

CONTEMPORARY ASANTE FUNERAL RITES HAVE EVOLVED FROM TRADITIONAL SPIRITUAL TO MODERN SECULARISM. THIS IS EASILY OBSERVED THROUGH THE ESCALATING COST OF FUNERAL RITES IN ASANTE. THE ESCALATING COST OF FUNERAL RITES HAS DEMINISHED THE SPIRITUAL MEANING AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FUNERAL RITUALS AS WELL AS REFLECTING THE REGIO-CLINICAL IMPLICATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MINISTRY.

PRESENTED BY:

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE IN PASTORAL COUNSELING

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Doctor of Ministry Project Approval Request (Please type or recreate on computer.)

To: The Members of the Doctor of Ministry Faculty

I hereby request approval of my proposed Doctor of Ministry Project:

Contemporary Asante Funeral Rites have evolved from traditional spiritual to modern secularism. This is easily observed through the escalating cost of funeral rites in Asante. The escalating cost of funeral rites has diminished the spiritual meaning and effectiveness of the funeral rituals as well as reflecting the relegio-clinical implications within the context of ministry.

The purpose of the Project is:

1. To bring about awareness of the purpose of funeral rites which should bring comfort to the family while still emphasizing the joy that the love one is uniting with God.
2. To change the attitude of the Asantes regarding the cost of funeral rites.
3. To educate the Families to realize the contemporary funeral rites.

My methods and approaches for the project will be:

Through personal encounter, interviews, and questionnaire. Based on this information acquired through my interactions (as described above), I will create educational materials to be presented in a full day workshop to various groups within the communities and the parishes within the Diocese of Konongo-Mampong.

I will have a pilot project Yes ☒ No ☐

REV.FR JOHN ADUSEH POKU

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DEDICATION

DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS

MR. CHRISTOPHER KWAKU OBENG

&

MRS. SELINA OBENG TAWIAH

AND TO

MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to thank the Almighty God for his assistance and protection. To God is glory for the great things He has done on my lives. Bringing this work to a successful end is not by my power but by the power of Almighty God.

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“REMEMBER ME”

*To the living, I am gone,
To the sorrowful, I will never return;
To the angry, I was cheated.
But to the happy, I am at peace.
To the faithful, I have never left.
Talk to me, and I will hear,
Your prayers, they comfort me,
Your laughter makes me laugh,
But don't weep for me as I have my reward
I am with the Father and will never let me perish,
The Lord comforts me, and longs to comfort you.
So be happy my family and don't despair,
I am in good hands, waiting for the day when
the Lord calls you to come home.
Do not let your life be like a shooting star,
Which lights up the sky for only a brief moment.
Let your life be like the sun.*

Kwame Dei Ampofo Ph.D.

PREFACE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF GHANA

“God Bless Our Homeland Ghana and make our Nation Great and Strong.”

(National Anthem)

To discuss the future of a nation and its people you must be knowledgeable about its history. It will not only aid in the recognition of the importance of the topic discussed, but it will put a visual in an individual's mind so that the information given can be clearly understood. My homeland is Ghana. Ghana's history once held traditions that were taken very seriously and held close to the heart, but now these certain traditions have faded and have been compromised by an economic disorder, specifically, money.

To understand my country, first you must visualize it. Ghana is located on the northwestern part of Africa. It borders three other countries including Cote D'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Togo. Most importantly, its southern side borders a body of water, the Gulf of Guinea.

The history of Ghana before the last quarter of the 15th century is derived primarily from the oral tradition that refers to migrations from the ancient kingdom of the western Sahel, which is the area of present day Mauritania and Mali. Much of its early history is derived from the myths told by various ethnic groups in the outlying areas.

The first contact with Europeans was made by the Fante nation of the Gold Coast in 1470 when a party of Portuguese landed and met with the King of Elmina. In

1482 the Portuguese built Elmina Castle, known in Portuguese as Castelo da Mina, as a permanent trading base. Thomas Windham made the first recorded English trading voyage to the

Coast in 1553. During the next three centuries the English, Portuguese, Swedes, Danes Dutch and Germans controlled various parts of the coastal areas.

The most southern part of what is today Ghana was divided among a number of states, including the Fante, the Ga, and the Ewes. To the north was the Empire of Asante that formed in 1670. This empire was the dominant power in the region. It is said that at its peak, the Empire of Asante could field 400,000 troops. The far north of Ghana was an outpost to empires of the cavalry-based Gur and Mande speaking peoples, with the Songhay Empire and the then Fulani Empire controlling the area. (www.ghana50.gov.gh/history, February 16, 2008).

In 1806 the Asante – Fante War broke out as the Fante were abandoning the allegiance to the Asante in favor of the British. This sparked a long series of wars as the Asante tried to minimize European power in the region. From 1826 to 1900, the British fought a series of campaigns against the Asante. In 1902, the British succeeded in establishing firm control over the Asante region and making the northern territories a protectorate. (History of Ghana pp 65-67).

