents to one's death, the way in which an individual views life can be deduced. Life and death cannot to be separated, they reflect each other.¹⁴

The Bi-Kpaciilib call death *nkum*, which is the separation of the soul (*kenaan*) from the body (*tiwonn*), even though they define *nkum* as a tragic evil. Their definition of death is not from the one of Thomas who says, “Death could be defined as a separation (as rupture of equilibrium) between the constituents of self followed by immediate destruction [...] Then, it appears like the destruction of the whole (the

¹¹ M.C. KIRWEN, *The Missionary and the Diviner*, 99.

¹² The stopping of rain or any natural disaster or a social misfortune such mysterious illness, death, miscarriage of pregnancy would be seen as the consequences.

¹³ H. HUBER, *The Krobo*, 284.

¹⁴ “L'attitude fondamentale par rapport à l'existence, l'option faite dès la base par rapport à la vie qualifie la mort, si bien que dans la manière dont un peuple vit on peut lire son option en face de la mort, et de la manière dont il consent à sa mort on peut déduire la façon il conçoit la vie. Vie et mort ne se laissent pas séparer, elles sont le reflet l'une de l'autre.” B. ADOUKONOU, in Y.K. BAMOUNOBA – B. ADOUKONOU, *La Mort dans la vie africaine*, 262. [Author's note : I am providing the original French citations in the footnotes and my own English translation of them in the text.]

person) in its unity and harmony.”¹⁵ Death is categorized as a life-event, something that concerns everybody, something that brings about loss, deep sorrow and human powerlessness. Death is such a terrible evil that occurs to an individual or a group of people, but at the same time, “death indicates that life comes from further way than the individual.”¹⁶ One of the Bi-Kpaciilib proverbs says: *Nkum kaa yii u ba* (Death does not refuse anybody). In a society where death is termed as “good” or “bad” depending on the circumstances in which one passes away, there are always the tendencies to seek the “socially acceptable death,” that is a “good death”. Also, “when death is premature, violent, or through disease, it no longer has the character of a ‘good death.’”¹⁷ The death of an old person in Bi-Kpaciilib society is termed “good” and “normal,” even though the death of an “elder and leader is a painful loss for the community.”¹⁸ The death of a young person is “bad,” because young people are supposed to replace the old ones in the near future, that is why the community clan sees the death of a young person as a real threat to its existence. In addition, the death of a pregnant woman is the “worst thing” that can happen to the Bi-Kpaciilib. Death has such a negative impact on the Bi-Kpaciilib that it has to be approached symbolically. Then, “the quality of life is obtained by the efficacious effort to render death human, to divest it of its arbitrary character.”¹⁹

¹⁵ “La mort pourrait se définir comme une separation (comme une rupture d’équilibre) entre les constituants du moi suivie d’une destruction immediate [...] Ainsi, si elle apparaît comme une destruction du tout (la personne) dans son unité et son harmonie.” L.-V. THOMAS – R. LUNEAU, *La Terre Africaines et ses Religions*, 246.

¹⁶ F.E. BOULAGA, *Christianity without Fetishes*, 149.

¹⁷ R.S. ANDERSON, *Theology, Death and Dying*, 41.

¹⁸ T.G. CHRISTENSEN, *An African Tree of Life*, 63.

¹⁹ F.E. BOULAGA, *Christianity without Fetishes*, 148.

5.1 The Causes of Death

Among the Bi-Kpaciilib, death bears an enigmatic and mysterious character. That is why the Bi-Kpaciilib seek to identify the “author of death” and the reason behind it. The diviner has the duty to reveal the “author of death” or the cause. There is a belief that death has no natural or biological cause. The notion itself of death without any comparison to life does not mean much. The cause of a death is attributed to the ancestors’ wrath, punishing the individual, the elder and leader of the clan, or the possessor of witchcraft, who had committed willingly a serious wrong such as the breaking of a taboo. When somebody dies, his/her belongings are supposed to be brought to the elder and leader of the clan. These belongings have to be shared by the deceased person’s contemporaries. In the event that a son or a daughter or a relative of the deceased person hides some of the belongings that are now meant to be shared among people of the deceased person’s age, he/she will die. If, also the living people neglect the rites at the funeral of a member of the clan, death will occur among the people. For these beliefs, the Bi-Kpaciilib think a deceased person can be the cause of a death. Witchcraft is believed to be the cause of the death of children, young people and pregnant women.²⁰ Murdering a human being, during a war or quarrel over a personal affair or killing a wild animal, can be the cause of death within the clan if the ‘murderer’ did not go through the proper rite of protection (*jabu*).

6. The Bi-Kpaciilib Concept of Funeral

The Bi-Kpaciilib see death as a threat to the existence and harmony of the whole clan community, as far as when its effects are not properly handled during the time

²⁰ H. HUBER, *The Krobo*, 295.

dedicated to a funeral. The body of the deceased, which has no social status, is a visible sign of death over the life. Here Thomas is right when he says that:

In the face of the abjection of decay, our phantasms organize themselves according to a dynamic that opposes the clean and the dirty, the beautiful and the ugly, the pure and the imperishable hard and the soft which fades, the dead body as a thing and the dead body-person.²¹

Even though, “death is an event that requires an explanation about its provenance,”²² the funeral is not an attempt to explain it, but rather, a dramatization of an unexplained event in order to reinforce the relationship among the living, to face death together as a traumatizing reality, for “every human society has recognized the importance of orientating its members to the phenomenon of death [...] and death’s aftermath.”²³ The funeral rites are meant not only to attenuate the destructive stain and the effects of death on the living but also to reinforce the relationship between the living and the dead. The funeral is all about the reaffirmation of life, the cleansing of the place where the death occurred and of the people who are ‘stained by impurity’ who had direct or indirect contact with the body of the deceased person. Therefore there are even some rites which are conducted to cleanse. Death freezes life — that is challenges — the life of the community, that is why they celebrate, before and after burial, a certain number of rites which are deeply rooted in life. These rituals depend especially on the one who died, in what circumstances and where. The funeral of somebody who is believed to be ‘abnormal’ is the fastest in the sense that the society wants to get rid of him/her. The place where someone meets his/her death determines the ritual funeral that

²¹ “Face à l’adjection de la pourriture, nos fantasmes s’organisent selon une dynamique qui oppose le propre au sale, le beau au laid, le pur à l’impur, le dur impérissable au mou qui se délabre, le cadavre chose au cadavre-personne.” L.-V. THOMAS, *Le Cadavre*, 78.

²² K. GAO, “Death as a Threat,” interviewed by author, 10 May 2003, Nkokomann.

²³ R.S. ANDERSON, *Theology, Death and Dying*, 1.

should be performed. For instance, when a person dies by drowning, his/her burial and funeral have to take place at the riverbank where the body was found.

7. Definition of a “Sacrifice”

The word sacrifice comes from the Latin *sacrificium*, which is the combination of two words: *sacer* and *facere*.²⁴ The first refers to “holy” and the latter means “to make.” A sacrifice is an offering to the divinity of an animal, vegetable, food or anything belongs to the very essence of religion. Sacrifices are acts which reinforce the relationships of an individual or group concerned for the moral or spiritual benefit of all. In the context of the Bi-Kpaciilib culture I agree with Groeschol who says that:

The sacrifice is an act whereby an authorized person, representing a group, changes a material offering in such a way as to withdraw it from profane uses, places within the “sacred” sphere and thus dedicated it to God as an expression of adoring, self-surrendering to holy God; to make it, when accepted and sanctified by God, the sign of the community’s sacrificial meal of God’s gracious will to enter into communion with man.²⁵

“Sacrifice” also refers to the idea of immolation; the victim is meant to suffer and die. Immolation implies violent death. Overall immolation is a frequent ritual act of “offering” in most African religions. In any case, whether one calls it sacrifice or immolation, we have the same idea of a symbol taking the place of a reality by means of a simple sign.

7.1 Sacrifice in the Context of the Bi-Kpaciilib Culture

Among the Bi-Kpaciilib, there is a deep yearning and desire to remain in communion with the dead, because the living are “thus less powerful than the ancestors, whom they have no power to coerce or sanction”²⁶ This longing for the

²⁴ A.J. BARETT, *Sacrifice and Prophecy in Turkana Cosmology*, 23.

