

THE TRADITIONAL BAVENDA CONCEPT OF THE AFTER-LIFE VIS-À-VIS
THE BAVENDA CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF ETERNAL LIFE

by

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Summary

This dissertation explores the traditional BaVenda concept of the after-life vis-à-vis the BaVenda Christian understanding of eternal life. In this dissertation a historical background of the traditional BaVenda and how there were reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ will be given. A comparative study of the traditional BaVenda and Christian BaVenda beliefs and practices is given. It will be noted that the BaVenda Christians of BeitBridge district revert to traditional beliefs and practices concerning the dead. These rituals carried out by the BaVenda Christians show the syncretistic elements practiced. A central question therefore is "Are the BaVenda Christians operating on the basis of Christian concept of death and hereafter?" It is argued in this dissertation that the BaVenda Christian concept of death and after life is the blending of BaVenda Christian and BaVenda traditional beliefs and practices, particularly when it comes to death and burial practices.

Key Words

Traditional BaVenda

BaVenda Christians

BaVenda Worldview

After – life

Death and its meaning

Burial practices

Death rituals

Communication between the living and the dead

Syncretism

Eternal life

DEFINITION OF TERMS

ENGLISH	VENDA
Death	Lufu
Hereafter	Vutshilo vhusa fheliho
Eternal	Ngausa fheliho
Puberty	Utomba
Circumcision	Huisa mulani
Razor marks on the cheeks or body	Nola
Diviner	Nanga
Future time	Tshifhinga tshidaho
Future life	Vhutshilo Hudaho
Soul	Muya
Body	Muvhili
Life	Vutshilo
Witchcraft	Vhuloi
Magic	Mushonga
He/she has left	Worisiya
He/She disappeared	Hatsheho
He/She has passed on	Wofhira
God	Mudzimu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
Summary	ii
Keywords	iii
Definition of Terms	iv
CHAPTER ONE	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.1.2 Aim/Justification	2
1.1.3 Objectives	2-3
1.1.4 Methodology	3-4
1.1.5 Methodology for Data Collection	4-5
1.1.6 Literature Review	6-7
1.1.7 A brief Life History of the Traditional BaVenda	7
1.1.8 History Background of the Christianity among the Bavenda people	8-10
1.1.9 Outline of chapters	10
CHAPTER TWO	
2.1 The Bavenda Traditional worldview	12
2.1.1 Spirit of the dead	12-13
2.1.2 Relationship to ancestors	13
2.1.3 Spirit possession	14
2.1.4 Magic	14
2.1.5 Divination	15
2.1.6 Heaven and hell	15-16
2.1.7 Communication with the dead	16-17
2.1.8 Death A definition	17-18

1.1.1	The origion of death “Lufu” among the Bavenda	18-19
1.1.2	Causes of death	19-20
1.1.3	The meaning of death among the Bavenda	19-21
1.1.4	The Traditional BaVenda Burial rituals	21-23
1.1.5	Men’s burial	23-25
1.1.6	Women’s Burial	25-28
1.1.7	Boys and Girls burial	28-30
1.1.8	Infant Burial	30
1.1.9	The concept of life after death	30-35
	Conclusion	35

CHAPTER THREE

3.1	The Bavenda Christian Concept of Eternal life	36
3.1.1	Spirit of the dead	36-38
3.1.2	Spirit possession	39
3.1.3	Spirit of the dead-The Christian Worldview	40-41
3.1.4	Spirit possession-The general Christian view	41
3.1.5	Heaven and hell	41
3.1.6	The Christian Teaching	41-42
3.1.7	Communication with the dead	42-45
3.1.8	Death – a definition-The Christian understanding	45-47
3.1.9	Origion of death	47-48
3.1.10	Causes of death	49
3.1.11	The meaning of death	49-50
3.1.12	Christian Burials	52-54
3.1.13	Eternal life	54-55

3.1.14 The Christian Teaching about eternal life	55-59
Conclusion	60

CHAPTER FOUR

1.1 A comparative analysis o the Bavenda Traditionalists and the BaVenda Christians on the concept of the after life	61
4.1.1 Definition of death	62
4.1.2 Origion of death	62-63
1.1.1 Causes of death	63
1.1.2 The meaning of death	63-66
1.1.3 Burial practices	66-67
1.1.4 Life after death	67-68
Conclusion	68-71

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Theological work in the community needs to be done in direct relationship to the actual life of the people. The subject of this dissertation is an attempt to investigate the actual understanding of the BaVenda traditionalists regarding life after death, and the BaVenda Christian understanding of eternal life. Although the subject of life after death occupies the central place in the majority of both traditional and Christian BaVenda, not much research has been done along these lines concerning the BaVenda people.

My interest in this subject became explicit when I worked among the BaVenda people of BeitBridge district. I observed a lot of beliefs and practices done with regard to the dead, then my question was, what do these people believe about the dead? The central question is what happens to the soul after death? The traditional BaVenda and the traditional BaVenda who have been converted to Christianity will be given this dissertation the opportunity to give their views concerning the destiny of the soul.

I am aware of the fact that, I am an indigenous person living in this district. In addition to this, my love for and commitment to the BaVenda people, their traditional and cultural heritage and identification with their struggle for understanding life after death and eternal life are some of my reasons for investigating these concepts. I will attempt in this dissertation to describe and comparatively evaluate life after death among the traditional BaVenda and eternal life as it exists among the BaVenda Christians. Where I describe death rituals I will be trying to strengthen either the after life death or elucidating the Christian concept of eternal life. The descriptions will focus on the phenomena and will

be as far as possible be given from the believers point of view.

1.2 AIM/JUSTIFICATION

The dissertation looks at the traditional BaVenda worldview and the BaVenda Christian worldview. This means that the aim of this dissertation will be to investigate in greater depth the concept of the after life among the traditional BaVenda and the BaVenda Christian understanding of Eternal life. As a minister of religion and in the Lutheran Church one of my personal reasons for pursuing this study is to help me to be aware of the points of divergence and convergence concerning death and the after life among the traditional BaVenda and the BaVenda Christian understanding of eternal life. This study will help me in turn to be aware of the possibility or impossibility of a synthesis. From a scholarly point of view, we need to take note that very little has been written concerning the traditional BaVenda in general and their concept of the after life and the relationship to the BaVenda Christian understanding of eternal life.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

In terms of objectives, I intend to:

- 1.3.1 investigate the traditional BaVenda concept of the afterlife.
- 1.3.2 investigate the BaVenda Christian understanding of eternal life. This also goes along with achieving the following sub-objectives:
 - 1.3.3 to establish similarities and differences between the traditional BaVenda and the BaVenda Christian concept of death and the hereafter.
 - 1.3.4 to identify elements of traditional BaVenda concept of death and after life which are blended with the BaVenda Christian concept of death and eternal life.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This dissertation employs the phenomenological method. By phenomenological method I refer to the approach commonly referred to as “the phenomenology of religion” Synonymously it has been called “comparative religion,” or even “the science of religion.” Streng 1976:226 defines it as, “the art of interpreting the intention of religion that is phenomenology’s studies the meaning of concrete religious data, not according to the intentions of the advocates.” Phenomenology of religion is difficult to precisely characterize. Attempts to define it have rendered it to be a descriptive, a comparative, a systematic, and typological method. Despite the different characterizations most phenomenologist of religion agree on the common tendency of the approach some of which I will employ in my dissertation. These are brought together systematically in Cox 1992 in his step by step method. These are, epoche, empathy, eidetic intuition, pure descriptions. For my dissertation, I will define the terms I have outlined above and then exemplify how they have been applied.

1.4.1 People to be researched

The people to be researched are the BaVenda traditionalists and the BaVenda Christians. I will take equal samples in both groups so that I have a balanced data collection.

1.4.2 The data to be collected

Data to be collected involves the traditional BaVenda concept of life after death as compared to the BaVenda Christian understanding of eternal life.

1.4.3 As a researcher

As an indigenous researcher, used to the people and environment in which I am doing the research. I will have an advantage of a larger pool of respondents who will give the results credibility. I will also try as far as possible to be objective. Eidetic Intuition – I will act as an observer; allowing to see into the meaning of the phenomena. The above will help me in my research to find out the meaning of death in each tradition and also the concept of after life vis-à-vis the Christian understanding of eternal life.

I will also try to get to the experiences of the traditional BaVenda believers. This type of approach eliminates bias. I know that there are limitations to this effect and that no pure description of the phenomena separable from the subjective observer are attainable. No final or universal statement of the essence of the meaning of the method or approach can help me on its strength in that it can cultivate an attitude which will not permit me to make pre-mature judgments.

1.5 METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION

Personal interviews have been conducted with the traditional BaVenda and BaVenda Christians. Questions were asked individually to twenty traditional BaVenda of between 49-80 years of age and responses recorded. Questions were also asked to fifteen traditional BaVenda of between 20-45 years of age and responses recorded. By this I was trying to get the individual responses of different age groups. Among the age of 20-45 years was a combination of school teachers, nurses, villagers and traditional healers or diviners. Questions were also asked to BaVenda Christians who are professionals like secondary and primary school teachers, nurses at the hospital and clinics, some villagers

who were part of the first people to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ when it was brought by the missionaries and responses were recorded. In doing this, efforts were made through the attitude of epoche, not to express my own opinion or allow my opinions to influence the answers. I tried to be as objective as possible. I also explained the purpose of the interview clearly and as briefly as possible soliciting the help of the respondent. Special care was taken in using this method not to put answers into the respondents mouth. Where the questions asked for an opinion, all the probing allowed to the enumerator was to ask respondent to explain an unclear answer more fully. This way of data collection helped me in the following ways.

- 1.5.1 Personal interviews have assisted me to probe to a greater depth thereby gaining more complete data.
- 1.5.2 As an indigenous person of the area, these personal interviews permitted me to establish good relationship and maintain rapport with the respondents.
- 1.5.3 They made it possible for me to gain some confidential information and unplanned additional information.
- 1.5.4 Afforded me the opportunity of gaining responses to my questions.
- 1.5.5 Personal interviews also allowed insight into the true feelings of the interviewed through glimpses of his/her gestures and tone of voices. On the whole, there were however certain problems associated with my interviews.
- 1.5.6 These interviews consumed a lot of time and more patience was required.
- 1.5.7 There were problems of recording some responses which were not very clear.
- 1.5.8 Sample size was also restricted by lack of adequate financial resources and

transport to move from one place to the other. However on the whole, I was able

to come out with information which formed the basis of my research.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

Concerning the concepts of death and the after life only a few authors mention the BaVenda people. None of the authors give us a full and clear account of the traditional BaVenda concept of death and after life, but nevertheless we will consider a few works on the BaVenda below:

Gottschling 1905:195 says, "the curriculum vitae of the heathen Mo-Venda is a long succession of fear, superstition, suppression, and misery; from birth to death. They are haunted by their gods, by the ghosts and their ancestors, by all sorts of hobgoblins and tremble from fear of their witch-doctors and chiefs." He goes on to say that, "the BaVenda people do not readily accept death and as a result they try by all means to find its causes." Since mention is made of ancestors, it shows that at least the traditional BaVenda believe in what Mbiti 1991:125 refers to "the living dead.." It is also hinted that they are very much concerned about the cause of death for individuals. E

Gottschling is silent on whether these concepts and practices are honored among the BaVenda Christians. Van Warmelo 1950:20-28 in his ethnological publications of the Venda history and tribal rituals and religions, highlights that, "the BaVenda possess a double set of religious institutions, that is the ancestors worship and the Christian belief."

He does not go ahead to elaborate this statement in detail. Junod, 1920 : 207-220 is trying to show that that there has been interaction between the BaVenda traditional religious beliefs and the BaVenda Christian beliefs. He does not however go into the

issue whether the idea of ancestral spirits is accommodated in the BaVenda Christian understanding of death and eternal life. Mbiti 1975:265 as he discusses eschatological concept like resurrection; reincarnation; and transmigration; says that “ The traditional BaVenda believe that the spirit of some people, particularly of chiefs return to this life in the form of animals, like lions, leopards and snakes.”