On March 6, 1957, the British colony of Gold Coast became an independent country, the first sub-Saharan African country to shed the chains of European colonialism, and assumed the name Ghana. Until 1957, only British Gold Coast colony extended less than one hundred miles inland up to the Pra River, Asante. Today this includes Asante, Brong Ahafo and parts of the Eastern Region.

The name Ghana was assumed at independence for three reasons. First, some of the founding fathers of Ghana argued that the Akan of the Gold Coast, who constitute 45% the population, were descendants of the ancient Ghana Empire that flourished from the 19th to 13th centuries BCE between Sahara and head waters of the Senegal and Niger Rivers. Second, the spectacular example of ancient Ghana in building a great African empire that endured for three centuries should be emulated by the new emergent nation.

Finally, the name was not ethnically specific to any of the countries' numerous ethnic groups, therefore it will engender the spirit of national coercion and consciousness.

Before independence the capital was called Cape Coast. The British moved the capital of Ghana from Cape Coast to Accra in 1875, where the capital is still located. Ghana adopted the motto of "One People, One Nation, and One Destiny." Following a referendum on July 1, 1960, a new constitution was adopted which changed Ghana from a parliamentary system with a prime minister to a Republican form of government headed by a powerful president named Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.

Historically, Ghana was really only part of the rest of the continent. It had its own way of life and not until the rest of the world bombarded upon it, did it then receive the attention that it has today. It is a country where many people have grown up and have become legends with their own creative and talented minds. Music became a huge influence as well as the arts and in this particular situation, life. To be even more precise, the part of life here expressed is death.

THE PEOPLE OF GHANA

To understand who Ghanaians are, first one must know the background of Ghana and the people of the Asante for whom this project is about. Ghana is a huge country as large as many states in United States of America. My country has a total area of 238,537 sq. km =92,100 sq. miles (Oregon is slightly larger) and the total population was estimated to be about 25,467,747 as of July 2005 (Citation).

Ghana has a variable terrain; coasts and mountains, forest and grasslands, lush agriculture areas and near desert. The major commercial products for exports are cocoa, gold, timber, bauxite, manganese, ore, diamond, aluminum and tuna. The Asante settled in the central part of the present-day Ghana about three hundred kilometers from the coast. The territory is densely forested, mostly fertile and to some extent mountainous. There are two seasons, the rainy season (April to November) and the dry season (December to March). The land has several streams; the dry season however is extremely desiccated. It is hot year- round.

The capital city is Accra (pronounced Ah-Krah) and its metropolitan area population is estimated to be about five million. The climate is hot and humid in the southwest; warm and less humid in the north. Ghana has a wet season in May-September and dry season October-April. While the official language is English, the other principal languages are Akan (Twi), Moshi-Dagomba, Ewe and Ga.

The principal ethnic groups in Ghana are comprised of Akan who constitute about 45% of the total population. The Akan include many tribes, including Asante, Fante, Ahanta, Guan, Bono, Akyem, Akwamu, Kwahu, Akwuapim, Sefwi and Nzema. Other smaller ethnic groups include the Moshi-Dagomba (16%) made up of

Nanumba, Dagbani, Mamprusi and other. The Ewe (13%) made up of Anlo, Some and the Ewedome, and the Ga (9%) made up of shai, Adamgbe, Ada and the Krobo. Europeans and others make up (0.2%).

An important part to the development of Asante and what it has within its traditions today relates much with the migration of various tribes. Today, Asantes number close to 4.7 million people (roughly 20% of the Ghanaian population, speaking Asante, also referred to as Twi, a member of the Niger-Congo language group). The political power has fluctuated since Ghana's independence but they remain largely influential.

The majority of the Asante reside in the Asante region capital (Kumasi), one of the administrative regions of the country. Kumasi, the capital of the current Asante region, has also been the historic capital of the Asante Kingdom. Currently, the Asante region of Ghana has a population of 4,612, 950, making it Ghana's most populous administrative district. (Ashanti.com.au-Ashanti)

THE RELIGIONS OF GHANA

The composition of religions of the Ghanaians is 43% Christians, 38% Indigenous belief, 16% Muslim and 3% other. These are rough estimates at best. The Christians believe in a Supreme god who takes on various names depending upon the particular region of worship. Akan mythology claims that at one time the god freely interacted with man, but that after being continually struck by the pestle of an old woman pounding fufu, he moved far up into the sky. There are no priests that serve him directly, and people believe that they may make direct contact with him.

There are also numerous gods (*abosom*) who receive their power from the Supreme god and are most often connected to the natural world. These include ocean and riverine spirits and various local deities. Priests serve individual spirits and act as intermediaries between the gods and mankind. Nearly everyone participates in daily prayer, which includes the pouring of libations as an offering to both the ancestors who are buried in the land and to the spirits who are everywhere.

