

TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

OF EASTERN AFRICA

OMONIYI STEPHEN OLANIYI S.D.B.

**THE FEAR OF DEATH AND
CHRISTIAN HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE
FROM THE YORUBA PERSPECTIVE**

Moderator

Fr. Fogliacco, Nicholas, I.M.C.

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

NAIROBI 2003

*“I am the resurrection and the life.
Whoever believes in me will live,
even though he dies; and whoever lives
and believes in me will never die.”
(Jn. 11:25-26)*

My sincere thanks and gratitude to God for all he has done for me through my study of theology.

I thank Fr. Fogliacco who despite his busy schedule has guided me to achieve the goal of this work.

My gratitude to all the lecturers and students of Tangaza College who had accompanied me during my theological studies and through their friendship has helped me to grow spiritually.

I cannot but thank Mrs. Omodara who has helped me to carry out some investigations on this topic and Mr. Richard (a Salesian volunteer from England) who has helped me to proofread this paper.

Finally, my thanks go to my confreres (the Salesians of Don Bosco Utume) who through their encouragement and support have helped me in many ways.

Thank you all.

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, study, research and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillments for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any College or University for academic credit. All sources have been cited according to the norms of academic integrity.

Signed: 

Name of Student: Omoniyi Stephen Olaniyi S.D.B.

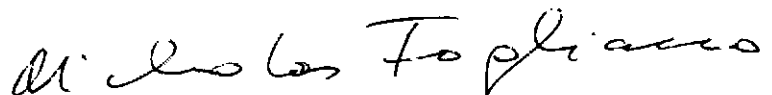
Date: 31 | 1 | 2003

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

Signed:

Name of Supervisor: Rev. Fr. Fogliacco Nicholas, I.M.C.

Date:


31 / 1 / 03

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	i
CHAPTER ONE	
1. The reality of Death	1
1.1. The Question of Death	1
1.2. Christianity and the question of Death	4
1.2.1. Death in the Old Testament	5
1.2.2. Death in the New Testament	7
1.2.3. Death and Sin	8
CHAPTER TWO	
2. The concept of Death and Afterlife among the Yoruba people	12
2.1. The reality of Death	13
2.2. Suicide	14
2.3. Death, Evil and Sin	25
2.4. Death Personified	29
2.5. Life after Death	21
CHAPTER THREE	
3. How the Christian Hope of Eternal Life overcomes our fear of Death	24
3.1. Eternal Life	26
3.2. The Death of Jesus and His Resurrection	30
3.3. Christian Faith	33
3.4. The Inspiration of the Saints	36
3.5. The Prayer of the Church	39
CONCLUSION	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47

Introduction

One reality of human life that has raised up question about the meaning life is death. While many people see it as a threat to humanity, some people do not know what to say or think about it, and others think that talking about it could help accept the fact that death is part of human reality. However, the question that many people would like to know, which perhaps would have made the reality of death acceptable, is about the nature of life after death. Thus, the inability to explain what life would probably be after death is the cause of the fear of death. Therefore, in order not to be disturbed by the fear of death, many people tend to suppress or deny the fact that death is part of human reality. Hence, life is viewed from a materialistic or biological point of view; we live so far as the organs in the body are functioning. This way of thinking reduced the value of human life to a mere object. To reject a reality just because it cannot be subjected to reasoning does not mean affirming the non-existence of that reality. Experience and reason as we know are not the only form of human knowledge. There are other forms such as intuition and faith.

The fear we have of death is not about the fact of death in itself (since we all know that we are not immortal beings) but on the importance of life. Human beings, as the only creature with cognition to know and value life, ask the question, why death? What is the meaning of life with all the aspirations and hopes of man dying with him? With these questions, human beings have no answer to death. Death is a mystery, though denied by human experience, is affirmed by Christian teaching and faith.

According to the Holy Scriptures and in particular the New Testament, the meaning of death is revealed to us as the means that God used to fulfill his promise of redemption and salvation. Thus, what was an enemy of the human race has now become a grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, death has become a path of hope into a new life for all those who believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The hope of eternal life is Jesus Christ himself who is “The way, the truth and life” (Jn. 14:6)

The subject of death is very vast and deals different topics such as heaven, hell, purgatory, the new heaven and the whole concept of eschatology. All these topics are related to the idea of the place for the dead after death.

My intension is not to state the condition of life after death but to see why we fear death and whether the Christian hope of eternal life (which deals with the condition of life after death) can help us to overcome our fear. I consequently chose to write this paper from an African context and in particular from a Yoruba cultural perspective because of my believe that the Christians among the Yoruba people need to have a proper understanding and integration of the Christian faith so that the virtues of Christian life become a transforming factor in their daily living.

This is how I intend to proceed in this paper. I am going to develop the first chapter on the general understanding of death and the Christian approach to the concept of death. In the second chapter, I will focus on the Yoruba understanding of death and afterlife from the perspective of the culture and tradition. Thus, in order to establish that the idea of eternal life provides us the hope to overcome our fear of death, I will focus the third chapter on how the Christian hope of eternal life provides us the basis on which we can overcome the fear of death and accept it as part of human reality.

What I want to achieve with this paper is to see how the Christians among the Yoruba people confront the reality of death with the Yoruba cultural background they possessed with the Christian faith. My conclusion, therefore, is a synthesis of how the Yoruba understanding of death finds its completeness in the Christian teaching, which reveals the divine plan of God to us. Hence, since the Yoruba culture is within the divine plan of God, the Christian teaching, doctrine, dogma or expression of faith provide us better understanding of what God's plan is for us in life and death, which consequently leads us to hope that the end of life is not in death but in the beatific vision of God.

Chapter One

The Reality of Death

Right from the inception of human life, death has remained a reality that human beings continue to question. Why death? What is the purpose of life? However, since the nature of human beings is mortal, death remains an inevitable reality that all human beings must pass through.

What I intend to do in this chapter is to approach the reality of death from two perspectives: first, to present the general understanding of death from how different people perceive it and why it is feared and secondly, to present the Christian approach to the understanding of death.

1.1 The Question of Death.

Dealing with the question of death consequently implies the question of life. Life and death are two realities of human existence that cannot be seen in isolation. We cannot understand one without the other. The reality of life implies death and death implies that there was life before.

From human consciousness, the concept of death is irrefutable. Max Scheler and Heidegger agreed on this concept, they said, the awareness of death is immanent and an a priori to the structure of human consciousness. Therefore, the refutation of this reality is said

constitutes some form of repression.¹ Thus, from a psychological point of view, we can say, to deny an object of human consciousness is a denial of the self because a human person is his or her consciousness. Hence, the fact that death cannot be subjected to an empirical investigation does not mean that it cannot be known. Heidegger and Scheler, maintained that although human consciousness perceives death, death is not a natural phenomenon and thus, cannot be explained in terms of natural causes.² Therefore, the inability to explain the reality of death and what becomes of life after death, made human beings fear death.³

Our attitude towards death denotes our concept of death. According to Epicurus, the fear of death is based on the belief that death is painful and that the soul may survive to experience pain or torture in afterlife.⁴ However, death by itself is not painful, but the circumstances that often lead to death (e.g., sickness, accident, war) make people to conceive death with pain.

By the nature of human life, death is the limit to the physical or biological end of human life. Thus, it is natural within human nature that human beings should die because as finite beings, we cannot live infinitely.

The theological understanding of death has its foundation on the philosophical traditions of the Western civilization, which attempt to explain the nature of human being. There are two major traditions of interpretation that were applied to explain the nature of human beings. First, is the integralistic evaluation of human nature, that is, the conception of a human person as a psychological organism of which both the material and the non-material

¹ Cf. P. EDWARD, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. I and II, 307

² Cf. P. EDWARD, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. I and II, 309

³ Cf. P. EDWARD, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. I and II, 309

⁴ Cf. P. EDWARD, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. I and II, 308

constituents of human nature are essentially proper to the integrality of a person's existence.⁵ The second view is the dualistic approach of the Greek philosophy shaped by Plato. Matter was seen as bad thing and only the spirit and the idea were counted as genuine, the God-like and the real thing. Hence, a human person is conceived as comprising of an inner essential self or soul, non-material and a physical body, material and mortal. Based on this distinction, the soul is said to be imprisoned by the body and at death; the gate of the prison is flung wide open for the soul to be freed while, the soul is regarded as being essentially immortal because it is not material.⁶ However, the consciousness of the reality of death is there but what people want to know is what becomes of a human person after death. This is the problem and why the question of death causes fear.

The paradox of human life is that we live to die and die to live. Therefore, the question of death is a mystery. A reality not fully understood but still within human apprehension because we are conscious of it.