Mbiti 1975:2267-268 goes on to observe that, “The traditional BaVenda people like other African societies, maintain human contact and relationship with the departed mainly the living dead and the land of the departed. “

1.7. A brief life history of the Traditional BaVenda people

Two questions arise when one looks at the brief historical background of the BaVenda. Who are the BaVenda people? What distinguishes them from the general African population of Zimbabwe? I must admit that the above questions are not easy to answer, but to try and answer these questions, I will refer to two schools of thought by some scholars first and later see if the BaVenda people agree with the historical points. These schools of thought have dominated interpretations of the BaVenda history of South Africa Loubser 1989:6-50 suggests that the traditional BaVenda people originally came from the lower Congo region under Thoho-ya-Ndou. Gottschling 1905:365 acknowledges that, “ The traditional BaVenda people may be defined as those people who acknowledge the legendary Tho-ya-Ndou as their progenitor. The current school emphasizes local origins referring to the Soutpansberg area in South Africa. According to Loubser 1989:54-56. “The archaeological evaluation of the competing hypotheses, dated ceramic styles and settlement patterns have that the Shona speaking people ruled South of the

Soutpansberg at least since the twelfth century while the Sotho speakers probably lived in the Soutpansberg since the early fourteenth century. Loubser goes on to say that, "by the fifteenth century, the Shona speaking immigrants from Southern Rhodesia settled in the Northern Transvaal and interacted with the local traditional BaVenda people and the Sotho inhabitants."

1.8. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE BAVENDA PEOPLE

Since sound judgment requires the knowledge of the past and present, it is axiomatic that events of the past tend to recur, to ignore history is therefore to put oneself at a disadvantage. This section focuses on the general understanding of death and eternal life but before I discuss these aspects in detail, I will look at the worldview of Christianity. This section concerns the BaVenda Christians who were once traditionalists before accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this section I will try to highlight the historical background of Christianity among the BaVenda people. I will also show when and how they were reached with the gospel, by which missionaries and denominations that might have worked among them, the main churches who have worked and planted Christianity among them. The view of the BaVenda Christians on the concept of life after death will also be considered. In 1872 the church of Sweden formed a Mission Board to carry the gospel abroad. By 1877 the Swedish Missionaries were already at work in Natal, South Africa. This church in Natal became a kind of springboard from where the gospel was carried further inland into Southern Rhodesia now Zimbabwe. In 1899 Reverends C R Kempe and J F Ljungquist accompanied by evangelist Jeremiah Makubu both of the Lutheran church in Natal came to Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia. They were received

by the Reverend Helmen of the London missionary society at Hope Fountain Mission. Their mission was to explore the possibility of starting Lutheran mission work in Southern Rhodesia. After some exploratory work, they went back to Natal, South Africa. The year 1902 saw a second exploration to Southern Rhodesia by Reverends Anel Liljestrand and Adolf Hellden who were again accompanied by evangelist Jeremiah Makubu. They came again to Bulawayo. When this second group returned to Natal, South Africa, it is said they were apparently satisfied that it was possible to start mission work in Southern Rhodesia. This was a SiNdebele speaking area. Because of the committee agreement, the Lutheran church was allocated the Belingwe, Gwanda and BeitBridge districts to operate in. The first Mission work was done in Belingwe in earnest from 1903 at Mnene Mission among the Karanga speaking people. Missionary work among the traditional BaVenda people began in the early 1920's by the Apostolic Faith Mission Church. The early 1903's saw the appearance of the Lutheran Church among the BaVenda people of BeitBridge district, so two Church denominations were now at work. While the Apostolic Mission operated in the Beit-Bridge district, it worked differently from the Lutheran church in that the Lutheran church introduced the gospel through church schools, clinics, hospitals and Mission stations. The first Lutheran Mission station among the traditional BaVenda was built at Majini in 1933 in Siyoka communal land under chief Sitaudzi. The mission stations, schools and hospitals and clinics were places where the gospel was preached. Prayer, Bible reading and the exposition of the word of God was the order of the beginning of the day in these three places. Scripture lesson was compulsory at school. Every school child was compelled to

attend the Lutheran church Sunday services. To the grown up school children, Catechumen and Confirmation lessons were compulsory. Through this strategy, the Lutheran church missionaries, saw a rapid increase in the number of mission station, primary church schools, church clinics and hospitals. This also led to the rapid increase in the number of people who were baptized. Eventually the Lutheran church in the BeitBridge district among the traditional BaVenda people became a dominating church up to now. Besides the Lutherans and Apostolic Faith Church, there is a small population of the Zionists independent church. This church can be spotted by the small gatherings on Sundays under trees. In this chapter, I will concentrate on these three denominations, which are currently operating among the traditional BaVenda people I am studying. My sample answers as regards this chapter comes from interviews with older BaVenda Christians, the intellectuals, the illiterate and semi-illiterate, and the younger Christian group. These interviews of different groups will indicate the belief on the concept of death and eternal life. The Christian teaching on the subject matter on this chapter will be represented by the Lutheran, Apostolic Faith Mission and Zionists.

1.9 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter two deals with the traditional BaVenda concept of death and after life. This chapter focuses on the BaVenda traditional worldview where I will try to show how they deal with the spirits of the dead, their relationship with the ancestors, spirit possession, their understanding and interpretation of magic, divination, heaven and hell, and how they communicate with the dead. I will also deal with their myths about the origin of death and the cause, of death, their traditional burial rituals and finally their

concept of life after death. Chapter three deals with views of the BaVenda Christian worldview which covers how the older BaVenda Christian, the intellectuals, the illiterate and semi-literate, the younger BaVenda Christian groups, a sample of Christian denominations like, the Lutherans, Apostolic Faith Mission and Zionists understand the concept of eternal life. The general Christian teaching will summarize the understanding of this concept. This concept is discussed under some of the following sub headings, Spirit of the dead, Heaven and hell, communication with the dead, how they interpret the origin of death and its causes. The Christian burial and Eternal life. Chapter four is a comparative analysis of the traditional BaVenda and the BaVenda Christian on the concept of life after death. This comparison done under the following: Death and its origin, the causes of death, the meaning of death, burial practices, and the concept of life after death.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TRADITIONAL BAVENDA CONCEPT OF DEATH AND AFTERLIFE

2.1 THE BAVENDA TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW

Before I deal with this topic let me try to explain the term “world view” so that we understand below what I am talking about. Donovan 1988:3 defines “Worldview as the view which a person has of his/her world, it is the way on understands and interprets the things which happen to him/her and to other people. It is a person’s way of understanding life and the world in which he/she lives. It is a person’s belief about what is real and what is not real.” So in trying to follow O’ Donovan’s explanation of worldview, life in present traditional BaVenda is changing. The question of traditional beliefs and practices is still an important issue. I will try to explain the traditional BaVenda worldview as regards their beliefs and practices below as per their responses in my interviews. Scholarly work will be noted where a point needs to be emphasized and clarified, otherwise most information below come from the interviews conducted among the traditional BaVenda people.

2.1.1 Spirits of the dead

From my interviews, it was clear that the traditional BaVenda have a strong belief concerning the spirits of the dead. They also believe that there is a necessary relationship between the living and the spirit of the dead. The departed are believed to remain in the neighbourhood of their human homestead. There are viewed as part of the family. The relatives feel and believe that the spirits of the dead are on the mountains or in the

forests and because of this belief there is the necessary relationships with the dead. After a year, the spirit of the deceased has to be brought home (*muvhuiso*) and to bless members of the family who are still surviving or living. Mbiti 1991:123 alludes to some of the beliefs and practices I have mentioned above without being specific to a particular ethnic African group by saying, “ He says the surviving relatives and friends feel that the departed are close to them. In other societies it is held that the land of the departed is in the woods, forests, river banks, hills or somewhere in the country.” A point to note is that not all spirits of the dead are recognized as important. The spirit of young children, boys and girls, and some elderly people who lived bad lives are not taken into account when the traditional BaVenda deal with the spirit of the dead. It concerns only those who lived good lives that their spirits after death are ritualized and tamed or domesticated so that they can still continue to live within the home in the spiritual form.

2.1.2 Relationship to ancestors

The traditional BaVenda people often look for relationships between the living and the spirits of the dead. *These relationships can include rituals, sacrifices and offerings.* These are done to try to persuade or to satisfy the demands of the spirits of the living dead or the ancestors. This communication between the living and the dead may be through divination or through words from spirit possessed people. Ancestors are very important in the life of the traditional MoVenda in that, they are believed to either bless or curse the living. The living look upon the ancestors for guidance, for help and for correction. The popular belief is that one cannot live well on this earth without honoring your ancestors.

2.1.3 Spirit possession

The traditional BaVenda have a belief in spirit possession. These spirits act differently in their actions. Some of the spirit are believed to be harsh and destructive and should not be domesticated. A diviner is sought in such cases to drive this bad spirit away from the home and neighbourhood. Some spirits are believed to be good and are a blessing in the home. Some spirits are believed to be ancestors. When someone is possessed by it, he/she acts exactly like the dead relative and sometimes talks or make gestures imitating what the deceased was doing before he/she died. Through these spirits the living know the demands of the living dead. The possessed sometimes speak with a different voice, the voice of the spirit who indwells them. These voices may claim to be ancestors or to be bringing messages from ancestors. But the question still remains as to what is the reality behind spirit possession?

2.1.4 Magic

The traditional BaVenda people have a strong belief in magic. Magic is the use of mystical powers by a person to accomplish a person's desire or will. They believe that there is good and bad magic. Bad magic is for destruction or to harm other people and good magic is for blessing or welfare. The traditional BaVenda believe in the power of magic, charms, spells, fetishes. They use such powers to try and protect themselves from misfortune, danger, evil spirits, evil people like witches and socery, sickness and to get control over other people and situations. Some people use these magical powers to harm others. For example the example the traditional BaVenda believe and practice the manipulation of lightning to harm others. Magic can also be used to cause death.

2.1.5. Divination

In traditional BaVenda belief in divination is high. This is a practice they use to detect or to discover the cause of things. For example most causes of deaths are discovered through divination and this is believed to be always true. In serious sickness and much difficulties, divination is used to discover the cause. Divination is used as a way of getting advice or to make decisions. Divination may also be used to get to know the will of the ancestors. Divination is used also among the traditional BaVenda as a way of finding out what kind or type of ritual or sacrifice can be done to solve a particular problem. Divination can be used among the traditional BaVenda to detect the future. At times divination is used as a way of trying to revenge on the enemy. Divination, takes many forms. A diviner is someone who has the power to communicate with the spirits and receives secret knowledge or information within the spirit world in order to benefit his/her client. So divination plays an important part in the life of the traditional BaVenda in that they believe that the diviner understands the relationships, the jealousies, the grudges, the frustration and difficulties people have with each other and can prescribe solutions to such problems which can solve the issue in a culturally acceptable way.

2.1.6 Heaven and hell

In my interviews I found that the above concepts are very difficult to explain. The traditional BaVenda do not talk of heaven and hell, instead they talk of a ritual called bringing back the spirit of the deceased person home (hu humisa vhofaho) The belief is that the spirit of the dead are roaming in the forests, mountains, caves and should be

invited back into the family of the living. This spirit which is wandering or roaming out of the home should be brought back. At this ritual, the eating together and mutual sharing of meat without salt, snuff, and beer are emphasized as a way of communion with the deceased's spirit. Banana 1991:30-31 says, "Meat is eaten without salt because salt is believed to be hot and therefore not suitable for the tired soul which has been roaming about the forests. Moreover slat is bitter and the fact that it is not used here shows that the spirit is no longer bitter. This symbolically shows that the spirit is no longer dangerous and wild, it is now tamed." This ritual makes the spirit an ancestor. The traditional BaVenda believe that life is lived on this earth here and now. The idea of heaven and hell seem foreign and unclear, so the BaVenda traditional beliefs and practices do not prepare people for either heaven and hell.