²⁵ B.J. GROESCHOL, “Healing Original Wound,” 6.

²⁶ J.A. GITTINS, *Mende Religion*, 41.

ancestors' protective and harmonious intervention in the daily life of people is expressed by means of religious rituals performed just to win their favor. One of these rites is the sacrifice performed at the closing of funerals. The living as a physical group needs a medium to carry out the required ceremonies. "The service and honor which they render the dead — apart from the funeral celebrations and libations poured during the family rituals — are mainly based on mere personal relationship, offerings and invocations, rather than on a public cult."²⁷ In the context of the Bi-Kpaciilib culture, sacrificial bloodshedding or bloodletting of an animal is the medium between the dead and the living, because in the physical disappearance of the blood "the contact, communication and communion"²⁸ that are the sole foundations of the relationship between the living and the dead are symbolized. During the sacrifice, the bloodshedding or bloodletting is an act of readiness, from the side of the living, to restore and strengthen a broken relationship with a clear intention to remain in communion with the ancestors and spirits. Sacrificing integrates and unites the members of the clan.

The Bi-Kpaciilib have their own typical way of performing a sacrifice, that is, to pour first cool water (a libation of millet flour or beer poured over the wall of the homestead), and they also use sacrificial stones, ground (soil), clay stools, pots, calabashes and other sacred objects. Secondly the prayer or the purpose for which the sacrifice is being performed is then uttered aloud and is addressed to the ancestors, the clan's protective spirits, and to the *ηwaa*. The mention of ancestors does not go beyond five generations and "is regarded as a corporate act of the whole

²⁷ H. HUBER, *The Krobo*, 223.

²⁸ B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 78.

community of both the living and the departed”²⁹ ancestors. Thirdly, the sacrifice itself consists of the killing of a chicken, guinea fowl or any other animal, except for pigs and ducks. The one performing the sacrifice kills the animal by cutting its throat. There are social and personal levels of performing a sacrifice in Bi-Kpaciilib culture. Whenever there is a social sacrifice to be performed on behalf of the whole society, the ritual has to be public and women are not allowed to be present.

7.2 A Sacrifice at the Tomb of an Ancestor

The sacrifice performed at the ancestral tomb is an annual thanksgiving to an ancestor for having protected the clan throughout the past year. On this occasion, all the elders and men gather around the tomb of the ancestor. All sit down while the oldest among the elders — in a squatting position — takes a calabash with *ndaam*. He holds this calabash with his two hands and occasionally sprinkles it over the tomb. He says:

Kii yii nma, ki yii utindaan, ee ti yajaa (saal)foo ndaam nnaa kii tii aa baa (saal), aa yajaa (saal) aa tiyajaab kpal(saalib) (To whom shall I call, you the universe owner. Our ancestor (Name), take this beer to your father (Name), to your grandfather (Name) and to our ancestors (Names)). At the end of last year’s harvest, we came to you for protection for the New Year that was to come. Today we have come to thank you for the request granted. Another year is coming, rise and protect the clan. We, the Bi-Kpaciilib still living on this earth, are blind and cannot see the future. Lead us always.³⁰

Next, the principal elder asks for the harmony and unity of all the clan members. Upon this, he takes a chicken cut its throat and lets the blood pour over the tomb. He then throws the still moving chicken to the side and everyone waits to see how its body will lie on the ground when dead. The rest of people clap their hands, for the position of the dead chicken’s body shows that the ancestor has

²⁹ J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 70.

³⁰ G. KOUTOB, “Sacrifice at an Ancestral Tomb,” interviewed by author, 7 May 2003, Nkokomann.

accepted or rejected the sacrifice. The oldest among the elders performs the sacrifice of a guinea fowl in the same way before removing the feathers from the animals. He then pastes the feathers on the blood, which was poured over the tomb.

8. Partial Conclusion

Through culture, people reveal not only what they hold as values but also their vision of the world. From this remark one can say that every particular group of people has its own way of looking at life and all the events involved in it. In this line the Bi-Kpaciilib attempt to enter into a relationship with the ancestors showing clearly that they believe that there is life after death. This life is a continuation of the earthly life, that is why the 'living-dead' are involved in the running of the clan-community affairs and family activities, and with keeping a close relationship with the living. When this relationship between the living and the 'living-dead' is broken, a sacrifice is needed to restore it again.

Death causes fear and destruction when the appropriate rituals are not performed. Rituals are not meant to erase death, but create an appropriate period in which people can face it as a group. In this chapter, the aim was to succinctly and briefly mention the Bi-Kapciilib concept of death and the funeral as their response to it. For instance, the purification of life after death is seen in the way the body of the deceased person is treated — the burial —, the effects of death on the living are contained, and the relationship with the 'living-dead' is strengthened through rituals.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BI-KPACIILIB FUNERAL RITES

1. Introduction

Even though death is viewed as a tragic event, it seems a “normal process” to go back to the invisible world and so it is in the Bi-Kpaciilib traditional religion. In fact, death itself is an issue people often discuss, even the circumstances in which it occurs. Death is seen as a terrible evil that needs to be treated according to some specific rituals with the clear intention of containing its undesirable effects on the relational realms of the living.

Death always puts into question the cosmic and social structure of the Bi-Kpaciilib; it covers all men, women, children and objects with the stain of impurity. In other words, life as a whole bears the stain of impurity. Therefore there is a need “to establish the disrupted order of powers and then to spare the group of the constant and dangerous consequences of impurity.”³¹ That is why, traditionally, the Bi-Kpaciilib perform a series of rites before and after burial.

In this chapter, I will examine the traditional funeral rites that precede and follow the actual burial, the role of the diviner at funerals, and funeral sacrifices as the Bi-Kpaciilib’s first reaction to the reality of death and an attempt to make its effects socially acceptable to people. Secondly, I will show how the divinatory ceremonies lead to the celebration of life through the funeral sacrificial meal.

³¹ L.-V. THOMAS – R. LUNEAU, *Les Religions d’Afrique Noire*, 223 : [...] d’établir l’ordre des forces perturbé et de délivrer ainsi le groupe des conséquences toujours dangereuses de l’impureté.”

2. The Role of the Diviner in Funeral Sacrifices

When a person is seriously sick or is about to die or if his/her agony is too long, on behalf of the clan community, an elder will lead a group of two or three men to a diviner. The aim here is to find out what kind of sacrifice should be performed in order to facilitate the reception of the dying into the community of the ancestors, who are believed to be the exclusive protectors and punishers of the society of the living in times of difficulties or threat to its survival. "Above all, they are watchdogs of the moral behavior of the individual, the family, the clan and the entire society with which they are associated. No serious misbehavior or anti-life attitude among their descendants, in thought, word and deed, escapes their gaze."³² The diviner is believed to be the mediator between the living and the dead, and because of his social status, he is also committed to receiving his powers from the ancestors and sacrificing to ancestors who are source of life and harmony. For the living, he predicts or communicates the will of the ancestors and their possible sanctions, which can be either positive or negative.

By his constant role, he helps the Bi-Kpaciilib community of the living to express what it expects from the "living-dead."³³ The diviner, as the instrument in the hands of the ancestors, instructs the elder of the community as to what kind of sacrifices the *kenaan* (soul) of the dying needs in his/her ultimate journey to the community of the ancestors, because "death is the door that allows to enter into the fullness of the life of ancestors."³⁴ In this line I agree with Shorter who says, "the first stage in ritual is divination, which attempts to discover which factors are

³² L. MAGESA, *African Religion*, 51.

³³ J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 58.

³⁴ N. KISIMBA, *La foi Chrétienne*, 160, cited in M. MUNUNGURI, *The Closeness of the God of Our Ancestors*, 41.

involved and what are the appropriate rituals to be performed.”³⁵ Beside this, it is the duty of the diviner to reveal the cause of death and prevent the *kenaan* from coming back to torment the living. For this reason, the Bi-Kpaciilib undergo a certain number of rituals during the traditional funeral.