Religion commands a central place in the organization of social, political, and cultural life, and regulates the relationship between people and their physical and spiritual environment. Many different forms of religion exist in Asante and tolerance of religious differences is very high. People preach on the public buses and many of the passengers join in to what quickly becomes a call-and-response prayer session.

There is a universal God (*Onyame*) but this does not exclude gods associated with a particular religion or spirits (*obosum*) by whom a priest may be possessed. (This lack of exclusiveness makes it possible, say, for a traditional priest to be a Roman Catholic). There is no doubt of the existence of the Kingdom of the Dead (*Asamanado*) so custom requires that greater attention be paid to the proper conduct of burials and funeral celebrations. Among the Asante, death is the great certainty. Traditional religion does not require regular attendance at particular buildings. Religion is not something that is remembered for one hour a week, it must always be remembered. The God and the spirits of the ancestors are always present.

GHANA TODAY

Ghana today is under constitutional rule and multi-party politics. A new constitution was approved in a referendum in April 1992. The 1992 constitution introduced an executive presidential system which mandates that a president could serve no more than two four year terms in office and includes a 200-member unicameral legislature (since increased to 230 in 2004). Ghana's elections from 1992 to 2004 were widely considered free and fair and every president stepped down and the current government took over without resistance.

On human rights, the situation has been transformed for the better since the return to constitutional rule. Currently, Ghana's record is good. There is an independent judiciary and a free and active press freedom.

INTRODUCTION

This study looks at funeral rituals as one of the major activities that occupy the life of the Asante people of Ghana. The funeral rites are meant to help the local community to cope in healthy, intelligent, faith-filled ways while dealing with the shock of a loved one's death. Much has been discussed on the need for educating our community on cutting down costs, but little has been talked about concerning how the Asante embrace death within the theological and psychological context.

This study will examine the escalating cost of Asante funeral rites, its effectiveness and its spiritual meaning, and the religio-clinical implications in the context of ministry. It will also consider the current commercialization, expense and expansion of Asante funeral rites in the Akan culture in Ghana. Funeral rites have always become the main public social events in Asante region, but the growing cost of funerals significantly alter the way death is celebrated.

This project intends to provide an understanding of the ritual context for the creation of remembrance and identities, the elaboration of differences, the competition for status and power, and negotiation of cultural and social bonds and values within the framing narratives of respect for the dead and guiding the spirit to the next world. The celebration of Christian funeral rites brings hope and consolation to the living and offers worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life, and the hope of the just. This maximizes the spiritual meaning of the death of a loved one and minimizes the secularization accompanied by escalating cost.

Money is a huge part of the funeral ceremony and will be discussed throughout the paper. This project describes how, in shaping funeral rites, many people deal with money to negotiate values of life and their relationship between the living and the dead as well as religious and clinical principles that have helped to shape the Asante funeral rites. One of the many reasons for people spending so much money on the funeral for an individual is because “you do for others what you would want them to do for you”. Contrary to popular belief, the commercialization of the funeral rites has effects and consequences on local culture and society.

The purpose of this project is twofold: one, to explore the problem of secularism and its influence of the Asante funeral rites and second, to reform the Asante funeral rites by doing away with its unnecessary expenses and to put the funeral rites into its proper spiritual context. Many Asante feel that the money and social significance of the funeral tradition do not contravene, but rather reinforce each other. The funeral rites are not wiped away by expensive nature, nor are they a kind of last defense against it.

Indeed, it is exactly through money and commodification that funeral rites are expanding, social ties forged, and cultural performances stimulated in new ways. In Asante’s funeral rites, people appropriate practices of consumption and commercial enterprise as well as indigenous traditions and exchange patterns in a process of ‘cultural diffusion.’ Thus the Asante have developed new, local styles of celebrating the funeral in which money has come to play a central role as a social glue and an expression of lifestyles, cultural values and ideals.

Science and technology have played a significant role in the transformation of the Asante funeral rites traditions that have been changed by modern science with the introduction of embalmment and the necessity of using morgues, social requirements to dress the body, and the introduction of costly food and drinks at the wake. This is the main problem that I want to address in this project. Thank God that many people among the Asante and outside the Asante have expressed their concerns with the funeral cost and have agreed that there is every good reason to guide against the expensive funeral rites.

I have cried out to every brave man and woman of authority who can stop the commercialization and the expensive nature of today's funeral rites that has become a business for the rich in our society. In my community work and in the workshops I am appealing to the community heads to share their experience and educate their own people to put a stop to these extravagant and expensive funeral rites. Those community leaders are heroes and champions who can bring change to the funeral rites celebrations into the Asante region and its people.