2.1.7 Communication with the dead

This is one of the crucial aspects of the traditional belief and practice. A funeral is an important event. The traditional BaVenda believe that the living have a responsibility to the spirits of the dead. This usually starts after death, when funeral observances are held. Obligations to the spirit of the deceased should be fulfilled. It is in the interest of the traditional BaVenda to receive or hear messages from the spirit of the dead. Under normal circumstances when an elderly person is sick and to the point of dying, the elderly close to the sick person and always they would like to hear from him/her the last words. The last words or message is kept and no one would ever deviate from it. Any deviation from the last words of the deceased is taboo and may lead to serious consequences from the side of the spirit of the deceased. In order to communicate with

their dead, the living make offerings and sacrifices to their dead relatives to show their respect and to try to keep their relatives happy. The fear is that if the ancestors are not happy, they will punish the living with sickness or some other hardship. The living always through their communication with the dead seek to get the ancestors advice on what to do about various decisions in life. This might be concerning problems and difficulties in life such as marriage, childless, poverty, unemployment, sickness and general welfare of the living. The traditional BaVenda have expressed that this communication should always be kept alive and active.

After looking at the traditional BaVenda beliefs and practices about the spirit of the dead, their relationship to ancestors, spirit possession, magic, divination, heaven and hell, and why the living communicate with the dead, I now move forward to look at the next stage which is death, its origins, what it means and rituals that are connected with death and burials and their significance in the life of the traditional MoVenda.

2.1.8 DEATH : A Definition

The traditional BaVenda do not have vernacular words to define death. They speak of death rather than defining it. So for the purpose of clarity, I will define death so that we understand what we are talking about.

The Concise Oxford dictionary defines death as, "the final cessation of vital functions" "It is an event that terminates life." Mbiti 1991:116 expresses death as one of the most universal and mysterious experiences. Mbiti 1991:150 goes on to say, "Death stands between the world of human beings and the world of spirits, between the invisible and the visible. According to the traditional BaVenda I interviewed in my research death is

known as (lufu). The expressions were that nobody likes it whether it comes as an accident after a short illness or after a long illness, the traditional BaVenda express “Death as painful”. The traditional BaVenda fear the dead especially the male and female adults while they pay little attention to the death of the unmarried, the childless, boys, girls and infants. These receive less treatment, and few ceremonies as compared to the married adults. Because of the fear of the dead, the married adults are handled with great care to avoid problems that their spirits might cause to the living. Many of the most serious taboos of the traditional BaVenda life are built around the treatment of the dead. For example you can not spit saliva when you come in contact with a decomposing body of a deceased person. If you spit saliva when you come in contact with a decomposing body of a deceased person. If you spit on the ground it would be taken that you show no respect of the dead. (Hu tonifha vho lalaho).

2.1.9 THE ORIGIN OF DEATH (LUFU) AMONG THE TRADITIONAL BAVENDA

The coming of death is explained in mythological terms, “these myths are as important as the Biblical myth of creation written and read in Christianity.” From most people I interviewed, many could not tell how death came into the world, but I was fortunate that my interview with a local Headman Mr. Daniel Kohopmela Mbedzi, told me a myth about the origin of death – (lufu). He said the BaVenda associate the origin of death with the chameleon (vuluvulu) and Millepede (dongololo). According to this myth the creator who is (mudzimu) sent a millipede to go and tell the people of the world that they would not die. On the way to deliver the message the millipede is said to have delayed eating the fruit of a (tutulwa) tree. Seeing the delay of the millipede in bringing the reply

the (mudzimu) sent the chameleon to deliver the message to the people of the world that they would die. The chameleon arrived first and delivered his bad news and when the millipede finally arrived later, the chameleon had delivered the message of death. So today the chameleon is feared and disliked by BaVenda. Most of the BaVenda people kill the chameleon by forcing open its mouth with a stick and fill the mouth with snuff. Chameleons are always killed if they are caught because they carried the instruction which caused death and so much sorrow in the world. This myth has not been recorded anywhere and it seems it remains to be known by very few BaVenda. Mbiti 1991:16 says, "There are hundreds and hundreds of myths all over Africa concerning ideas about the origin of death." Unrecorded or oral myths get distorted from generation to generation. These mythological origins of death, help us try to explain how death originated and traditional perceptions as regard death. The fact that we have hundreds and hundreds of myths trying to explain the origin of death shows that we are dealing with a problem which does not have one answer. These many recorded and unrecorded myths about the origin of death lead us to look at the cause of deaths.

2.1.10 CAUSES OF DEATH

A good number of traditional BaVenda people I interviewed believe in witchcraft (vhologyi). This topic is controversial, frightening, scaring and on the other hand it can provoke interest. Witchcraft (vhologyi) is the evil art of science, of causing madness, bad luck, illness, death or misfortune on another person, by the use of powerful dangerous charms among the traditional BaVenda. If a husband dies, the biggest suspect is always

the wife who is believed to have bewitched him. Surprisingly enough if the wife dies, the husband is not responsible. A different person or sometimes a neighbour is thought to be jealous of the woman. According to the traditional BaVenda belief all deaths are caused. The death of infants, boys and girls are mostly attributed to witches who are believed to work at night using bad medicine to kill and devour their human flesh. The deaths of infants, still born child, small children are not very crucial to the traditional BaVenda belief. At such instances the cause may call for investigations through a diviner (nanga) and to detect the cause (hutungudza). One finds that there are two outstanding beliefs on the cause of death among the traditional BaVenda that is witchcraft (vhuloyi) and evil magic (mushonga o vhhahho). If these are the basic beliefs, then it is logical to call for an investigation to find out who used witchcraft or magic. After these investigations the responsible person is approached and if he or she refuses responsibility the two involved have to agree to go ahead and consult another diviner who lives far from their community. The traditional BaVenda of Beit-Bridge district always prefer to go as far as Chipinge the bordering district with Mozambique, to a place known as (Pfafule). From their visit the two involved will know the person responsible for the death of the deceased person. The responsible person and his/her family are made to pay for the death and all other expenses incurred by the other family. In most cases, a daughter from the responsible family is given to the offended family as a wife and she would bear children. This would seal the problem since this daughter became the reconciling link between the two families. In these modern days this could be viewed as child abuse and violating her human rights. In some cases suspects are killed silently through revenge by

witchcraft or bad magic. This is what Mbiti 1991:17 says, "take revenge which is less open." The traditional BaVenda worldview has beliefs and practices in spirits. These spirits are believed to take different forms and some of them are known as (ngozi) spirits. The (ngozi) spirits are known to avenge if not taken care of by the family whom one might have worked for so many year without payment. It also has serious quencequences to the family concerned if the deceased was not properly buried. Spirits of such people become angry and want to avenge. Traditional warnings of such spirits come in different forms before they can cause death. At times strange happenings occur, for example a member of the family might fall sick and the medical doctors are not able to detect the cause of illness. At times lightening might struck the home of the family concerned as a way of warning. The family concerned should investigate the cause through a diviner who will be able to tell what course of action to take to prevent death. Another cause of death is believed to come through the breaking of traditional taboos and promises of oaths. Any traditional MoVenda will avoid breaking of taboos because of the consequences that might follow. Natural death is not much entertained by the traditional Bavenda people. But what I discovered is that those who seem to entertain natural death have been influenced by Christianity and their traditional beliefs have been influenced by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2.1.11 THE MEANING OF DEATH AMONG THE BAVENDA

The meaning of death among the traditional BaVenda is understood by analyzing certain terms.

i. Death as defeat – (Hukundwa)

This can only be mentioned or said after sending someone to different diviners, (nanga) and after all possible channels of bringing back the sick to normal life by eradicating illness or madness has failed, then the relatives would say at his/her death, we have tried all we could to restore life to this person but we have failed, we admit to be defeated by the illness. (Ro-kundwa). We have been defeated.

ii. Death as punishment – (lufu lori vhofo)

Death is taken as punishment where a young person has died.

ii. Death as release – (lufu lori vhofoholola)

The traditional BaVenda can only talk about death as release after an aged person who has been ill for a long time has passed away. I was told of a story where one old woman who was unable to walk, and was always kept in her hut. Her back was always cracking and blood came out. To stop the flow of the blood, wet cow dung was applied to her back, since such people are looked upon as a burden to the family, her death was a release.

iv. Death as enemy – (lufu ndi swina)

Under normal circumstances the traditional BaVenda view death as an enemy because it takes lives of their beloved ones, it separates the relatives and neighbors who were living together in peace. Death is viewed as an enemy because once a person dies, the community will miss him/her for ever.

v. Death as a friend – (Khonani)

The traditional BaVenda can never treat death as a friend since everything possible is done to try and avoid it. Trying to avoid it means it is not liked. So death is not a friend but an enemy.

2.1.12 THE TRADITIONAL BAVENDA BURIAL RITUALS

In traditional BaVenda life has many rituals. Some of them are impromptu rituals which occur suddenly, which are circumstantial in cases of danger, for example a person escapes miraculously from an accident. The person makes contact with the spirit or if some one may be missed by a carnivorous animal like a lion, elephant, snake, or gun fire, this person requires contact with the spirit and it will be a moment to express gratitude. These people also believe and practice situational rituals which are done by arrangement like birth rituals, which occur when a child has been delivered. The traditional BaVenda also practices initiation rites which are concerned with marking the transition from childhood. There are also life crisis rituals which are associated with the treatment and exorcism of spirits. There are also marriage rituals associated with the approval of marriage. But because of the nature of my topic, I will deal in details about the traditional BaVenda burial rituals. As I discuss this dissertation, it will be important to show that, rituals on the whole promote health and well being of the living. The good amicable relationship with the departed. Zuesse 1991:9 who has done significant research into the African world view links up with the preceding statements and supports the function that rituals play among the traditional BaVenda by saying, "ritual itself is concerned first of all with ordering bodily movements in space, and clearly the body is the foundation for all awareness, he goes on to say that, "ritual not only provides for

classifications of bodily, social and specially cosmic space, it also seeks to interrelate these spheres in a harmonious and fruitful manner, so as to transform and renew the universe.” So we can say ritual characteristics are:

- i. to manifest the sacred through re-enactment of the original heirophany.
- ii. To re-establish structures in the community.
- iii. To bring the picture of the sacred to life.
- iv. To also bring the believer into the presence of the universal experience.
- v. To make myths true by transposing the believers into sacred space and time of

the sacred. They are a fulfillment of what happened in myths.

Looking at the traditional BaVenda burial rituals, not everyone receives the same burial rituals. There are different rituals for married people, male and female, children, boys/girls, chiefs and infants. The traditional BaVenda have different ways of burying different people. For example, a rich person is buried differently from a poor man, a married man or woman with children is buried differently from an unmarried person, infants are buried differently from boys and girls’ burial, a stranger’s burial is different from the other burials. A leper is also buried differently. For the purpose of my dissertation, I am only going to look at the burial of a married man or woman, boys or girls and an infant. When a married person with children dies, or someone dies, young children within the home and community are not supposed to know of the state of affairs. There are not allowed to see the corpse. First they are called together and told that grandmother or grandfather, (kuku) or father or mother (baba kana mme) is no longer with us. He/she has been snatched from his/her house by a hyena. (Vho hwalwa nga

phele). Secondly these children are sent to a neighbor's home which is a distance from their home so that they do not see the activities taking place in their home where death has occurred. The reason given by people I interviewed for sending children to a neighboring home was that traditionally children are not supposed to know about death because they might be shocked by the news. The other reason was that dead bodies were not put in the refrigerator and after a day the body would produce a bad smell and the fear was that children unknowingly would spit on the ground which is taboo to spit saliva on such conditions. This is viewed as a sign of no respect for the dead. (Hu tonifha vho lalaho)

2.1.13 MEN'S BURIAL

When an old person has died, the brothers and aunts come together and call a diviner (nanga) who divines (hutungudza) to find out or detect the site for the grave which is often referred to as (ndu) symbolizing a house for the deceased. The brother of the deceased under any normal circumstances has to start to mark or dig the spot where the grave or (ndu) is supposed to be dug. This should take place on an uncultivated ground. After marking the spot of the grave, the rest of men join to dig the grave. (hulugisa ndu). Generally the traditional BaVenda men dig their grave just outside or inside the cattle kraal. The reason given for this was that, the Venda people value cattle very much as their source of income and economic livelihood, and if the grave is at cattle kraal the belief is that he will continue to see his cattle. Socially among the BaVenda tribe a man is a "man" if he has a large herd of cattle. The society despises and ridicules a man who dies without cattle as jakal, (phunguwe), kudu (tholo), they scoff at his funeral uttering

statements of disgust and disapproval. To them, he is a failure, lazy and he is generally shunned. Some traditional BaVenda are buried in their own huts. As I said earlier the diviner (nanga) advises the family on the wishes of the deceased regarding site. Some old people tell one family member before they die, what they wish to be done and some even point the spot of their grave. This person can only disclose the information after the deceased's death. Normally the relatives would take his/her words as the actual words of the deceased. In such cases, a diviner may not be necessary for detecting the spot of the grave. The people interviewed gave two reasons for engaging the diviner before digging the grave.

i. There is a strong belief that if you start digging the grave before consulting the spirit of the deceased, it may be hard to dig a deep grave. Sometimes there may be a rock underneath and if this happens, the belief is that he/she does not want to be buried at that spot (O hana) So the people will make sure that they consult him/her first through the diviner (nanga) before they can prepare his/her grave.

ii. The other belief is that the corpse of the deceased becomes heavy for the pall bearers to fit it out of the hut to the gravesite. This belief is said to be his/her sign of not agreeing with the people to bury him/her at that grave.