Death at an old age is accepted as a reasonable conclusion of life because in it all human potentialities are realized; the joy of having lived to achieve many things and the relief from the struggle that we have passed through. Hence, the fear of death comes as a result of the instinct to preserve or protect life against the threat of what is the deepest desire of human being, that is, the human self-possession in knowledge and the self-giving in love which all disappear in death.⁷ The most painful effect of death is love. To contemplate missing people one loved put into question the meaning of life and why one has to live just to die as if he or she never lived.

⁵ Cf. SGFB, "Death Rites and Customs", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. V, 533

⁶ Cf. A. JOHANN, - J. RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology. Eschatology - death and Eternal life*, 73

⁷ Cf. H. KOSTER, "Death" *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, 687

Philosophers have tried to rationalize death as an unknowable answer, but the question remains, why are we afraid of death? On the other hand, religions confront death with hope and comfort, but do the beliefs, propositions and religious doctrines offered satisfy human fear of death? We may go on asking questions but how would the world be if people knew the nature of death and their fate after death? The quest for human beings to take control of death without fear could be dangerous to life. This could lead to different forms of violence against life such as suicide and murder. Or turn death into something, which human beings think they can manage in order to suppress their fear of death. The issue of euthanasia is becoming more alarming because people want to avoid death in order to make it up through a selfish mean leading to the dehumanizing of death, which consequently implies the dehumanizing of life.⁸ Therefore, to live life to the full is to live it in the vision of its end, which is not an end in itself but a transition of life from one state or level to a different level.

1.2 Christianity and the Question of Death

The fundamental principle to the question of death is life. The Christian understanding of life and death is developed from two sources: the Old Testament or the Hebrew scripture and the New Testament. Going by the formulated ideas that the Old Testament and the New Testament provide us, the basic understanding of death in both Testaments complements each other in such a way that the complete understanding of death and life cannot be understood without the unity of the two. The New Testament does not contradict what was already expressed in the Old Testament but brings newness and completeness to the understanding of death and life in the martyrdom of Jesus and his resurrection.

⁸ Cf. A. JOHANN, - J. RARZINGER, *Eschatology. Death and Eternal life*, 71-72

1.2.1. Death in the Old Testament

The traditional understanding of the ancient Israelites about life and death was that life is God's given gift (breath) to human beings, and that at death God simply takes back the life-breath.⁹ This concept we can see from the creation story in Genesis 2:7.¹⁰

The early ancient Israelites (Hebrews) did not speculate about what happens when a person dies because, it was not a problem for them due to their idea of creation as God taking dust, shaping it and breathing life into it. And that at death, the human person literally breathed out and the breath returned back to God.¹¹ Hence, death is just the taking back of the gift that God gave to human beings after the expiration of the work of the gift. Therefore, living the gift of life given to human beings was more important than the return of the gift because the return was considered to be natural.¹² Moreover, the fullness of life was conceived to consist in dying 'old and filled with years'. What this meant was that the full richness of an earthly life was to see one's children and children's children as a way of participating through them in the future of Israel.¹³

The dualistic idea of the Greeks separating the body and soul with regard to death and immortality did not go down well with the Hebrew thought that believed in the organic unity of both the body and soul as one reality. This is one of the reasons why the Biblical authors did not submit to the idealistic description of death but rather, saw it in its full, truthful reality as the destroying enemy of life¹⁴ not in the sense of being an end to human life but in the sense of its effect with regard to sin as we shall see later. Thus, the widespread notion of death is

⁹ Cf. WENSING, MICHAEL, G, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 11

¹⁰ Cf. Gen. 2:7: then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became living being.

¹¹ Cf. WENSING, MICHAEL, G, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 12

¹² Cf. WENSING, MICHAEL, G, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 12

¹³ Cf. Cf. A, JOHANN, - J, RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology death and Eternal life*, 80

¹⁴ Cf. A, JOHANN, - J, RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology death and Eternal life*, 74

that it is not simply annihilation for when a person dies since the person did not cease to exist entirely but continued in a shadowy existence in the place of the dead called Sheol.¹⁵ According to Walter Brueggemann, the Jews in the Biblical historical context and faith understanding did not fear death because of the affirmation of hope in the life to be lived.¹⁶ “But anyone who is alive in the world of the living has hope ...”(cf. Eccl. 9:4) Hence, the ultimate quality of life was the life lived with God in the living community of faith and life blessed with longevity.¹⁷ However, the Jewish never perceived death as something desirable except when it was seen as a release from suffering. For example, Elijah begged God to die because he had had enough of life.¹⁸ (cf. 1Kg. 19:4)

In the Old Testament thought, death was perceived as something normal and acceptable if it comes at old age, but horror or disgraceful if it was premature, or tragic or occurred far away from one's homeland and people.¹⁹ Life is identified with blessing and death with curse (cf. Ps 90:14).²⁰ The Old Testament spoke of two types of death, the abnormal death and the death without a surviving heir. In the first type of death, it is the death, which occurred to young people or through incurable diseases and sin. And the latter type is a complete death because the person, who had died without heir, died forever and will never be remembered again. This concept was apprehended due to God's repeated promise of descendants in the covenant he made to Abraham.²¹ (Cf. Gen. 22:17-18) Nevertheless, death was seen as the natural destiny of human beings. The book of Ecclesiastes 3:2 says, there is “a time to be born, and a time to die; ...”

¹⁵ CF. WENSING, MICHAEL, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 12

¹⁶ CF. WENSING, MICHAEL, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 17

¹⁷ CF. WENSING, MICHAEL, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 18

¹⁸ CF. WENSING, MICHAEL, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 26

¹⁹ CF. WENSING, MICHAEL, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 26

²⁰ Cf. A. JOHANN, - J. RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology death and Eternal life*, 82

²¹ Cf. WENSING, MICHAEL, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 28

1.2.2 Death in the New Testament

The New Testament notion of death is built on the ideas already established in the Old Testament but in a new light based on the sign of the cross. Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection present us with a different approach to understand death. Death, which was seen as enemy of man, has now become a means by which God's grace is extended to all people. In the First Corinthian chapter 15 verses 25 to 26, we read: death, the last enemy, is conquered thus signifying the decisive power of God and the victory of life over death.²² Therefore, the focus of the New Testament thought was not on death but on the life won for us by the death of Jesus on the cross. And in the descend of just one, the son of God into Sheol, where no praise of God is ever sounded, made God himself to descend into Sheol so that death ceases to be the God-forsaken land of darkness. "In Christ, God himself entered the realm of death, transformed the space of noncommunication into the place of his own presence."²³ Now the very reality of death has become for us the gift of life. Therefore, the Gospels and the epistles in the New Testament, present us with the whole idea of death and life after death in the vision of God's plan of salvation by which the proclamation of the cross as our redemption makes death occupy the central point of our faith. Hence, with the cross culminating the understanding of death and life in the New Testament and Christian belief, the teaching is to see death more than the end point of our biological existence but as that which open to us the grace of God that comes after death when God will glorify us.²⁴

²² Cf. A, JOHANN, - J, RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology death and Eternal life*, 92

²³ A, JOHANN, - J, RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology death and Eternal life*, 93

²⁴ Cf. A, JOHANN, - J, RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology death and Eternal life*, 93-100

1.2.3 Death and Sin

The question of death consequently aroused in human beings the quest to know its nature and also its origin. Since human mind works in a scientific way of cause and effect, death as a reality of human consciousness also follows the same principle. According to the creation account in the book of Genesis chapter one, God created human beings good in his own image and likeness and there is nothing said about death because God's intention is to create life. Therefore, the question is, why death?

The first fruit of human life was destroyed by death due to sin. Cain said to his brother Abel, let us go to the field and when they were in the field, Cain rose up his hand against his brother and killed him.²⁵ Through the action man, resulting from sin, the greatest enemy of human being, death entered into the history of humankind.²⁶ God created life, but human beings brought forth death.

However, in order to avoid making generalizations, which can distort the reality of death, a clarification is needed to understand the link between sin and death. Although physical death is within the nature of human beings, it can also be due to sin in the case of Cain killing his brother - "He raised his hand on his brother Abel and killed him." (Gen 4:8) Moreover, in the same narration we recall the first episode of a natural death unconnected with sin but to the natural expiring of life. Adam lived and died at a very old age.²⁷ Therefore, to attribute the cause of death to sin will not be justifiable because not all death is caused by sin. Although for a long time in the tradition of the Church and her teachings, the Church held that sin was the root cause of human death. This was not to justify that death is caused by sin but to show how destructive sin is to human life. Saint Augustine in his writing against Fortunatus,

²⁵ Gen. 4:1-8

²⁶ Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, , *Light Beyond Death*, 2nd Ed., 5

²⁷ Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 5

he wrote: "The law of death is that by which it was said to the first man, 'You are dust and unto dust you shall return,' for we are all born of him in that state because we are dust and we shall return to dust as a punishment for the sin of the first man."²⁸ Augustine did not only see Adam's sin as that which brings about human death but the lost of God's grace which was only to be restored by Christ.²⁹

An exegetical explanation of the Genesis narrative of the fall of man according to some modern exegetes and theologians was that, what the author of the book of Genesis wanted to express was not Adam's physical or biological death but his spiritual death (i.e. the lost of God's grace), which was as a result of sin, because when Adam and Eve actually sinned, God did not carry out his initial threat of death, but allows them to live. This implies that the warning did not speak directly of death but rather life (which ends with death due to human natural mortality).³⁰ The Second Vatican Council document, *Gaudium et Spes* 18, shed some light into the meaning of life. Human beings it states were created for a blissful purpose of life.³¹ Therefore, man's eventual death according to Genesis 3 was mentioned in the context of sin but not as the direct consequence of sin.³²

The passage of Genesis chapter 2-3 which gives us the insight to the mystery of death does not deal precisely with physical death but offers us a theological approach to the question of death. Sin is linked with death in the sense that God is the life giver and turning away from him is like cutting oneself from the source of life, which consequently implies death.