This project will provide an honest, useful way to deal with painful and cost sharing funeral rites at a time when such money is needed to take care of the poor and the needy children in the community who want to further their education but are unable to due to lack of financial support from their families. This problem of escalating costs of Asante funeral rites has diminished its effectiveness and its spiritual meaning. With the growing concern over the increased of cost of funeral rites in Asante, many families are finding it difficult to pay for their children's school

fees. This has resulted in many problems such as school dropouts, unwanted pregnancy or teenage pregnancy and many more.

This problem has touched my heart for a very long time and challenged me to think about what I can do as a member of my community to assist them. It was these problems that have led me to write about this topic. As an Asante and a priest I will be accepted by my people to promote the transformation of these funeral rites by bringing in religio-clinical implications that define the concepts of funeral rites within the context of my ministry.

Based on my suggestions and the help of the Catholic Diocese of Konongo—Mampong in conjunction with the Ghana Bishops Conference, I have devised a workshop to educate my people with the goal of limiting the escalating cost of funeral rites and bringing spiritual meaning into it. This workshop is an opportunity for the participants to take a frontline defense against the escalating cost of funerals in the communities and Asante as a whole.

My project presented in this paper consists of a preface, introduction and five chapters. In the preface I will introduce the history of Ghana, the people of Ghana and Asante, and Ghana today. The introduction presents the project with its problem of the commercialization of Asante funeral rites.

The first chapter is devoted to the meaning of death, the historical background of the Asante spirituality, how the Asante family confronts death, a description of Asante funeral rituals, a critique of the Asante funeral rituals, problematic areas within the rituals that need to be changed and finally, the new funeral rites proposal.

Chapter two concentrates on the religious and clinical principles of the funeral rites as expressed in the current literature. This includes religious principles that define the concept of funeral rites, the ethical issues in working with the bereaved families, theological effects on the family, Church teachings on the funeral, clinical principles and a review of clinical literature.

The third chapter addresses the materials and methodology used to assess the outcome. This includes a questionnaire, interviews, educational workshops and community visitations. In this chapter, I shall depend largely on the available questionnaire, interviews and the participants of the workshop to express the problems associated with the escalating cost of the funeral rites in Asante in this project.

The fourth chapter is devoted to an analysis of the results of the questionnaire, interviews and discussions from the workshops, description of outcomes assessed and developments not anticipated.

In the fifth chapter, I will assess the whole project, evaluation and results of the project, implication of results, contributions to religious principles, contributions to clinical principles, and contributions to ministry in a wider context and finally, implications for future ministry.

In the course of my ministry, I realized that the Asante, both as parishioners and in the larger communities under my jurisdiction, are finding funeral rites in Asante very expensive. This project is therefore an attempt to propose a way and means to this conflicting situation, which diminishes the spiritual meanings of death, by setting out to formulate a new funeral rites proposal. To be successful, this project must take into

consideration some important cultural elements among the Asante people of Ghana.

The starting point of this project must be the Asante people.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MEANING OF DEATH AND ASANTE FUNERAL RITUALS

“Weep and you weep alone! - What a lie that is! Weep and you will find a million crocodiles to weep with you. The world is forever weeping. The world is drenched in tears.” Henry Miller, *Sexus*

1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ASANTE KINGDOM

The Asante went from being a tributary state to a confederation of states and ultimately a centralized hierarchical kingdom. Beginning as a tributary state of Denkyira, the foremost Akan power during the 16th century, the Asante Kingdom or the Asante grew out of confederation of Akan-speaking states led by Otumfo Osei Tutu I Asantehene (King). Otumfo Osei Tutu I, military leader and head of the Oyoko clan, founded the Asante Kingdom in the 1670s. (Shillington, 1994 (1989), p.194).

Otumfo Osei Tutu obtained the support of other clan chiefs and using Kumasi as the central base, subdued surrounding Akan states. He challenged and eventually defeated Denkyira in 1701. Realizing the weakness of a loose confederation of Akan States, Otumfo Osei Tutu strengthened centralization of the surrounding Akan groups and expanded the powers of the judiciary system within the centralized government. Thus, this loose confederation of small city-states grew into a kingdom or empire looking to expand its borders. Newly conquered areas had the option of joining the empire or becoming tributary states (Erik, 2004).

Otumfo Opoku Ware I, Otumfo Osei Tutu's successor, extended the borders, embracing much of the present day Ghana's territory (Shillington, loc. cit.).