Before the corpse of the deceased man or woman is taken to the grave, the aunt or in her absence his/her brother or any close blood relative will address the deceased by taking a pinch of snuff and says, (Nda, ndinne mukene, takuwani rivhoni isa midini) This literally translated means, I am so and so, we are now taking you to your home or hut. When the corpse is carried to the grave, elderly people follow quietly and there is no taking or

singing during the funeral procession, No children are allowed in the procession or at the gravesite. Great care is taken to conceal the locality of the grave so that there is no danger of parts of the corpse falling into the hands of an enemy always a witch. Before the corpse is laid in the grave, the pallbearers lift it up, the elder son of the deceased passes under it holding an axe in his right hand. The holding of an axe is said to be the assumption of responsibility, of caring for the family and that he is taking over the responsibility of his father. He now stands as the mouth piece of his deceased father. The axe he is holding is also for cutting the branches for his young brothers when they want to start building their new homes outside their fathers home/kraal. This they call in Venda (Hu hoyela tanzwu) Traditional Bavenda burials are usually done before sunrise, noon, or sundown. The explanation given here is that women often give birth to children in the morning, and also after midday to sundown. It would also be logical to bury the deceased bodies during those times as if to say, you came to this world during these times and you should depart from this world during these times. At the grave the eldest sister throws the first handful of soil on the corpse in the grave saying “you must sleep in peace (Uri lugisele vhudzulo). Do not be angry with us, we gave you all that you required and wrapped you with the skin of one of your ox. “After this, the relatives stand aside and the grave is filled with soil. The eldest son then places a large flat stone at the head of the grave and other stones known as mountain (thavha), are laid on the grave by the rest of the men using their left hand only. The explanation here was not quite adequate but the general view is that he has handed power to his son. The use of the left hands show that the deceased no longer yields power. Some of his utensils like a stool, a tea cup,

water jar, walking stick in the case of an elderly man/woman, plate for food, are broken and placed on the grave. The people believe and recognize that this person has started a journey and he needs these utensils for his long journey. Another explanation was that the deceased should go with some of his/her belongings. The grave is swept and explanation is that the people should be able to trace the footsteps against witches who might come at night to dig and devour human flesh. For three days the elderly would sleep near the fire in an open space to guard any witches. After three days the people understood that the deceased has decomposed and no harm from the side of witches are any longer feared since they are believed not to eat bad human flesh. If the elderly slept at home, they would visit the grave very early in the morning for three days, to see if the grave has been tampered with. On the grave the branch of the (Mutshetshete) tree is placed as a sign of peace and also to give shade to the dead who is sleeping.

2.1.14 WOMEN'S BURIAL

In cases of prolonged long illness, her relatives are summoned to help in the interim and to see that all the obituary rites are properly followed and performed. Immediately after death the body is laid in position by old women. They remove all ornaments and wrap it in a blanket. Among the traditional BaVenda a woman's corpse is never wrapped in a cow skin as what is done to a man's corpse. The explanation is that women do not have or own a cattle kraal. The kraal belongs to the man. After corpse has been wrapped in a blanket, the elderly women carry it out of the hut and men receive it and proceed to the gravesite. At the grave, the elderly son throws the first clod of soil saying, "you can rest in peace my mother, do not trouble us. I will give you all that you require" (Ninga awela

nga mulalo mawe, nisongori tswenya ndido ni lugisa zwothe zwine na to da”) Then the grave is filled and stones are put on the grave. The woman’s old stamper, clay pots, trays and all her bracelets and anklets are broken and placed on the grave by one of her female relatives. The explanation is that, she will need to use these things in her future life showing a belief in the hereafter and the eternal communion with the living. The (Mutshetshete) branch is placed in position on the grave. After the burial, people return home in the same path. At the gate of the homestead two dishes are placed with roots, herbs, and water for ritual washing. After washing people are allowed to eat the meat and food. Usually this meat is boiled without salt for those people who have no teeth the elderly men and women. The rest of the people eat roasted meat according to their villages. After the food most people disperse to their homes while close relatives remain in the home to continue to comfort the bereaved and to receive those who were not present at the time of the funeral. After a month and in some cases after three months the burial party is summoned together to observe this rite of washing the property of the deceased, spacing part of this rite. This beer is for cleansing those who dug the grave, those who took part in the burial preparations and those who carried stones to put on the grave. This beer is known among the traditional BaVenda as the beer of hyenas (Halwa ha dziphele). The people who carried the corpse to the grave are likened to hyenas that snatch sheep out of the kraal and take it away and never to be seen again. Some of this beer is poured on the ground, and (tshiho) is used as a cup for drinking the beer. The pouring of beer on the ground is said to signify a common sharing and communion with the living timeless. It is at this ceremony that the cause of the death might be revealed.

Banana 1991:29 who has done some research into the African world view links up with the presiding by saying that, "This ritual is also meant to sooth the spirit of the departed and among other things to cushion the feeling of insecurity."

2.1.15 BOYS AND GIRLS BURIAL

These burials do not have any rituals. The body of a boy is washed by elderly men and that of a girl is washed by elderly women. Ordinary water and soap are used. The parents of the deceased do not participate in the washing and preparation of the body. The utensils used when washing the body are put in the grave during the filling of the grave with soil at the gravesite. After burial, people return home and wash with water mixed with some herbs, roots, and medicine. A goat is usually killed for the people to eat, and people can disperse while close relatives remain at the home to console the parents of the deceased child and to receive any visitors who might come some day after the burial.

2.1.16 INFANT BURIAL

Infant burial is very crucial among the traditional BaVenda. Only elderly women who are beyond childbearing age within the community participate in the burial of an infant. The elderly women take the corpse of the infant to a river bank, a swampy place and do the burial. No man is allowed to take part in the burial. The mother of the child does not take part in the burial, neither is she allowed to see the grave. From the interview, one could get the feeling that these elderly women who sometimes take part in these infant burials are not keen to disclose the procedures taken. I am also informed that infant is buried in a sitting position as if it is sitting in his/her mothers' womb. Great care is taken when burying the infant because it is said if it is not properly buried, the mother can be

barren. When these elderly women have finished burying the child, they return home without looking back. No gathering of mourners is done when an infant has died. No fire is made for the mourners. When I tried to probe the elderly women why? I was told, “this is a matter for old women and not for man to know.”

2.1.17 THE CONCEPT OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

The traditional BaVenda believe in a future time and a future life. They understand that after physical death of the body, the soul (muya) continues to live. The immortal soul resurrects and comes to live again in its community and family. This belief only concerns the good elderly people only. Infants, children, the unmarried, bad people are not considered in this belief in a future time and future life. The spirit that is brought in the home to live in the family and community is that of a good married man or woman. When the BaVenda people talk of (lufu) death they would prefer to express it in words and sometimes phrases. This is mainly because death to them is fierce, unwanted and disliked. So they use words or terms like: He/she has left us (Worisiya), He/she has disappeared (Hatsheho), He/she has passed on (Wofhira), he/she has rested (O a wela). The traditional BaVenda believe in what Banana in his book, *Come and Share* 1991:27 would say, concerning the Shona and Ndebele people that, “Life is an endless enterprise” Death is not death, it is a vehicle from the ontology of visible beings to the ontology of the invisible beings. This means that death is part of life, it is a gateway to eternity, it is a gateway to life in the after life. The question to reflect on is “where are the souls of the infants, children, the unmarried and bad elderly people in the traditional BaVenda understanding of continuous life after death?” The traditional BaVenda believe that

when they talk of life and when one dies and continues to live in the spirit, they are talking of good elderly married people. Only the good married people can continue to live as (mudzimu) not any other person. In the interviews, I discovered that “sickness and death,” among the traditional BaVenda people bring a lot of problems. This statement may be qualified by Mbiti who has done significant research in African world view in his book, African religion and philosophy 1969:149-150 when he says, “there are many often complicated ceremonies connected with death, burial funerals, the living dead, the world of the departed, the visit of the living dead to their human families and the survival of the soul” Why? We find that the traditional BaVenda do not readily accept death and most of the time they want to know why this death has happened, who caused it. They also want to know why their relatives, the beloved ones are sick and die? Why the sickness or death happened at that particular time and place? These unanswered questions have led them to engage a diviner, (nanga) to find out the cause (hutungudza). This shows that for the traditional BaVenda, death is never acceptable as inevitable. So in this way death is a disrupting suspicious phenomenon, which is unwanted, shocking and dreadful. According to the interviews conducted the BaVenda people believe that while the dead, did not have physical force, they have a spiritual power which is greater and mysterious when compared to a person when he/she is still alive. This shows that when someone dies, the belief is that he/she graduated and is gravitated into a new and higher life. His or her spirit is immortal (Muya wawe ausini) This belief that the flesh perishes but the spirit is immortal can be seen and understood by what the traditional BaVenda do when someone dies. In an interview, I was told that, these practices are

done for the well-being of the bereaved and also to prevent the spirit of the deceased from coming back to harm the community or family. It is also believed that after death the spirit of the deceased is unpredictable, so every kind of precautions are taken by performing some rituals to purify those concerned with the funeral and to prevent the spirit of the deceased from returning from the grave to trouble the members of the family. The source of powers of the spirit after the death of a person is not clearly defined. Family spirits affect the physical welfare of the community they have left behind, but they do not have control over more senior spirits. It is also believed that these family spirits can be defeated by witchcraft. The important work imputed to the spirit guardians is the caring for their immediate descendants. The traditional BaVenda believe that God (mudzimu) is spirit and their dead good people became a spirit (mudzimu) like God although they are not the same as God. These lesser spirits (midzimu) are believed to communicate and intercede and plead with God (mudzimu) on behalf of the family or community in question. Generally there is a conviction that death is not the end of life. The basic idea is that of continuity of life after death as expressed in words or concepts like, Worisiya, Hatsheho, O a wela, etc. The spirit of the deceased goes beyond the life of the physical body. This belief makes the relatives to keep the good spiritual relationship and communication between the living and the dead through libation and the observation of proper rights towards the departed. Before I conclude this chapter I would like to summarize the main elements of burials and where possible relate them to the concept of after life.

i. Preparation of the grave

The preparation of the grave is taken seriously. Traditionally the spirit of the dead, person should agree with the living relatives on the spot of the grave. This is done by engaging a diviner. The preparation of the grave links the deceased with his/her forefathers who died long ago in that they are laid to rest in the same place and face the same direction. This preparation has no bearing to the concept of life after death.

ii. Body washing and anointing with oil

This is a new phenomena which has emerged with the body viewing practices which was originally not linked with burial procedures. It has nothing to do with the concept of life after death.

iii. Actual burial

The body is laid to rest facing a direction of where their ancestors come from. In urban centers where graves face the same direction this traditional has been violated. The utensils placed in or on the grave is a belief that the deceased is on a journey and would use these things on his way or in future. When relatives bid fare well they say you look after your children, (U lavhelese vhana vhawu) This suggest that the traditional belief is that the deceased continues to live though in the spiritual realm. This element relates to the belief in the concept of life after death.

iv. Cleansing and purifying

Traditional rites are carried out during the cleansing process. This is done after the stage of grief. Since it is believed that death contaminates and gives bad luck, a diviner is invited to purify the family.

