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**An Attempt to Inculturate Tonga Funeral Through Effective  
Communication**

Moderator

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
the  
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay (thesis) is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with the approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:..... F. Fernando Lourenço, M.C.J.

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Date:..... 26/11/04

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to Muzuma and Busiku, my nieces.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This essay is an interdisciplinary work. It is the fruit of pastoral, systematic theology and social communications insights. It ventures to attempt an inculturation of the Tonga traditional funeral through effective communication. The essay is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter is an overview of the Tonga people: their concept of life, concept of death, world-view and the dawn of Christianity in Tongaland. It ends with the impact of the first Christian evangelisation and the Tonga people conversion to Christianity.

The second chapter is a general presentation of the Tonga traditional funeral rites. The Tonga traditional rituals: birth, girl initiation, marriage and death are transitions that mark one stage of life to another. They could be likened to the Catholic sacraments. They mark the turning or important moments in the life of a Tonga person. They are usually celebrated with traditional religious acts. Among the Tonga, funeral rites are the last transitional rites that lead one into the world of spirits.

Besides outlining the essential parts of the Tonga funeral rites, the chapter also deals with the Christian funeral rites in summary. This is purposely meant for the comparison that comes at the end of the chapter to highlight some common and differing elements of the two rites. The common and differing elements shall be the basis for the inculturation attempt that the essay aims at.

The third chapter deals mainly with definitions, descriptions and explanations of terms: Communication, Social Communication, the Church and Communication, Intercultural Communication and Inculturation. Indeed, this chapter speaks of the Trinitarian foundation of Christian communication. As a community of love and communion, the Blessed Trinity is the basis for human and Christian communication. God's self-communication manifests itself in the three divine persons: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit who is the uniting principle of love. God created human beings in his image. Thus human beings are able to communicate because they share in God's communicative life. Evangelisation requires communication of the Christian message. The chapter also presents some concepts of Inculturation in relation to evangelisation. Inculturation requires pastoral agents to understand and appreciate cultural values. In this way they can be equipped to communicate effectively the Gospel message. So, in the process of attempting to integrate the Tonga funeral values and the Christian faith, some communication elements are indispensable.

Chapter four presents some possible converted Tonga Christian attitude after Christ has been properly appropriated. Moreover, the chapter also gives some pastoral implications and recommendations that are deemed appropriate towards fostering the Tonga person's change of attitude towards their departed.

Bearing in mind that the Church employs various ways of communicating the Gospel message, this essay proposes grass-root and dialogue as forms of communication for the effective integration of the Tonga traditional funeral rites and the

Christian funeral rites. The Small Christian Communities are the proposed place for this dialogue to take place.

### **Motivating factors**

- Personal interest in pastoral, systematic theology and social communications and to discover about their relationship and importance for the pastoral agent.
- To discover how integration of two differing religious faiths could be fostered.

### **Approach and Methodology**

- This thesis derives inspiration from pastoral and communication areas, thus a link between theology and communication.
- The essay is the fruit of my knowledge of the Tonga funeral as an enculturated person. Therefore, it is a combination of personal knowledge: observations, interviews, research work and personal reflections.
- The methodology used is See, Judge and Act.
- The author will try by all means to be as objective as possible for theological and communication endeavours require above all, practice.

### **Objectives**

- To attempt to foster a Tonga people's Christian attitude towards their departed so that Christ may be appropriated in their religious practice of Christian faith.
- To highlight and also to stress the value of communication in pastoral theology for the effective communication of the Gospel message.

- To show that inculturation can be a reality once a pastoral agent is determined and interested in learning the culture and traditions of the people and deeply immerse him/herself into the lives of the people one ministers to.
- To show that the culture and the Gospel can enrich one another, hence the possibility of integration of the acceptable values.

### **Limitations**

- The author could not find many and useful bibliographical books about the Tonga people of Gwembe valley of the southern province of Zambia.
- Most of the people the author interviewed were practicing traditionalists though they are baptised Christians. They know quite little about Christianity in practice. Interviews were in the local language therefore sometimes it was not easy to translate some traditional concepts into English.
- The list of the interviewees could have been longer. More than thirty people were interviewed. However, due to the limited space, only few are quoted and acknowledged.

# Chapter I

## Tonga people, their concepts of Life, Death and World-view

### 1. Introduction

This first chapter presents an overview of the geographical location, the concept of life, the concept of death and indeed the world-view of the Tonga people also called Batonga.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it deals with the dawn and brief history of Christianity in Tongaland. Further, it outlines the impact of the first missionary evangelisation. The chapter also looks at the conversion of the Batonga to Christianity.

### 2. The Tonga people

The Tonga people are an ethnic group found in the southern province of Zambia. They are a patrilineal society. In fact, they have retained a "decentralised social organisation, which is defined by household and matrilineal kin link, rather than the more centralised structures adopted by others."<sup>2</sup> Their main occupation is farming and keeping livestock: cattle, pigs, goats, chicken etc. The tribe is made of three small groups: *Ba-We* found in Gwembe valley along the Zambezi Escarpment, *Ba-Ila* found on the plateau and *Ba-Lenje* found in the central part of the region. The group we will be dealing with in this work is the one that is found in the Gwembe valley: *Ba-We*. It

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, *Tonga* and/or *Batonga* are used interchangeably. Basically both terms have the same meaning.

<sup>2</sup> E. P. Murphy, ed., *A History of the Jesuits in Zambia*, 38.

occupies an area right from the Zambezi River that borders Zambia and Zimbabwe up to about over a hundred kilometres north of the river.

## 2.1 Concept of life

The Batonga believe that life comes from God whom they call *mulengi* (creator) and it goes back to God at death. The Tonga life cycle follows thus: God...Ancestors...Birth...Death...Ancestors...God through rituals. Life is considered sacred and precious among the Tonga. This can be noticed at the birth of a child. In traditional Tonga society, "the birth of a child brought joy and happiness to the family and society as a whole [...] The whole community would come to the place where the new born baby was, to give thanks in the form of presents."<sup>3</sup> Once a person is born, he/she is expected to live up to old age and later die a natural death. Tonga people value family life, marriage and children bearing, sharing, community, respect for elders, ancestral veneration and unity among other things.

## 2.2 Concept of Death

The Tonga people believe that the human person is a composition of *mubili* (body), *muzimo* (spirit/soul), and also *muya* (breath). It is believed that at death, the spirit is separated from the body and this is evidenced when a person stops breathing. The loss of breath is noticed through the mouth or nostrils, indeed, when the body of the dying person changes from warm to cold. In fact, an actual death among these people is expressed in such words like *kuzimina* (to disappear), *kutusiya* (to leave us), *koona* (to

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<sup>3</sup> J.H. Mwiinga, "Tonga View of the Past" in Murphy, ed., *A History of Jesuits in Zambia*, 56.

sleep). *kulaya* (to say good-bye), *kuswaungana abasikale*<sup>4</sup> (to join/meeting with the forefathers). We should note here that such words signify a strong belief that death is not the end of all life – a total destruction of a person. The term death or dying is not commonly and explicitly used in reference to people but to animals. It can be said then that among the Tonga people somewhat “disappear” and “sleep” while animals die.

### 2.3 World-View

Traditionally, the Tonga people believe in the existence of three worlds, that is, first, the immaterial world where the creator resides, far from the human persons, second, the world of the spirits – home of the living dead and third, the material world of creatures including human beings. The spirit world is believed to be close to earth. Life goes on but we cannot see it. Those in it see the visible and physical world, hence the belief that they “check and guard” the living. The living-dead (ancestors) are believed to be close to both God and the living persons. Ancestral veneration and sacrifice are their traditional religious activities. Veneration of and sacrifice to God through ancestors is done in places like *malende* (shrines) or in homes. In fact, ancestors are taken for the source of security and hope for the living.

Indeed, Batonga have a strong sense of a Supreme Being (God). God is perceived as a transcendental being who after creating the world and human beings, remained at a distance, though He comes to visit his creatures from time to time. Thus his movement of coming to his creatures is attributed to his name *Leza* from the verb *uleza* (he who comes).

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<sup>4</sup> *Kuzimuna* implies finding, *koona* implies waking up and *kulaya* implies coming back at some time. Thus, Batonga's expressions and belief in the life after physical death.

### 3. The coming of Christianity among the Tonga

Christian faith among the Tonga came from Zimbabwe where the Jesuit missionaries had been evangelising. It was around the early first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Jesuits crossed the Zambezi River to the North and settled in Chikuni where, besides opening mission stations, they also built primary schools. In fact, it was Frs Peter Prestage and Joseph Moreau who:

Undertook to expand the Zambezi Mission north of the Zambezi river. Having gained the confidence of Monze (Tonga religious figure – rainmaker), in the course of their 1902 expedition, Fr. Moreau was enabled to return three years later with another fellow Frenchman, Fr. Jules Torrend, and four local boys who had accompanied Moreau and Prestage earlier to Empandeni, then Southern Rhodesia. Moreau's main purpose of returning to Tongaland was to open a mission station there. As part of the Zambezi Mission enterprise Moreau founded what later came to be called the Chikuni Mission in 1905. The mission's central aim was to enlighten the darkness of heathenism and make Christians of the Batonga.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the Jesuits built a secondary school called St Canisius. Historically, it is one of the best schools in Zambia in terms of quality education.

The Jesuit missionaries committed themselves to pastoral work in the villages. They founded Catholic centres (Missions) which later came to be developed into Parishes. These include Chikuni, Chivuna, Kasiya, Fumbo and others. These parishes are currently in the diocese of Monze.

Though the Jesuits were the pioneers of evangelisation among the Tonga, other missionaries gradually joined them as years passed by. These were the Holy Ghost Fathers and the *Fidei Donum* priests among others. This was around the early 1970s.

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<sup>5</sup> B. Carmody, in Id., ed., *African Conversion*, 86.

At present, religious congregations of both women and men are increasing in the diocese. They are all engaged in the spreading of the Christian faith in Tongaland. Further, the diocesan clergy is increasing in personnel year after year.

The early missionaries (Jesuits) used schools as a strategy to bring the local people close to them for Christian instruction. On one hand, educational skills were taught to those who attended these schools. On the other hand, catechism was taught them and Mass said for them in Latin. Though basic evangelisation and development centres are still in operation, there are some other areas of concern at the moment in the diocese. These include youth animation, mass media (Chikuni community radio station) and communication, justice and peace issues, and inculturation among others.<sup>6</sup>

It is worth mentioning at this point that though the missionaries seemed to have done somewhat well in first evangelisation, they overlooked the fact of seriously learning and understanding the Tonga culture and traditions. Missionaries considered Tonga traditions (shrines, initiation ceremony and ancestral veneration) as paganism that led to hell. The Tonga people were considered as uneducated, poor, uncivilised, idol worshippers etc. "It appears nonetheless that Africans were rarely consulted with the result that religious and morally neutral customs were often condemned as pagan. For this reason, many Zambian Catholics perceive the early missionary approach to have been negative towards local culture."<sup>7</sup> From this kind of attitude, we can say that missionaries invited the local people to embrace Christianity that was to a good extent

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<sup>6</sup> For the full list of other areas of concern, see Diocese of Monze Reports: Sixth Diocesan Pastoral Council Meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> May 2003.