2.1 Rites before the Burial

“Death”, says Buti, “interrupts the ordinary flow of human existence and imposes a condition of ritual impurity during this ‘time of interruption’ — the liminal period.”³⁶ From the fact that “death brings about impurity,”³⁷ there is a need for the living to cleanse ritually all the areas that are affected by this impurity so that life may be again at the center of every celebration.³⁸

2.2 Announcement of the Death

When an elderly person or a married person who has at least one child, dies, the women cry aloud and yell. When the clan members are informed then the Bi-Kpaciilib send their young people to announce it to the people of the other clans. To announce the death to the clan from which the departed’s mother comes, the Bi-Kpaciilib tie a white rope on the right leg of a chicken for a woman, a cock for a man and a chick for a baby, and the announcer would leave it in the compound of the oldest among the elders of the clan from which the deceased’s mother comes. After that the announcer says the ‘bad news,’ and the clan that receives the message sends some of its members to go and help for the burial.

³⁵ A. SHORTER, *African Culture and Christian Church*, 123.

³⁶ T. BUTI, “Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel”, 10.

³⁷ T. BUTI, “Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel”, 10.

³⁸ P. TAGNINA, “On Death as an Impurity” interviewed by author, 10 May 2003, Nkokomann.

2.3 The Place and the Digging of the Grave

Usually the Bi-Kpaciilib bury their elders to the right of the entrance of the departed's homestead and a woman is also buried next to him. It is believed that by burying the father or the mother at the entrance of their homestead, the spirit of the departed will keep their household from misfortune.

Before digging the grave, an elder of the Bi-Kpaciilib clan takes a calabash full of ashes and some leaves of a tree called *buduub*. He places the calabash on the soil, takes the ashes and makes a circle around the calabash while holding the *buduub* leaves.³⁹ The same calabash will be used in collecting the soil from the grave as the digging goes on. The place for burial depends on the age of the deceased and the way of dying.⁴⁰ That is why there are two types of digging of a grave, depending also on the social status of the deceased. An adult who has a child is buried in a circular grave in his compound, and a bachelor without a child, young people and children are buried in a rectangular grave, in the bush. Taking the model of a funeral in Africa, Klose made the same remark: "The married people will be buried in the compound while the young people [...] and the children find their resting place in the bush."⁴¹

2.4 The Washing of the Dead Body

Bibisaliib are the paternal sisters and aunts of the deceased. They are the ones who take care of the dead body, which is now "the center of pious attention. Often there are ritual forms of fondling or attestation of reverence. The body is

³⁹ These leaves would then be put aside to be used later at the actual burial. See section 2.7 below.

⁴⁰ J.J. PAWLIK, *Expérience sociale de la mort*, 92.

⁴¹ H. KLOSE, *Togo unter deutscher Flagge*, 513, cited in J.J. PAWLIK, *Expérience sociale de la mort*, 93.

sometimes kept on the knees of the seated persons, stroked and embraced.”⁴² Some of the *Bibisaliib* go to the river to fetch water for the funerary bath. While going they express their sadness in songs. Some of the water will be used to bathe the deceased, and the remaining water will be used by those who dug the grave and took part in the burial. Some *Bibisaliib* hold the body in a sitting position, and one of them shaves off the hair of the deceased while others sing. The water freshly fetched from the river by the *Bibisaliib* is put into a pot called *lisaapeel*. After they have shaved the hair of the deceased, they carry him/her to a bathroom (*ngnibunn*) where he/she will be given the last earthly bath. “In all such rites, there is a desire to maintain the tie and the parallel tendency to break the bond.”⁴³

2.5 The Withdrawal of Grudges

After dressing the deceased, the living offer their forgiveness to the departed and ask him/her, in return, to forgive them. On this occasion, an elder will represent the clan, the widow and one of the orphans⁴⁴ will represent the family members. The whole idea here is to clear off anything that may be a hindrance to the new relationship the living wish to establish between them and the departed, and this has nothing to do with the “process of making social what is private public or making social what is personal.”⁴⁵ During this rite, if the deceased is a man who once killed a wild animal or a person during a war that was a threat to the clan, men and boys will perform a dance called *njeem* (victorious dance in honor of the departed) by going around the household three times. Once the rite of withdrawal of grudges is over, then the corpse is exposed for the viewing. Parents viewing the body make

⁴² B. MALINOWSKI, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 49.

⁴³ B. MALINOWSKI, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 49.

⁴⁴ In Bi-Kpacilib culture, when one parent of the family has died, all the children are considered to be orphans, even though the other parent is still alive.

⁴⁵ V.W. TURNER, *The Forest of Symbols, Aspect of Ndembu Ritual*, 50.

many requests to their dear one, who died.⁴⁶ Then the funeral procession starts with the carrying of the corpse from the death chamber to the grave. Four men carry the corpse.

2.6 The Burial

When the corpse arrives at the grave, the men while carrying the body turn around three times, if it is a man, and four times if it is a woman. Always there is an elder in the clan who is in charge of burying the dead. This elder is the first one to descend into the grave. It is the duty of the sons-in-law of the clan to pass the corpse into the grave.⁴⁷ The elder who is already standing in the actual grave, takes it and gives it the position according to the sex of the departed, as if he/she was sleeping. If it is a man, his face is turned towards the East, and if it is a woman, her face should be turned towards the West (cf. Chapter I, section 3). The grave is dug in such a way that there is an appropriate space to place the branches of a tree (*buduub*) and its leaves. The soil is not supposed to touch the corpse. After placing well branches of the *buduub*, the elder who is carrying out the burial, comes out. The calabash that was used to collect soil during the digging of the grave is thrown in. Then the sons-in-law fill the grave with soil.

2.7 The Purification Rite

Normally, the purification rite starts at the moment a person is declared dead; the whole household in which the dead body lies, is considered affected by the blemish of impurity. At the entrance of the homestead, there is a big pot containing water and

⁴⁶ There is a belief that when the spirit of the departed will arrive in the community of the 'dead-living,' the recent dead will ask him/her if he has brought some recommendation from their living family members. In case there is no recommendation addressed to them, it will be a sign that the living family members do not consider them anymore. Then the recent dead can revenge by sending misfortune and illness to the living family members.

⁴⁷ N. YIGMA, "Role of the sons-in-law at a Burial," interviewed by author, 7 May 2003, Nkokomann.

grass called *kutaakpinuu*, which means literally, the cleaner of the dead boy's odor. With this solution of *kutaakpinuu*, the people who had been in contact with the dead body, wash their face, arms and legs. Everyone who viewed the body or had been in the compound or in the house of the deceased goes through this ritual washing. There is a belief that in order to contain the blemish of impurity or to avoid contaminating another household, one must perform this rite of washing while going out of the house of the departed. Buti says, "People who have been in contact with a corpse are considered marginal to society because of the belief that death contaminates."⁴⁸ After the burial, all those who touched the soil of the grave, the corpse or anything that has been in contact with it use the *kutaakpinuu* to clean the stain of impurity. The presence of a corpse among the living is in itself a source of blemish. This is the reason why the Bi-Kpaciilib do not keep the corpse very long — usually burying within one day. Once the corpse is buried, there is no need of performing a special purification rite. Concerning the impact of the impurity on people's life, Buti says:

The threat of death during burials is real, hence the recourse to symbolic cleansing from ritual impurity. The surviving relatives and friends feel as if they themselves are on a precipice as it were, as a result of the death of a close relative. Death rituals, including the rite of cleansing, serve to help the bereaved to face up to adversity.⁴⁹

The burial is always a traumatic experience flanked by the initial shock and passivity which accompany the emptiness left by the departed, and it is quickly overcome for there is a need for the living to reaffirm life through rituals once the burial is completed.

⁴⁸ T. BUTI, "Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel," 9.

⁴⁹ T. BUTI, "Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel," 10.

2.8 The Rite of Widowhood/Widowerhood

Among the Bi-Kpaciilib, once death is announced all farming and other activities are suspended, because “the whole event breaks the normal course of life and shakes the moral foundations of society”⁵⁰ and, at this moment also, the widowhood/widowerhood starts. The woman’s head is shaved at the beginning of her widowhood. She is placed under the guidance of an old woman and is clothed with a white rope around her head, because “it is always a question of really inscribing onto the body the mark of a communal relationship”⁵¹ that binds the deceased and the widow. The widow is never alone from the moment of the announcement of the death of her husband to the end of the divinatory ceremony. During her widowhood, she eats before sunset, and abstains from sexual intercourse.