Conclusion

For the traditional BaVenda people, death is known as (lufu). It is believed that, it came as a result of the chameleon myth. They also believe that death is caused by witchcraft, socery and magic. Death may mean defeat, punishment, at times a release, and enemy. It can not be regarded as a friend. There are also different burials for different people of different age groups. There is also a belief in a future life (Vhutshilo hu daho) and future time (Tshifhinga tshidaho) with these traditional BaVenda practices and beliefs, let us consider the state of affairs concerning the BaVenda Christian understanding of eternal life in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 THE BAVENDA CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF ETERNAL LIFE

As shown in the chapter outline this chapter three concentrates on the three denominations, which are currently operating among the BaVenda people under study. The sample answers as regards this chapter come from interviews with older BaVenda Christians, the intellectual Christians, the illiterate and semi-illiterate the younger Christian group and the three denominations referred to as Lutherans, Apostolic Faith Mission and Zionists. These interviews of different groups will indicate their beliefs on the concept of death and eternal life. The general Christian teaching will be supported by Biblical references. The Christian teaching is meant to show the general Biblical reference of the Christian worldview.

3.1.2 Spirit of the dead

i. Older BaVenda Christians

The interviews show clearly that this category of Christian believe that those who have died are conscious and continue to exist. The existence is not bodily but spiritual. They believe that the spirit of the dead can bless or harm someone. Some of these spirits they believe have a bearing on the life of their immediate family and welfare. One old MoVenda Christian Eselina Ndou whom I interviewed said, "As Christians we acknowledge the existence of the spirit of the dead, and although we have accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ these spirits can not be totally ignored or abandoned, we turn to them when times of trial and other family problems occur.

ii. The intellectuals

This group also indicates a belief in the existence of spirits of the dead. They say the dead can see, but this group raise a lot of questions about the spirit of the dead. They cite Biblical verses and stories like, Deuteronomy 18:10-11 where God does not want the living to speak with the dead. Also in I Samuel 28:8-19 the story of King Saul when he wanted to talk with the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. (Although King Saul knew that he was doing something wrong by consulting the dead; it is also like that with Christians. When they come to desperate situations they consult the spirit of their dead or ancestors for example family deaths, and other family problems. The New Testament presents a view where Jesus Himself spoke to the dead. For example at the mountain of transfiguration Jesus is said to have spoken to Moses and Elijah, people who had vanished from the world long ago. (Matt 17:1-13) The intellectuals see some similarities between the traditional BaVenda belief in spirits and the biblical Christianity in the New Testament. The Biblical story about the rich man and Lazarus also gives Christians some insights as to what happens after death and the possible condition of the dead.

iii. The illiterate and semi-literate

These groups believe that people in most parts of the world have seen spirits at one time or another. These spirits they believe are mostly ancestors. They act and look exactly like the deceased's relatives. They talk like them. Sometimes these spirits are known as demons, Matshonani in Venda. They are seen and believed as more powerful and intelligent than people. These demons or spirits have the ability to imitate the appearances and voices of the dead relatives. These spirits appear with surprise and wonder to human eyes. Yet the illiterate and semi-literate group agree that it is difficult to say with certainty whether a particular appearance of a spirit is actually the spirit of the

person who has died or just a visionary appearance by a demon, but they confess that the spirit of the dead exist in one form or another.

iv. The young group

The more spiritual group influenced by the Pentecostal movements in urban areas. This group displays Pentecostal sentiments. They take the Bible literary. They believe in the existence of demons and these demons are evil. They should be exorcised. Demons they believe are there to increase the deception of non Christians and some weak Christians trust in ancestors and other spirits instead of trusting in Christ. Their argument is that, if Jesus Christ drove out demons so as Christians it is our duty to drive away all evil spirits in the name of Jesus Christ.

v. The Lutheran, Apostolic Faith Mission and Zionists

These churches teach that spirits do exist and have been seen by people in most parts of the country at one time or another. These churches do not underestimate the power of Satan. The Zionists do what ever they can in their means to exorcise these spirits. The Lutherans and Apostolic Faith Mission have not carried out such a ministry. The Lutheran teaching is that God warns people not contact the dead. Those Christians or people who contact the dead, open themselves to be deceived by demons and other spirits. These churches teach that demons are clever, powerful and intelligent. They serve their master Satan, whom Jesus Christ said was the father of lies (John 8:44) God also condemns the practice of trying to contact the dead (Deut 18:11-12) A Christian should avoid this practice at all times.

3.1.2 Spirit possession

i. Old BaVenda Christians, illiterate and semi-literate

Believe that spirit possession is a common occurrence in many parts of the country and world. They say the reality of spirit possession is evidenced by the display of unusual strength, endurance or tolerance of pain. The possessed may speak with a different voice. These Old BaVenda Christians believe that the Bible describes some cases of people who were possessed by spirits (Mark 1:23;9:25; Luke 9:42; Matt 8:16). These spirits are some of them evil and unclean. These spirits are a reality and cannot be ignored.

ii. The Intellectuals

The intellectuals say that spirit possession is a reality and comes from creation, but if one believes in the power of Jesus Christ, spirit possession can be a thing of the past. They believe that spirit possession can be simply a state of self induced behavior or a form of play acting. They say people may act in a certain way in order to escape a personal problem to draw attention to themselves, or for some other reasons. Spirit possession makes them the center of attention in a way which is accepted and believed by the people. Some of these intellectuals are quick to say the explanation given above may not always be true.

iii. The younger group

Believe and recognize the presence of the spirits among Christians and Non Christians but to them, nothing surpasses the power of Jesus (Mark 7:23; Matt 8:16). To the young Christian group spirit possession is nothing else other than the work of the evil one Satan

and the demons.

3.1.3 SPIRIT OF THE DEAD – THE CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW

In the interviews it was clear that Christians believe that those who have died are conscious and continue to exist. At the mountain of transfiguration Jesus is said to have spoken to Moses and Elijah people who had vanished from the world long ago. This can be cited in (Luke 9:28-36) A similar story cited was Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus. This story gives Christians insights into what happens after death and the possible condition of the dead.

The stories of the transfiguration and the rich man and Lazarus reveal to Christians the truth which is consistently taught in the Bible. In (Deut 18:10-11) God does not want the living to speak with the dead. The Christian belief is that at death there is a permanent separation between the spirits of those who believed, loved and served God and those who did not? There will be a separate of spirits at death. Other information cited the story of King Saul (I Sam 28:8-19) where the King wanted to talk with the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. King Saul at this point knew that he was doing something wrong by consulting the dead but he was doing this out of desperation. From this story, the Christian conviction is that God does not want living people to contact the dead.

Christians believe that contact with dead cannot be a source of help. So to Christians those who die go into the presence of Christ in heaven. I will look at this concept of heaven when I come to it. In this intermediate state before the resurrection of all the dead, believers are given a heavenly body form in which they can speak and relate to one another (2 Cor 5:1-4). As noticed earlier in Jesus' transfiguration, the heavenly forms of

Moses and Elijah were both seen and heard by Peter, James and John, as Jesus spoke to the prophets on the mountain.

3.1.4 SPIRIT POSSESSION – THE GENERAL CHRISTIAN VIEW

Christians believe that the Bible describes many cases of people who were possessed by spirits. Some of these spirits are described as evil or unclean and Jesus dealt with many such cases. The unclean spirits revealed their fear of Jesus ' power. From Jesus' dealings with these spirits, it shows that the spirit-possessed people had evil spirits within them. Christians recognize the reality of spirits possession whether evil, unclean or God's spirit. Christians generally believe that spirit possession is the work of demons, many Christians believe that as Jesus Christ drove out spirits, and demons possessed people, the church of God also be engaged in these activities. In the book of (Act 10:38), Jesus' ministry of healing and driving out spirits is summarized, "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

4.1.3 HEAVEN AND HELL

i. Older BaVenda Christians; illiterate and semi-illiterate

These believe that heaven and hell are real because the Bible teaches us so (Luke 23:43) Heaven is taught and sometimes described Biblically as "The Holy city, the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:2) by the apostle John. There are some people who were very sick and these people say they died and went to heaven and saw Heaven. They say at the gate of heaven they saw a person wearing a white robe. They have always referred this person to peter on the Apostles of Jesus. Whether these statements are true of false, on one can

tell. The stories go on to say, after some questions have been posed on the, they are told to go back to their people, then they wake up from the sleep or came back to life. So for many Christians, heaven is perceived as a place of joy for those who lived good lives on this earth and is seen as a more glorious reality. The question of where is heaven could not be properly answered by the older Bavenda Christians, semi-illiterate and illiterate. They perceive heaven as somewhere in the sky (tadulu, tadulu)

ii. Intellectuals

The intellectuals see the concept of heaven and hell as one of the difficult ones to conceptualize. Where is heaven they ask? Traditionally heaven and hell do not exist. These are biblical terms. If God is love asks, one intellectual, why does He send people to hell? These questions remain for debate since the intellectuals interviewed show many reservations about the concept of heaven and hell.

ii. The younger group

These believe without any reservations that heaven and hell are real. Their argument is, if Jesus Christ spoke about heaven and hell, it is a reality. The state of hell is described in terms of darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12;22:13;25:30) Jesus Christ describes it as a place of eternal fire, torment and punishment (Matt 13:41-42; Mark 9:43;Rev 14:10-11)

4.1.4 The Christian teaching

I have been dealing with different groups their understanding and interpretation of death and eternal life. Now I move to focus on the Christian teaching which will form the basis of the Christian world view.