²⁸ D. J. MCWILLIAM, *Death and Resurrection*, 164

²⁹ Cf. D. J. MCWILLIAM, *Death and Resurrection*, 164

³⁰ Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 9

³¹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 18, While the mind is at loss before the mystery of death, the Church, taught by divine Revelation, declares that God has created man in view of a blessed destiny that lies beyond the limits of his sad state on earth. ...

³² Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 10

For Paul, there are two main actors in human history, sin and death. He referred to Adam's sin as that which releases into the world the power of sin, and brings forth death. Paul dealt with the question of sin and death intensively in his letter to the Romans while trying to explain the concept of grace, justification and faith. He sees the plan of God being reflected by two people, Adam who lost the grace God bestowed on humanity through the sin of disobedience, and Jesus who restores back the Grace of God through his faithful obedience.³³ (cf. Rom. 5:12)

However, it would be an oversimplification or a distortion of Paul's thought to think that when Paul speaks of death, he meant physical death. According to Paul, death has three dimensions: physical, spiritual, and eschatological. Although physical death is undoubtedly part of human life, Paul did not consider it in isolation as the result of Adam's sin or human personal sin. He saw the consequences of sin as destructive to human life because when one sins, one loses the grace of God.³⁴ (Cf. Rom. 8:13)

But according to some modern theologians, to make an intrinsic connection between sin and death they said is devoid of any Biblical support and as such, it does not explain the link between sin and death. Hence, they tried to find a way of drawing a link. Human beings therefore, they said are neither a creature alone subjected to death nor a sinner alone destined to die. But rather, he or she bears within him or herself the twofold root of death, that is, his or her creature-hood, which is limited and his or her sinfulness. Although it is not easy to establish what belongs to either side, at the same time it cannot be denied that there is something in human death resulting from sin.³⁵ Sin touches the inner being of a person and not the physical or biological state of human being. Therefore, death as an end to human

³³ Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 11

³⁴ Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 12

³⁵ Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 15

biological life is not due to sin, but, the painful character of death, the fear of it, and the suffering connected to it could be the result of sin.³⁶ Differentiating cause from effect with regard to sin and death would enable us to understand the connection between the two because not all sins lead to physical death. But in the case of spiritual death or the eschatological death, according to Paul's distinction, every sin leads to the loss of God's grace if life is to be seen as being in communion with God. This is evident in Jewish culture; life is a covenantal relationship with one's people and God.³⁷ Death is associated with sin in the disobedience to the covenantal relationship between human beings and God.

³⁶ Cf. M. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 16

³⁷ Cf. WENSING, MICHAEL, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 30

Chapter Two

Concept of Death and Afterlife among the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria

In my research and attempt to get some information on the concept of death, I found that the question of death was not a problem among the Yoruba people because in their concept of life, death is seen as part of the reality of life. According to one Yoruba saying; '*gese ni iku, ko si eni ti ko ni ku*' which means, death is a debt and there is nobody who will not die implies the inevitability of death. Therefore, since death is natural and part of human reality, it is within the Yoruba consciousness that death is real and perhaps, this is one of the reasons why there is no extensive literature on the subject. Nevertheless, what we know of the Yoruba concept of death and afterlife is derived from Yoruba myths, stories, and poetries.

What I intend to do in this chapter is to look at the Yoruba understanding of death and afterlife, and what hope does the concept of afterlife give the people. Most of my resources would be based on Yoruba oral tradition, which I am very conscious of, and some of the sharing I had with some of the Yoruba elders on the subject of death. I shall also make use of some of the African literatures, which dealt with the same subject because of the common elements of belief, which are shared in most African cultures or traditions.

2.1. The reality of Death

From the African worldview, which the Yoruba people share, death is a transition from this world into a communal life with the ancestors. The Yoruba believe that a person does not die but sleeps. Thus, death is not a traumatic experience nor is it to be considered as a radical separation of one from his or her beloved ones. Although there is a physical separation, there is also a continuation of the communal relationship between the living and the dead, which gives insight to the mystery of life.¹ This concept of communion between the living and the dead makes the Christian teaching on death and resurrection expressed in the creed, make a lot of sense to the African belief in death and after life.²

The fear of death is the natural fear that all human beings have due to its untimely act and the separation it caused from those that we love. But there is a strong sense of reconciling the fact of death with the belief in the community of the ancestors in which one is destined to live hereafter. Also, there is the belief that the dead remain linked with the living community he or she left behind.³ With this belief in mind, the dying person does not see his or her death as an end to life but a continuation of life in a different form that is, participating in the life force of the ancestors.⁴

The communitarian aspect of African value and belief goes beyond restricting communal life to the living alone but it includes the dead members of the community. Thus, in the context of African theology, the union of life between the living and the dead Bujo called, '**vital union**' by which every member of the community, whether it be

¹ Cf. J. HEALEY - D. SYBERTZ, , *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 217

² Cf. J. HEALFY - D. SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 217

³ Cf. J. HEALEY - D. SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 217

⁴ Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 124

family, clan or tribe knows that he or she only lives by the life of the whole, and that God and the ancestor are the sources of that life.”⁵ This expression is also true for the Yoruba people in the way names are given to the newborn child such as Babatunde (the grand father is back to life), Iyabo (the grand mother is back to life) etc.

Egungun, "masks and masquerades", are the means by which the Yoruba try to materialize the experience of the spirit-of the dead: *Egungun* and *oro* ... are means of demonstrating in a concrete way the belief that those who depart from this earth continue in existence and are actively "in touch" with those who are still alive. *Egungun* designates the spirit of the deceased to which worship is offered at the ancestral shrine. It materializes in a robed figure, which is designed to give the impression that the deceased is making a temporary reappearance on earth. They are called *ara orun* (the people of heaven) and during the *egungun* festival people go out to meet the masquerade in song and dance to receive message from them from their ancestors.⁶

Death is a transitory event like any other moment in the life of human beings. It is a 'rite of passage' from which one passes from this world to the other world of deeper communion of life with God.

2.2. Suicide

Among the ancient Yoruba, heroic men and women who have made useful contributions to life and culture of the people were deified. Instead of saying that those heroes and heroines died the Yoruba would say that their life have transformed or they

⁵ Cf. B. BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 124

⁶ Oral tradition

have changed state. They were mostly described as going into the bosom of the earth or ascending by means of a chain into heaven above. There are a number of such deified ancestors such as Sango from Oyo, Efunsetan-lyalode from Ibadan and so on. Sango was a human being and that he reigned as the 4th Alaafin (the king) of Oyo kingdom. Myths show how he came to be apotheosized and associated with the solar deity. Another version of myth says that he discovered a charm by means of which he could call down lightning from heaven. One day he went to a hill outside the city to try his new discovery. The charm worked against him. Lightning descended on his palace and destroyed it together with his wives and children. Sango was so horrified by the calamity that he went out and hung himself.

Also Efunsetan, a woman in Ibadan killed herself after enslaving people and killing people in Ibadan for many years. She was a woman who did not believe in God or human being except herself. She drugged herself with *Majele* (poison). There are many things that lead to committing suicide, they can be: worries about illness or depression. In most cases, powerful men and women prefer to commit suicide and die in time of difficulties than to be humiliated as a way of showing their courage. Nevertheless, suicide is seen as a crime and not accepted as a way to face death.⁷

2.3. Death, Evil, and Sin

The Yoruba people believe that death came into this world right from the beginning of human history. It is also believed that death is caused by external factors

⁷ Cf. A, OMOSADE, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, 33-34.

such as sorcery, witchcraft, and evil magic.⁸ When someone died, people often tried to find out what actually caused the person's death by consulting a diviner (what we can call in today's term; postmortem). There is always a blame of someone's death on other people. And if the blame is not put on sorcery or witchcraft, the spirits may be blamed, that is the spirits of those who have grudges against the person who have died or the spirit of those whose bodies were not properly buried or neglected by their relatives disturbing the community.⁹ In many cases, the neighbour of the deceased person are questioned, investigated or even asked to take an oath or swear that they do not know or have hands in such death.