THE UNIQUE HISTORY OF THE ASANTE (GOLDEN STOOL)

Essential to the Asante nationhood is the legend of the "Golden Stool" (Sika Dwa). The legend actually tells of the birth of the Asante Kingdom. In the seventeenth century, in order for the Asante to win their independence from Denkyira, then another powerful Akan state, a meeting of all the clan heads of each of the Asante settlements was called. In this meeting, the Golden Stool was commanded down from the heavens by Okomfo Anokye, the priest, or sage advisor, to the very first Asantehene (Asante King), Otumfo Osei Tutu I. The Golden Stool floated down from the heavens straight into the lap of Otumfo Osei Tutu I. Okomfo Anokye declared the stool to be the symbol of the new Asante union (Asanteman), and allegiance was sworn to the Golden Stool and to Otumfo Osei Tutu I as the Asantehene (King). The newly founded Asante union went to war with Denkyira and defeated it (Lloyd, 1964, pp.21-24).

The Golden Stool is sacred to the Asante as it is believed that it contains the "*Sunsum*" spirit or soul of the Asante people. Just as man cannot live without a soul, so the Asante would cease to exist if the Golden Stool were to be taken from them. The Golden Stool is not sacred; it is a symbol of nationhood, a symbol that binds or unifies all Asante.

The Golden Stool is a curved seat 46 cm high with a platform 61 cm wide and 30 cm deep. Its entire surface is inlaid with gold, and hung with bells to warn the king of

impending danger. Many have not seen it and only the king and trusted advisors know the hidden place. Replicas of the stool have been produced for the chiefs and each of their stools is blackened with animal blood, a symbol of their power for generations.

The Asante have always defended their Golden Stool when it was at risk. In 1896, the Asante allowed their King, Prempeh I, to be exiled rather than risk losing a war and the Golden Stool in the process. The Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Frederick Hodgson, demanded to sit on the stool in 1900. The Asante remained silent and when the assembly ended, they went home and prepared for war.

Although they lost on the battlefield, they claimed victory because they fought only to preserve the sanctity of the Golden Stool, and they had. In 1920, a group of African road builders accidentally found the Golden Stool and stripped it of its gold ornaments. An Asante court tried them, found them guilty and the death penalty was imposed. The British intervened and the sentence was commuted to perpetual banishment (Kyeremateng & Nkansa, 1996).

The Asante have always been proud of the uniqueness of their Golden Stool as it was a symbol of not only their independence, but also a common bond between their people. When the king of Gyaman, Adinkra, made a Golden Stool for himself, the Asantehene was so annoyed that they led a massive army against him. Adinkra was completely destroyed near Bontuku and he was decapitated. The Asantehene then proceeded to order the melt down of Adinkra's golden stool and for it to be made into two masks to represent his "ugly" face. These masks remain hanging on each side of the Asante Golden Stool to this day (Lloyd, 1964).

THE ASANTE

In dealing with the Asante you must first know their culture. Failing this, the stranger can make serious mistakes. In Ghana for example, to kiss a woman, even your own wife, in public would be an immoral, reprehensible act. Hence, understanding of the meaning and impact of culture will help towards a better understanding among human beings and in religious communities. It will help to generate mutual respect among human beings. The Asante and their culture form an important basis to understanding their visions of themselves, their country and their attitude towards death. For example, many people believe that life is life and death is death, but to the Asante, death is still considered life and afterlife. Let me now attempt a rudimentary description of the Asante culture.

Asante is a major ethnic group in Ghana. In modern Ghana, there is no ethnic group or tribe that comprises more of a majority of the population than the Asante. The entire Akan population makes a plurality (45%) of the country's total population of about twenty six million. The Akan of Ghana are made up of many sub-groups such as the Asante, Fante, Akwapim, Akyem, Bono (Bronog), Ahafo, Adansi and Nzema. However, it is estimated that the Asante are (20%) of Ghana's total population. This along with their history makes them very influential both politically and economically.

The Asante speak Twi, one of the Akan languages. Prior to European colonization, the Asante people developed a large and influential empire in West Africa. The Asante later developed into the powerful Asante Confederacy and became the dominant presence in the region. The current president of Ghana, His

Excellency John Agyekum Kufuor, is an Asante and was elected in part with their massive support.

The major denominations represented in the Asante culture are Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican, although Pentecostal is growing in popularity. Minorities of Asante are Muslim, many of who belong to the recent Ahmadiyya movement as opposed to the non-Asante northern peoples who maintain Sunni beliefs.

CULTURE OF LIFE

The question is often asked: “What is culture?” There are almost as many definitions of culture as there are people trying to define it but for the purpose of this paper I shall limit myself and apply the definition of culture by the English anthropologist Edward B. Taylor. He described culture, more than 120 years ago, as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”(Taylor 1891). Broadly, a culture can be said to be those beliefs, traditions, and institutions that create and mediate individual, community, and national identity. History and geography are defining elements but they are not the only elements. Ethnicity, economics, religion, and other factors are all shaped by culture. Therefore, culture comprises everything that you have as a social being; the way a particular people farm, the way they eat, the way they marry, the way they settle cases, relationships between men and their wives, the way of hunting, the type of food and how to prepare it, one’s language, ideas and the way they celebrate their funerals. All of these

combine to create the culture of the Asante people. In most cases, people who share a culture do so because they acquired it from parents and other family members.