i. Lutheran. Apostolic Faith Mission, Zionists

Christianity teaches that the spirit of the dead either go into the presence of the Lord or to a place of torment. A permanent separation of the dead and living is believed as is cited in the story told by Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) . It is taught and believed in Christianity that since the time of Jesus Christ's ascension, all Christians who die go into the presence of the Lord. (II Cor 5:8) It is believed that the Holy angels meet the Christians at the moment of death and accompany his/her spirit into the presence of Christ. The spirits of the Christians will accompany Christ when he returns to earth, at which time these Christians will receive their resurrection bodies (I Theses 4:14-17). The spirit of Lazarus after his death was carried by holy angels to the place of comfort. Many dying Christians have testified seeing angles at the moment of death. Perhaps God sends His angels to protect his people from the evil spirits who inhabit the world (Eph 2:2), but no such protection is mentioned concerning the rich man because he did not belong to the Lord. Christians also believe in the reality of hell. Almost all Christians preaching ends with an appeal that if you do not repent you will go to hell a place of torment. But this is the most painful and difficult truth in the Christian teaching. According to Jesus Christ hell is real. In Matt 18:8-9 Jesus Christ says, "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away, it is better for you to enter eternal life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it way; it is better for you to enter eternal life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell or fire." (NRSV). This warning by Jesus Christ is put in the strongest possible words. There is hell for those whose sins are not forgiven. If tearing out a person's eye

could save a person from hell; it would be worth doing it. Sin comes from within a person's heart and tearing out an eye can not take away a person's sin. Jesus Christ is here trying to show that there is no degree of power, or any opposition of importance or any wealth or any kind of pleasure of this that would make a person gain eternal life (Mk 8:36). It is only Jesus Christ through whom a person's sin can be forgiven and be saved from hell (Eph 2:8-9). In Matt 18:9 Jesus described hell (Gehena) as a place of unquenchable fire. In the book of Revelation this place is called the "Lake of fire" (Rev 20:14-15), a place where unforgiving sinners are cast after the final judgment (Rev 20:11-13). This lake of fire is described by Jesus as the "second death" (Rev 20:14). The physical death of the body and the departure of the soul to the place called Hades are the first death (Rev 20:13). Christians interpret the words of Christ concerning hell in different ways. Some take them literally and some take them figuratively. Whatever meaning Christ intended, the fact is that Jesus made it clear that hell is a terrifying reality. The awful reality is that there is eternal anguish and suffering after death for those whose sins are not forgiven (Matt 25:41). Hell is described in terms of darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12; Matt 22:13; 25:30) Jesus Christ describes hell in terms of eternal fire, torment and punishment (Matt 13:41-42; Rev 14:10-11) Jesus said that, "the suffering of hell was not prepared for mankind, but for Satan and those angels who rebelled with him" (Matt 25:41). Since the scene in the garden of Eden, human beings have participated in Satan's rebellion against God. Human beings will share in Satan's punishment unless they repent and receive forgiveness of their sins through trusting in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross (John 8:24). There might

be people who find it hard to believe that the loving God can ever send people to hell. Christians believe that Jesus Christ knows all things he has spoken more about the reality of hell. God is a holy and just judge. He will not tolerate sin. It is for this reason that all rebellious people and angels should be punished for their sins (Heb 2:2). Christianity teaches that it is for this reason that Jesus Christ came to this world and gave his life on the cross to pay the death penalty for mankind's sin, so that people could be saved from the anguish and suffering of hell, knowing that Jesus died and rose again is not enough, humanity should repent of their sins and personally believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour by receiving Him into their lives (John 1:12). It is only through this way that the Christians believe that people can find forgiveness and be saved from God's Judgement and sin (Mark 1:14-15). For those who will not repent of their sins and receive Christ and his forgiveness, there is the reality of hell. This reality has moved Christians to urgently spread the gospel of forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ.

3.1.7 COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEAD

i. The older BaVenda, semi-illiterate, illiterate

These groups share the same belief that in African societies including the BaVenda, a funeral is an important event. The traditional belief is that the living have a responsibility to the spirits of the dead. The answer responsibility concerns the traditional BaVenda and BaVenda Christians. This is observed when a MoVenda dies. In the Christian burial. The answer of mixing Christians and traditional practices and rituals they say, we have to observe our responsibility over the spirits of our dead relatives, the ancestors. They say this is their heritage which can not be easily thrown away. To them receiving messages from the spirits of the dead is very important. These

groups show a clear, belief that although they have accepted the Christian religion they still hold and practice their traditional funeral observances which are vital in their lives.

ii. The Intellectuals

The intellectuals understand that people who practice traditional religions and communicate with the dead by making offerings and sacrifices, do it to show their respect and keep the spirit of their dead relatives happy. They do this out of fear not out of love for their deceased relatives. If the living do not communicate with their dead, they may be inflicted with sickness, or other forms of punishment until they seek the guidance and advice of the ancestors.

iii. The young group

This group says, it is destined to move away from the old BaVenda traditional beliefs. It believes that once a person accepts Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior, it is of no use to consult mediums and spirits who whisper and mutter. A Christian they believe should consult the dead on behalf of the living (Is 8:19; Lev 20:6)

iv. THE GENERAL CHRISTIAN TEACHING

Lutherans, Apostolic Faith Mission, Zionists

Christianity teaches that there should be no relationship between the living and the dead. God in (Deuteronomy 18:10-13), forbids the living to speak with the dead. By law, trying to contact the dead is a sin. God sets His face against the person who, turns to mediums and spirits. God knows our needs for guidance and help. So he wants us to be guided by His word and principles (Ps 119:105). This is done through his word and the Holy spirit who lives in the Christian. Christian teaching states clearly that our help comes from the

Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. The Christian teaching and belief is that it is only God who watches over us, our life, our coming and going both now and forevermore (Ps 121:1-3). The living God not ancestors or other spirit can help humanity in need. The Christian teaching is that when a person has a daily relationship with God through Jesus Christ there is never a need to contact a dead relative. God promises to give us all the protection and the help we need. Christians believe that Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). As Christians God becomes their loving father. He is also Lord and king over all spirits in the universe, whether ancestors, angels or demons (Heb 12:9). Christians no longer need to fear any person or spirit because God is watching over them (Ps 121:7-8). The source of spiritual strength for Christians is to remember that evil spirits are terrified in the presence of Jesus Christ (Matt 8:29). The Psalmist says, "The Lord is my light and salvation-who shall I fear? The lord is the stronghold of my life-of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps 27:1).

3.1.8 DEATH-A DEFINITION-THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING

The Christian understanding of death is turned back to the Old Testament. The prevailing view in the Old Testament is that death is terminal. "One's concept of death is ultimately determined by one's concept of life; hence the Hebrew concept of the human person as an animated spirit made the end of animation appear to be the cessation of all vital activity" (Mckenzie (1965:183). He goes on to say, when a person died, the "Spirit" departed, the deceased continued to exist as a "self" (napes) in Sheol, but was incapable of any vital activity or passivity."

The dead take no part in divine worship as can be seen in (Ps 6:6; 30:10; 115:17, Isa

38:11; 18). It is against this background of the Old Testament belief that Jesus Christ in the New Testament said that, "God is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38). Death according to the Jews is accepted as the natural end of man (II Sam 14:14). The ideal death was attained in the fullness of old age with undiminished powers (Gen 25:8; Job 21:23ff; 29:18-20). One who dies such an ideal death dies easily and quickly, he goes down to Sheol in a moment (Job 21:13), and is not the victim either of a premature death or of a lingering wasting disease McKenzie (1965:184). Such a death "embitters" one (Job 21:15).

The sense of the story of paradise in Genesis Chapter 2:3 is that death is the consequence of the primeval fall and that humanity was not created by God to be mortal. Immortality in this story was attained by eating the fruit of the tree of life. But the belief that death came as the consequence of a primeval fall is not reflected elsewhere in the Old Testament. There are occasional expressions in the Old Testament of a strain of hope that death is not as terminated as it seems. In Psalm 16:9 the poet rejoices that Yahweh will not abandon him to Sheol or permit him to see the pit.

In Psalm 49:16 the poet is assured that God will redeem him from Sheol. Similar expressions are not uncommon in the Psalms and usually signify no more than preservation from sudden or premature death. There is evidence in the Old Testament that a dead man still has a kind of existence. King Saul went to the witch in Endor who conjured up the spirit of the prophet Samuel. The spirit appeared and prophesied Saul's defeat and death the following day (I Sam 28:11-19).

3.1.9 ORIGIN OF DEATH

The Christian origin of death is obscure. The Christian cannot answer this question definitely, but they can talk of the cause of death which was a punishment of sin as taken from Gen 2:17; 3:19. We also find that not all deaths are a result of punishment as specified in the two chapters of Genesis. Therefore it is difficult to identify the origin and biblical origin of death. However the relationship of God with death appeared in the myths as sort of enigma. The Genesis story seem to demonstrate less of a sense of problem or things getting out of control.

3.1.10 CAUSES OF DEATH

According to the order of creation, it seems God did not create humanity to die. Thus it is that humanity experience a natural horror of death. Death is part of God's threat as a punishment of sin (Gen 2:17; 3:19). Death according to Paul entered through sin (Rom 6:23). In the letter of James 1:15 he says, "They desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is full grown brings forth death." In Deuteronomy 31:14 and II King 20:1 The reality of death is more than just a verdict in a court of law. In Ps 90:3 God turns humanity back to dust. In Job 14:5 God determines the days, and months and appoints his bounds that one cannot pass. God terminates the lives of humanity in various means such as sickness, old age, accident, war etc (Luke 13:1-5) and at different ages children were killed in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16). Simeon died at an old age (Luke 2:25-29). Whatever may be the physical cause of death the Psalmist says, "all men die of their sins (Ps 90:7-9). Yet when we look more closely into the matter, we see that the curse reigns," over the whole human race and encompasses the whole existence of each individual. (Kantonen 1962 in his book, Life After Death would say, "Only God can

remove it, and He does it in Christ.” Looking into the matter we see that Adam did not die physically on the day that he sinned and disobeyed God. Physical death always brings with it pain, mourning, depression and grief. On the other hand, death is viewed as natural (Heb 9:27), and man is like a beast that perishes (Ps 49:12) So one can conclude that Christians see death as punishment of sin, and humanity lives and dies by the will of God.

3.1.11 THE MEANING OF DEATH

i. Death as a defeat

From the Christian point of view, death can never be viewed as defeat because Christians believe that we die to rise to eternal life. Christians believe that as Jesus Christ died and rose to life, those who believe in him will also die and rise to eternal life. Jesus Christ died and rose in his bodily form (John 20:19-29) Christians believe that when they die and rise, the bodily form will be different. It is from this Christian view that death is a passing event and not a lasting condition (Acts 2:2-36). Jesus Christ after his resurrection said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18-20). The Apostle Paul after Jesus Christ’s resurrection says, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (I Cor 15:54). So for Christians death is not defeat but rather, is a way to victory.

ii. DEATH AS PUNISHMENT

In Genesis 2:17 the Bible introduction the death of Adam as punishment for disobedience. Paul carries on this theme when where he says, “the wages of sin is death.” We used to take the other thought that the Scriptural passage which connect sin and death do not qualify death not all death is due to sin. For problems of interpretation

Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sin of humanity and not for his own sins (John 3:16). We need to understand that biblically mortality was the result of Adam's sin and also that the penalty includes both physical and spiritual aspects. I would also not take death through an accident as a result of sin and death after illness would not be attributed to sin and punishment. Death comes to human beings because God has allowed it to happen.

iii. **DEATH AS RELEASE**

Release means to set free. Death can come as a release when someone has been sick for a long time especially at an old age. The Christians would say after his/her death we have been released. Christians believe that Jesus Christ's resurrection released humanity from the power of sin.

iv. **DEATH AS ENEMY**

The New Testament sees death as a profoundly hostile force. According to Paul, death is the consequences of Adam's sin (Rom 5:12), and death is the least enemy to be destroyed. (I Cor 15:26). Paul believes that Jesus Christ's resurrection has released humanity from the power of sin and death and expresses total confidence that death no longer has dominion (Rom 6:9; I Cor 15)

v. **DEATH AS FRIEND**

Death can be regarded as a friend when it terminates life after our long struggle. It has its ups and downs on earth. Its ups and downs promises and failures. Yet on the other hand when Jesus Christ the son of God was facing death, he was deeply grieved (Matt 26:38), and He prayed "My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want

but you want” (Matt 26:39). This shows us that even Jesus Christ did not simply take death as a friend, but he viewed it as an enemy which should be destroyed.

3.1.12 CHRISTIAN BURIALS

With the Christian understanding of burial practices, it is important to note that all Christians are supposed to be buried in the same way regardless of their status. There is no difference in burial for married or unmarried people, boys or girls. When death takes place the local community is informed. This informing means that everyone within that community is expected to attend the funeral including relatives of the deceased regardless of their religious affiliation. The pastor usually takes charge of the burial procedures assisted by the local church elders and Christians. Christians burial procedures are clearly written down in the liturgy of burial. In connection with the burial arrangements, washing of the body, the preparations for food for the people, digging of the grave, the suitable time of burial, the close relatives of the deceased take charge. The church comes in mostly with advise and leading in the funeral burial in consultation with the deceased relatives. Traditionally the deceased’s family appoints one relative who will liaise with the pastor on the procedure of the funeral and the program. When the program has been understood between the pastor who stand for church and the deceased relatives the funeral can start. The pastor will say a prayer to God committing the body and soul of the deceased to God. The body of the deceased is then carried out of the house or hut being led by the pastor in a procession to the grave site. If the deceased is a man, Christian men have an obligation to carry the body to the gravesite and vice versa if one is a woman. The procession to the gravesite is led through Christian hymns. When

the body arrives at the gravesite, it is laid in the grave in a position approved by the relatives. In most cases the head of the deceased is laid to face the direction in which their forefathers came from. For example if their fathers came from South Africa and one is buried in Zimbabwe the grave would be dug in a position that allows the head to face southwards or any other direction like north west as will be determined by their place of origin. This is not Christianity but is an African belief of burial that has been incorporated into the Christian burial. When the body has been lowered in the grave, the pastor will pray, a prayer written in the liturgy of burial. If the pastor is burying a non Christian, a certain liturgy is followed. After the prayer the pastor takes a half handful of soil and throws on the body or coffin saying, "You came from dust, and to dust you will return, Jesus Christ will raise you on the last day. These words are found in Ecclesiastes 12:7. If the pastor is burying a child or an infant, he/she says the following words when he/she throws the soil on the body or coffin, "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). The pastor then prays a prayer which is in the liturgy for Christian burial. This is followed by some Bible readings which talk about death and the hereafter. These Bible readings are done by selected Christians and are characterized in three different dimension as follows and let me give example.