The evil deeds of men and women are closely linked to death. Death is always seen as externally caused by close relations. There is a Yoruba saying which states; '*bi iku ile o pa ni, to de o le pa ni*' which means, if a close associate or relation does not kill someone, those not known to the person can not kill him or her. Only those who are close and know a person can cause evil or death to such person. This is a true experience of life and a strong belief among the Yoruba people. The fear of death therefore is not actually the fear of the fact that one will die but the fear of one's neighbours. We see also this same idea in the Christian Holy Scripture; the story of Cain and Abel, David and King Saul, Jesus and Judas Iscariot etc.

There is also the belief that death is caused by curses and the breaking of taboos or oaths. In these cases people are conscious of their actions and the effect of their actions that go contrary to the laws and norms of the society. This creates fear in the people and

⁸ Cf. J. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 111

⁹ Cf. J. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 112

thereby makes them try to desist from any act that will incur being cursed or breaking an oath.¹⁰

Another factor connected to death is sin. Sin is understood as an act of a person that goes against the existing order or violates a belief system. It is always seen less on the vertical line of offending God but on an horizontal line within the human community because human beings do not relate directly to God the almighty but through his or her fellow human beings, ancestors, and the spirits.¹¹ The human community in Africa is made of the living, the dead and the spirits. Therefore, a conflict within the community can result in death. Hence, from an African cosmological perspective, the cosmic order is life. God created order in the universe so that there may be life. Human beings brought disorder, disharmony, and anarchy into the order of life thus causing death in the world. Therefore, sin is seen as the root cause of death. The Yoruba say: '*iku ni ere ese*' meaning, death is the reward for sin. Hence, from the Yoruba conception of life and death, death is incurred through sin. God "*Olodumore*" did not create human beings to die but to have life.¹² This idea can be seen in the Yoruba greetings, "*ki emi ola gu*" which means may you live long. The effect of sin is believed to have consequential effect on the heirs of the deceased person who incurred the sin. Ritual is normally performed to avert effect of someone's sin on his or her heirs.

There is also a perception of death as evil, because it deprives human beings the right to live. A life lived up to an old age is considered a blessing and the natural way

¹⁰ Cf. J. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 112

¹¹ Cf. J. HEALEY D. SYBERIZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 218

¹² Death understood here is not the natural expiration of life since by nature human beings are mortal and one day they will end their physical life. It is the unnatural death resulting from other causes contrary to the nature of human beings.

God has ordained for human beings. Life, which is God's breath, naturally expires at old age. When this happens, it is not seen as death but a call by God to return back home to enjoy the communion of life with him. The lamentation of the people over death is not on the fact of death itself but when death occurs untimely or is caused by evil. The death of young people is seen as a bad omen because it rubs the young person's opportunity of future life. It is a complete death and because of that people grieve and pray for such not to happen in their community. "*Bi iku ba gba owo, m'ba fu l'owo, bi iku ba gba agbo, m'ba fu l'agbo, sugbon iku ko ko gba nkankan. Iku ja bi ole, o mu ni lemi lo.*"¹³ On the other hand, the death of an old person is a celebration; the cry of the family member is not for mourning the dead or to grieve but a sign of love due to the physical separation. The elderly dead person joins the ancestral community and there he or she intercedes for the living community.¹⁴

The belief in the ancestors is strong in Africa because the life force of the living is believed to be directed by them as God's servant to man. They played an active role in the human community. For any important event, they are to be consulted before anything is done. The good life or misfortunes are believed to be caused by the ancestors; the good fortunes when they are happy and the bad fortunes when they are angry. Joining the ancestral community is the way through which there is the continuation of life. Thus, only the elderly dead person who lived a good life while he or she was alive enjoy the communal of the ancestors while those who did not live a good life while they were alive

¹³ This saying means, if death accepts money, I would have given him money. If death accepts lamb, I would have given him lamb. But death refused to accept anything. He came like a thief and stole our life.

¹⁴ The communion of life with the dead is central to African worldview. There is a link of relationship between the living and the dead. The living community does nothing without the ancestral's blessing. (Cf. J. HEALEY D, SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 210-211)

are left out of this communion. Hence, this can be related to the Christian understanding of heaven and hell. However, the spirits of the dead who are not welcome into the communion of the ancestors are believed to be the ones wondering in the forests, big rivers, and seas, and that cause evil in human society.

The Yoruba do not refer to the dead person as dead, if the person is young, they say he or she has gone on a journey and if the person is old, they say he or she has gone to rest or home. Life on earth is always transitory and from our human condition, human beings are alive but on the verge of dying.¹⁵ Death is a daily occurrence, which no one can run away from when it comes. All that is needed is to be ready for it. The significant reality about death is that it is a relief from this world of unfulfillment to a fulfilled life of the saints.

2.4. Death Personified

From Yoruba myths, folktale, stories, drama and songs, death is personified. He is said to be an agent of the supreme God who acts as the adjudicator of human beings. He either acquits or condemns people. His exoneration is seen as relieving human beings from this world into the freedom of life in communion with the ancestors while his condemnation is seen as a punishment for one's sinful act or the violation of the community's order of life.

There are two images normally associated with the action of death; one is that he carries around a club to hit people to death and the second is that he carries around a

¹⁵ Cf. J. HEALEY -- D, SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 207

crown '*ade*' and places it on people's head. The difference between the two actions is that one is a punishment and the other is a reward for good life.

The idea of death as a person is often depicted in Yoruba art and drama. In most Yoruba drama, before a person dies, death comes like a ghost with his club or crown to judge the dying person according to the way he or she lived their life. Thus, because of this belief in the in-personification of death, people engage in ritual acts or magic to avert death. Hence, people have recourse to the use of charm called '*Gbekude*' (which means to tie death) for protection. This charm or magic is done on human body or placed on the doorpost of a house in order to prevent the visit of death. With this belief, people feel protected, secure and able to prolong life. But experience has shown that no matter what is done to prevent death, people still die anyway. Nevertheless, the image of death as a person is there in Yoruba consciousness because people see the act of death through human persons (not only as an imaginary person in a figurative sense), for example in the death caused by witchcraft and sorcery. This is true from the experience of people most especially in their dreams. To some people their dream experience is a reality of life. In Yoruba traditional belief, a person that pursues someone in a dream with an attempt to kill him or her is the person of death that is after his or her life.

2.4. Life after death

Life according to Yoruba belief is cyclic. When a person dies, the soul goes to heaven before *Olorun* (God) and *Obatala*¹⁶ to receive his or her judgment according to how they have lived their life while on earth. The Yoruba people believe in judgment after death, which determines how a person would live after death. If a person lived a good life while he or she was alive, the soul goes to good heaven where there is no sorrow or suffering or it may choose another destiny and turn to be reincarnated again. But in the case of a deceased who lived a bad life, the soul goes to bad heaven where everything is unpleasant, hot and dry, and where it will be forever.¹⁷ The Yoruba eschatology involves a threefold process of separation, transformation, and incorporation.¹⁸

The difficult problem is to state precisely the place or where the afterlife is located. We have different answers from the elders. Some believe that they have a long journey to make, a river to cross, a ferryman to be paid, a mountain to climb, a doorkeeper to open the gate. Others say that the place is under the earth while some say, the place is in the invisible world which is separated from the living by a thin partition though very close to the living. Others say that the dead go to other villages and markets. People who claimed to have fainted one time or the other and later gained consciousness give accounts of how and what they experienced during that interval of time as a prelude to the idea of afterlife. Stories are told of men and women who were reported dead lived

¹⁶ Obatala according to Yoruba myth is the one sent by God to put order in the created world. He sits at God's right hand in heaven. The servant of all servants of God and the most preferred servant exalted to the highest status of being with God.

¹⁷ Cf. R, BENJAMIN, *African Religions*, 114

¹⁸ Cf. R, BENJAMIN, *African Religions*, 143

in other villages, normal life until they suddenly disappear when they learned that the local people have found out their identity. There are other stories that some who have died visit their children leaving important message and they come in human form. All these views make it difficult to say categorically as to where the after life is located. We believe that when the dying person says "*mo n rele*" (i am going home) he means that he is returning to the place from where he or she came from and that is to the Feet of *Olodumore* (God).¹⁹

The way the funeral rites are performed, show the belief of the Yoruba that spirit continues to live after its departure from the body in a different form but not completely unidentical to the person's identity when he or she was alive.²⁰ People claim to have encounters with the spirit of their deceased relatives not only in dreams or visions but also in actual life.²¹ The form of the body is not the actual or the material one the person possessed in actual life but a transformed body by which the deceased is incorporated into the ancestral community.²²

According to a Yoruba saying: '*o ku tan, od'orisa, od'eni a kunle bo*'.²³ This maxim underlined the Yoruba belief in ancestral worship, which gives foundation to the belief in the afterlife. With this belief, and the concept of reincarnation, the Yoruba see the pre-existence of the spirit before birth and its continued life after death.²⁴

¹⁹ Cf. A. OMOSADE, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial rites*, 53-58

²⁰ Cf. J. MBIFI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 119

²¹ In some cases, people claim to have an unexpected visit of their dead relations or friends before the news of their death got to them. This people say they could see the person in body.