The *bibisaliib* (aunts and sisters) of the deceased take care of her: they prepare food for her and her family and stay with her. Two weeks after the burial, the widow remains at her home together with the old woman under whose guidance she has been living her widowhood.⁵² The work of her guider is to console her and to remain in her company. After the divinatory ceremony, the *bibisaliib* and the whole clan and the widow guider lead the widow to a public place labeled, for the circumstance, *kitaakpil ŋaann* (the ‘market of the dead’) where she will interact with people, for the first time since she is widow, without any reference to her widowhood. There the widow buys, at a very cheap price, salt, pepper, beans, fruits and whatever would be for sale. The widowerhood is quite the same, the only difference is that he does not end the rite of widowerhood by going to the ‘the

⁵⁰ B. MALINOWSKI, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 52.

⁵¹ “Il s’agit toujours d’inscrire réellement sur le corps la marque d’un rapport commune” J. POUILLON, in B. BETTELHEIM, *Les Blessures symboliques*, 247.

⁵² M. NGBANBA, “The Care for a Widow,” interviewed by author, 8 March 2003, Nkokomann.

market of the dead.’ “By this symbolic action, she is released from the nuptial bond: she would, after a set period, of between three months to three years, be married to another member of the family”⁵³ or the Bi-Kpaciilib clan. In the past, “the rights of a kinship over a widow were complemented by its duty to protect and sustain her.”⁵⁴

Nowadays, even though the Bi-Kpaciilib still see the marriage as “the most solemn commitment which one cannot afterwards renounce,”⁵⁵ it is a fact that the social pressure on the widows to get marry is no longer there and “they have freedom to live where they choose, they marry as they choose, or to remain unmarried.”⁵⁶

3. Rites after the Burial

After the burial, the Bi-Kpaciilib may perform some sacrifices if after consultation the diviner requests so. Traditionally, there are only two rites at the closing of a funeral: the sacrifice of the cow whose meat will be used as a funeral sacrificial meal, and the divinatory ceremony which is, at the same time, all about the finding or the revelation of what caused the death, and is the main post-burial rite. These rites take place a year or even two years after the burial. They can also take place earlier if all the Bi-Kpaciilib have obtained all the things needed for the carrying out of these rites, but it cannot go beyond a period of three years.

3.1 Purpose of a Funeral Sacrifice

The purpose of the funeral sacrifice has nothing to do with entertainment, but rather, it is to promote and maintain a peaceful relationship among the people, with the divinities, the ancestors, and the spirits, and “to ensure that the primal order of

⁵³ S.U. ERIVWO, *Traditional Religion and Christianity in Nigeria*, 74.

⁵⁴ A. HASTINGS, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, 99.

⁵⁵ A. HASTINGS, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, 78.

⁵⁶ A. HASTINGS, *Christian Marriage in Africa*, 99.

creation is maintained.”⁵⁷ According to the belief of the people, the performing of a funeral sacrifice prevents the clan from being exposed to the wrath of the divinities, the ancestors or the spirits, which would bring illness upon the people, or even natural disasters.

3.2 Funeral Sacrificial Meal

A funeral sacrifice is not a secret affair in Bi-Kpaciilib culture, and it is visibly performed either on behalf of the departed family or the clan-community. Usually one or two are cows sacrificed. Sometimes there are more than two cows to be killed in this sacrifice, depending on how rich and large the family of the departed is. Traditionally in African context, it is believed that the slaughtering of the cows during this rite on the eve of the divinatory ceremony is the first gift of the family members to their departed one. In Bi-Kpaciilib culture, on the other hand, a funeral sacrificial meal means something else: it is a ‘sharing’ expressed by the sharing of the meat of the sacrificed animal with all the members of other clans with which they are linked by the bonds of marriage. This sharing is the visible and physical renewal of life and an expression of the relationship between the Bi-Kpaciilib and other clans. In the case of the funeral sacrificial meal, the understanding of the sharing of sacrificed animal meat goes beyond the Bi-Kpaciilib clan realm. It is also understood that when death strikes the Bi-Kpaciilib, it affects other clans by the bonds of exogamous marriages and friendship. This explains the involvement of other people at the funeral; they participate actively by offering many pots of *ndaam*. On this point Ubrurhe explains:

The people have to ensure that this delicate web of relationship is maintained and sustained. When this balance is upset, misfortunes and sufferings are either

⁵⁷ M.C. KIRWEN, *The Missionary and the Diviner*, xiii.

experienced or the fear that they will break out is constantly in the offender's mind. The breach of this covert covenant relationship renders the individual or community ritually unclean [...] Through sacrifice the harmony between the physical and the spiritual worlds is restored.⁵⁸

Besides the fact that this performance of sacrifices during a funeral seems to be a social attempt to renew life within the 'web relationship' and to fill the emptiness felt after death has struck the clan, it is also a way of showing the predominant role of the ancestors in a very singular event that occurs among the Bi-Kpaciilib. The dead person still needs the funeral sacrificial actions of the living and the living too need to complete the "safe journey"⁵⁹ rite of the deceased that he/she might pass from the visible world to invisible world of the spirits and the 'living-dead.' The Bi-Kpaciilib also believe that if the respect paid to the deceased is not handled according to the norms of the proper rites, sacrifices and offerings, then the living would be punished: "Prayers and oblations are more often addressed to our human ancestors who are reputed to have a great interest in their offsprings, and who are capable of punishing the descendants they left behind in the world."⁶⁰ In this context, sacrificing also refers to social moral codes.

3.3 Funeral 'Banquet'

In fact, for the Bi-Kpaciilib "Funerals are regarded as a duty, and no pains may be spared to make them memorable."⁶¹ During this period of solemn celebration, everybody from other clans, who comes to the funeral, is welcomed warmly. Every Bi-Kpaciilib family will offer him/her food, meat and *ndaam*. People who come to the funeral go back at their homes with many pieces of beef or pork.

⁵⁸ J. O. UBRURHE, "The African Concept of Sacrifice", 204.

⁵⁹ T. KOUA, "Funeral Farewell Rite," interviewed by author, 8 May 2003, Nkokomann.

⁶⁰ B. BUJO, *African Christian Morality*, 49.

⁶¹ P. SARPONG, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 26.

Generally, the meat most often served at this occasion is pork (a pig is not a sacrificial animal, but its meat is used during funerals).

During this period the Bi-Kpaciilib who live in Ghana or in other parts of Togo, come back to the fold, and also the workers and the students are granted permission to take part in funeral celebrations after a burial. It is one of the most joyful moments among the clan members and the other clans. Generally, the funeral rites that take place after burial reinforce among the Bi-Kpaciilib the sense of belonging to one clan, a kind of clan identity. Thomas makes the same remark when he says:

The funeral rites seem to be the bastion that resists well acculturation. Rare are the 'educated' Africans who do not feel socially obliged, even in virtue of intimate convictions, to participate in traditional funerals or to organize them for their relatives. It is one of the vital signs of the affirmation of identity and the quest for authenticity. In attending somebody's funerals from his village, even if one did not know well, one expresses his belonging and one find his roots.⁶²

This remark shows clearly that the funeral rites that take place after the burial are ceremonies in which people are eager to participate. People, especially the relatives of the departed, have to come for the funeral.

3.4 The Divinatory Ceremony

Death is "attributed to a variety of causes by different people."⁶³ In the Bi-Kpaciilib world there is no room for a natural death, and Mbiti made the same observation among the Abaluyia.⁶⁴ From this concept, there is a need for the people

⁶² "Les rites funéraires semblent être le bastion qui résiste le mieux à l'acculturation. Rares sont les Africains 'évolués' qui ne se sentent pas contraints socialement, mais aussi en vertu de convictions intimes, de participer à des funérailles traditionnelles ou de les organiser pour leurs proches. C'est là un des signes les plus vivaces de l'affirmation de l'identité et de la recherche d'authenticité. En assistant aux obsèques de quelqu'un de son village, même si on ne le connaissait pas très bien, on exprime son appartenance et on retrouve ses racines." L.-V. THOMAS, *La mort africaine*, 251-252.