There are two concepts that are of vital importance here. It is obvious that culture must have a bit of “permanence” about it. If something becomes the order of the day for a few years and disappears, you cannot call it cultural. For something to be called cultural it must remain, it must gradually become part and parcel of the people, and it must have a certain degree of stability for the people. Secondly, culture is “acquired” it is not the result of instincts or reflexes. It is learned. One learns culture informally. One is born into a culture which he or she becomes a member. A person learns through participation in actual events, imitation, observation, trial and error, and by asking questions. Roland S. Martin said, “The one thing I love about learning about other cultures is that what you do in your culture that is good, is not acceptable at all in another culture. And what is bad in yours is just in fine in their culture” (Martin, CNN Political Analyst, AC 360 Contributor, July17, 2008). Let us look at the specific Asante culture.

In each village of the Asante there are people of particular importance. The chiefs, together with the elders, maintain traditional customs and ceremonies and deal with disputes. The traditional priest and the herbalist provide a medical service, which can be partly paid for in local produce (a hen, eggs, goat sheep and others) as opposed to Western medicine, which requires cash payment and usually a considerable journey to the nearest hospital. Many Asante people believe that the traditional priest possessed by the gods is particularly powerful at dealing with spiritual problems. The herbalist relies on local plants to affect a cure. Many of these cures are now being

investigated by research institutes both in Ghana and elsewhere as alternative remedies for many ailments including Malaria and AIDS.

Another important leader is the linguist. The Linguist has no corresponding role in western society. A man wishing to consult with a traditional priest or the Chief addresses his remarks to the Linguist, even though all three people are present together. The Linguist is an intermediary, acting as a buffer to reduce the severity of utterances so as to avoid delicate situations. If a Chief should make a harsh pronouncement, it is the duty of the linguist to paraphrase and clothe the statement in proverbs.

PROVERBS

The official language of the Asante is English but many people do not speak it. The Asante are part of the Akan tribes who speak various dialects of Twi. The language is very rich in proverbs and its use is taken to be a sign of wisdom. The proverbs are about God, the world, the nature and destiny of man, social and political life, moral principles, pleasure, happiness, and so on.

Euphemisms are very common, especially about events connected with death. Rather than say, "The King has died", one would say, '*a mighty tree has fallen*,' or '*Ohene kese bi atutu*'. Proverbs are often used to express ideas indirectly as can be seen from the following: '*Obi mfa ne nsa benkum nkyere n'agya amanfo*,' this literally means, '*Do not point to the ruins of your father's house with your left hand*,' which is equivalent to, '*Do not scorn culture inherited from your forefathers*'. Proverbs are one of the most common forms of oral expression. Asante have

thousands of proverbs that express the wisdom of communities and provide a means to understanding life in the past and present. An Asante expression reiterates this, “We speak to a wise man in proverbs, not in plain speech.”

The wise person in the Asante conception is one who can “analyze” (*mpaepaemu*, *mpensempensemu*) the problems of the people and society with a view to suggesting answers. An Asante proverb says:

Wisdom is not like money, to be tied up and hidden away (*nyansa nnye sika na woakyeyere asie*). The wise person should apply wisdom to daily life.

That wisdom or philosophy should be used in solving practical problems is also expressed in the proverb, literally translated as if a problem lasts for a long time, wisdom comes to it (*asem kye a, nyansa ba ho*).

In Asante philosophy time is regarded as a concrete reality. But this does not imply that the abstract notion of time is lacking. The word “*bere*” (time) is used to express both the abstract and the concrete notion of time. An Asante proverb says, “Time is like a bird: If you do not catch it and it flies, you do not see it again.” A well known Asante maxim says, “Time changes” (*Bere di adani adani*).

The Asante hold a prominent place in Ghana history and culture. The Asante culture encompasses long-standing interactions between the past and the present, the traditional and the modern. It is a “dynamic culture that reflects the ‘duality’ inherent in the attempt to blend rich cultural institutions and customs with continuing adaptations to the political, economic, and social exigencies of the modern world” (Salam and Falola, 2002).

Asante philosophical thought is expressed both in oral literature and the thoughts and actions of the people. Thus, a great deal of philosophical material is embedded in proverbs, myths and folktales, folk songs, rituals, beliefs, customs, and traditions of the people in their art symbols and in their sociopolitical institutions and practices. Parrinder wrote: “Art is a means of expressing a basic philosophy of life...” (Parrinder, 1969, p.25).

Abraham observed, “As the Akans could not write they expressed their philosophicoreligious ideas through art...” (Abraham, 1962, p. 111). Busia wrote, “Asante drum language is full of riddles that conceal reflective thought and philosophy, and that funeral dirges philosophize on human life and death.” (Busia, 1962, pp.11, 26).