²² Cf. R. BENJAMIN, *African Religions*, 143

²³ The saying means. having died, he became a divinity; he became a being to be worshiped on bended knees.

²⁴ Cf. A. ADEGBOLA, . *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, 117

More so, the Yoruba belief in afterlife is strongly expressed in the practice of communal life with the dead; a belief that the family life here on earth extends to an afterlife through death. Therefore making death the gateway by which one passes from a contingent life to an eternal life.²⁵

²⁵ Cf. A, ADEGBOLA, *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, 117

Chapter Three

How Christian Hope of Eternal Life overcomes the fear of Death

The general attitude of people towards death is that it is a negative reality, which renders life absurd. We grow up seeing death as opposed to life. In the book of Genesis, the ideal human being seemed to be portrayed as if he would never have died if not because of sin. Death came to the world because of human beings' sin.¹ This approach of reading the book of Genesis could damage the Christian understanding of death and eternal life. Although the early Church Fathers hold the view that death was caused by the sin of human beings, it was not to deny the fact of physical death but to actually state the effect of sin on human life. The story of Genesis that highlights death is not to give a Biblical foundation for the cause of death but the effect that death has on human beings.² Therefore, the Christian understanding of death expounds the concept of death beyond biological death to spiritual death founded on the relationship between God and humanity:

“See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, ... and the Lord your God will bless you in the land, which you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day that you shall perish; ...” (Deut. 30:15-2-18)

¹ CF. X, LEON-DUFOUR, *Life and Death in the New Testament*, 5

² CF. X, LEON-DUFOUR, *Life and Death in the New Testament*, 5-6

This text from Deut. 30:15-2-18, means that faithfulness to God's commands is what guarantees life and while disobedience brings death. In both the Hebrew scripture and the New Testament, the theological teaching of death is centered on the effect of sin on human beings. Sin is what separates people from God. This separation is theologically referred to as death. The fear of being separated from God made us seek reconciliation with God so that we can enjoy communion with him. "Have mercy on me, O God for I have sin against you." (Cf. Ps 51)

God, while still loving us sent his Son Jesus Christ to bring us his reconciliation through the death of Jesus on the cross. Death has everything to do with the plan of God for us.³ "He chose us, chose us in Christ ..." (Eph 1:4) so that through his death we may gain eternal life. Therefore, it is in dying that we live. The fear we have about death is because of our sin, which prevents us from trusting in God's power to give life through death. This is not only true of the Christian belief. The Yoruba also believe that it is sin that cause us to fear death because the end of a sinner is a rejection from the ancestral communion.

Having seen that Christ is at the center of the Christian theology of hope and eternal life, my aim is to see how Christian hope of eternal life helps us to overcome the fear of death. In this chapter, I shall proceed looking at: 1) the concept of eternal life, 2) the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 3) how the Christian faith helps us to believe in afterlife, 4) the inspiration of the saints and the martyrs towards Christian hope of eternal life, and 5) the prayers of the Church as the means through which Christians express their faith and believe in life after death.

³ Cf. X, LEON-DUFOUR, *Life and Death in the New Testament*, 8

3.1. Eternal Life

From what we have seen in the Old Testament and the New Testament understanding of life and death, both Testaments established a fact that death is not the end to human life; therefore postulate the idea that after human physical death, life still continues.

The ancient Israelites thought less about the question of afterlife because their concern was on living the life God has given to them as gift.⁴ But there was a gradual development of the thought of death and after life as they come in contact with other cultures, which expanded their vision of life and they started to see death as a transition from the physical realm of the world to the world of the dead. The expressions “to sleep with one’s father” and “to be united with one’s own”⁵ referred to in the death of great Old Testament figures; the patriarchs or the kings, which emphasized the ties of blood relationship beyond the grave.⁶ (Cf. Gen. 47:29-30) This idea thus, implies that there was a conception of the continuation of life with one’s ancestors after death. The desire of Israel to lie with his father, as it is express in Gen. 47:29-30, indicates the union of life Israel wanted to enjoy with his father.

The thought of afterlife started to be part of Israelites thinking while they were in exile in Babylonia because of their strong desire to know what happens to the destiny of a person who enjoyed intimacy with God and the community of Israel while still alive. Thus, here comes the question of God’s justice.⁷ In the book of Ecclesiastes, God’s

⁴ Cf. M, WENSING, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 33

⁵ Cf. M, WENSING, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 36

⁶ Cf. M, WENSING, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 36

⁷ Cf. M, WENSING, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 36

justice is expressed from the idea that God will bring every dead into judgment whether good or evil. (Cf. Eccl. 12:4)

But, it was later in the book of Daniel that the concept of afterlife started to be developed. In Daniel 12:1-5, the great eschatological trial of human life was expressed.⁸ Verse 2 of the passage speaks of “life again”. Therefore, this verse gives us an undeniable testimony and belief in a life after death.⁹ Also with the Maccabean epoch of persecution (180-120 BCE) a further doctrine of afterlife was developed with the story of a woman with her seven sons. In the statement of the second son to be martyred, a profession of belief in the after life was expressed, “you accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his law.” (2Mac 7:9) Later on, with the rising of the wisdom literature, a new understanding of afterlife came up having its background on the Greek dualistic anthropological thought that the soul survives independent of the body.¹⁰ (Cf. Wis. 3:1-4) The soul is believed to be immortal and thus lives after its separation from the body at death. Although the eternal life of the soul was seen not to mean the resurrection of the body, but it did not exclude it since the doctrine of immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body has common the continuation of life. Thus, both the

⁸ Cf. Dan. 12: 1-5: “at that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ...”

⁹ Cf. B. MARIÉ-EMILE, *Our Victory over Death: Resurrection*, 5

¹⁰ Cf. J. DEWART - E. MCWILLIAM, *Death and Resurrection. Message of the fathers of the Church*, Vol. XXII, 23

continued life of the soul and the resurrection of the body were seen as a direct gift of God.¹¹

On the question of resurrection and immortality of the soul, there were two divergent thoughts upheld among the Jews. The Sadducees rejected resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul while the Pharisees believed in the resurrection. This we can see from Jesus' argument with the Sadducees in Mt. 22:23 and the episode in Acts 23:8¹²

However, it is in the New Testament that the concept of eternal life is properly treated as a fundamentally Christian faith. The life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ become the central tenet of faith by which Christians express their faith in God.¹³

According to the author of the book of Hebrews, we are sojourners on this earth (cf. Heb. 11:13-14) a journey that has its destination in God. For St. John, eternal life is a life here and now in Christ. In the words of Jesus to Martha in Jn. 11:25-26; "I am the resurrection and life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die ..." Jesus shows that eternal life is a life in him.¹⁴ Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is imperative to eternal life, which is a life in union with God. To gain eternal life is to enter the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 25:34). The author of the first letter of St John understood the eschatological teaching of Jesus when he said, "... we shall see him as he is." (1 Jn. 3:2)

¹¹ Cf. J. DEWART - E. MCWILLIAM, *Death and Resurrection. Message of the fathers of the Church*, Vol. XXII, 24

¹² Cf. M. WENSING, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 49

¹³ Cf. A. JOHANN, - J. RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology death and Eternal life*, 114

¹⁴ Cf. M. WENSING, *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, 66

In the Pauline text, especially in the letter to the Romans, baptism is interpreted as being engrafted into the death of Christ (cf. Rom. 6:3-4) by which we enter into a common destiny with Jesus in his suffering and death and thus participate in the hope of his resurrection.¹⁵ Eternal life is God's grace. It is the grace won for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁶

The question of eternal life is centered on the resurrection. In Mark 12:18-27, Jesus dealt with the question of resurrection recalling to our mind who God is, "He is the God of the living and not of the dead." (cf. Mk 12:27) The Johannine theology presents the resurrection from a christological perspective. John in chapter 6 and 11 of his gospel linked the idea of resurrection to Jesus. "He who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live." (cf. Jn 11:25) However the communion with Christ implies that a union of life here and now with Christ denotes what our life would be hereafter. In the same notion of communion, the discussion on the Eucharist in John chapter 6 where feeding on Jesus' word, flesh and blood, received in faith is described as being eternal food that gives life also suggests that eternal life is a life lived in communion with Christ. Hence, Bultmann took the Johannine theological understanding of eternal life to explain the authentic Christian way of life. For him, the resurrection is to be interpreted in an existential sense since the bond with Christ is to begin in the present.¹⁷