- i. Life and our accountability before God (Job 14:1-2; Ps 90:1-6; Mark 13:35-36).
- ii. Life in God and Jesus Christ (Job 1:21;Ps73:23-26;Luke 20:38;Rom 14:7-9).
- iii. Eternal life(John 11:25-26;Rom 8:11;I Cor 13:12;15:53-57; I Thes 4:13) The filling of the grave then follows starting with his/her close relatives. The rest of the men join in filling the grave using shovels, while women throw a pinch of soil. After the grave has been filled, flowers are laid on the grave. This is a new phenomenon which has been

adopted from western culture and is very popular among Christians and non Christian people. After the flowers the pastors call the congregation to repeat the Lord's prayer or the Apostle's Cred followed by the pastors benediction and the last hymn is sung at the grave. Then a vote of thanks and announcements are done usually by close relatives, after which people are asked to return to the home from where they will disperse after meals. For the Christians the question is "What is the state of death?" Christian believe that the material body will decay by being buried in the ground. Dust will return to dust (Gen 3:19; Accl 3:20). In this state, it will continue until the resurrection on the last day (Job 19:25-27) W A Koehler 1952:294 a prominent theologian in his book, A Summary of Christian Doctrine links up the Christian world view by saying, " The disembodied soul, and immaterial spiritual essence, does not dissolve and vanish into the air, nor is it absorbed into the essence of God, becoming a part of him, but being a created spirit, endowed with immortality by God, it continues to exist as a distinct personal entity." In Philippians 1:23, Paul desires to be with Christ. This separates existence of the soul continue until it is remitted with its body on the last day (I King 17:22; John 5:28-29; 11:24)

3.1.13 ETERNAL LIFE

i) Older BaVenda Christians, illiterate, semi-illiterate Christians

These groups believe that eternal life is in the next world. They talk of the next world as if it is similar to this world in which there are living now. The next world where we find eternal life seems to their imagination very close to the earth but invisible to the human eye. They believe the dead continue to live after death.

ii) The Intellectuals

The intellectuals say that eternal life becomes a difficult teaching to the BaVenda Christians. The intellectuals see its difficult in that this is a western concept that was brought by the missionaries and the gospel. The African faith and belief in God does not talk or teach of heaven, or hell, eternal fire, anguish, rewards or punishment after death. It talks of continuation of life after death.

iii) The younger group

This group believes very much that after death people all go to rest or sleep and wait for the great day of judgement (I Thess 4:13-18). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and life, he who believes in me though he dies, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26).

3.1.14 The Christian Teaching about eternal life

Lutheran Apostolic Faith Mission and Zionists on Eternal Life

Sherbok and Lewis (eds) (1995:ix) say, "Throughout history human beings have been Pre-occupied with personal survival after death" As a consequence, most of the world religions proclaim that life continues beyond the grave and in different ways there have depicted the Hereafter in a variety of forms. These various conceptions constitute answers to the most perplexing spiritual questions: will we remember our former lives in the hereafter? Will we have bodies? Can bodiless souls recognize each other? Will we continue to have personal identity? Will we be punished or rewarded or absorbed into the Godhead? My answer to the above questions will focus on the Christian understanding of eternal life. Most of the religions including Christianity proclaim that life continues beyond the grave, but in different ways. We saw at the beginning of this chapter that

Christians hold to the view that death is natural and an expected event. Christians view death as the beginning of a new and higher level of life. This belief has problems because when you ask Christians the following questions: what kind of bodies will Christians have in eternal life? Are Christians able to see each other in body form which they possessed before they died? Blue(1995:1) in his introduction reflections about life beyond death tries to answer this Christian problem of eternal life by saying that, "when he does not speak well about after -life, it does not mean that he does not believe in it, but because it is a contradiction". The other problem Blue (1995:1) highlights is that, "all one can ever know is life, whether this life, another sort of life or eternal life." This he says so because death is never experienced. Despite these difficulties, through faith Christians believe that there is eternal life. The Christians hold that eternal life is dependent on an invitation of repentance and the nature of the individual response to the invitation. Faith in the forgiveness of sins implies faith in the resurrection. But Christian ideas of eternal life vary dramatically. Recently an increasing minority of Christian theologians and philosophers have rejected the idea that eternal life should be seen as involving personal survival of death. Vardy (1995:13) says, "For this purpose eternal life is seen as a different quality of life "here and now". To live in the eternal is to live life in a different way, to turn one's back on self-interest and materialism and to live a life of self - giving love to others. By living this sort of life one may overcome death, not by surviving it but by refusing to let death trivialize the meaning of life. If someone walks with God by living the holy life, then whatever adversity may affect such an individual, nothing can really harm him or her as nothing

can take away the individual's inner orientation Vardy (1995:13). Eternal life, on this view, is not something to be sought after death but a different way of approaching life and living in this world. Christianity is built on the claim that Jesus rose from the dead and the apostle Paul recognized this when he said, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (I Cor 15:19). For the purpose of this chapter despite the problems encountered in trying to speak about eternal life, I am going to assume that Christianity still maintains traditionally that human beings survive death. Eternal life begins in this life and continues after death . Death is the wages of sin (Rom 6:23). Jesus Christ delivered humanity from sin, hence also from death (Heb 2:14-15). This implies that faith in Jesus Christ carries with it the hope of resurrection (John 11:25-26). Christians assume the content of the earliest Christian preaching is indicated by the apostle Paul at the beginning of the fifteenth chapter of his epistle to the church at Corinth. Paul introduces his statement about the resurrection of the dead by reminding the Corinthians of the message that he had once brought to them and that they had received in faith. Its declarations were not formulated by the apostle himself, instead he had taken them over from those who were already Christians before him and had conveyed to him the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul explicitly states that he had handed on to the Corinthians what he on his own part had received, the tradition that he cites goes back to the very beginning of Christianity. Its contents is as follows, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that he was buried, that Christ was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve" (I Cor 15:3-5). The belief among the Christians that Jesus Christ died and resurrected on the third day as also confessed in the Apostles and Nicene

Creeds. This is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. The fact that Jesus Christ appeared to a number of people after his death in bodily form (Luke 24:34-36; John 20:19-29; Matthew 28:16-20) points to an "objective resurrection in which his body no longer remained in the tomb.

Taylor 1963:165 says, "The Christian conviction is that eternal life is dependent on Christ". One has to profess his/her faith in Jesus Christ and accept him as his/her personal Lord and Saviour. This kind of conviction is what P. Vardy (1995:24) argues that, "Christianity has traditionally maintained that we will survive death as individuals and we will then be judged on the decisions we have made on our lives." By this he says, "to a large extent we will judge ourselves by the choices we make, whether we want to be in fellowship with God or whether by our pride and self interest, we have exiled ourselves from Him. "Much of the New Testament shows that life after death is either good or bad, either a paradise or a hell. Some people will enjoy a bright and happy future which others will regret that they wasted their opportunity of repentance. Jesus' parable of the Richman and Lazarus is a case in point to show how circumstances in the new world can be changed (Luke 16:19-31). It should be noted that suffering and poverty are no guarantee of the better life after death. Those who suffer for Christ's sake because they are as disciples have something to look forward to. "Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven"(Matthew 5:12). Some apostolic letters give the same description of eternal life. For example Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" Rom 8:18. The apostle Peter writes, "and after you have suffered a little which, the God of all grace who has

called you to his eternal glory in Christ will Himself restore, establish and strengthen you"(I Peter 5:10).On the occasion of the death of Lazarus, Jesus Christ assured Martha, Lazarus' sister that, "I am the resurrection and life he who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die " (John 11:25-26). Also in John 14:6 Jesus Christ says to his disciples, "I am the way, and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me. These scriptural writings show that in Christianity eternity comes through union with Jesus Christ.

On the other hand some Epistles like Hebrew 10:27 show the disaster which is in store for unbelievers in Jesus Christ. Paul says, "They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from His glorious might, when He comes on that Day to receive glory from all his people and honour from all who believe. You too will be among them, because you have believed the message that we told you." II Thess 1:9-10. In John 5:24 Jesus says, "He who hears my words and believe him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life! This saying is remarkable in two respects:

- i) Firstly, Jesus calls a life separated from God death.
- ii) Secondly he tells us that eternal life begins on earth.

The believer has eternal life and this is eternal life that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent (John 17:3). For Jesus to know God means to live in communion with God. When we know God we enter into a spiritual communion with him. Paul says, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" Gal 2:20. He who lives in Christ has communion with the eternal God and subsequently eternal life.

CONCLUSION

For the Christians, human beings are mortal and that death is an ever present phenomenon and companion of life. It came as a result of sin. Christian death cannot be regarded as defeat because we believe in the hope of eternal life. As regards burial, Christians are given the same burial regardless of status. In the next chapter we focus on how the BaVenda received their Christianity and make a comparative analysis of the BaVenda traditional concept of after life and the Christian concept of eternal life.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BAVENDA TRADITIONALISTS AND THE BAVENDA CHRISTIANS ON THE CONCEPT OF THE AFTER LIFE

In Chapter two I investigated the traditional BaVenda religion and how they view and deal with death, their burial practices and procedures, and finally looked at their concept of the hereafter.

Chapter three focused on the BaVenda Christian understanding of death in reference to the older BaVenda Christians, the intellectual Christians, the semi-illiterate and the illiterate, and the young Christians the general Christian teaching. I looked at the burial procedures and practices and the Christian teaching on death and the concept of the hereafter as taught by the Lutherans, the Apostolic faith Mission Church and the Zionists.

In this concluding chapter, I intend to establish through comparison the similarities and differences between the views of BaVenda traditionalists and the BaVenda Christians teaching on the concept of death and the hereafter. The comparison is done under the following sub-headings:

- i) Definition of death.
- ii) Origin of death
- iii) Causes of death
- iv) The meaning of death
- v) Burial practices
- vi) Life after death
- vii) Conclusion

4.1.1 Definition of death

The BaVenda traditionalists believe that death is one the most universal and mysterious experiences which stand between the world of human beings and the world of spirits, between the invisible and the visible. They view death as painful and as a result it instills fear with the living and they take every precaution to treat the dead well.

Christians can talk of temporal death which is not a total destruction or an annihilation of humanity, but the privation of physical life caused by the separation of the soul from the body. In both BaVenda traditionalists and BaVenda Christians, we can talk of death as the separation of the soul from the physical body.

From the above statements there is no clear definition of death among the BaVenda traditionalists and Christians. Both can only talk about it and how it affects human life without precisely giving a clear definition of the concept of death. Therefore there is a problem of definition of death in both religions.

4.1.2 Origin of death

The BaVenda traditionalists explain death by mythology. They associate the origin of death with the popular myth of the chameleon (vuluvulu) and the millepede (dongololo) which says, the creator (mudzimu) sent a millepede (dongololo) to go and tell the people of the world that they would never die and on the way to deliver the message the millepede felt hungry and started to eat the fruit of the (tutulwa) tree. (mudzimu) the creator seeing the delay of the millepede, sent the chameleon to tell the people of the world that (mudzimu) the creator said, you will not die but the chameleon on arrival told the people that he was the messenger of death before the millepede arrived.