The Asante have developed a national identity based on their rich, historical cultural traditions of indigenous people. Among the Asante, festivals promote traditional culture and customs through music, dance, storytelling, and art, processions of chiefs, tributes to ancestors, and purification rites. In the Asante culture, music and dancing is the best medicine to make man or woman feel healthy and to get rid of frustrations, depression, anger and anxiety. Music and dance can be found in almost every aspect of Asante cultural life. Men and women of all ages meet formally and informally to listen and dance to a variety of traditional songs. The songs are often inseparable forms of artistic and emotional expression.

Parents also use music to communicate a message to their children. The Asante songs bind the people together and reinforce roles and values among them. For example:

If you are hungry, cook yourself a meal.

Why do you cry?

You are the child of a cocoyam farmer.

Why do you cry?

You are the child of plantain farmer.

Why do you cry? (Nketia, 1974)

[As a child of a farmer you must not sit down hungry you must find something to eat either cocoyam or plantain].

For the Asante, elements or symbols are an important part of their ancient culture. The Asante boast of many cultural elements or symbols. Below are some examples:

Adinkra Symbols: These are part of a rich tradition. Adinkra was a legendary king conquered by the Asante people who, according to legend, wore patterned fabrics.

Asante Art: Woodcarving includes stools, which are recognized as “seats” of power and wooden dolls (akua ba) that are associated with fertility.

Kente Cloth: Kente is an Asante ceremonial cloth hand-woven in horizontal treadle loom strips measuring about 4 inches wide and sewn together into larger pieces of cloth. (The Asante Culture, <http://www.keciasworld.com/akantribe.html>).

The Asante culture is comprised of everything that has a social being-the way a particular people farm, the way they marry, the way they settle cases, the way of hunting, and the type of food that is eaten, ideas about life and death and others. All of these combine to create the culture of the Asante.

In the Asante culture, the best form of greeting is to shake hands while at the same time uttering a greeting. However, at a big gathering like funeral rites a person may

greet by shaking hands with the people seated at the front while the appropriate greeting continues. An Asante woman carrying food to her husband's house would not greet people on her way to the husband's house. This allows the woman to send the food to her husband on time. It avoids the possibility of dropping the food as she turns to greet. She can greet on her way back. If she meets people in her husband's house she has to place the food in its appropriate place before she greets. Men do not greet women, especially married, when they are bathing. They only leave the message of greeting for them. Some of the main features of the Asante cultures are as follows:

1. Culture is a human thing; no other creature on our planet has any culture.
2. All societies have their own cultures. It is arrogant to suggest that there is a society that has no culture.
3. All cultures are of equal importance; there is no super-culture anywhere nor is there any refined culture.
4. Culture is what makes me what I am. I am not a Ewe or Dagomba, I am Asante because of my culture.
5. Whatever happens, I must respect that culture even when certain elements in it appear to be "funny" or "strange" to me.

THE ASANTE FAMILY UNIT

Abusua Ye Dom ("The Family Is a Crowd"). The Asante families are truly a crowd. They can include extended families spanning three and four generations. The Asante are one of Africa's matrilineal societies where the line of descent is traced through the female. Historically, this mother progeny relationship determined land

rights, inheritance of property, offices and titles. The father role was to catalyze the conception and provide the *nkra* or “the soul” of the child, that is, the child received its life force, character, and personality traits from the father. Though not considered as important as the mother, the male interaction continues in the place of birth after marriage. Typically, individual Asante did not own land but rather occupied that which came down from a previous ancestor. Both men and women can possess property made or acquired by individual efforts.

Historically, an Asante girl was betrothed, if not in childhood, then immediately after the puberty ceremony. The Asante require a bridal price of various goods given by the boy’s family to that of the girl. A man marries a cross cousin, his father’s brother’s daughter or his mother’s brother’s daughter. Parallel cousins are members of the same *abusua* “family” and hence prohibited as marriage partners. Sometimes nuptial arrangements were arranged before the birth of the couple. Parents allow boys some initiative but he must receive the consent of the households, the only formality required.

Marriage is very important to the Asante communal life and it can be polygamous. Men may want more than one wife to express their willingness to be generous and support a large family. Women in the Asante culture will not marry without the consent of their parents. Many women do not meet their men until they are married. Even so, divorce is very difficult in the Asante culture and it is the duty of the parents on both sides to keep a marriage going.

As in most developing countries, there is a strong extended family system. Poorer members may seek financial assistance from their better-off relatives for school fees,

medical expenses and much more. Visitors are always welcomed, even if their arrival may be a cause of financial concern. In the Asante culture, visitors are first given a seat and then water before they are asked the mission or the purpose of their visit.