With the Biblical data found in the New Testament with the message of hope, the human fate is really defined in the presence of death as that which opens human beings to

¹⁵ Cf. A. JOHANN, - J. RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology. Eschatology - death and Eternal life*, 114-115

¹⁶ Cf. J. DEWART - E. MCWILLIAM, *Death and Resurrection, Message of the fathers of the Church*, Vol. XXII, 34

¹⁷ Cf. A. JOHANN, - J. RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology. Eschatology - death and Eternal life*, 115-118

see beyond the physical end of life and enter into the glory of life that God benevolently grants to human beings.¹⁸

3.2 The Death of Jesus and His Resurrection

The attitude of Jesus towards death was positive. He saw in death the act of the will of God. He predicted his own death and was ready to face it as a sign of his love for the will of God his Father. The whole life of Jesus was a life in communion with God to whom he is ready to do whatever he wants him to do. “For I always do what is pleasing to Him” (Jn. 8:29)

Jesus’ death is a paschal death. He sees the Calvary as a Passover or a transition from this world back to God. “Father into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Lk. 23:46) To consider the work and life of Jesus, which is not focused on his inner relationship with his Father is essentially incomplete.¹⁹ The self-surrendering of Jesus was in obedience to the will of God and His plan of salvation. For Jesus, death is not a thing that causes separation but builds communion with God.²⁰

In his farewell discourse with his disciples, Jesus steeped into his longing for going home, the hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father because he knew he had come from the God and was going back to God.²¹ (Cf. Jn.13: 3) With this knowledge, he had the glimpses of the radiance of his eternal abode; “In my Father’s house are many rooms ...” (Jn. 14:2) Thus to console his disciples who were distressed on hearing that he was leaving them he said: “If you loved me you would have rejoiced,

¹⁸ Cf. A, JOHANN, - J, RARZINGER, *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology - death and Eternal life*, 115

¹⁹ Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 18-19

²⁰ Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 19

²¹ Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 19

because I go to the Father ...” (Jn. 14:28) Jesus’ entire life can be summarized in his mission; “I came from the Father and have come into the world; again I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” (Jn. 16:25)²² Hence, impelled by his inner longing to be with his Father, Jesus faced the reality of death with love and died the death of a sinner taking upon himself our guilt.²³ He faced the agony and the painful experience of his death so passionately that he never relented in his desire to be with God. The cry of Jesus on the cross, which was misunderstood by the onlookers in Matthew and Mark has been investigated not to actually mean a painful cry but a cry on God in Aramaic, “Eli, atta” which means “You are my God.”²⁴

The darkness that eluded the land at the time of Jesus’ death was not a sign of mourning because it vanished when Jesus’ life came to an end and his eternal day began. Jesus’ resurrection, death becomes a transition from the anguish of darkness into the splendor of God’s presence or glory.²⁵

In John’s theology, ‘doxa’ (glory) embraces simultaneously death and exaltation as the two aspects of the same reality. The prayer of Jesus: “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made” (Jn. 17:5) elucidates the glory which he is to enjoy with God. The resurrection completes the event of the death of Jesus. If Christ had not risen, then our faith in his death would have been in vain. (Cf. 1Cor 15:17) Thus, it is through the resurrection of Christ that we have hope of what our life would be in the afterlife.

²² Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 19

²³ Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 19

²⁴ Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 21

²⁵ Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 21

For St. Paul, the death of Jesus is that which justifies and reconciles us with God. “Since therefore we are now justified by the blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:9-10).²⁶ While Paul links the death of Jesus Christ to our justification and reconciliation, he draws the conclusion that since Christ died for our sins, therefore all who have died, died in him so that they can participate in his death and in his risen life.²⁷ (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15) The resurrection of Christ is important for us to understand the salvific action of God who wants all to have a share in his eternal life by raising Christ from the dead as the first fruit to be followed. Christ’s resurrection is a victory over death - a victory that is for all those who believe in his death and resurrection.²⁸ “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” (1Thess. 4:14)

Jesus in his teaching taught that death is an indispensable condition one must accept in love. “I tell you most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. ...” (Jn. 12 24-25) By way of analogy, Jesus was the divine seed that fell on the earth only to die and rise to give us life. With the death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection, we have a different approach to death. Christ opens for us the door of a new life that is, the beginning of the new order of life and a new creation.²⁹

²⁶ Cf. K. GRAYSTON, *Dying. We Live*, “A new enquiry into the death of Christ in the new Testament”, 15

²⁷ Cf. K. GRAYSTON, *Dying. We Live*, 15

²⁸ Cf. G. MALONEY, *Death Where is your Sting*, 25

²⁹ Cf. G. MALONEY, *Death Where is your Sting*, 25

If the death of Christ and his resurrection bring us the hope of new life and we believe this as Christians, then, the question is why do we fear death when Christ's death and resurrection assure us of the continuation of life after death? The early Church Fathers and various Councils in the history of the Church gave us the clue to why we fear death despite the fact that the death and resurrection of Christ is enough evidence for us to have hope. Sin they said is the root cause of our fear because of its consequences.³⁰

St. Paul we can say is the master of the theology of hope. In his attempt to deal with the question of life and death, he taught that life has been won for us through Christ's death and resurrection. And, in a simple cry, St. Paul shouts: "O death, where is your victory?" in order to show that death has been defeated and is no more a thing to worry about because the God's life is stronger than death.³¹ In 1Cor. 15:20-28, St. Paul outlines how the death and resurrection of Christ is a grace, which he won for us so that we may share with him the same glory that God the Father has shown him by raising him from the death.³²

3.3 Christian Faith

The fundamental theological question been raised concerning eternal life is about its authenticity and whether it is God's revealed truth or it is merely a theological assumption, proposition or a mere expression of human words about human desires and longings.³³

³⁰ CF. G, MALONEY, *Death Where is your Sting*, 25

³¹ CF. X, LEON-DUFOUR, *Life and Death in the New Testament*, 223

³² CF. X, LEON-DUFOUR, *Life and Death in the New Testament*, 225

³³ CF. K, HANS, *Eternal Life*, 93

If reason were to be applied in verifying the belief in eternity or eternal life, it would be incredible and unintelligible to assert from a human point of view the reality of eternal life because it is beyond the realm of human experience. It is, therefore, an object of faith, which accorded with good reason, helps individuals to express his or her belief in eternal life.³⁴ The demand for verification does not mean we must demonstrate positively the experience of life after death before it can be accepted or believed.

The belief in eternal life goes beyond a recourse to human experience whether it be external or internal but to a theological cognitive structure which takes the experience to a deeper level in the light of the scriptural message of hope,³⁵ drawn from the New Testament.

The crucified Lord and his resurrection summarize the Christian belief and faith. St. Peter in his first public preaching on the Pentecost day proclaimed the faith of the apostles in the crucified Lord. (Cf. Acts 2:22-28) St. Paul while defending himself before the council in Jerusalem said, "It is about the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." (Acts 23:6)³⁶ Thus, he sets Christ's resurrection as the core of the Christian belief. "Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus." (1Thess. 4:14) Paul closely linked the resurrection of Christ and that of the Christians, referring them to the same action of God. In baptism, Christians are called to the new life of resurrection.³⁷ (Cf. Rom 6:4-11)

For St. John, Jesus Christ is God's gift to humanity so that through him and in him humanity may be saved. Christ himself is the resurrection. In Jesus' conversation

³⁴ Cf. K, HANS, *Eternal Life*, 93

³⁵ Cf. K, HANS, *Eternal Life*, 97

³⁶ Cf. S.B, MARROW, "The resurrection of the dead," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. Xii422

³⁷ Cf. S.B, MARROW, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 422

with Mary, the sister of Lazarus, he said: “I am the resurrection and life” (Jn. 11:25).³⁸ He asked Mary; do you believe this? Mary’s answer was an expression of her faith in Jesus Christ. “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.” (Jn. 11:27) Therefore, the Christian’s life here on earth is lived in an anticipation of the resurrection: a life of faith in the risen Christ, and a life of hope in the final triumph of life over death.³⁹

The final passage through death into a shared life in Christ’s glorification is undoubtedly a gratuitous gift. Hence, it is by faith in the Risen Christ that the death of a Christian becomes transitional leading to life.⁴⁰ Without faith, we cannot see beyond the physical life and death, which makes us unable to find meaning in life when confronted with the reality of death.