⁶³ E.A. NIDA, *Customs and Cultures*, 166.

⁶⁴ J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 165.

to find out what brought about the death in their midst. Pawlik gives the reasons why divination is so dear to the surviving when he says:

The death comes to turn upside down the family and the doubt of its provenance causes troubles: was the departed guilty of the death or not? Is he able to go the beyond or will he haunt the surviving for ever? The divination constitutes the adequate mean of entering into contact with the beyond and to make sure of the fate reserved to the departed.⁶⁵

As we have said, the main concern in seeking the cause of death is to avoid the repetition of such a brutal cause, which can possibly lead to the death of another person within the clan community. After the burial of the deceased person, the elders gather and propose the date of the *ubua*⁶⁶ that is, the divinatory ceremony which is meant to reveal the cause of the death. On this occasion, the *ubua* (the diviner) and *ubuateekr* (the diviner assistant) are chosen. The elders call upon the diviner because he is guided by a spirit that is able to communicate the ancestors' wishes, warnings or requests to the living.⁶⁷ Together the elders decide the date of the divinatory ceremony and then form two delegations of two people each. One delegation is sent to the *ubua* and the other is sent to meet the *ubuateekr*. The two *bi-buaab* (the diviners) are not chosen from the Bi-Kpaciilib nor are they of the same clan. They should be from two different clans. The choice of the *ubua* and *ubuateekr* still remains a secret to the rest of the Bi-Kpaciilib until these two accept the request from the elders to perform the divinatory rite.

Once the date of the *ubua* is known, the Bi-Kpaciilib inform their relatives, allied families and other clans. Men then give millet to the women for the

⁶⁵ "La mort vient bouleverser la famille et le doute de sa provenance cause des troubles: le défunt était-il coupable de la mort ou non? Pourrait-il faire le passage de l'au-delà ou hantera-t-il les survivants pour toujours? La divination constitue le moyen adéquate pour entrer en contact avec l'au-delà et s'assurer du sort réservé au défunt." J.J. PAWLIK, *Expérience sociale de la mort*, 126.

⁶⁶ *Ubu*a generally means the diviner but when it comes to the divinatory ritual *ubua* means the ceremony itself.

⁶⁷ D. TAIL, *The Role of the Diviner*, 167.

preparation of *ndaam*. On the day of the *ubua* in every household the men and the relatives kill a pig for the reception of their guests. This killing of the pig has nothing to do with the sacrifice, for in the Bi-Kpaciilib society a pig is not a sacrificial animal.

On the eve of the preparation of *ndaam* the relatives go to the family of the deceased person where food is served. After the meal, the Bi-Kpaciilib start the *gangaa* dance (a dance which is performed before the divinatory ceremony) as they wait for the people from other clans and villages to join them. *Gangaa* always precedes the divinatory ceremony that is to take place a day later. On the appointed day for the divinatory ceremony, the eldest man in consultation with other elders sends out the two delegations. When the delegations return with the *ubua* and *ubuateekr*, they do not go straight to the house where the Bi-Kpaciilib gather and grieve the loss of one of their loved ones, rather they withdraw to a corner under the shade of a tree for a preliminary consultation among themselves. Then an elder on behalf of the clan community will offer them *ndaam* to drink. Before drinking the *ndaam*, the *ubua* and *ubuateekr* pour it out three times on the soil while invoking the spirits of the ancestors in order to allow the spirit of the deceased person to reveal through them the cause of his/her death. As divinatory material, the *ubua* and *ubuateekr* use the *ibuaalik* (cockle-shells),⁶⁸ *tiudufaarl* (the leaves of a tree called the *buduub* and *nbuadõ*), and the diviner's staff.

When the *ubua* and *ubuateekr* arrive at the place where the divinatory ceremony is to take place, the crowd is already formed. On one side, men are sitting

⁶⁸ According to K. GMAGHOUB, a chief diviner, the cockle-shells were used as currency before the Germans colonized Togo from 1884, "Functions of Cockle-shells," interviewed by author, 11 Mai 2003, Nkokomann.

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behind the elders, and opposite to them, the women and children are standing. The eldest in the clan community withdraws from his fellow elders and stands between the diviners and the men and the elders. From where he stands, he offers a calabash of cool water to the *tiyajaab* (the ancestors), the *bitaakpiib* (the deceased) and to the *Unimbor* (Supreme Being) by asking them for permission to perform the divinatory ceremony. In offering a drop of *ndaam*, he asks the deceased person to reveal what caused his/her death without fear or shame. The *ubua* and *ubuateekr* have the duty to answer the question that is on the lips of the Bi-Kpaciilib: was the death “the work of the sorcery, force that stop life in its tracks by denying it, by assigning it an end outside itself”⁶⁹ or the ancestors’ sanction for an unveiled wrong. The diviner asks the crowd’s permission before starting the *ubua* ceremony; he then tolls a bell and in response to this tolling, the *ubuateekr* sings a divinatory litany, to which the diviner continuously responds “*N faa kii boo*” (the ritual welcoming words). It is only at the end of this divinatory litany that the diviner goes to the bush, some thirty meters from the gathered crowd of men, women and children in order to speak with the spirits of all the dead who are now in charge of keeping the spirit of the deceased person.⁷⁰

With the permission of the guardians of the deceased person’s spirit, the diviner comes back to the crowd. As soon as the *ubuateekr* sees the *ubua* from afar, he alerts the crowd and if the deceased during his lifetime committed a murder and concealed knowledge of it or killed a dangerous animal, this hidden secret will be immediately revealed by the *ubua*. There would then be one or more notes of a

⁶⁹ F.E. BOULAGA, *Christianity without Fetishes*, 65-66.

⁷⁰ It is believed among the Bi-Kpaciilib that if the spirit of the deceased person does not go through the divinatory ceremony to reveal the cause of his/her death, it cannot enjoy all the privileges in the community of the dead. It is kept by other spirits until the day of its *ubua*.

traditional flute (each one of them corresponds to a murder or killing), and the crowd cries triumphantly for a while. Then the *ubua* reveals the cause of the death, and in the presence of the crowd, the eldest among the elders can question the spirit of the deceased who will answer through the diviner, since he is “the indispensable go-between for the research”⁷¹ of the still hidden cause of death. The Bi-Kpaciilib believe that any deceased who does not reveal the cause of his/her death has not been fully accepted among the ‘living-dead.’ In order to avoid a series of misfortunes and diseases which might strike the clan, it is necessary “to substitute for the wandering of the soul, source of disorder and danger, the determination of a fixed status, ritually codified.”⁷² Sometimes, the *ubua* may use symbols and parables of which the *ubuateekr* gives the interpretations. Usually, the *ubua* speaks directly to the crowd. Once the cause of the death is revealed, the divinatory rite ends.

4. Partial Conclusion

Human beings by nature have a profound need to make sense of death as a life-event, and of the circumstances in which it occurs. When human beings fail to make sense of a striking life-event such as death, which challenges at a very deep level the highest value at the top of the pyramidal paradigm, then people who hold life as such are deeply disoriented and disturbed. It is a fact in ordinary and daily life that when people face a disturbing and sorrowful situation, their need to make sense of it becomes even greater. Funeral rites are the means to make sense of an event over which nobody has power; they do not reverse or prevent such an event but

⁷¹ M. HOUIS, *Les noms individuels chez les Mosi*, 25 : “[...] intermédiaire indispensable pour la recherche.”