The Christian origin of death talks of death as a punishment of the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:17) This leads us to two different views about the origin of death. The BaVenda traditionalists trying to explain death mythologically and Christians seeing the origin of death as the consequences of sin and punishment.

4.1.3 Causes of death

To the BaVenda traditionalists, most deaths are caused by witchcraft (vhuloi) and evil magic (Mushonga o vhifhaho). Christians believe in predestination. A person's life revolves around God's wishes. They believe that there is time for everything ,time to be born,and time to die. Therefore no one can counter God's wishes. When a time for death comes one dies. Another view is that death entered into the world by sin (Rom 6:23).Although there are different causes of deaths among the BaVenda traditionalists and Christians there is an underlying factor that death does not simply happen, although Christians would argue from the death of Jesus. Jesus Christ's point of view is that not all deaths are caused, but in both religions we can deduce that there is a cure of death either by witchcraft (vhuloi) among the BaVenda traditionalists and sin among the Christians.

4.1.4 THE MEANING OF DEATH

i) Death as defeat

The BaVenda traditionalists can speak of death as defeat (hukundwa) after all possible channels of trying to bring back the life of a sick person has been exhausted. Then at death the relatives can say (rokundwa) expressing their failure to make one live. At this point they can say we have tried to fight the disease but we have failed. From the

Christian point of view though death can be painful and sorrowful, faith in Jesus Christ makes them not to see death as defeat. From a Christian point of view, death is viewed as sleeping. They believe that death was defeated on the cross by Christ, hence a dead Christian awaits for the coming of Christ. This then shows us that the BaVenda traditionalists hold that death can be seen as defeat while Christians hold to the faith that they die in order to rise to eternal life.

ii) Death as punishment

According to the BaVenda traditional religion death can be seen as punishment (lufu lori vhofo) when it takes the life of a young person. An example can be that the death of a recently married young couple or person. Christians believe that the death of Adam was introduced as a punishment. Paul says the wages of sin is death. But there is a sense in which both religions do not view death as punishment, for example the death of an old woman or old man is accepted by both the BaVenda traditionalists and Christians.

Therefore death as punishment among the BaVenda traditionalist needs to be qualified.

There is need to explain what is meant by death as punishment. For the Christians not all death can be viewed as punishment of sins (John 3:16). The Christian teaching talks of talk of physical and spiritual punishment. The BaVenda traditionalists view death as punishment entailing the separation of physical body and soul.

iii) Death as release

Death as release (ufu lori vhofo) among the BaVenda traditionalists can be talked of after the death of an aged person who has been ill and unconscious for a long time. Such death is a release to the family members and the community, (ro vhofo). Christians believe that humanity is under the bondage of sin, so release from this bondage can only

come through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal saviour. The death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection is a release of humanity from the power of sin. So the BaVenda traditionalists see death as release in the separation of body and soul, while Christians talk of release as the separation of body and soul and also release from the bondage of sin.

iv) Death as opportunity

The BaVenda traditionalists can only view death as an opportunity (hu fhiwa tshifhinga) after the death of an unwanted person within the community for example a witch (muloi) or a thief (mbava). Christians do not talk of the death of a thief as an opportunity.

They would like to see the thief repent, and change his/her behaviour.

But for Christians death could be an opportunity in the sense that the deceased goes to rest or to enters into the Kingdom of God.

v) Death as enemy

The BaVenda traditionalists view death as an enemy (lufu ndi swina la muthu) because it takes the lives of their relatives, sons, brothers, daughters, sisters and friends. Christians also see death as a hostile force, an enemy that should be destroyed. So both religions understand death as an enemy. The only difference is that Christians believe that through the resurrection of Jesus Christ humanity no longer exists under the dominion of death.

vi) Death as friend

From the BaVenda traditionalists point of view and belief, death cannot be treated as a friend (khonani). They do everything possible to avoid it. Christians view death as a friend that finally terminates life, But at the moment of facing it, it brings with it friend

and people struggle with it and do not simply take it as a friend, although the Bible teaches Christians how to face death as a friend that will take them to eternity. Therefore the BaVenda traditionalist do not understand death as a friend while Christian teaching emphasizes that death is a necessary friend to take our soul to heaven.

4.1.5 Burial Practices

Not everyone receives the same burial rituals according to the BaVenda traditionalists. They have different rituals practices for married people, male or female, chief, boys and girls, infants where as Christianity does not make such distinctions. The biblical liturgical burial practices and procedures are the same for Christians.

The study in chapter two concerning the BaVenda traditionalists show that their way of burying their dead and their burial rituals and practices have been integrated into the Christian way of burial. This has been necessitated by the fact that the BaVenda as an ethnic group had a feeling that, the Christian burial did not cater for some of its hereditary burial practices and procedures which were more cultural than Christian.

Some of these practices are:

- i) The ritual body washing and smearing the body with medicated oil by close relatives.
- ii) (Hu tonaka) the smearing of the white stuff on the eyes of those who will wash the body (corpse) and those who will enter the deceased house sometimes this includes
- iii) The pastor who will be officiating at the funeral.
- iv) The use of snuff to address the deceased before carrying the body from the hut/house to the gravesite.
- v) The passing of the elder child under the body before it is lowered into the grave, putting of some of the deceased's clothes into the grave.

vi) Putting of the deceased's cup, dish, plate, stool, stamper, bracelets, anklets on or in the grave.

vii) Use of water mixed with herbs for washing after burial.

4.1.3 Life after death

The BaVenda traditionalist and Christians both believe in a future time and future life.

They both understand that after physical death of the body, the soul continues to live. The difference between them is that while, the BaVenda traditionalist believe that the immortal soul (muya) of some deceased people become a (muzimu) and come back to live in the community and family, Christians believe that the soul goes back to the owner who is God the creator (Eccl 12:7 Acts 5:9) Whilst the BaVenda Christians believe that a follower of Christ and a righteous person goes to heaven after death, to the BaVenda traditionalists it is not automatic to be a (mudzimu). A person must possess certain privileges to be a (mudzimu). A person may be an adult in the family or be chosen by the ancestors themselves to qualify to be a (mudzimu).

Christians consider every truly repentant soul in the final judgement to attain eternal life. The traditional BaVenda believe that if a person dies a violent death, or dies angry, their soul may not rest the soul may rise to avenge its death.

The Christians believe in the final judgement while the BaVenda traditionalists do not believe in judgement, hell and eternal life. The Christians believe that the souls of the departed do not return to earth to communicate with the living. The BaVenda traditionalists believe that some souls of the departed return to communicate with the living. Both the BaVenda traditionalists and BaVenda Christians believe that the eternal

destiny of humanity is decided the moment one dies. Both BaVenda traditionalists and Christians believe in the anticipated re-union. The difference is that the BaVenda traditionalists believe in a union and communication with their dead. The Christians believe in the re-union with Jesus Christ (Acts 1:3;10-11; I Thess 4:13) While in Christianity the dead do not take part in divine worship (Ps 6:6; 30:10; Is 38:11-18) The BaVenda traditionalists invoke their ancestors to participate in their ritual ceremonies. The BaVenda traditionalists believe that their dead become a (mudzimu) like God although not the same as God. But generally both Christians and the BaVenda traditionalists are convinced that death is not the end of life. The basic idea in both groups is that of continuity of life after death , hence the blending of the two religions when it comes to matters of dealing with death and burial.

CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of the concept of death and hereafter among the BaVenda traditionalists and the BaVenda Christians shows that there are points of convergence and divergence. The points of convergence found in this research are:

- i) Both BaVenda traditionalists and BaVenda Christian believe in a future time and future life.
- ii) They both believe that after physical death of the body the soul continues to live.
- iii) Both BaVenda traditionalists and the BaVenda Christians believe that the eternal destiny of humanity is decided the moment one dies.
- iv) Both BaVenda traditionalists and the BaVenda Christian believe in the anticipated re-union.
- v) Both BaVenda traditionalists and BaVenda Christian are convinced that death is not

the end of human life.

vi) They both believe in the continuity of life after death. It is on the basis of these that Christians concept of death is syncretistic.

Let me elucidate my point. Syncretism is the attempt to combine teaching and doctrines from different and apparently divergent traditions for example, from Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

Syncretism is characterized by a mixture of different ideas and cultural elements. The major cause of syncretism or syncretistic tendencies is that the western Christian theology was not related to the BaVenda context.

The BaVenda find that western issues in theology did not answer their inmost questions or solve some of the spiritual problems related to the traditional BaVenda culture.

Western method of thinking and learning did not suit the traditional BaVenda ways of life, thinking and learning, hence this resulted in a mixture of some elements of African Traditional Religion to the teachings of the Bible. To avoid syncretism, contextualization is needed among the BaVenda Christians, since lack of contextualization will result in many BaVenda Christians being Christians by day and Christian traditionalists by night.

The gospel has become part of their culture, but the ancestors cannot be washed away from their communities and they see no conflict in the way they relate to them and to the gospel. Traditional methods of healing and divination do not pose a challenge to a person who believes in both the general and the special revelation of God. The traditional Christian mission approach to the BaVenda traditional culture evidently left the gospel above African culture. The phenomenon described here shows that many

individual BaVenda Christians have taken the initiative to find a place for the gospel in their culture. Many could not conceive a life without the “living dead” members of their family. What difference is there between praying to the ancestors and to the saints? The BaVenda people knew very well in their traditional religious beliefs that the “living dead” derive their power from God (mudzimu) and as intermediaries do not function independently of God. When the church condemned their traditional rites of passage and rituals related to the departed members of the family, many BaVenda Christians felt a vacuum which they could not ignore if their spiritual needs were to be fully satisfied. By rejecting the possibility of relations with the “living dead” Christian preaching among the BaVenda failed to recognize that its message was not complete as far as its listeners were concerned, for it excluded part of the family. While many BaVenda Christians today manifest in ceremonies relating to them openly, many others do so privately. They live a Christian life during the day and live the real African life during the night, resulting in what Tutu (1978:366) says, “Until fairly recently, the African Christian has suffered from a form of schizophrenia. With part of himself he has been compelled to pay lip service to Christianity as understood, expressed and preached by the white man. But with an ever greater part of himself, a part he has often been ashamed to acknowledge openly and which he has struggled to repress, he has felt that his Africanness was being violated. The white men’s largely celebrated religion hardly touched the depths of his African soul: he was being redeemed from sins he did not believe he had committed, he was being given answers and often splendid answers, to questions he had not asked”. It is common among BaVenda Christians to participate in times of prolonged illness or other misfortune in the family in the traditional rituals relating to the departed elders.

What this shows is that the BaVenda culture today though very influenced by the western style of living have retained many of their own characteristics. The traditional BaVenda worldview continues to be very much alive in their lives. The challenge for the African church is to be able to affirm both the uniqueness of Christ and his supremacy within African cultures. This means taking the BaVenda experience and cultures seriously and allowing them to participate in the transforming power of the gospel so that in them, and through them, the love of Christ might be made manifest. I want to allude to Maimela (1981:124-27) when he responds to WA Saayman's Religious Pluralism in South Africa in Christianity among Religions when he says, "the reality of syncretistic tendencies proclaim loudly that African religious views have not been fully discarded by Africans and that, to understand the emergent African Christianity resulting from cross-fertilization between the Christian and the African ethos, the church needs to acknowledge the viability of African religions and to enter into dialogue with them." Maimela (1981:125) It is the BaVenda Christians who are seen to be taking beliefs and practices of traditional BaVenda into the Christians beliefs and practices concerning death and the hereafter. While the BaVenda traditional religion invoke their ancestors to participate in their ritual ceremonies, the BaVenda Christian believe that the dead do not take part in divine worship. The above make us wonder over the extent to which a synthesis of BaVenda traditional concepts of death and the hereafter and BaVenda Christian concept of death and hereafter are possible. We leave this issue for further investigation.

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