<sup>7</sup> B. Carmody, *Education in Zambia: Catholic Perspectives*, 28.

coloured with western culture(s). In his article “Evangelisation and Inculturation”, Hugo

F. Hinfelaar helps us to understand this fact when he says:

The more I was given the time to reflect and to study in the past years, the more I realised that we, missionaries of Europe, have not followed St. Elizabeth and John the Baptist. We did not allow ourselves to be moved by the presence of the embryonic Christ within the womb of people’s cultures. We cut away age-old trees of custom without looking at the fruits, we burnt the good seed of tradition with the chaff and at times threw away the Christic baby with the dirty water.<sup>8</sup>

It is evident then from this approach that the early missionaries overlooked the value of reciprocity in communication. Cardinal Carlo Martini more recently helps us to see this as a risk when he says:

Lack of reciprocity is the pretext of one-way communication: “I know what I want to say, and I claim to know already what the other wants: I decide how the other ought to respond to me”. The person who thinks like this – and there are not a few who live out of this way of communicating – considers communication as only an outward movement, since what ought to be a free and unpredictable return is already anticipated as if all depended only on the original point of departure.<sup>9</sup>

Today we may look at it as lack of patience in early missionary activity. It is as if they were obliged by some kind of a principle that might read thus; *convert, baptise many and fill up the registers as soon as possible*. The kind of response the Tonga people manifested was determined by the kind of attitude with which they were evangelised.

### **3.1 Impact of missionary evangelisation among the Tonga**

It is worth noting that the missionaries brought about the education for many Tonga people. Nevertheless, “in any event, although the Jesuits at Chikuni utilised the school as a means of attracting potential converts, they chose to present their converts

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<sup>8</sup> H.F. Hinfelaar, “Evangelisation and Inculturation”, 3.

<sup>9</sup> C.M. Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World*, 43.

with the paradoxical message which at this point appears to have had little intrinsic appeal ... Chikuni's schooling increased one's chances of white-collar employment."<sup>10</sup>

But they also introduced new technologies for agriculture. Fr. Moreau introduced the first plough among the Batonga:

Up to 1905 the Batonga had never seen a plough, nor anything drawn by oxen. The Batonga looked at the plough with great interest. When they were told that it was for turning over the ground previously to sowing they wondered how that could be done – who could handle such a heavy “jamba”. When told that oxen would do the handling of the “jamba” they were still more astonished. Father Moreau told them “wait for the first rain and then you will see, but first of all I must have oxen. You have many, but you only look at them and kill them at funerals. Bring some to me – I will buy them.”<sup>11</sup>

The Gospel message was planted on the Tonga soil (though some would say it did not sink deep enough) and advanced farming skills were taught to the Tonga people.

There were some challenges that missionaries met. Though people got converted to Christianity, they continued to practice their traditional religion at home far from the mission compounds. They were what one could call “Christians by day and traditionalists by night.” Girls were not so free to go to school “because of early marriages.”<sup>12</sup> Polygamy was and is still one of the challenges. Indeed, widow/widower cleansing (involving sexual intercourse as part of the ritual) is another major challenge to Christian message.

### **3.2 Batonga conversion to Christianity**

Many Batonga are Christians since the advent of Christianity. However, due to the attitude and strategies the missionaries used to evangelise them, many of them are

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<sup>10</sup> Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> Murphy, *A History of Jesuits in Zambia*, 216-217.

<sup>12</sup> Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 12.

still traditional in some of their religious practices. They value most events like initiation ceremonies at the expense of Church celebrations: liturgy and celebration of sacraments. For example, if there is an initiation ceremony-taking place on Sunday, most people will choose to attend it rather than the Sunday Mass. One would say this is a sign of “shallow level” of Christian faith.

Moreover, the missionaries did not just offer the Batonga education and spiritual nourishment, they also offered free material assistance; food, clothes and money. For instance, at Chikuni Mission, Fr. Moreau felt that people needed “food, and a bit of money to buy the most elementary of clothing and especially to pay the personal tax which had been recently imposed.”<sup>13</sup> Most probably this was the reason he had to improve the farming methods of the people. Many Batonga flocked to Church missions on Sunday not necessarily to attend Mass celebration but rather looking forward to receiving free things. In some instances, some early missionaries baptised people into the Christian faith without adequate catechetical preparation. In a letter from Fr. Czarlinski, superior of the mission, to the Prefect Apostolic in April 1921, this is what he said in regard to Fr. Torrend’s approach to baptisms:

I ask your advice; Fr. Torrend baptises crowds of people without a minimum preparation, both children and adults as one would baptise dying people only. They are taught occasionally by a Christian, not even a catechist, and know nothing beyond the prayers and some hymns and have not the slightest idea of Christian living and its demands.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, from such evidence, one could say that Christian faith was not very deep in many converts. In fact, “conversion ranged from nominal adherence because of

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<sup>13</sup> Carmody, *Conversion and Jesuit Schooling in Zambia*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> J. Coyne, *History of the Jesuits in Zambia*, 23.

the prospects of material rewards to some depth of commitment. Beyond doubt, some of the earliest converts were superficial.”<sup>15</sup>

After almost a hundred years (1905-2005) since the advent of Christianity among the Tonga, one would tend to wonder why Batonga do not seem to have fully embraced Christianity. Moreover, Christ is not yet fully appropriated in their religious allegiance. One of the reasons could be due to the way they were evangelised. Though the Tonga people were invited to become Christians and their world-view somewhat affected, basically, they remained quite traditional in their religious beliefs and practices.

The first missionaries do not seem to have engaged themselves very much in learning the culture and traditions of the Batonga. And therein lies an important aspect of evangelisation i.e., mutual dialogue and inculturation that were overlooked. Their work seems to have been the implantation of the western Church onto the Tonga soil.

Currently, there is a crucial need for inculturation of some aspects of the Batonga religious life. One of the areas that requires an urgent attention is inculturation of the Tonga funeral, lest they continue to live a double standard life: Christian and traditional (with tradition often taking an upper hand). On one hand, there are values that a Tonga person would wish to embrace fully. But on the other hand, that very person feels obliged to observe some traditional and cultural practices. How can one

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<sup>15</sup> Carmody, *African Conversion*, 94.

integrate the two and live as a true Tonga Christian without losing his/her identity? This is an issue that ought to be of great concern to any Tongaland pastoral agent.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Batonga perceive life as a gift from God through the forefathers and ancestors. Life is considered sacred. Moreover, Batonga have their way of relating to God and their departed ones. This relation comes out of their strong belief in God, life, death and the life after death. Batonga are very religious people as many missionaries who have worked in Tongaland have confessed. When missionaries came with their own concept of God, life, death and after death, their impact on the people often implied the suppression of traditional beliefs and practices that sustained Batonga's life. Batonga were invited to accept the foreign faith.

However, some questions that may be considered today are; what happens to a Tonga person who has been brought up and formed in the traditional concepts and even eschatology and is converted to Christianity? Is it possible that the two faiths and eschatologies – Tonga and Christian can become one in an individual Tonga person? And how can this be manifested in reality?

In this paper, we are trying to look at the possibilities of what may be called a Tonga Christian attitude towards the departed; an attempt to inculturate Tonga traditional funeral rites.

Having given the background and an historical overview of Christianity among the Batonga, we shall now devote the second chapter to the Batonga traditional funeral rites and Catholic funeral rites. This is a challenge that we set to undertake and

hopefully, fruitful reflections shall result for the pastoral agents in their evangelisation and inculturation endeavours among the Tonga. What might be needed at present is an authentic dialogue between the Christian message and the Tonga culture for the meaningful and an appropriated faith in Christ Jesus who is “the Way, the True and the Life” (Jn 14:6).

It is in this respect that we intend to venture into the study and reflection of the Tonga funerals. Therefore, in chapter two, we will present the traditional Tonga funeral rites and compare them with the Catholic rites so as to discover some common and differing elements. This will help us reflect on how the common and possibly the differing aspects as well could be integrated in a Tonga person's faith practice, particularly with regard to a Christian attitude towards the departed.

## Chapter II

### Tonga Funeral Rites

#### 1. Introduction

In chapter one, we looked at the Tonga people, their concept of life and death. We also presented some points on the history of their evangelisation. We also outlined some results and the challenges of the pioneer evangelisation in Tongaland. Chapter two presents in brief some Tonga traditional funeral rites. A summary of the Catholic funeral rites will also be presented. Then, the chapter ends with a note on common and differing elements between the two rites. This will later help us to see some areas that we would attempt to inculturate.

#### 2. Death

Among the traditional Batonga, death of any nature was treated with suspicion and even with caution. Because of this, witch finders were consulted to review the cause of any death be it, accident, illness, dropping dead and even drowning in a river or stream.

The Tonga people believe that death began at an early stage of human history. However, as many African societies believe, Batonga also sustain a belief “that every time a person dies this death is ‘caused’ [...] that sorcery, witchcraft and evil magic cause death.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *An Introduction to African Religion*, 111.

The death of a person brings sorrow not only to the immediate family members but also to the whole community. Among other events, death brings the Tonga people together at any time of the year.

### **3. Tonga funeral rites**

Traditionally, the period of the funeral varies in relation to the person who has died. Culturally, the funeral of children and unmarried people is simple and the period is short. But for the married and old, the funeral takes seven days and the normal daily activities are usually suspended during the funeral period.

In this chapter, we will present a general overview of the funeral rites and will highlight the most important parts.

#### **3.1 Vigil**

Death in a family can be known through the women around the dying (in case of illness) who sharply wail and mourn when death occurs. Women can confirm that a person is dead by feeling the body of the dying person changing from warm to cold. Touching the body of the dying often using hands/palms evidences this. Once death is confirmed, it is the beginning of the Tonga funeral rites. Hence, the vigil. The corpse is kept in the house. This is the time when the death stricken family is consoled and empathised with by relatives, friends and neighbours.

As soon as possible, the family members, close relatives, friends and neighbours of the deceased gather at the home of the deceased person. A group of people displays emotional wailing and mourning. People visit the funeral home one after the other, wailing. Women can throw themselves onto the ground and wail at the

top of their voices. The vigil can last up to the time when some elders of the bereaved family arrive. This is before the corpse starts to decompose. When two or three elders arrive, then arrangements for burial can commence.

Traditionally, it is a council of elderly relatives that makes burial arrangements. At this point “the key item was deciding where the deceased would be buried. Once the place was agreed upon, a senior relative—especially the father of the deceased or the father’s brother—would be the one who would first dig where the grave would be. This is to show that the father has made the final house and resting place for the child.”<sup>17</sup> This first digging made by the father is called *kuganka munzi* (to mark the home).