⁷² L.-V. THOMAS – R. LUNEAU, *Les Religions d’Afrique Noire*, 31 : “[...] substituer à l’errance de l’âme, source de désordre et de danger, la détermination d’un statut fixe, rituellement codifié.”

softens its effects among the surviving. On this point, Shorter finds two types of rituals and even gives their functions:

Some rituals are merely or mainly expressive. They appear only to be giving expression to human feelings or expectations. They are 'saying' something about events, rather than 'doing' something about them. [...] Others are instrumental. They appear to be trying to influence the events, make them happen, prevent them happening.⁷³

In this perspective, the funeral "rituals contribute to social integration, [...] and enable societal tension to be lived with,"⁷⁴ then the traditional funeral rites offer a new 'social' status to the departed and to the living. These funeral rites are instruments for helping the mourners to cope with the loss of their dear one. Through funeral rites, the Bi-Kpaciilib and other clans come together to celebrate again life. In this regard it is interesting to note that at the closing of the funeral rites, the mourners enter into a new era of relationship among themselves and with people of other clans. In Christian funeral rites, every single death is linked to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They always develop this link between the events that happened at each specific funeral and those that occurred in the life of Jesus Christ. Still then, Christian funeral rites do not erase death or pain but set a springboard for hope. That is why the readings and all the prayers draw the attention of the listeners from the particular death to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

⁷³ A. SHORTER, *African Culture and Christian Church*, 125.

⁷⁴ G. FOUREZ, *Sacraments and Passages*, 39.

CHAPTER THREE

PASTORAL CHALLENGE IN TRADITIONAL FUNERAL RITES AND THE POSSIBLE SOLUTION

1. Introduction

The foundations of Christian funeral rites are the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the Christian funeral rites, according to the *General Introduction*⁷⁵ to the new 'Order of Christian Funerals,' God is worshipped, the salvific seal of God's grace upon the Christian is proclaimed, thanks are given to God for the life of the departed and intercession to God is made on behalf of the deceased that his/her sins be forgiven. At the human level, when Christian funeral rites are celebrated, the paschal character is fully expressed.

While the sacrifice of animals is still taking place in the traditional African funeral rites, the Bi-Kpaciilib renew their belonging to the clan. A member of the clan who refuses to take part in them, cuts off the ties with the rest of the members of the clan. In an environment where people live and grow with a high sense of belonging to the clan, where people believe that the failure to respect the traditions, customs and taboos, will bring death, illness or natural disaster to the clan; there will always be a danger of depriving them of their cultural and social values.

In this chapter, I will first discuss some values found in Bi-Kpaciilib traditional funeral rites, and secondly, I will mention some other elements that need to be changed. Thirdly, I would like to make some recommendations or offer some

⁷⁵ A. BOULEY, ed., *Catholic Rites Today*, 550.

possible solutions to the pastoral challenges raised in Bi-Kpaciilib traditional funeral rites.

2. Some Values Found in Bi-Kpaciilih Traditional Funeral Rites

Death, no matter the circumstances in which it occurs or to whom it occurs, requires the ritual process of dealing with the loss of the individual and society. Death is a tragedy that needs to be faced by a 'web' of relationships within and outside the society, because leaving the 'death-reality' without any significant rituals would be devastating in a society where life occupies the top place in a pyramid-shaped value system.

2.1 The Consolation of the Bereaved.

Among the Bi-Kpaciilib, the first rite to be carried out is to allow the bereaved to express his/her feelings such as sadness, anger, guilt or hurt. In this particular moment, the bereaved expresses his/her feelings in words or tears. The mourner, in this painful experience, is not alone. Other members of the clan share his/her sorrows and pains. The bereaved is surrounded by relatives and clan members who assist him/her in "the routine tasks of daily living,"⁷⁶ and during this time of mourning people are with the bereaved. During the mourning period, people from other clans come in the morning to show their concern and sympathy to the bereaved and all the members of the clan. In return, they will be told in what circumstances the person died. Having people with whom the bereaved can share his/her feelings is psychologically helpful. In a word, this togetherness in times of the loss of a loved one is a great consolation to the individual and the clan members.

⁷⁶ A. BOULEY, ed., *Catholic Rites Today*, 551.

2.2 The Renewal of Relationship Bonds

When death occurs, it has not only destroyed the life of the person to whom it occurs but it seems to be a threat to the surviving. There is a set of rites starting from the announcement of the death to the burial, which reveal the wish of the living not to fall into the destructive effects of “death, as transition, a gateway to a new status”⁷⁷ of the broken relationship that death brings into a family and the society. The rite of purification seems to be the simplest among others. In fact, its ritual significance bears all the signs of the renewal of bonds in a household and the neighborhood. A corpse has its own ‘odor’⁷⁸ which is a ‘physical danger to the living, and if somebody has been in contact with a corpse, he/she carries the dangerous ‘odor’ and cannot mix with people unless he/she renews the bonds of relationship by undergoing the rite of purification with the herb called *kutaakpinuu*. Once a death is announced, all the Bi-Kpaciilib women married in other clans leave immediately their homes, husbands and farming activities to join their clan for mourning. If there had been a quarrel among some clan members, the announcement of death would bring them together and improve considerably the relationship among members. At the end of the funeral one can see that the Bi-Kpaciilib are closer to one another than before.

2.3 The Openness to Other Clans

The traditional funeral offers an opportunity for other clans to come closer to the Bi-Kpaciilib clan. On this occasion, the relatives, sons-in-law and the friends to any Bi-Kpaciilib take part in carrying out the funerals. The funeral is the only

⁷⁷ T. BUTI, “Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel,” 9.

⁷⁸ The Bi-Kpaciilib believe once a person has died, the body no longer has the ‘odor of life,’ but now has the ‘odor of death.’ This is a more spiritual discernment, and not to be confused with the odor of a decaying corpse.

moment one can see that the Bi-Kpaciilib as a clan are open to other clans. The principal element at a funeral that expresses this openness of the Bi-Kpaciilib clan is the funeral meal. Death which raises the question about the fragility of life is not an experience proper to the Bi-Kpaciilib, but intrinsically shared by all human beings. In this context, the Bi-Kpaciilib find themselves in a large 'community of clans' where the members "share the meal to express their solidarity in face of death. It is an acceptance that life must go on notwithstanding the death experience."⁷⁹ When death strikes a member of Bi-Kpaciilib clan, there is always a 'window' to other clans. For instance, there are many roles during the funeral rites that have to be played by people from other clans, for example they dig the grave and participate materially in organizing the funeral 'banquet.' On the occasion of the divinatory ceremony, the Bi-Kpaciilib receive warmly people from other clans.

3. Elements to Be Changed in Bi-Kpaciilib Traditional Funeral Rites

Some of the Bi-Kpaciilib traditional funeral rites like the consultation of a diviner, the divinatory ceremony and the sacrifice of a cow for the funeral meal are not compatible with the Christian faith. This fact does not remove the possibility of changing them in such a way that they could reflect the values that can be shared, lived and treasured by the Bi-Kpaciilib Christians. It is always good to allow the Christians themselves to be involved in this enterprise of changing or modifying those values that they saw as worthy to be treasured even before converting to Christianity. There should be no gap between Christians and their cultural values, because, as Rahner says, there is no event in which people cannot experience God;

⁷⁹ T. BUTI, "Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel," 7.

there is nothing in life so secular, sinful, profane and mundane that God cannot be found in it. Skelley summarizes Rahner's views when he writes:

The explicitly religious moments of our lives, experiences of the church's liturgy, for example, are necessary and important symbolic manifestations of the presence of God in all our moments. But they are just that; they are not the only times that God is present. We will be only able to recognize the presence of absolute mystery in the liturgy if we first recognize its abiding presence throughout our whole lives and in all the world.⁸⁰

The Christian task here is to see how and in which way cultural values that are incompatible with the Christian faith can be purified and bear significantly the gospel values so that Christians might be able to live without any harm to their cultural identity. It also would be good to take into consideration the reaction of the adepts of the tradition funeral rites because:

The search for the truth, however, must be carried out in a manner that is appropriate to the dignity of the human person and his social nature, namely, by free enquiry with the help of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue. It is by these means that men share with each other the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in such a way that they help one another in the search for truth. Moreover, it is by personal assent that men must adhere to the truth they have discovered.⁸¹

3.1 The Consultation of a Diviner

The rite of consulting a diviner is, by nature, incompatible with the Christian faith, because of its magical and occult character, and the *General Catechetical Directory* does not encourage the "superstitious practices and magic"⁸² when it states: "Sometimes, elements of nature worship, animism and divination are introduced into the Christian religion, thus inducing in some places a lapse into syncretism."⁸³ For

⁸⁰ M. SKELLEY, *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of World*, 83.