Faith enables us to see beyond the physical death and to identify ourselves with Christ’s life. The book of Wisdom portrays how Christians should see their death: “But the soul of the righteous are in the hand of God. ... In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died and their departure was thought to be an affliction and their going away from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.” (Wis. 3:1-3)

St. Paul in his theology of justification centers Christian faith on the gratuitous grace of the cross. For him, it was on the cross that we were justified. His conviction of the power of God manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ made him to long for death not as an escape from life but as the most legitimate fulfillment of his love for Christ. Thus, “death for him is not destruction but completion; not painful separation but joyful reunion; not the cause of fear and anxiety but rather the object of rejoicing and

³⁸ Cf. S.B, MARROW, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 423

³⁹ Cf. S.B, MARROW, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 424

⁴⁰ Cf. L, BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 25

intense longing⁴¹ because we shall see God face to face to enjoy his peace (cf. 1 Thess: 4:17). Paul also sees the Christian death as a sacrificial event because it is a sharing in the Calvary experience of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, the notion of sacrifice implies the self-commitment to God and the total acceptance by God. Therefore, Christian death being a sacrifice implies self-giving to God and God's acceptance. Christ and the Christians give themselves to God in death and God accepts their surrender by raising Christ and those who believe in him into his presence.

3.4 The Inspiration of the Saints

The life of the saints and their experience provide us the intuition or the inspiration that can help us to deal with the reality of death. We live in the world of history where experience forms the belief system of the people. From what experience has taught us, the saints or the martyrs lived leaving us a vision of life that is centered entirely on following Jesus Christ. Jesus told his disciples, if they persecuted me they would persecute you too.

The saint's life was transformed by their experience of Christ. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." (Phil 1:21-23) St. Paul in this exclamation, expresses his longing to be with Christ. Death is directly connected with entering into "being-in-Christ". Therefore death is seen as a desired event, a friend and a liberator.⁴² This desire to be with Christ made Paul sees his entire life in the vision of Christ:

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having righteousness of my

⁴¹ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 26

⁴² Cf. J. BAUER, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, Vol. II, 759-760

own, based on the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:9-11)

This attitude or impression is not only exclusive of Paul; it is the same experience of the power of the Holy Spirit that is at work in the Christian saints.⁴³ All the saints identified themselves with Christ in order to share with him his glory. There is the instinctive longing for death among the early Christians. St. Stephen, the first martyr was happy to die because of the joy of meeting the Lord. During the persecution era of the Christian history, the Christians sang with joy, before their persecutors, their desire to meet Christ.

For the saints, the joy of meeting Christ surpasses their fear of death because they saw in death the opportunity for them to give a prophetic witness to Christ.⁴⁴ St. Justin while facing his death felt the boundless grace of the divine Son of God with whom he was going to share in his grace. Thus, he was ready to die. As for St. Athanasius bishop of Alexandria, he wrote: "After the savior raised his body from the dead, death is no longer terrible; rather those who believe in Christ trample it underfoot as a negligible thing and prefer to die with Christ rather than deny their faith in Christ. ..."⁴⁵ But St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, did not only dispel the fear of death but longed for it as a way to express his love for Christ. While he was being taken from Syria to Rome to be persecuted, his fear was not on dying but he was afraid that the influential Christians in Rome might put pressure on the authority to spare his life, which for him would derail him the opportunity of quickly seeing God face to face. Thus, on his way to Rome, he

⁴³ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 28

⁴⁴ Cf. F. SADOWSKI, *The Church Fathers on the Bible*, 249

⁴⁵ ST. ATHANASIUS, "On the Incarnation", *patrologia graeca* 25, col. 142-143

wrote to the Christians pleading with them not intervene.⁴⁶ He wrote: "I am yearning for death with all passion of a lover. I have no taste for the pleasures of this life. ..."⁴⁷

The saints' intuition is profoundly drawn from their faith in Christ. They imitate Christ by following his path of glory and ready to suffer for their faith.⁴⁸ This is not exclusively the privilege only ascribed to the Christians of the antiquity. We find the same substantial attitude among the Christians of our time with regard to death. St. Teresa of Avila was an example. She felt like the deer of Psalm 42 that thirst for God. Crazy with the direct contemplation of God, she expresses her ardent longing for the release of death. In her book, "The Interior Castle", she wrote: "Having won such great favours, the soul is so anxious to have complete fruition of their giver, that its life becomes sheer, though delectable, torture. It has the keenest longings for death, and so it frequently and tearfully begs God to take it out of this exile."⁴⁹ Here in Africa, we have the example of the martyrs of Uganda and many others who stood firmly in their faith and were ready to die for Christ.

The burning desire of the saints to die and meet God was possible because of the bond of relationship that existed between them and Christ. Without the bond of relationship or the union that we need to have in faith, there is no way we can approach the reality of life and death in the same vision that the saints and the martyrs did. Death for them is a transition and not an end. This belief made the saints and martyrs see their physical death not something that can be compared with the glory of the life that is to

⁴⁶ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 29

⁴⁷ St. ATHANASIUS, "Epistle to the Romans", *In the Fathers of the Church*, vol. I, 109-111

⁴⁸ Cf. B. CHENU, *The book of Christian Martyrs*, 24

⁴⁹ Cf. A. PEERS, "The Interior Castle", *St. Teresa of Avila*, English translation, 56

come.⁵⁰ Fixing their thoughts on the grace of Christ, they despised the torments of this world in order to gain eternal life by turning their hearts upon things “which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (1 Cor.2: 9) reserved for those who endure.⁵¹ The fears we have about death arise from lack of faith. It is only by faith that one sees beyond human reasoning that death makes meaning to life.

The saints desire to die is not to see life as being unworthy but to see the fulfillment and continuation of it in the beatific vision of God. Therefore only those who identify themselves with Christ in their life will be praised for their faithfulness. “Well done good and faithful servant; ... enter into the joy of your master.” (Mt. 25:21)

3.5 The Prayer of the Church

The belief of the Church and her hope in afterlife (eternal life) is well reflected and expressed in the Church’s liturgical prayers for the dead. In the preface of the mass for the dead, the faith of the Church is expressed. Death is seen as nothing but a transition: “The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality. Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.”⁵²

This prayer assures the living not to grieve over their dead but to hold onto the promise of the Lord as the only hope that give meaning to life. The Church accompanies her faithful with prayers at the moment of dying to strengthen them in faith and hope so that they can be touched by the love of God and be free from the fear of death and be

⁵⁰ Cf. B, CHENU, *The book of Christian Martyrs*, 25

⁵¹ Cf. B, CHENU, *The book of Christian Martyrs*, 45

⁵² L, BERMJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 30

raised in spirit to accept with joy their moment of transition into the next life.⁵³ In the text for the commendation of the dying, the Church also expresses her love and concern for the dying:

I commend you to God Almighty, beloved brother (sister) ... that you may return to your Creator. May your soul, after leaving the body, be met by the dazzling company of the angels May you meet the white triumphant army of martyrs May you be surrounded by the glowing crown of confessors May Mary, the mother of God, turn her eyes kindly towards you May Jesus Christ appear to you mild and joyful And you, merciful Lord Jesus Christ, have pity on this soul and introduce her into the green pastures of paradise, so that she may live united to you with an indivisible love May you see your redeemer face to face and standing in his presence forever may you see with joyful eyes Truth revealed in its fullness. ...⁵⁴

During funerals, the prayers usually said are very rich in portraying the hope of immortality that the dead person would enjoy in the beatific vision of God when he or she shall encounter the Trinity.⁵⁵

All the prayers of the Church for the dying and the dead express the deeper theological truth of human experience that is the desire for a higher life.⁵⁶ From the anthropological understanding of human being, man is a being directed towards the transcendental. There is in human beings the quest or the longing for satisfaction or fulfillment or self-realization. Human beings feel him or her self-incomplete and longs for completeness that is to be realized only in God. Prayer is one way through which human beings can unite themselves with God. Jesus Christ while approaching his death, prayed to God, his Father so that he might overcome the fear of death and accept the will of his Father. "Father, he said if it is your will, take this cup away from me. But let your

⁵³ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 31

⁵⁴ Vatican II, *The rite for the commendation of the dying*, 271-273

⁵⁵ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 32

⁵⁶ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 33

will be done not mine.” (Cf. Lk. 22:42) Therefore through death, human beings are “linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength that comes from hope.”⁵⁷

The main liturgical celebration that expresses the hope of Christians after death is the paschal liturgy. From the Holy Thursday’s liturgy to Easter Sunday liturgy, the theology of death and hope are profoundly expressed. Our hope is realized through passing from death. Hence, for Christians who believe in the power of prayer, death is a mystery that we can understand only through faith. Before Christ, death was frustrating and misery, darkness and failure. But with the death and resurrection of Christ, Christ illumined death with his paschal splendor,⁵⁸ which now turns death into a beatific sign of God’s salvation. Thus, death is no longer to be feared or to be seen as terror but a confident hope that leads someone to realize the plan of God. Hence, prayer makes a Christian death becomes a Christic death,⁵⁹ which brings the hope of eternal life.