### **3.2 Burial**

On the day of the burial, some rituals are performed in the house. Firstly, the corpse is washed and dressed – only relatives are allowed to do this. This is a sign of honour and respect for the body whose nakedness is never exposed anyhow. Secondly, one of the elders says a prayer. The prayer is meant to let the ancestors know that one of their family members will be joining their world soon.<sup>18</sup> Ancestors are asked to welcome the deceased. After this, songs and mourning continue.

When this is done, some amount of water is put in a calabash (carried by an elder) and is taken to the graveyard (which is always a reserved place outside the

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<sup>17</sup> Murphy, *A History of Jesuits in Zambia*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. C.M. Habumbeni, “Traditional Tonga Funeral”, an interview by author. 15 June 2003, Gwembe.

compound) together with a hoe (carried by the father or his brother), picks and shovels if any. The horizontal length and width of the corpse are measured with pieces of reed or grass. Reaching at the graveyard, the father of the deceased using the hoe then marks the grave whose length is determined by a reed. He marks and digs once and says “*nomulikunze, kamwiibombya nyika*” (those who are on the other side, soften the ground). It is believed that this serves to make the digging easy.<sup>19</sup> This is done particularly in the dry season though it can also be done in the rain season as well. The tendential hardness of the ground where one is to be buried is believed to result from the refusal of the ancestors to welcome the deceased. Hence a ritual in anticipation for their permission.

The procession to the graveyard begins when the grave is ready. Traditionally, four men carry the corpse to the grave. Mourning and funeral songs accompany it. Culturally, women are not allowed to carry the corpse to the grave. However, they are the ones who wail while men are not expected to wail like women. In their wailing sometimes women recall and mention the good sayings and deeds of the deceased. Culturally speaking, men are not supposed to cry no matter what.

Reaching the graveyard, the corpse is carried around the grave twice or three times. This moving round the grave is meant to show the deceased that this is his/her new home/place before joining the ancestors later. The corpse then is put in the grave.

After the corpse has been lowered into the grave, the parents and relatives of the deceased collect some soil (at the grave) in their hands and each of them throws it

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. B. L. Cheelo, “Traditional Tonga Funeral”, an interview by author, 4 July 2003. Gwembe.

into the grave, beginning with the father. This is a sign of saying good-bye to the deceased person. It is normally accompanied by these words, *weende kabotu, tuyakukujana antoomwe abali kumbele* (go well, we shall find you together with those who have already gone ahead). Sometimes such words are said in silence. The burial then proceeds. Mourning and funeral songs continue.

Furthermore, some belongings of the deceased are buried with the corpse. These could be utensils like a plate, a spoon and a cup made of wood or even clothes. The belief is that the deceased shall continue to use these things in the next world.<sup>20</sup>

Children and pregnant women are traditionally not allowed to come near the corpse or even close to the grave for fear that some misfortune may befall them at some point in their lifetime.

Moreover, it is also important to note that all these rituals are meant to prepare the deceased to enter into the spirits' world and of course to be accepted by ancestors through correct funerals rites. It is believed that if the right ritual is not done, the spirit of the deceased would not be welcomed into the abode of the living-dead/the blessed ones. Instead, the spirit would become *muzimo ulimusyokwe* (spirit in the bush/wandering spirit) that would be haunting relatives. Haunting relatives is a way in which the spirit communicates to the living that they did not perform a ritual, let alone a right one for him/her to be welcomed by the ancestors. Hence his/her being alone and wandering anyhow. To be a wandering spirit is the worst punishment that implies being ostracised from the community.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. K.V. Mulangu, "Traditional Tonga Funeral", an interview by author, 12 June 2003, Gwembe.

### 3.3 Kulamba (smearing of mud)

There are various signs and symbols used during the funeral period and *kulamba* is one them. In this ritual, the relatives of the deceased person go to the nearby river or stream where some rituals are performed. The relatives of the deceased person especially women smear themselves with mud on the cheeks and upper part of the arms. This is the actual *kulamba*. *Kulamba* signifies that though we are alive now, we will die some day and be buried in the soil. It evokes the reality of death. Sometimes, women also put on round their heads small pieces of cloth that have been shared from the deceased person's clothing. This is a sign that symbolises the last physical contact the living have with the departed. All these symbolise bereavement and mourning. Indeed, they are also meant to identify close relatives of the deceased, hence condolence attention and greeting from anyone who attends the bereaved family.<sup>21</sup> Traditionally, in case of a married person, the widow or widower is not allowed to have a bath and is supposed to shave hair.<sup>22</sup> All these and other signs are used and remain until the funeral is over.

### 3.4 Feasting and celebrating

During the funeral, animals (especially cattle) are slaughtered to feed the people. This in a sense is the feasting time. In fact the more food people are provided with, the longer will be the funeral period even if it is during the farming season.

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<sup>21</sup> Culturally, anyone who visits the morning home is expected to greet the bereaved members.

<sup>22</sup> The belief in the sign of hair-shave is that death does not completely destroy life as such but is a kind of gate way to another life. New hair will grow as a sign that life continues or springs up again.

Towards the end of the funeral week, an overnight celebration is held. It is the time when no more funeral songs are sung but the joyful ones instead. This is the moment for singing and dancing. This ritual is to some extent meant to express that people have come to terms with sorrow and the disruption caused by the death. The ritual marks the beginning of the normal ordinary life. In a way, death is being danced away and life is somewhat renewed in the family.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.5 Kulya zyina/kwaangwa muzimo (inheriting the spirit of the deceased)**

The ritual of *kulya zyina/Kwaangwa muzimo* (inheriting the spirit of the deceased) can be done at any time that is deemed appropriate by the family members. It can take place towards the end of the funeral week or any other time that can be arranged. What matters most is to find someone to be named after the deceased. This is a ritual that notifies mourners about departing from the funeral home. When a relative inherits the spirit of the deceased, mourners can depart for their homes. The close relatives are the last ones to leave the funeral home.

To avoid the spirit remaining wandering about and also to keep the deceased remembered among the living, the Tonga people inherit the *muzimo* (spirit) of the deceased. The potential wandering spirit would find a home in the inheritor through an inheriting ritual.

Culturally, inheriting the spirit can be done in several ways; cleansing in case of a widow or a widower, expressed in a sexual act or in a symbolical way called *kucuta*, naming another relative or naming children after the deceased. Traditionally,

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. S.D. Kanene, "Traditional Tonga Funeral", an interview by author, 20 July 2003, Gwembe.

widow inheritance is normal though with some exceptions. All this is meant that once inherited, the spirit would have a home, would be settled and feel part of the rest of the community (the living and the living-dead). Normally, an elderly person who lived an exemplary life is renamed throughout the clan. Children are named after him/her thus a belief that the ancestor becomes a guardian and protector of the child. If one lived a culturally unacceptable life while on earth, special rituals have to be performed and it takes quite some time before any relative accepts to inherit his/her spirit.<sup>24</sup> This would be the case of a witch or a wizard. In such cases, inheritance is done just to make the deceased feel somewhat a part of the community but without much honour and respect in the living community.

Traditionally, when wicked people die, children are not named after them. This is because of the fear that such children might grow up with some characteristics of the wicked deceased person. Only elders do inherit the spirit of bad people because they are said to have stopped growing. So, during the period before the spirit of the deceased wicked person can be inherited, rituals are performed. One of them is that of putting the *muzimo*/spirit of the wicked person on a tree. The tree is of course taken care of. It should neither be cut nor burnt until the spirit is inherited. Usually, the tree is near or close to a relative's home. It is worth noting that among the Tonga, anybody who dies is culturally accorded the acceptable funeral rites due to all members of the society. There is no discrimination whether or not one betrayed the family or society. All are equal in terms of traditional funeral rites.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. P.F. Hakalinda, "Traditional Tonga Funeral", an interview by author, 27 July 2003, Gwembe.

The meaning of all these rituals is to please the ancestors who are believed to be the givers and protectors of life. For instance, when someone is proved barren, it is believed that the ancestors have closed the door of life. Hence a ritual has to be performed so as to open the door and someone could be able to bear children. Ancestors are also said to provide security. They are indeed honoured and venerated as guardians.

Indeed, ancestors come to the living in dreams and visions to give instructions or make requests. It is also worth noting that in this matter, the spirit possessed people are a great help to the diviners in identifying the type of spirits and what they want or need. Thereafter, ways are sought to meet the requests or to follow the instructions.

### **3.5 Remembering the departed ones**

The departed are remembered especially those who died as adults or have been heads of families or married people of past generations. Children and unmarried people are ritually rarely remembered.

Traditionally, local brew is made. When it is ready, elders of the clan or even only elderly family members gather together in a house. Beer is collected in a gourd from a clay pot. An elder takes a sip and without swallowing it, spits it onto the ground. Invocations, petitions and thanksgiving to the ancestors are said as more beer is poured on the ground where ancestors will take it as a sign of communion. Prayers for protection, guidance and support are said at this time.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. G.C. Malambo, "Traditional Tonga Funeral", an interview by author, 3 August 2003, Gwembe.

Tonga people pray to God through the ancestors though they rarely address God directly. Normally, once a long list of God's names is uttered, suffices. Therefore, the departed ones are not forgotten as such among the Tonga people.

Moreover it is believed that only through a traditional funeral rite that one is accepted in the company of the blessed ones. The belief in the ancestral spirits makes the living behave well and live a good life for fear that when they die, they might be cursed, forgotten and indeed taken for the black sheep of the family or clan. In fact the rituals are also meant to maintain a good relationship between the spirits' world and the earthly world of the living persons.

Ancestors are also believed to have powers to grant or refuse the requests of the living, hence their veneration. Tonga people believe that there is communion and communication between the ancestors and the living persons. Hence, the ancestors' influence on the living relatives. Their role of intervening in the life and death of the living is vital. Further, hope and security are believed to derive from ancestors. The emphasis on this is great that one might be tempted to say, the Tonga people pray to and trust more in their ancestors than to and in God as the source of everything. The fact however is that, Tonga people feel that ancestors are closer to the living than to God who is believed to reside far away and only comes from his world – *kujulu* (heaven) but does not dwell among the human persons as such. Hence the Tonga people have a sense of filling-up the gap with the so-called, close mediators – ancestors.

#### 4. Catholic Funeral Rites

The Rite of Christian Funerals is divided into three principal ritual moments; namely i. Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers, ii. Funeral liturgy and iii. Rites of Committal.