⁸¹ *Dignitatis Humanae*, n°3b. All the Church Documents: *Ad Gentes, Dei Verbum, Dignitatis Humanae, Evangelii Nuntiandi, General Catechetical Directory, Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate* are taken from: A. FLANNERY, ed., *Vatican II Council, Post-Conciliar Documents*, St Pauls, Mumbai 2001.

⁸² *General Catechetical Directory*, n°7c.

⁸³ *General Catechetical Directory*, n°7c.

this reason it has to be completely suppressed and replaced by the consultation of the Bible because it contains the full revelation of God who

had spoken many times and in various ways through the prophets, “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1-2). [...] As a result, he himself — to see whom is to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9) — completed and perfected Revelation and confirmed it with divine guarantees. He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation — by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and finally by sending the Spirit of truth.⁸⁴

Traditionally, when the Bi-Kpaciilib experience sickness, misfortune or any natural disaster, they consult the diviner not only to know what may be the cause but also to know who may have broken a taboo, a tradition, or may have practiced witchcraft. In the face of hard times, the diviner finds a scapegoat to sacrifice; often the innocent are being pointed as the guilty party. Definitely, the consultation of a diviner (which is based on fear, human deliverance from an evil and the search for the guilty person⁸⁵ when death strikes) does not bring salvation. In fact, the divinatory ceremony refers to the Bi-Kpaciilib’s attempt to get deliverance from death and from all the traumatic effects on the people through the performance of the ritual. On this point, the Christian faith has an aspect of salvation that must be taken into account. Pope John Paul II expressed this salvation in these words:

Because salvation is a total and integral reality, it concerns man and all men, and touches as well historical and social reality, culture and community structures in which they live. However, salvation cannot be confined to the picture of merely the earthly necessities of man or society, neither can it be reached by playing with historical dialectics. Man is not his own savior in a definitive manner; salvation transcends that which is human and earthly — it is a gift from above. There is no self-redemption; God alone saves man in Christ.⁸⁶

In replacement of the consultation of a diviner, the Bible could be used to explain sin as the main cause of death, which means living outside of communion

⁸⁴ *Dei Verbum*, n°4.

⁸⁵ H. HUBER, *The Krobo*, 225.

⁸⁶ JOHN PAUL II, “Today’s Challenge,” 540.

with God. Secondly the Bible contains God's revelation to people and as "revelation, consequently, is necessary for salvation."⁸⁷ Incorporating the Scriptures could be an opportunity to invite the Bi-Kpaciilib Christians to conversion of heart because the "believers of every age and culture can find their identity in relationship to revelatory events that have objectively occurred and have brought with them a new horizon of interpretation."⁸⁸

3.2 The Divinatory Ceremony

The diviner, as we have seen, leads to the inevitable dimension of evil where people are not able to terminate the tiring and painful game of counting and measuring everything,⁸⁹ to promotion suspicions, prejudice and the victimization of the innocent people. He pretends to know the identity of the person who is responsible for the death of somebody. Today, there are different causes that lead to death, and it is very unfair to use somebody as a scapegoat for every death that occurs among the Bi-Kpaciilib.

The divinatory ceremonial rite should first be completely suppressed, because it is the opposite extreme of the love of the neighbor, and then replaced by the Anniversary Mass for the deceased, since there is no fixed period for this rite. Secondly, death is part of human reality, and Boulaga is right to suggest that "death is not explained by fall or fault — Death is explained by life."⁹⁰ Thirdly, the suppression of this traditional rite is a necessity for the simple reason that sometimes, during the divinatory rite, the Bi-Kpaciilib use a lot of food to receive the people who come to the funeral; they buy costly pigs and clothes, possibly

⁸⁷ Vatican I, *Constitution on Catholic Faith*, cited in A. DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, 42.

⁸⁸ A. DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, 61-62.

⁸⁹ G. FOUREZ, *Sacraments and Passages*, 109.

⁹⁰ F.E. BOULAGA, *Christianity without Fetishes*, 65.

falling into debt. Thirdly, the divinatory ceremony can lead the Bi-Kpaciilib to a certain centering on themselves, seeing their conscious convictions as the center from which to judge others,⁹¹ seeking in them the scapegoat for any cause of death. It has been a common experience that, just after the divinatory ceremony, some families start struggling to find food because theirs had been used to meet the socially acceptable standard for funerals among the Bi-Kpaciilib: that is providing *ndaam*, food and pork for all the people who may visit the family on the occasion of the divinatory ceremony.

3.3 The Sacrifice of a Cow

The sacrifice of a cow or cows carried out on the eve of the *ubua* (the divinatory ceremony) should be suppressed only in its meaning. Instead of calling this ritual a sacrificial or ritual killing, it should be called simply the slaughter of a cow. The change of the name in this ritual during a funeral will not harm the communion which the living wish to establish with the ancestors, but rather, it will discourage the ideas that the sacrificial animal is at the same time a compulsory gift to the ancestors and to the deceased. As one can see, the value of a ritual sacrifice does not come from the pedagogy of fear and, Panikkar is right when he says:

The human being is seen to perform many sorts of acts. There is usually certain continuity between the subjective aim of an act and its objective goal. [...] The believer is certainly aware that there is a rupture of planes between the empirical act and its invisible or transcendent target, but he is also convinced that there is no other way for him, in that particular context, to reach that goal than through the act he is performing⁹².

This means that the main function of a sacrifice is to procure 'salvation' to people who perform it. This 'salvation' by its nature is not definitive, that is why people repeat the ritual sacrifice many times. In addition, the ritual sacrifice or

⁹¹ J.P. BRENNAN, *Christian Mission*, 74.

⁹² R. PANIKKAR, "Man as a Ritual Being," 5.

sacrificial killing is meant to maintain a 'salvific' and new beginning for the people who perform it. In this context, sacrificing is to communicate with the invisible world, the world of "living-dead." For the Bi-Kpaciilib clan this ritual sacrifice bears "the traditional way of communicating with ancestors," according to Buti who says:

Christianity teaches that there is but one sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The sacrifice of the Mass enables Christians to participate in the paschal mystery of Christ. Ritual killing and meal as a symbolic means of communicating with the ancestors, if understood within the context of primary sacrifice of the cross, do not contradict Christian faith.⁹³

The main issue here is not the living's desire to enter into a relationship with the dead, but how they do it and with what intention. We suggest that this ritual be suppressed, because it is done not as an act of love but as an obligation to propitiate or appease the ancestors.

4. Some Recommendations

Since the Second Vatican Council put an emphasis on the enriching and healthy relationship between faith and culture, and namely between the Gospel and culture, the proclamation and the acceptance of the Good News regain a new value in which Christians cannot anymore accept Christ's message as "a purely decorative was as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their roots."⁹⁴ Today the main pastoral challenge is still about how to communicate the Gospel in a way that people in a particular culture like the Bi-Kpaciilib can understand. It is true that in the Church the process of inculturation has begun since Pope Paul VI published his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On the Evangelization of Modern World), but there is a long and painful way to go before initiating any steps towards the field of inculturation of a culture or any attempts at

⁹³ T. BUTI, "Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel," 7-8.

⁹⁴ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n°20.

dialogue between the Christian faith and a particular culture. In the case of the Bi-Kpaciilib, we feel that it is the task of the Church to proclaim the Good News to people in their own culture. Evangelization then means to allow people to encounter and experience Christ and his message in their own cultural environment. If we assume that Christ is the center where his message, human beings, as well their culture encounter one another, then there is a need for discernment of a individual culture, in our case, the Bi-Kpaciilib culture.