⁵⁷ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, nn 18, 22

⁵⁸ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 33

⁵⁹ Cf. L. BERMEJO, *Light Beyond Death*, 33

Conclusion

No matter how we want to refuse the reality of death, the truth is that death is an inevitable reality that we cannot deny. It is a reality we are conscious of. But, the problem is on how to confront it or accept it as part of human reality. Life is a journey towards death. Yes! But how do we tell this to a dying person or a person facing death in a painful situation or to the people grieving their dead that there is hope of life after death when what we know is the present life. Perhaps, it is time to accept the reality of death as part of the mystery of life that we cannot understand fully. The dilemma here is on how to reconcile the reality of the life we know with the reality of what is beyond our human experience that we are conscious of. Thus, we are left with a question, "why must I die?" This question engages all human values that are, his or her self-definition and commitments. It is a question about the whole meaning of human existence, which we find difficult to explain.

But according to some contemporary thought based on the principle of cause and effect relationship, there is no effect without a cause; therefore, death is seen from the point of view of human retribution, which makes the reality of death better comprehensible.¹

CF. X, LEON-DUFOUR, *Life and Death in the New Testament*, 7

Jesus reacted to this principle of human retribution citing the examples of the death of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices in Lk 13:1-5. he asked the people “Do you think this Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, ...” (Lk 13:2) Therefore, the cause and effect relationship does not reflect God’s justice or give complete explanation to death.

The reality of death goes beyond trying to find a way by which we can rationalize death in order to know how we can have control over it.² I think we must be very sincere with ourselves on this issue and not overlook the fact that death is not only a point at the end of life but a dimension of our whole experience of life because our life is a journey towards death.

From what I have been able to gather together on the question of death and eternal life from the Christian perspective and the Yoruba cultural/traditional perspective, there is a common conception of death that both upheld as a principle and it is: death is not an end to life and that life continues after death. However, there is difference in understanding of life after death. Thus, it is important to note the difference in understanding between the two concepts in order to understand the basis on which the hope of eternal life can help us to overcome our fear of death.

Going by what we have seen in chapter one on the general and Christian understanding of death, we can more or less see the comparism and the difference in understanding from what we have seen in chapter two about Yoruba concept of death. The Yoruba understanding of death, which partially goes in line with the Jewish concept in the Hebrew tradition, finds its complete understanding in the Christian thought.

² Cf. M. K. HELI WIG, *What are they saying about death and Christian hope*, 8

Life according to the Yoruba understanding is cyclic against the Christian linear understanding of life. The Yoruba believe in the reincarnation of life is the way through which life people believe in the continuation of life. Therefore life does not end in death but only a passage from one form of life to another form to be reincarnated again. Hence the concept of eternal life is a continued life cycle of a person is from life through death into a reincarnated life.

The continuation of life is believed to be carried on through the generations of offspring. This same notion is predominant in the Hebrew thought on having children. In fact according to the Jews, a complete death is a death without heir as we have seen earlier in the first chapter. Similarly, children are very important for the Yoruba people (most especially male children) as the bearers of the continued life of the family. Living without an heir is the worst thing that could happen to somebody because when such a person dies it as if the person never lived. The same concept is applied to the death of young people since they died without an heir to continue the generation of life. Therefore, the hope of every Yoruba person is to die old and with children to continue the family life cycle. More so, the Yoruba believe that after the whole cycle of life, there is going to be the final communion of life with the creator at the end of time. This belief can be seen in reference to the Christian understanding of final eschatology when the whole creation shall be united with God.

Looking at the Yoruba people today, the understanding of life and death is mostly determined by the religious doctrine that the people believe in and not exactly on the traditional belief system. Although some aspects of the Yoruba belief still prevail in the mind of the people because they are part of them or their consciousness. Hence, the

Christians among the Yoruba people draw their understanding of life and death from the divine revelation of God from both the Hebrew scripture and the New Testament. When all was set for God to finally reveal himself, he became incarnated into human history in order to change our history. Thus, with the paschal event of Christ, God leads humanity into a new history and vision of life. Death is no more to be seen as evil that threatens man but a grace through which God brings to fulfillment his plan of salvation and his eternal life.

However, with the teaching and hope that Christianity brought to Yoruba culture, there is one reality and problem that the people have to confront in bearing with the reality of death and that is witchcraft. The people believe that witchcraft is the cause of death when it is premature and unnatural. Perhaps, this is where the Yoruba approach to death differs from the Christian approach, which sees every death as God's plan to be accepted in faith. Here is where the challenge of faith is before the Yoruba Christians who still believe in witchcraft. The fear of death comes from this belief. In order to overcome this fear, I think there is a need for a better understanding and integration of the Christian faith. There are many examples for us to follow: the life of Christian saints and the martyrs showed us what our attitude should be towards death. Their experience of God made them desire death as a way through which they can be with God. "Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ" says St. Paul (cf. Rom. 8:35-39). When Christ becomes our focus of life, then death is no more a victor because it has been conquered once and for all through Christ's obedience to the will of God. He is our divine healer who heals our wounds; takes upon himself our suffering and death.³ "I have come in order that you might have life - life in all its fullness." (Cf. Jn.10: 10) This is the reason

³ Cf. J. HEALEY · D, SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 218

why Jesus had to die an innocent death so that we may live. Thus, Jesus sets for us the way to follow. Through his own experience of human suffering, he accomplished for us eternal life.

The key to the hope of eternal life against the human grief, fear and trembling before death is well expressed in the episode of the resurrection of Lazarus in the gospel according to John. Jesus said to the grieved Martha (who symbolically stands for Christians facing the reality of death) “if anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live and whoever lives and believes in me, will never die.” (Jn. 11:25-26) The answer of Martha is an expression of faith: “Yes Lord... I believe ...” Her faith strengthened her hope that the presence of the Lord will bring back her brother to life. It is only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Martha and Mary did that we can confront death with great hope. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (Jn. 11:32)

The paradox of Christian faith is the tension between the “already” and “not yet” of our hope that swings from the ideal that is guaranteed to the reality that continues to sway us.⁴ On one hand we tend to accept the reality of death with faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a guarantee of our hope in eternal life while on the other hand, the incomprehensible idea of the reality after death leaves us in fear. Nevertheless, there is more reason to hope than to fear because fear cannot stop us from dying. In fact, it causes us to die faster while hope gives us the strength of life and enables us to see the continuation of life in God.

⁴ Cf. X, LEON-DUFOUR, *Life and Death in the New Testament*, 224

Bibliography

BOOKS

- ADEGBOLA, A, *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Ibadan, 1983
- ALLISON, P., "The Interior Castle," *St. Teresa of Avila*, English translation, London 1979
- AUER, J. - RATZINGER, J., *Dogmatic Theology, Eschatology – death and Eternal life*, Washington, D.C. 1988
- BERMEJO, L., *Light Beyond Death*, 2nd Ed., India, 1996
- BUJO, B., *African Theology in its Social Context*, Nairobi, 1986
- CHENU, B., *The book of Christian Martyrs*, London, 1990
- DEWART, J. – MCWILLIAM, E., *Death and Resurrection, Message of the fathers of the Church*, Vol. XXII, Wilmington, 1986
- GRAYSTON, K., *Dying, We Live*, A new enquiry into the death of Christ in the New Testament, London, 1990
- HEALAY, J. - SYBERTZ, D., *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, Nairobi, 1997
- HELLWIG, K. M., *What are they saying about death and Christian hope*, New York, 1978
- KUNG, H., *Eternal Life*, London, 1984
- LEON-DUFOUR, X., *Life and Death in the New Testament*, San Francisco, 1979
- MALONEY, G., *Death Where is your Sting*, New York, 1984
- MARIE-EMILE, B., *Our Victory over Death: Resurrection*, Collegeville, 1999
- MARROW, S.B., "The resurrection of the dead," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. Xii, U.S.A, 1967
- MBITI, J., *Introduction to African Religion*, Ibadan, 1975
- MCWILLIAM, D. J., *Death and Resurrection*, Wilmington, 1986
- OMOSADE, A., *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, Ibadan, 1974
- RATZINGER, J., *Eschatology, Death and Eternal life*, Washington, 1988
- RAY, B., *African Religions*, New Jersey, 1976
- SADOWSKI, F., *The Church Fathers on the Bible*, New York, 1987
- ST. ATHANASIUS, "On the Incarnation", *patrologia graeca* 25, col. 142-143

ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTOCH, "Epistle to the Romans", *In the Fathers of the Church*, vol. I, New York, 1947

WENSING, M., *Death and Destiny in the Bible*, Collegeville, 1993

ENCYCLOPEDIA

BAUER, J., *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, Vol. II, London, 1970

EDWARD, P., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. I and II, New York, 1967

KOSTER, H., "Death," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. IV, USA, 1967

SGFB, "Death Rites and Customs", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. V, Chicago, 1979

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December, 1965

VATICAN COUNCIL II, *The rite for the commendation of the dying*, 1964

BIBLE

THE HOLY BIBLE, *Revised standard version*, London, 1973