##### 4.1 Vigil for the deceased

The Christian vigil is the “principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy and the rite of Committal. The vigil may be celebrated in the home of the deceased. in the funeral home, parlour or chapel of rest or in a suitable place or even in the Church.”<sup>26</sup>

During this time:

The Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to God of mercy and finds strength in Christ’s presence. The word of God is read. In this time of loss the family and the community turn to God’s word as the source of faith and hope, as light and life in the face of darkness and death. Consoled by the redeeming word of God and by the abiding presence of Christ and his Spirit, the assembly at the vigil calls upon the father’s mercy to receive the deceased into the Kingdom of light and peace.<sup>27</sup>

Further, the Related Rites and Prayers contain three brief rites; “Prayer after death”, “Gathering in the presence of the Body” and “Transfer of the Body to the Church or the place of Committal.” Through these moments, the minister and the faithful are helped to pray with the family and friends. The Prayer after Death is used when the minister first meets the family. Gathering in the presence of the Body happens when the family gathers together around the body of the deceased. And Transfer of the Body to the Church or to the place of Committal, when the “family and friends prepare

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<sup>26</sup> A. Bouley, ed., *Catholic Rites Today*, 562 (Hence forward CRT).

<sup>27</sup> CRT, 562.

to accompany the Body of the deceased in procession to the Church or to the place of committal."<sup>28</sup> All these moments are accompanied with prayers and intercessions from the Christian community in communion with the saints in confident hope to God.

## **4.2 Funeral Liturgy**

Bouley goes on to say that the funeral liturgy is the central celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. It has two forms: "Funeral Mass" and "Funeral liturgy outside Mass." The second form is used when Mass cannot be celebrated. In instances when Mass is celebrated, the community together with the family and friends gather in order to praise God for Christ's victory over sin and death. They also "commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery."<sup>29</sup>

### **4.2.1 Reception at the Church, Celebration of the Liturgy of the word, Liturgy of the Eucharist and Final Commendation.**

After being begotten in Baptism, the Church nourishes her members in the Eucharist. The Church being the place for community worship, it is also the place where the community of faith commends the deceased members to God the Father. The Church is the symbol of the community and of the heavenly liturgy in anticipation.<sup>30</sup>

Beginning with the reception of the Body at the entrance of the Church, the "minister sprinkles the coffin with holy water in remembrance of the deceased person's initiation and first acceptance into the community of faith."<sup>31</sup> Some symbols like a

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<sup>28</sup> CRT,570.

<sup>29</sup> CRT,590.

<sup>30</sup> Cf., CRT,571.

<sup>31</sup> CRT,571.

funeral pall may be placed on the coffin as a reminder of a baptism signifying life in Christ. The procession into the Church then follows.

After the community gets into the Church, the word of God is read. This is the Liturgy of the word. The paschal mystery is proclaimed in the readings. The readings are meant to “teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God’s Kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian Life ... tell of God’s design for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own.”<sup>32</sup> The homily is given in which the minister encourages the community to be consoled and strengthened in the face of death. The community is instilled with some hope from the word of God.

At the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the community is spiritually nourished at the table of the Eucharist. In this sacrifice, “all are given a foretaste of the eternal life in Christ and are united with Christ, with each other and with all the faithful, living and dead.”<sup>33</sup>

At the conclusion of the funeral liturgy, there is a Final Commendation. This is the time when the community manifests a final farewell to the deceased. It is an act of respect through which the dear ones are entrusted to God’s tenderness and mercy.<sup>34</sup> Through this act, the reality of separation is acknowledged. The act also signifies that the members of community of faith have the same destiny, which is the resurrection on the last day.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> CRT,573.

<sup>33</sup> CRT,573.

<sup>34</sup> Cf., CRT,573.

<sup>35</sup> Cf., CRT,574.

Sprinkling of holy water on the coffin and incensing may be done during or after the farewell song. "The incensation signifies respect of the body as temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>36</sup>

The last aspect of the Christian funeral rites is the procession to the Place of Committal. It serves to show "the journey of human life as a pilgrimage to God's Kingdom of peace and light, the new and eternal Jerusalem."<sup>37</sup> Music and singing accompanies the procession to the Place of Committal as reinforcement for the communion among the participants.

#### **4. Tonga and Christian funeral rites: Some common and differing aspects**

##### **4.1 Some common aspects**

- Life is a gift from God.
- Vigil; both rites have the moment when the relatives, friends and neighbours meet to console and empathise with the bereaved family. The community also plays a significant role in praying for the departed.
- Respect for the departed.
- Naming after someone: the baptised are given new and Christian names at baptism. Batonga name their children after ancestors at birth. Relatives are named after the deceased at the inheriting the spirit of the deceased rite.
- Belief in the life after death.

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<sup>36</sup> CRT,574.

<sup>37</sup> CRT,574.

- Belief in spirits: saints and ancestors.

#### **4.2 Some differing aspects**

- Tonga people believe that ancestors are to some extent mediators of human life while Christians believe that God through Christ is the source and giver of all life.
- Tonga people believe that death is caused by mysterious human intervention. Christians believe that death is part of human nature and that through death we take part in the death and resurrection of Christ.
- Tonga people have a moment of sharing traditional stories, myths and proverbs while Christians share the word of God as a source of faith, hope and strength.
- Tonga people direct their prayers to God through the ancestors while Christians direct to God sometimes through Christ and entrust everything into God's tender loving mercy and compassion.
- Tonga people believe that entry into the world of the ancestors depends very much on the right funeral rituals. Christians believe that communion with the saints and eternal life depends on faith and hope in God through Christ.
- Tonga people believe that accepted traditional life and traditional funeral rites guarantee a person's entry into the ancestral world. Christians believe that through prayers for the dead offered at Mass, the faithful departed may enter the heavenly Kingdom. And the judgement of who enters into His Kingdom does not depend on rituals but on one's relationship with Him and one's neighbour while one was still alive here on earth.

## **5. Conclusion**

In chapter two, we have looked at the major aspects of the Tonga traditional funeral rites and how in general Tonga funerals are organised and actualised. We also presented in a summary form the Catholic funeral rites especially the essential elements of each stage right from the time of one's death to the final commendation.

Moreover, this chapter also outlined some common and differing elements between the Tonga funeral rites and Catholic funeral rites. This comparison is meant to highlight some funeral aspects of the both rites so as to see which areas could possibly need some communication insights and eventually inculturation in reality.

Having reached this far, we shall dedicate the third chapter to some definitions and views about communication and inculturation and the relationship of the two in regard to pastoral needs in evangelisation. This will lead to the last chapter that is the major aim of this work: How the Tonga people could bury their departed in fidelity to their tradition and to Christ. This of course shall be an attempt to inculturate Tonga funerals in the light of the Christian principle of inculturation.

## **Chapter III**

### **Communication, Christian Communication and towards Inculturation**

#### **1. Introduction**

In chapter two, we presented the Tonga traditional and the Christian funeral rites. The chapter ended with a note on some common and differing elements between the two rites.

In the history of the early evangelisation among the Tonga, there has been a lack of the dynamics of communication particularly in relation to the area of inculturation. The integration of the above mentioned traditions requires some communication elements. The attempted inculturation in chapter four would be possible provided some pastoral communication insights in ministry are taken into consideration.

Our topic in this thesis is a pastoral issue, a reflection from pastoral theology insights. Pastoral theology requires some pastoral communication for its relevance.

This chapter presents some definitions, descriptions and explanations of concepts. Communication can be understood from different perspectives. However, communication as a means of interaction and communion is somewhat taken in a general sense. Further, the chapter looks at communication from the Christian point of view, its basis, the Blessed Trinity, seen as a community of love. Indeed, the chapter presents the Church as an instrument of salvation to the world. The chapter also gives some descriptions and views on intercultural communication and inculturation. Communication as an instrument is essential for evangelisation and inculturation

endeavours to the pastoral agents of the gospel. Hence a look at some concepts and views about communication which could help us towards a required integration of the two traditions.

## **2. The definitions, descriptions and explanations of concepts**

### **2.1 Communication**

Communication can be understood as a transmitting, giving or exchanging of information or message. In a sense, communication implies sharing or participation of some kind. According to Karl Rosengren “the word ‘communication’ is historically related to the word ‘common’. It stems from the Latin verb *communicare*, which means ‘to share’. ‘to make common’, and which in turn is related to the Latin word for common: *communis*.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore “everything, which leads to bring together, to having something in common, can thus be called communication.”<sup>39</sup> It can be said that communication is a tool that serves any human relationship. Moreover, “in its broader sense, ‘communication’ covers everything which brings people closer together, unites and binds them in one way or another.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, human beings are social beings that are meant to associate, relate and socialise, hence, human relationships network.

Further, “communication is the tool that makes societies possible ... without communication, there would be no communities; and without community, there would be no communication.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, according to Franz-Joseph Eilers “Human society cannot exist without the mutual sharing of signs and meanings between human beings.

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<sup>38</sup> K.E. Rosengren, *Communication: An Introduction*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> F.J. Eilers, “Communication” in K. Muller, *et al ed.*, *Dictionary of Mission*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> F.J. Eilers, “Communication” in K. Muller — *al.*, *Dictionary of Mission*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> T.E. Shanks. *Power, Truth and the Flow of Information*, 43.

Also Religious life is not thinkable without the communication between God and the human beings.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore we can say that communication in a way creates community and it is an ongoing process of sharing ideas and information among people. It enables people to interact and thus, it promotes and more so, maintains any existing human society.

## **2.2 Social communication**

The Vatican Council II tackled the issue of social communication. In the decree *Inter Mirifica* (December 1963), the Council affirms that the Church in her task of preaching the gospel “...believes that its task involves employing the means of social communication to announce the good news of salvation and to teach men how to use them properly.”<sup>43</sup> It seems the council had in mind the modern means of communication as essential to evangelisation. Television and radio were the kind of modern instruments that the Church referred to at that time.

In Franz-Joseph Eilers’ view, social communication is “an interactional symbolic process, which allows people to establish contact by sharing meaning through signs.”<sup>44</sup> This of course we should note, applies to any kind of group sharing.

## **2.3 Pastoral theology**

There is a relationship between theology and communication. According to Franz-Josef Eilers, “pastoral theology is about the application of theology into the different areas of the lives of people and society.”<sup>45</sup> From this perspective then, it can

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<sup>42</sup> F.J. Eilers, *Communicating in Community*, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Vatican II, *Inter Mirifica*, no. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Eilers, *Social Communication Formation in Priestly Ministry*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Eilers, *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*, 77.

be said that pastoral theology is concerned with sharing and appropriating faith into the daily lives of people. And this in the case of the Church's ministry, can be manifested in activities such as liturgy, catechetics, sacraments, preaching and sharing of daily life experiences of people at any level of the life of the Church. In such a case then, inculturation process would imply that dialogue and participation kind of pastoral communication be considered.

#### 2.4 Christian communication

Jesus commissioned his apostles to "go ... and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19-20 in RSV). Christianity implies reaching out to others, hence communication. Christian communication "originated from the intra-Trinitarian communication that flows into creation and revelation."<sup>46</sup> Moreover, according to Paul Soukup "Christianity is essentially about communication."<sup>47</sup> The Church is witnessing to Christ whose mission she is entrusted with. The Kingdom of God is about witnessing to its values as Jesus gave an example. In fact, "the Church is by its very nature also communication."<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, "the aim of communication is to help people interpret their existence in the light of what God has done for them as manifested in Jesus."<sup>49</sup>

We can therefore say that Christian communication, while deriving from the Triune God, is meant to bring people closer to God and to each other. In such a case

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<sup>46</sup> Eilers, *Social Communication Formation in Priestly Ministry*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> P. Soukup, *Communication and Theology*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> F.J. Eilers, "Communication" in K. Muller – *al.*, *Dictionary of Mission*, 74.