To carry out such discernment one has to know what the traditional funeral rites really are, and have enough courage to point out those rites that are not compatible with the Christian faith. In a dialogue, people give up some of their opinions in order to enrich themselves. The act of 'giving up' itself is already a rupture with one's traditional past and this is applied to Christ's death and resurrection, which were a turning point in the history of humanity. In dealing with the encounter of a particular culture with Christ's message, one should not only see the loss of values but also the work of Christ himself elevating a particular culture to its full dignity. In *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes*, it is said that it is "the task of the Church to purify, elevate, and perfect whatever seeds of goodness are found in the hearts and minds of men, or in customs and cultures of people."⁹⁵

There is a tendency among the very few Bi-Kpaciilib Christians to participate in the traditional funeral rites as full members of the clan. This tendency is seen most often when the deceased is one of their family members or a relative. The pastoral work here could consist in helping the Bi-Kpaciilib to understand the Christian concept of death and the funeral rites, as stated: "It is the mystery of Christ

⁹⁵ M. RUOKANEN, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 69. See *Lumen Gentium* 17 and *Ad Gentes* n° 9 and n°2.

that the church celebrates, with faith, in the funerals.”⁹⁶ That is why we suggest that the heralds of the Good News take up this challenge during catechism sessions for the simple reason that, “in the field of catechesis, presentations better suited to the African soil must and be made, while at the same time taking into account the more and more frequent culture exchanges with the rest of the world.”⁹⁷

In the event of the death of a Christian, we recommend that the Christian community — whether led by the herald of the Good News or not — should be able to meet the elders of the clan together with the members of the concerned family and arrange the burial. First and foremost, we suggest that the Funeral Mass should be celebrated for two reasons: firstly, “the bereaved are strengthened in hope that the deceased will rise and enjoy the gift of life.”⁹⁸ Secondly, we foresee that when the funeral liturgy is celebrated outside Mass by the catechist or the leader of the Christian community, the wrong message could be sent to the elders of the Bi-Kpaciilib. It is understood that the burial of a Bi-Kpaciilib member is a clan community affair and the elders of the clan arrange and carry out the funeral rites. The elders of the clan are open to allow the *priest* to bury a Bi-Kpaciilib Christian according to the Christian Funeral Rites, but they would find it difficult to allow a catechist or a lay member of the Christian community (who may even be a clan member) to carry out the funeral rites. Simply put, they would see Christianity as a threat to their authority and leadership within the clan. By suggesting the Funeral Mass as the solution within the Bi-Kpaciilib clan, we do not deny that fact that all those who, by their baptism, belong to the people of God, must feel concerned and

⁹⁶ *Rituale Romanum*, n°1.

⁹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, “African Addresses”, 178.

⁹⁸ T. BUTI, “Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel,” 7.

involved in the funeral celebrations. In other words, the whole Christian community has a role to play.⁹⁹ During Funeral Mass, the mourners stricken by the pain of losing their loved ones “are brought together as a single body; the Body of Christ.”¹⁰⁰ In this Body of Christ, they shared not only the pain caused by death but also the hope that, through the merits of Christ, eternal life will be granted to the departed.

5. Partial Conclusion

Within a community, when somebody dies, he/she leaves a large lacuna at level of the life of the community and those who feel it are the living. Death comes to turn upside down the setting of a family and of the society. Through funeral rites, the living try to re-organize the social realm affecting the place left by the deceased. In this task of re-organizing, the living provide a gradual way for dissipating the effects of the loss one of their members. In funeral rites, human dignity is expressed in caring for the body as “temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 3,16).” The living either in traditional or Christian funeral rites do not see death as an end in itself but as a gateway to new life: union with the ancestors according to the Bi-Kpacilib belief, and with God according to that of the Christians. At this point, it would be good note that

Death, then, no longer has the power to plunge human beings into a destiny of their own making. This power has been nullified and the ‘sting of death’ has been removed. The means by which death has been nullified in its power to bring condemnation has not been achieved by appealing to a motive of love in God more worthy of praise than His wrath; rather, His wrath has been felt totally and unmediated in the midst of His Love.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Rituale Romanum*, n°16.

¹⁰⁰ M.K. AYIEKO, “The Eucharist Meal for Christian Life,” 212.

¹⁰¹ R. S. ANDERSON, *Theology, Death and Dying*, 72-80.

The pastoral challenges that a herald of the Good News might face among the Bi-Kpaciilib can be overcome if there is an ongoing dialogue between Christianity and Bi-Kpaciilib culture. To carry out such a task successfully, it is important for the Christians to know more about the Bi-Kpaciilib culture, its dynamism and openness to give and to receive values and changes.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this research, the goal has been to come to know more about the Bi-Kpaciilib clan and to attempt to find a solution to the pastoral challenge that emerges when it comes to the burial of a Bi-Kpaciilib Christian.

It has been clear that the Bi-Kpaciilib see themselves as living in a relationship with the ancestors, in a world dominated by the spirits, and — to propitiate or appease in case of the breaking of a taboo or tradition, or, in the event of a natural disaster (disease, flood or drought) — they perform sacrifices. We have pointed out the circumstances in which they perform sacrifice. The Bi-Kpaciilib have a strong sense of belonging to a one clan. They believe that their dead are alive and they have their own concept of culture, sacrifice and death.

Among the rites the Bi-Kpaciilib, we have chosen to study their traditional funeral rites. Again, as we have seen, their attitude towards death is full of hope and fear. Hope: they believe that death is a birth to a new life and that the deceased will be in the good hands of the dead, that is the ancestors. Fear: they assume that the failure to carry proper traditional funeral rites may cause another death within the clan. A second aspect of fear is that during the funeral rituals, especially that of the divinatory ceremony, somebody among the clan may be declared by the diviner to be the author of death. This spreads confusion in the mind of the people, especially for the victim.

One can grasp from the *General Introduction*¹⁰² to the new 'Order of Christian Funerals,' that in Jesus' death and resurrection God has given freely his salvific grace to everybody. In other words, Christian funeral rites are the human

¹⁰² A. BOULEY, ed., *Catholic Rites Today*, 551.

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response to God's offer of salvation, which is a gift free of charge. This means that there is no need for a Christian to perform another sacrifice to make sure that a good fate be reserved for himself/herself.

For Christianity the cause of death is seen in sin, the failure to live and proclaim love for God and neighbor. It appears that to live as a Christian among the Bi-Kpaciilib means to render Christ present, that is to put into daily practice the gospel values. The main salient point is that a fruitful dialogue is possible between Christianity and the Bi-Kpaciilib culture, if the bearers of the Good News are open to entering slowly into a true dialogue with the Bi-Kpaciilib clan. In addition, only a few of the Bi-Kpaciilib have embraced the Christian faith, that means that this present work is just a step towards the true dialogue, which will strengthen Bi-Kpaciilib Christians "in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots,"¹⁰³ so that Jesus Christ will be the way (Jn 14:6) to the process of inculturation of their traditional funeral rites; nevertheless we think, for the time being, it would be good to catechize the very few converted among the Bi-Kpaciilib. Under these conditions, it is a pastoral challenge to replace the performance of animal sacrifices into a Christian symbol while the appeal is made for more reflection concerning the way to elevate the Bi-Kpaciilib culture to the level where gospel values are "fully lived out"¹⁰⁴ by the Christians, sharers of the Bi-Kpaciilib culture.

The church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n°20.

¹⁰⁴ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 June 1982, 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Nostra Aetate*, n° 2c.

GLOSSARY

Bibisaliib, the aunts and the sisters of the deceased

Bitakpiib, the deceased

Buduub, a tree

Gangaa, a dance before the divinatory ceremony

Ibuaalik, the cockle-shells

Ikoolkpaamb, the spirits

Jabu, the protection rite for the one who killed a human being or a wild animal

Kenaan, the soul or the spirit of human being

Kutaakpinuu, an herb with a strong odor

Lisaapeel, a clay pot

Liwaal, the divinity; *ηwaa*, the divinities

Nbuadō, the staff of the diviner

Ngnibunn, a bathroom

Ndaam, the local beer made from millet

Njeem, a dance of victory for the one who killed a human being or a wild animal

Nkum, death

Nwiin, the sun

Nwiinbor, Chief sun or Ruler sun

Ti-buaal, the rite of selecting a diviner

Ti-udufaarl, the leaves of a tree called *buduub*

Tiyajaab, the ancestors (plural of *yajaa*)

Tiwonn, the body

Ubor, the Ruler

Ubu, the diviner or the divinatory ceremony; *bi-buaab*, the diviners

Ubuakpil, the chief diviner

Ubuateekr, the assisting diviner

Unimbor, God, Supreme Being

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