<sup>49</sup> W.F. Fore, *Television and Religion*, 48.

then it can be said that, “communication is God’s unique gift to humankind, through which individuals and societies can become more truly human.”<sup>50</sup> We are able to communicate because we are created for communion with God and with one another.

## **2.5 Pastoral approach to communication**

In relation to evangelising communication, pastoral communication is somewhat outlined in the Church’s Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* when it says:

Those who proclaim God’s Word are obliged to heed and seek to understand the “words” of diverse peoples and cultures, in order not only to learn from the but also help them recognise and accept the word of God. The Church, therefore, must maintain an *active, listening presence in relation to the world* – a kind of presence which both nurtures community and supports people in seeking acceptable solutions to personal and social problems. Moreover, as the Church always must communicate its message in a manner suited to each age and to the cultures of particular nations and peoples, so today it must communicate in and to the emerging media cultures...<sup>51</sup>

It is quite clear from this Church document that communication is a vital element in the Church’s pastoral ministry. Pastoral communication requires above all the communicator to adjust him/herself in pastoral activities, especially in the area of inculturation.

The Church learns her communicative life from the Trinity and also from the incarnation of Jesus.

## **2.6 The Trinity as foundation of Christian communication**

The divine persons of the Blessed Trinity exist in love of communion. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit relate to each other in complete mutual love. And the communion takes place in this form “the Father communicates being, power, all divine

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<sup>50</sup> WACC, *Statements on Communication*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communication, *Aetatis Novae*, no.8.

attributes, to the Son; and Father and the Son communicate them to the Spirit.”<sup>52</sup> From this we can say that the Blessed Trinity is the fullness of communication as a perfect community. Due to his nature as communication, God shares this communion with humanity.

According to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation of the Vatican Council II, “it pleased God, in His goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of His will (cf. Eph. 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18, 2 Pet. 1:4).”<sup>53</sup> God communicates with humanity precisely because of his plan of salvation. Hence, God’s communication to human beings is right from the Old Testament times up to our times and beyond. So, God’s self-revelation is the foundation of all communication. In fact, “the heart of communication is found in what theology calls the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>54</sup>

### **3. The Incarnation of Christ and communication**

Already in the Old Testament, God spoke in words and deeds. He used his messengers i.e., prophets as the instrument of his word. He finally became incarnate in the Son; God made man, Word becoming flesh. This communication of course takes place in history. God became one of us through his Son.

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<sup>52</sup> T.J., Farrell -- P.A. Soukup, ed., *Communication and Lonergan*, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no.2.

<sup>54</sup> AMECEA, *Communication in Pastoral Work*, 1.

It can be said therefore that the incarnation of Christ is at the centre of Christian communication. Jesus identified himself to human beings who in fact are the recipients of his message. The letter to the Hebrews puts it well when it says “in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world” (1:1-2). Through Jesus, we have come to know who God is.

According to Soukup, “God’s self-communication to humanity and cosmos ... reached the point of ultimate unity in incarnation. in the man Jesus in whom God dwelt.”<sup>55</sup> Hence, *Immanuel* – God with us. And Jesus himself revealed the Father in various ways during his earthly life. He inaugurated God’s Kingdom (Mk. 1:15, 3:13-18). He did this through his words and deeds. He mixed and related with any one; sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes. Indeed he forgave sins. He preached and healed. And in this way he showed that God his father is. loving, caring, merciful and compassionate. In his communication with people, Jesus used parables, stories and sayings in the ordinary language of the people though he challenged their attitudes and actions. Finally, his death and resurrection was the ultimate event of re-establishing the God-man broken relationship.

### **3.1 Communication and Church**

The Church is a sacrament of Christ here on earth. As the mystical body of Christ, she is the continued visible presence of God’s salvific will. More so, “she is the abiding presence of that primal sacramental word of definitive grace which Christ is in

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<sup>55</sup> P. Soukup. *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination*, 283.

the world, effecting what is uttered by uttering it in sign.”<sup>56</sup> She is an instrument of salvation here on earth. The same Spirit that filled the Apostles at Pentecost, leads, guides and directs the Church in her mission as Christ’s visible presence. It is understandable therefore to say, “God continues to communicate with humanity through the Church, bearer and custodian of His revelation.”<sup>57</sup>

In fact, in the view of Avery Dulles, “the Church exists in order to bring men in communion with God and thereby open them to communication with each other.”<sup>58</sup>

The Church is indeed an entity and a sign of communion between God the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit and the human beings. She is a sacramental instrument of God’s grace here on earth. Hence, the communication dimension of her nature. The Vatican Council II describes the Church’s task to communicate in these words; “the one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity as a visible organisation through which he communicates truth and grace to men.”<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, according to Franz-Joseph Eilers, Church as communication can be seen in this way:

The salvation history under the communications aspect means to see revelation, incarnation and evangelisation as flowing from the Trinitarian communication; God reveals Himself, he communicates in the Old Testament in many and various ways and leads Israel to become a people ... Out of revelation-incarnation the Church is born on Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Church thus is the fruit but also the continuation of God’s communication to mankind. The Church is God’s ongoing communication of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit till the end of time.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> K. Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communication, *The Church and Internet*, 45.

<sup>58</sup> A. Dulles, *The Church is Communication*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8.

<sup>60</sup> F.J. Eilers, *Communication Between Cultures*, 145.

The Church document *Aetatis Novae* gives a concise and precise theological foundation of Christian communication. It clearly expresses the Trinitarian basis of communication where the Church draws inspiration and always models her communication. Indeed, it affirms that “Christ is both the content and dynamic source of the Church’s communication in proclaiming the Gospel.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore the Church’s mission is open to all nations and to all cultures (Mt 28:19). Hence, the Church lives between and across cultures.

#### 4. Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication can be defined as a “process of the exchange of thoughts and meanings between people of differing cultures.”<sup>62</sup> It is important to note that the underlining notion here is the exchange of “thoughts and meanings”. Furthermore, intercultural communication occurs “whenever a message producer is a member of one culture and a message receiver is a member of another.”<sup>63</sup> The underlining concept here is an expression of “cross-cultural communication.”

However, according to William B. Gudykunst:

An interpersonal encounter may be designated as intercultural when the participants act as though they believe it is intercultural...If a participant now alters communication style slightly to markedly he/she is indicating that the other individual appears “foreign” and that some adjustment in accustomed style is necessary in order for contact to be made. If the other also shows efforts at adaptive behaviour, then the necessary condition for initiation of intercultural communication has occurred.<sup>64</sup>

Here the underlined concept is an element of “individual adjustment and adaptation”.

This implies a kind of negotiation in a give and take manner. Furthermore, intercultural

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<sup>61</sup> *Aetatis Novae*, no.6.

<sup>62</sup> G. Maletzke, *Intercultural and International Communication*, 409.

<sup>63</sup> L.A. Samovar — R.F. Porter, *Intercultural Communication*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> W.B. Gudykunst, ed., *Intercultural Communication Theory*, 197.

communication is closely related to acculturation. According Jose Antunes da Silva, “acculturation refers to the encounter of two cultures, two different sets of symbols, values and worldviews, such an encounter can occur in a context of mutual respect and tolerance or in a context of conflict and manipulation.”<sup>65</sup>

#### **4.1 Church and intercultural communication**

Since human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), they participate in God’s own communicative life. Human ability and capability to communicate comes from God, the source of all communication. From this point of view, it is worth noting that “the basis and exemplar of every human communication is in the Christian view, the inner communication between Father, Son and the Holy Spirit within the Holy Trinity. The Triune God communicates within himself in loving communication between the three persons being one in Trinity.”<sup>66</sup> In fact, even the Gospel-culture encounter could be rightly said to be an intercultural communication.

#### **5. Christian inculturation**

The history of inculturation of Christianity is rooted in the reality of the incarnation of Christ. An experience of inculturation of Christianity is presented in the Acts of the Apostles (15: 6-21). This is where we find the first ecumenical council of Jerusalem during which the apostles Peter and Paul challenged the Jewish-Christian community, not to impose their Jewish cultural practices on the Gentile-Christian converts. As a matter of fact, the Christian message was first received and lived in the Jewish culture and then spread to the Roman-Gentile cultures. Nonetheless, this

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<sup>65</sup> J.A.D. Silva, “Inculturation as Dialogue”, 201.

<sup>66</sup> Eilers, *Communicating Between Cultures*, 143.

underlines the fact that the Good News of salvation is not only for the Jews but for the entire human race. The inculturation of Christianity can also be seen in Jesus' missionary instruction to the apostles after the resurrection (Mt. 28: 19-20).

In her unfailing obedience to the apostolic mandate of Christ, the Church has continued to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to all the cultures of the world. And this missionary undertaking is not without inculturation.

According to John Paul II, inculturation can be defined as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the human cultures."<sup>67</sup> It is not something that has to do with mere adaptation. Inculturation stresses the encounter of Christianity with cultural and religious heritage of different societies. Inculturation of Christianity requires the people of a particular culture to reach a point where they are able to live and express their Christian faith.

The Gospel message must therefore, be inculturated more correctly and in accordance to the social context and situation of the local people. The African Synod of bishops stressed inculturation on the grounds that "a faith that does not become part of our culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived."<sup>68</sup> The process of inculturation is a life long process that requires total commitment of the local Christian community, with the help of competent theologians. It is a challenge that has to be faced in the light of the Holy Spirit who continues to guide the Church towards the eschatological existence. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Catechesi Tradendae* says

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<sup>67</sup> J. Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 52.

<sup>68</sup> AMECEA, *The African Synod Comes Home*, 26.

that evangelisation “is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of the culture or cultures”. And according to him three steps are necessary as part of inculturation; “(i) seek to know these cultures and their essential components; (ii) Learn their most significant expressions; (iii) respect their particular values and riches.”<sup>69</sup> In fact in this way, the knowledge of the hidden mystery will be offered (Rom. 16:25).

The local culture ought to allow its values to be transformed and incorporated into Christian values. In this way, the Gospel values should penetrate into the local culture. Consequently, an integration of some sort becomes the fruit.

Indeed inculturation can be compared to the incarnation of Jesus who took the human flesh and lived in the Jewish culture. It can be rightly said then that Jesus needs cultures through which his message of salvation can be transmitted and at the same time, his life shared with the human race. According to Aylward Shorter “there could have been no earthly ministry for Jesus if he had not adopted the cultural concepts, symbols and behaviours of his hearer.”<sup>70</sup> This implies that inculturation is an essential element through which the Gospel message can be incarnated. Here indeed lies the fact of the mystery of incarnation as the foundation for the understanding of the meaning of inculturation, which is at the centre of evangelisation. And this is the ground for the relationship between incarnation and inculturation. Therefore evangelisation, communication and inculturation embrace one another for a meaningful and credible Christian life. Moreover, according to John Paul II, “inculturation is a requirement of

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<sup>69</sup> J. Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 53.

<sup>70</sup> A. Shorter, *Towards A Theology of Inculturation*, 79.

evangelisation, a path towards full evangelisation and one of the greatest challenges for the Church on the continent.”<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, the incarnation of Christ offers humanity a share in communion with God the Father. So, we can say that through the incarnation, all cultures have received grace and undergone transformation of some kind.

To be precise, “inculturation is a movement towards full evangelisation. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches on them on a personal, cultural ... level.”<sup>72</sup> Further, in Shorter’s view “inculturation of Christianity happens when the Gospel of Jesus comes to people living in their own culture ... and they also begin to express their faith in a new and original way.”<sup>73</sup> Such is a challenge that agents of evangelisation together with the local Christian community must face with determination, courage, patience and perseverance.

Therefore, we could say that there are two approaches to inculturation christologically; the first considers Jesus as one who comes into the culture to transform and give it a new meaning. In this way, “every culture needs to be transformed by the Gospel values.”<sup>74</sup> The second takes into consideration the positive cultural values and examines how they can be integrated into the Gospel message. With reference to African Theology, this approach could be described as “making the connections between the culture and daily life of the African people and the Christian faith.”<sup>75</sup> In

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<sup>71</sup> J. Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*. 59.

<sup>72</sup> J. Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*. 62.

<sup>73</sup> T. Okure — P.V. Thiel et alii, *Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, 59.

<sup>74</sup> J. Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*. 61.

<sup>75</sup> J. Healey — D. Sybertz, *Toward An African Narrative Theology*, 31.

such a case then, we could say that the African beliefs, proverbs, customs, stories, songs and even myths could be analysed and somewhat linked to our Christian faith. In fact, considering both approaches, culture and faith enrich each other. And we could infer that the two approaches have their basis and revolve around the theology of incarnation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Having looked at communication from the Christian perspective, we can say that it has both divine and human aspects. It is a means of relationship among the persons of the Trinity, between God and the human beings, indeed human persons with one another.

As an instrument, communication creates, builds and maintains relationships at any level. It serves God-man and also man-man levels of relationship. It essentially brings two parties into a closer relationship. The close relationship between pastoral theology and pastoral communication has also been briefly mentioned.

Moreover, chapter three also looked at Church in her communicative role, an instrument of God's salvation to the world. Indeed some views have been presented on the incarnation of Christ and communication. Finally, some intercultural communication concepts and Christian Inculturation were also presented.

Inculturation requires dialogue and in order for dialogue to take place, communication is a must. It is in this light that the last chapter attempts to integrate some possible Tonga traditional and Christian funeral beliefs.

## Chapter IV

### Pastoral implications and recommendations

#### 1. Introduction

In chapter three, we saw that from the Christian point of view, communication is seen to have its basis in the Trinity, the community of communion. Indeed, we saw that communication is vital for the communication of the Gospel message. Spreading the Gospel message requires the Church to encounter other cultures. In this way, the Church involves herself in dialogue with other cultures. Therefore, an inculturation process between the Christian message and cultures is necessary.

In chapter four, we shall present what could be called the converted Tonga Christian attitude towards the departed. This is in view of how the Tonga people could bury their departed in fidelity to their tradition and to Christ. This of course shall be an attempt to inculturate a Tonga traditional funeral in the light of the grass-root and dialogue kinds of communication.

“For the Church, evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”<sup>76</sup> It is the Church’s mission therefore to evangelise the world in her endeavour to proclaim and bring about the Kingdom of God among all people. Hence

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<sup>76</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18.

the Church's encounter with other religions and cultures and therefore her need to dialogue with them.

With no doubt, the Tonga people are religious. They have their own kind of theology that could be seen as self-revelation of God in their life. As Rahner puts it "the history of revelation in the proper sense takes place wherever the individual and collective history of the human race is taking place."<sup>77</sup> God reveals himself to people in various ways. We can say that the structure of the Tonga religion is good and holy for somehow it also comes from God. However, it may not be perfect though it has many values that come from God. Indeed, it contains elements of faith, hope and love. For "every culture has standard values and measures with a greater or lesser affinity to the evangelical ideals of the Gospel."<sup>78</sup>

In this chapter, we shall consider first the possible attitude that a Tonga person would have towards the departed after having been properly converted to Christianity. The aspects that could be inculturated will follow and then finally, the recommendations.

Some questions that may be considered at this point are: What happens to a Tonga person who has been brought up and formed in the traditional concepts and even eschatology and is converted to Christianity? Is it possible that the two faiths – Tonga and Christian can become one in an individual Tonga person? And how can this be manifested in reality?

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<sup>77</sup> K. Rahner. *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 145.

<sup>78</sup> F. Nwaigbo, "Priestly Celibacy: A Millennial Challenge", 121.

## **2. Possible converted Tonga Christian attitude**

When a Tonga person has been appropriately converted to Christianity, he/she cannot avoid having his/her religious structures moved around. The world-view also changes. For now he/she begins to understand and explain his/her life and world in a new way. Jesus becomes the centre and vision of what shapes life. Jesus is appropriated as the fullness of salvation. Salvation is God's work through Christ Jesus. Rahner further says that "there can be salvation and hence also faith everywhere in history ... a supernatural revelation of God to mankind must have been at work everywhere in the history of the human race ... in such a way that it actually touches every person and effects salvation in him through faith."<sup>79</sup>

Through the realisation that there is no area of human experience that lies outside the knowledge and power of Christ, a Tonga Christian ought to have little if any urge to look for security elsewhere when faced with metaphysical problems. For if proper evangelisation takes place, Christ and not the ancestors can be seen as all sufficient for every need. Therefore, what is the kind of feedback or response could be expected from a fully converted Tonga Christian?

### **2.1 Jesus Christ becomes the ground and hope and not the Ancestors.**

When a Tonga person has converted to Christianity, the ultimate concern and hope is not in pleasing the ancestors, rather it is that of being attached to Christ, the fullness of life. He/she no longer sees the ancestors as the only ground of hope. He/she no longer worries about appeasing them that they may accept him/her in the life to

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<sup>79</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 148.

come. It is Jesus Christ who gives life (cf. Jn.10:10). Ancestors only become a sign of hope in the sense that they point to a life lived in communion with Christ. As Charles Nyamiti puts it well “Christian hope alone can authorise us to regard as our true ancestors the dead who are not canonised.”<sup>80</sup>

The ancestors represent a people who have been rewarded for their good lives on this earth. The Tonga Christian also no longer sees the ancestors as givers of life, but rather they also owe their existence to Christ through whom all has come into existence (Hebr.1:2).

In fact Nyamiti goes on to reflect thus:

African Christian ancestorship has two components; i. Natural relationship and ii. Supernatural ancestral relationship in Christ. Natural relationship includes brotherly/sisterly, parental, clanic, tribal etc. and corresponding ancestorship will be brotherly/sisterly, parental and so forth. The supernatural ancestral relationship in Christ can only be brotherly since it is always based on common divine sonship between the saints and their early relatives. Hence seen from this perspective all saints are our brothers or sisters in Christ.<sup>81</sup>

## **2.2 Jesus Christ is the foundation of communion with the Ancestors**

When the Christian world-view has been properly understood in the minds of the Tonga Christians then follow some vital questions like; if ancestors lived outside the knowledge of Christ, how do they now qualify to be friends of Jesus?

Traditionally, a Tonga person believes that the way to the abode of the blessed departed is by following the tradition of the ancestors. When we look at the religion of ancestors critically, we find that it is not far from the way of Christ. Yes, Christ is the

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<sup>80</sup> C. Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, 128.

<sup>81</sup> Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, 129.

fullness of the way but also we cannot rule out the fact that the tradition of the ancestors has some elements of grace or seeds of the way. Indeed, it participated in the way of Christ by fostering love, peace, unity, hospitality, kindness, generosity and care that are typically manifested by the Tonga people. Traditionally, it gave the Tonga people an experience of loving one's neighbour, developed in them an attitude of hope for the future in spite of circumstances that suggest fear and even despair. Moreover, it gave them an attitude of readiness and acceptance of death as openness to another life.

We know quite well that the tradition of the ancestors was not and is not perfect. That is why Christ had to come to redeem it. He offered his blood for all, including the Tonga ancestors. Rahner has a wonderful thought when he says:

Therefore the history of revelation in the usual and especially full sense of the term is found where the self-interpretation of God's transcendental self-communication in history succeeds, and where with certainty it reaches its self-awareness and its purity in such a way that it correctly knows itself to be guided and directed by God, and protected by him against clinging tenaciously to what is provisional and what is depraved, it discovers its own true self.<sup>82</sup>

He goes on to say that "history of revelation has its climax when God's self-communication reaches unsurpassable high point through the hypostatic union and in the incarnation of God in the created, spiritual reality of Jesus for his own sake and hence for the sake of all of us."<sup>83</sup> In this sense, we can say that we can all be saved. Christ has made us all, ancestors included, sharers in his own divine life.

Therefore, a Tonga person who has been adequately evangelised and has appropriated Christ in his/her life will be able to know that the way to communion with

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<sup>82</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 155.

<sup>83</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 174.

the ancestors in Christ is no longer the traditional one. Jesus Christ is the Way to eternal life. All those who live in him and follow his way have eternal life. However, this does not mean the throwing away of the whole of the tradition of the ancestors but rather implies as Fernando Domingues puts it reflectively:

It seems to be a fairly well established fact that, in accepting a new faith, people will leave an important aspect of the former, only if they find in the new one a better answer to the same need. Besides, if an important component of the former faith is not superseded or contradicted by the new one, it will probably continue to play its role in the person's life even when there is an official change of religious allegiance.<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, we can say that a Tonga Christian may only follow the ancestral tradition in so far as it does not contradict his/her Christian faith.

### **2.3 A qualification for the abode of the Ancestors**

Because his/her world-view changes, a Tonga Christian understanding of the qualification for the sharing in the abode of the blessed departed changes too. Now what matters is not old age, offspring or offering but it is a life of faith in Christ and the commitment for the effective living of Christian life. It does not matter any more whether one was young, barren, poor or made no offering but all who live a life of faith in Christ are acceptable to God. For Jesus Christ is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25).

If this becomes a reality then we can say that a Tonga Christian needs not to fear barrenness, poverty, age and more so, not having a proper funeral rite. For all these are no longer of paramount importance in attaining communion with the ancestors in Christ. Moreover, a change is expected in the way he/she relates with the departed.

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<sup>84</sup> F. Domingues, *Christ Our Healer*, 15.

Inevitably, a Tonga funeral takes a different shape. The external forms of relating with the departed may continue but they will be coming out of a new perspective. Hence a look at how a Tonga Christian would behave at a funeral.

### **3. How the Tonga could bury their departed in fidelity to Christ and to their Tradition**

At the death of a Christian, the Christian community stands on firm hope and trust that the departed is now in the hands of the Lord, where he/she is to receive the reward of eternal life for the good life he/she lived on this earth. Tonga Christians know that it all entirely depends on the Lord to give their dear ones a place in the abode of the blessed departed. And all they can do is to rely on the love and mercy of God. The proper Tonga funeral rites cease to be a guarantee or a measure by which one may be thought to have entered into communion with the ancestors. The funeral rite cannot give eternal life but only Jesus Christ who is the source of security and the only hope.

Traditionally, Tonga funeral rites were seen as indispensable for entry into the abode of the blessed departed. Without them, it was feared that the departed would be condemned never to have a place among the ancestors. For the Tonga Christian, new light dawns on his/her mind and heart. It is not the funeral rite that gives entry into the longed for Kingdom. What matters now is whether the life of love and faith had been lived by the departed. If this is so, then even without the proper funeral rites as long as the departed lived in Christ, he/she has eternal life. The most important thing now is that the Tonga Christian knows that judgement of who gets a share in the Kingdom entirely depends on God. We cannot manipulate God. Well, the living Christians may

make prayer contribution by interceding for their sibling that the Lord may grant him/her eternal rest among the ancestors. They may also ask the ancestors to pray for the deceased and to welcome him/her to their home. It is vital to note that these prayers offered are in no way undermining the salvation brought about by Christ. But rather they come from the belief that though Christ has all the power to save, he allows the living to take part in the salvation of their brothers and sisters, and to celebrate the generosity of Christ towards them.

Conversion demands a change of attitude. It may not be so fair to get rid of the Tonga funeral rites simply because we are Christians. At the same time if they are to continue in some way, we should be able to give them a new meaning in our Christian faith. There are many values within these rites that the Tonga Christian would need to preserve. These include the identity they give, the strong feeling that the living are their brother's keeper, the faith they invoke that the departed is still a member of the living community, he/she should be taken care of, the honour and respect given to the departed. Indeed, a strong sense of communion that it brings between the living and the departed. Pope Paul VI helps us here with his insight as regards evangelisation and culture. He says "the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures."<sup>85</sup> However, what needs to be checked within the Tonga funeral rites "is the kind of security that they are believed to

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<sup>85</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

offer and the fear they sometimes bring about."<sup>86</sup> Funeral rites are not the ultimate security for the people, Christ is.

For the Tonga Christian the same rituals may continue but expressing the following; invoking the faith of the living that the departed is now resting in the Lord. The whole ritual may then be directed to Christ. Sometimes it may express a strong feeling that the departed is still living and moving towards a community of ancestors in Christ's Kingdom. Also it may express the communion between those already sharing in the Kingdom and the living members. Rituals and prayers that may express such attitude ought to be preserved for the Tonga Christian. And this could be the newly acquired meaning.

### **3.1 Inheriting the spirit of the departed**

In firm faith and hope that the departed Christian is now resting in the Lord, that a permanent resting place is in Christ, and also believing that there is no better home for the departed than that which is found in Christ. Then there could be no fear among the Tonga Christians that the departed is now a wandering spirit with no home until it has found an inheritor.

Traditionally, a Tonga person believes that through the inheritor, the departed has a home and cannot wander about to haunt people – relatives. For the Tonga Christian this is not the case any more. The home found in Christ is the best, and faithfully put, eternal. It is more restful than what the deceased would find in the living person. In fact, the departed Christian does not depend on the offerings and any other

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. C. Hanjoomo, "Traditional Tonga Funeral", an interview by author, September 2003, Nairobi.

form of gifts that may come from the inheritor to lead a normal life. However, if the inheritor becomes a symbol through whom the departed can continue to be remembered or said to exist and to continue functioning within the community of the living, there would not be much difficulty. It would be a value to preserve. A Tonga Christian can then continue to “inherit” the spirit of the departed sibling but simply as an expression of the deceased person’s ongoing participation into the community of the living. It is through the “inheritor” in fact that the deceased would continue to be remembered, loved and somehow present among the living. His/her social and religious functions would somehow then continue among the living. In other words, life would be on the normal move, with the deceased still playing some part in the community of the living.

### **3.2 When the departed are in the abode of the blessed ones**

The Tonga Christian can continue to look at the ancestors as parents, siblings and friends worthy of honour and respect. As is the case in the African context, ancestors are those who lived good exemplary lives. Then for the Tonga Christian, these ancestors continue to be an example of a good life rewarded, a life that leads to communion with the ancestors in Christ. Also knowing that the departed have a share in the abode of the blessed ones, are enjoying the fullness of God’s love and also have compassion for the living, the Tonga Christian then continues to see the ancestors as guardians of the community. Just as God had given them the power to take care of their families when they were still alive, even now. He continues to fill them with the same love and spirit. He gives them the capacity to remain in communion with the living as guardians.

Realising that the ancestors are somewhat still alive and concerned with the well being of the living members, the living persons cannot of course fail to express their gratitude for the protection and guidance provided by the ancestors. This may be in the form of an offering of traditional local beer or anything that may be deemed dear to the ancestors. This offering however is not taken as an appeasement, rather it becomes a mere sign of honour, remembrance, gratitude and respect for the ancestors. It comes out of mere memory and love for them and not anymore out of fear as could have been the case before.

Naming ceremonies can also continue for the Tonga Christian as a way of remembering those that have gone ahead of him/her and not as a way of perpetuating them as if they depended on these names for their continued existence in Christ. In Christian faith, the Tonga person comes to believe that the ancestors could do without naming ceremonies. When the Tonga people give names of their ancestors to children, it is only for their sake and for the sake of the ancestors, and nothing more. An ancestor's name given to a child ceases to be considered as the ultimate security, for all ultimate protection and security are only found in Christ. In fact, this is the new meaning that these naming ceremonies may acquire in the Christian faith. Christ is the one who enables ancestors to have the power to guide and protect if at all they do.

Traditionally, the child was expected to grow up into the personality of the ancestor who had been given to the child as a guardian. This would not pose a big problem for the Tonga Christian. As long as the ancestor remains a symbol of the life of faith in Christ, by imitating or growing into the personality of this ancestor, the child is

in fact growing into the image of Christ who is Lord and Master of all. This could be seen as following the good example of the ancestors whose name the child bears.

#### **4. How an Inculturation process could be fostered**

##### **4.1 Small Christian Communities**

Bishop Emilio Patriarca, the current bishop of Monze diocese shows a keen interest in inculturation and other current issues as mentioned above. He writes pastoral letters for the diocese from time to time according to his pastoral plans. Through such letters, the bishop communicates to the faithful right from the diocesan pastoral office to the parish and eventually to the Small Christian Communities. So, we would recommend that inculturation could be fostered first in the Small Christian Communities around the parishes.

The diocesan pastoral council has already existing pastoral commissions. These commissions collaborate with pastoral departments in the diocesan offices. The pastoral commissions usually operate hand in hand with the parish pastoral councils. With this structure then, there ought to be parish funeral committees that would be under the parish pastoral councils. The funeral committees would be specifically dealing with funeral matters. These committees would consist of members from Small Christian Communities. So, whenever there is a funeral in a Small Christian Community, a funeral committee member from that area would be required to attend the funeral so as to follow the funeral proceedings.

The Small Christian Communities are a basic cell in the family of God and the foundation of the Church. It is in such communities that Christians feel more at home,

experience much sense of belongingness, express solidarity, share experiences, support and console each other. Indeed they discuss developmental and community service issues. Small Christian Communities are a kind of schools of family prayer. It is during the their meetings that the faithful would be discussing issues like funeral rites, widow/widower cleansing and inheritance so as to see some possible alternatives that could be integrated with Christian values.

Catechism instructions could be given right in Small Christian Communities. This could encourage parents teach their children the necessary basic catechism in turn. Traditionally, teaching catechism was the work of the parish-selected teachers. And this could be part of *Lweendo lwesu antoomwe mumuzumino* (our journey together in faith).

Young people who are leaders of tomorrow also do attend Small Christian Community meetings. Youths would be given time to discuss issues like careers, marriage even some funeral matters among themselves though under the guidance of elders. In addition, young people normally get recommendations for their careers' training, Church leadership, vocations, religious as well as priestly from their respective Small Christian Communities. Eventually, the parish priest gives a Church recommendation in the name of the Christian community.

So, since most of the messages the bishop gives in letterform are shared in such communities, this is the right place for discussing funeral matters as well. This is what can be described as communication at the grass-root level. This kind of encounter will definitely need committed Church leaders. But unless these leaders undergo some kind of training, their endeavour would not yield much result.

#### **4.2 Recommendations for the diocesan communications department**

Since there are already pastoral programmes in the diocese, inculturation workshops and seminars for all pastoral agents should be a must. These workshops and seminars on communication and inculturation would be organised by the diocese communications department under the pastoral coordinator in collaboration with the inculturation commission.

The diocese is also structured into deaneries for pastoral facilitation. This is a zones/regions kind of structure that is lead by a leader called a dean. The structure is meant for easy and close collaboration of pastoral agents of one zone/deanery in terms of pastoral ministry. So, since the diocese is divided into deaneries, the coordinator in collaboration with other pastoral departments would arrange occasional workshops and seminars at such a level. Deanery meetings are normally attended by priests, religious and also lay pastoral leaders.

Furthermore, the coordinator with the communications department would take the task of looking for communication professionals who would be seminar/workshop teachers or facilitators. Pastoral agents would be offered communication inputs in places quite close to their parishes. So, priests and all other Church leaders after attending such seminars would go back to their parishes and share with their people (especially the pastoral council) the inputs they have acquired. In this way, many pastoral agents would have access to and acquire necessary communication skills for the ministry. This movement would be from the diocesan pastoral office to the deanery level, then down to the parish and eventually in the Small Christian Communities.

However, at parish level, it would be necessary to have active pastoral committees that would be monitoring such undertakings at the grass-root level.

With such a structure in existence and operation, then the diocesan pastoral team would ensure periodical parish visits as a follow up towards fostering communication and inculturation education among other areas that need attention.

#### **4.3 Recommendations for parish pastoral agents**

The Priests, Sisters, Catechists, parish pastoral council, parish funeral committees, and also the Small Christian Community leaders ought to be educated and trained in communication skills. This would enable them to communicate effectively in their areas of apostolate. These leaders will have to take an active part in people's lives especially at funerals. Having attended seminars and workshops especially on communication and inculturation, Christian leaders would not just be required to operate in Church building premises. They will have to meet the people in their homes and in the Small Christian Communities for serious faith-tradition discussions; in this case, funeral matters.

Sometimes even when leaders would be visiting the sick, they would be required to help people to faithfully understand that those who fall ill or sick do share in the sufferings of our Lord Christ Jesus. In fact, such visits and sharing would help the people to faithfully prepare themselves to face death. This would be a basis in the process for the change of attitude towards the dying and the departed. Hence, the time of Anointing of the sick is one of the right moments when this point could be emphasised. It is through the sacrament of Anointing of the sick that "the Church

commends to the suffering and glorified Lord the faithful who are dangerously ill so that he may support and save them.”<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, at funerals, Church leaders would not only offer material help and a little sharing of the word of God and then leave. They ought to be available to the local people especially on important funeral days. For example, in case of widow/widower cleansing rite, parish funeral committee members would help the faithful to handle such a case by offering alternative ways beside sexual intercourse as a traditional way of inheriting the spirit of the deceased. This would help them to discover more elements of the Tonga traditional funeral that could be integrated with Christian faith.

Church leaders would also be required to give the Christian meaning to the formalities of the funeral that may have been in the traditional eschatology. The kind of communication that would be required in this regard is dialogue. According to Shorter “our dialogue is to take place with a living tradition, a dynamic religion in which there are new areas of appreciation as well as continuities with the past.”<sup>88</sup> It is through dialogue that the Tonga people can get to appropriate the Christian faith in their life.

Genuine assimilation of Christian faith is vital among the Tonga people. In fact on this same line of thought, Bernard Lonergan has this to say “doctrines that really are assimilated bear the stamp of those that assimilate them, and the absence of such an impact would point to a merely perfunctory assimilation.” This is because “human

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<sup>87</sup> *The Code of Canon Law*, no.998.

<sup>88</sup> A. Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, 12.

concepts and human courses of action are products and expressions of acts of understanding; human understanding develops over time.”<sup>89</sup>

According to Michel Phillipart, whoever engages in grass-root communication should have these points in mind; “(i) the facilitator or animator should live among the people; (ii) the people in the community must come first. The communicator must listen to them and understand the environment before relaying his/her own message.”<sup>90</sup> Dialogue in an effort to inculturate Tonga funerals is an essential condition for the appropriation of Christianity in Tongaland. This is because real dialogue implies an encounter at a level of experience. Having attended communication and inculturation seminars and workshops, the pastoral agents would have some of the required expertise to interpret the experiences of the people and help them to see what really matters in their faith. Moreover, the Church recommends communication training of pastoral leaders in general. Hence a brief look at what the Church says about communication education.

#### **4.4 Compulsory training of pastoral leaders in communication skills**

The Church through her leadership, the *Magisterium* has emphasised the need for the training of the candidates for priesthood and priests in communication. This is evidently noted in the documents *Inter Mirifica* no.1, *Aetatis Novae, Redemptoris Missio* no. 37 and also *Communio et Progressio*.<sup>91</sup> It is worth noting that leaders of the

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<sup>89</sup> B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 301-302.

<sup>90</sup> M. Phillipart, ed., *The African Church in the Communications Era*, 132.

<sup>91</sup> Vatican II. *Communio et Progressio*, no. 10.

Church especially ordained ministers play a vital role in the Church's mission of evangelisation. Hence, their greater need to have some communication skills.

The pastoral agents carry out the Church's task of proclaiming the Good News by means of communication that can take different forms. It could be through witness of life, administering sacraments, homilies, and even using television and radio where applicable. In their ministry, they should always have it in mind that "communication is the heart of evangelisation without which there can be no evangelisation."<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, it is the Holy Spirit that is the "principal agent of the Church's mission."<sup>93</sup> However, the Church also depends on human agents as her servants. These are the ordained ministers as well as any other trained pastoral agents. But basically the recipients of the message could be called traditional agents too especially in the area of inculturation. Therefore in this case then, the bishops and ordained ministers as it were, could be there to monitor or more so to ensure fidelity and indeed provide discernment in the inculturation process. Again John Paul II helps us when he says that "inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community's life... The safeguarding of the traditional values is the work of a mature faith."<sup>94</sup>

Reception of the Gospel message first and foremost is a call to conversion. And conversion is a gradual process. This is evidenced in Jesus' preaching in which he expressed a need for change of attitude necessary to embrace his message. In Matthew

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<sup>92</sup> F.J. Eilers, *Evangelisation and Communication*, 344.

<sup>93</sup> J. Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 21.

<sup>94</sup> Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no.54.

(6:24) Jesus called for the change of life towards God. Moreover, he challenged the political and religious leaders who imposed their way of life and even culture on others (Mt. 23:13-30). His main emphasis was on freedom of the person to choose, not on imposition. He did not proclaim his message in the atmosphere of domination or exploitation but rather equality.

Pastoral agents ought to learn from Jesus as a perfect communicator. Jesus did not launch his mission just from his personal initiative though he could have done. Rather, he responded to the needs of the people he addressed. These were people who needed healing of any kind and food etc. It is from his parables and sayings that we can grasp his methodology. Thus, in order to understand they should listen and listen again; in order to perceive they should see and see again. Only then would they be converted and healed (cf. Mt 13:10-15).

In fostering an integration of the Tonga funeral with Christian faith, there is a need therefore to adapt the Christian liturgy in general and for the departed in particular to accommodate and suit the local requirements.

Indeed, it would be a must that a Tonga Adult Catechism be prepared in such a way that it can also deal with prevalent and urgent issues like traditional initiation in the light of Christian sacraments of initiation, death and funeral rites etc. This would be of help to a Tonga person's world-view today. The catechism should also aim at helping the local people to interpret their experiences in the light of Christian faith in day to day living, lest the work of evangelisation and theology be of less importance in the local

people's lives. For communicating the Good News of Christ is more about practice rather than abstractions/theories as such.

Inculturation is an ongoing process that requires patience, determination zeal and commitment. It is only by being committed to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that the Church in general and her pastoral agents in particular will be successful and their message relevant to the local audience. Spreading the Kingdom of God is the Church's task and she will continue her mandate in her leading the world to the eschatological existence as a manifestation of her commitment to Christ her Head.

## **5. Conclusion**

In chapter four we have presented some pastoral implications that would arise after the Tonga person has been converted to Christianity. We also outlined how a Tonga Christian would bury the departed in fidelity to Christ and to his/her tradition. This of course would be the result of the aimed integration of the two faiths. From this perspective, it can be said that in the inculturation process, cultural customs, beliefs and traditions of the local people need to be understood in the sense of what they communicate. In this way, inculturation will benefit both the culture and the Christian message.

Finally, the chapter suggested some pastoral recommendations to specific groups that are engaged in the pastoral activities in the diocese. This was aimed at enhancing effective communication in regard to inculturation. Inculturation is the work of all the faithful, though each one participating at a different level. The Christian message makes sense to the local people when it is well appropriated in their lives.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this essay we were trying to look at what may be called an attempt to inculturate Tonga funeral in the light of effective communication. Inculturation of some Tonga funeral values could be a success provided the pastoral agents bear in mind the religious heritage that sustains the culture of the Tonga people, and have a good ground, to establish communication between the Gospel and Tonga tradition.

Christian communication has its foundation in the Blessed Trinity, the community of communion and love. The incarnation of Christ is the basis of any Christian inculturation. The incarnation is the way God decided to communicate to humanity so as to bring all people to Himself. Human communication is possible because human beings participate in the communicative life of God. So, cultural, intercultural communication and more so spreading the Kingdom of God through gospel values is possible because communication among human beings is possible. And its nature is both divine and human.

Communicating Christ in a particular culture and from one culture to another requires some knowledge of both cultural and intercultural communication. Hence, training in communication skills should be a must for all pastoral agents of evangelisation.

The pastoral agents could learn to approach cultures different from their own with openness, humility, patience, respect and dignity. They could also learn from Jesus who never imposed himself on anyone. He always brought about liberation and salvation in a humble manner, respecting the people of his time. The attitude of Paul

towards the Greeks in Athens (cf. Acts 17:16-34) is another example from which we can learn. Paul spoke of the cult of the unknown God amid Greek gods. It is through his appropriate and contextual missionary approach that he managed to demonstrate the message of Christ to the Greeks. The art of intercultural communication requires communicators to have some prior communication education.

The disposition of the recipients of the Gospel message also needs to manifest a serious desire to embrace Christianity in all its demands. Unless, a proper desire and attitude is ascertained on the side of the recipients of the Gospel message, catechism appropriately taught and assimilated, theology and more so, evangelisation might head for irrelevance among the targeted audiences.

This essay focussed on the Tonga traditional funeral rites that the author deems to need inculturation; hence an attempted integration of some of the aspects discussed with Christian faith. Inculturation is an ongoing process that requires determination, enthusiasm, patience, courage and above all committed pastoral agents.

In order for the Christian message to be relevant to the local people, it must be contextualised so as to suit the needs of its hearers. Communicating Christ to the world at any time requires the Church to move with the signs of the time so as to adjust to the needs of the situation. In this way, the Christian message shall remain relevant yesterday, today and forever. The Holy Spirit who is the driving energy in and within the Church will continue to lead, guide and direct the Church in her mission. The Church is never and should never be tired of preaching Christ, the Saviour of all humanity. And this is the greatest gift she can offer the world.

Communication, Evangelisation and Inculturation is the triple major pillar on which the Church needs to build herself on, in her missionary endeavours in the world. There can be no evangelisation without the communication of the Christian message. Christianity shall never be relevant to the recipients unless it is contextualised and inculturated. Effective communication of the Christian message will remain an ideal without the training of pastoral agents in communication skills. The world is desperate for the Good News of salvation. But how would the world be fully converted without the proper training of messengers? How would the Christian message be spread without volunteers to work in God's vineyard? And how would there be volunteers if there are no converts, convinced and bold enough to live as witnesses to Christ's message? The pastoral agents of the Gospel are today's legs, mouth, hands, eyes, ears and head of Christ in the world. Therefore, all pastoral agents are called to embrace Christ fully and faithfully witness to him to the world. The Church will have to remain committed in leading the world towards an eschatological existence: eternal communion with God our Father, through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

## APPENDIX 1: ABBREVIATIONS

AMECEA	Association Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa
Cf	Confer. compare
CSSp	Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
CRT	Catholic Rites Today
Dr	Doctor
ed.	Edited by
Eph	Ephesians
etc	et cetera
Fr.	Father
ff	Following
Gen	Genesis
Heb	Hebrews
Jn	John
MCCJ	Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
n.d.	No date
no.	Number
OCD	Discalced Carmelite Friars
Pet	Peter
Rev.	Reverend
Rom	Romans
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TV	Television
Vol	Volume
WACC	World Association for Christian Communication

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### APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEWS; GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What is your name? Christian name.
2. Where and how did you get this name as a Tonga person?
3. Are you a baptised Catholic Christian?
4. Did you have any kind of catechism before you were baptised?
5. What was it like? Where did you have it? School, home. Church etc. and how long was it?
6. Do you normally call for a priest or any Church leader when a family member is sick?
7. Do you know a Tonga traditional funeral?
8. Do you know a Christian funeral?
9. What is the difference between the two?
10. At burial, do you invite any Church leaders?
11. As a Tonga Christian, do you think you will at some point bury your departed in a Christian way?

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