In Asante the family line is matrilineal in that it passes through the mother to her children. A man is strongly related to his mother's brother but only weakly related to his father's brother. This must be viewed in the context of a polygamous society in which the mother/child bond is likely to be much stronger than the father/child bond. As a result, in inheritance, a man's nephew (sister's son) will have priority over his own son. Uncle-nephew relationships therefore assume a dominant position.

(Legislation was introduced in 1984 to change this traditional pattern of inheritance).

Due to the above family unit among the Asante, when one succeeds in life the whole family succeeds, but when one dies the whole family shares the pain together. That is why among the Asante, funeral celebrations are complex in nature. They involve extended family members in their entirety.

THE RITES OF PASSAGE

One of the most important responsibilities of lineage membership is the participation in rites of passage celebrating birth, naming ceremony, puberty, marriage, and death. The ceremonies help determine family organization, domestic hierarchies, and future lineage relationships. Each event is marked by specific rituals that teach children how to be responsible adults and send the deceased on their journey to the ancestral world with dignity and respect.

These rites begin with the Asante child-naming ceremony. Naming a child plays a major role in the society. The Asante father is responsible for the character (*sunsum*) of the child which is why it is the father who names the child. “A baby is not considered to be a proper human being until it has been named. To become a human being, the child has to have a name that identifies him. Without such a name, the child is only a *hohoo* (“stranger”). The day on which one is born (“*kra da*”) gives one a name *kra din* (“soul’s name”). For example, a male child born on a Sunday is called Akwasi (Kwasi). Every day name has an appellation to it. That of Akwasi is Bodua.” (Sarpong, 2002 p.108).

It is interesting to note that the Asante do not believe that anybody gives the child its first soul’s name. The child is born with it and it cannot be changed at all. The soul name is not given with any ceremony. Examples of male and female soul’s names are:

(A male will have “Kwa” and a female “A” as a prefix to the name)

Kwasiada (Sunday) Kwasi and Akosua

Edwoada (Monday) Kwadwo and Adwoa

Ebenada (Tuesday) Kwabena and Abena

Wukuada (Wednesday) Kwaku and Akua

Yawooda (Thursday) Yaw and Yaa

Efiada (Friday) Kofi and Afua

Memeneda (Saturday) Kwame and Ama

On the eighth day of the child’s birth, its father gives it a name. The name given is the name of anybody the father wants to honor.

Puberty is the time to become a man or a woman. In this stage, an individual man or woman is really only thinking about himself or herself, how they want to live, who they want to be with, what jobs they want and where they want their lives to go.

The last but not the least rite of passage, is the stage of death. Death is not the end or saying goodbye to the life you had, but it is more of a passage to the next life you will live.

1.2 THE ASANTE FAMILY CONFRONT DEATH

The idea of death is a peculiarly complex matter. The fear of death always haunts human beings. Man tries to find ways and means to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man, and again trying to avoid it. Some family members do not want to talk about death because they are afraid to die and others do not want to hear of death at all.

Individually, we will die. Collectively, civilizations flourish, wane and die. Believers and non-believers alike are united in the ecumenicity of death and all philosophers have something to think about. The Asante believe that individually, we are of the nature to grow old; there is no way to escape growing old. We are destined to die; there is no way to escape death. All that is dear to us naturally changes. Death, as we know, is indeed neutral and inevitable; it has always been with us. According to Anthony Kelly, "There can be no progress in the evolutionary scheme of things unless death ensures the succession of generations." (Kelly, 2006 p.95).

Most Asante are Christians and those who are not Christians have some members in their families who are Christians. Therefore confronting death at times is not all

that difficult for Christians, non-Christians and even traditional believers. If the person dying is a devoted Christian and meets death not as a foe but as a friend, then the family task will be easier in the confirmation of the faith and confidence of the sufferer about to enter into the valley of the shadow of death. If, on the other hand, the dying person is depressed because of a fear of death or is un-prepared for eternity, then the family must strive by the Spirit to lead the troubled soul into the joy of forgiveness and into the rest in Christ.

It sometimes happens that the person is not fully aware as others are that death is imminent. In such a circumstance, the family often finds a pastor to prepare him or her for the end. Often words of comfort and compassionate prayers made during visits to the dying ensure him or her of the family support. It is the solemn responsibility of the pastor to read the Gospel and assure the family and the dying that all is well if Christ is enshrined in the heart as Savior and Lord. In my own case, when I am confronted with this kind of situation I always remind the dying that Jesus faced both life and death in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed to the Father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." (Matthew 26:39). I often draw their attention to the fact that Paul's letters glow with light from a heart prepared for either life or death. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Even those Asante who are not Christians believe that the dead are going back to their own ancestors. As a popular saying state, "We are not alone." First and foremost, we belong to a clan and a family as well as a community. Therefore when death strikes in the family we have people to lean on. As one writer put it, "We are not alone, nor are we thrust out of community, even in dying. Our ways of

understanding death are shaped by the values and beliefs of our community.

Abraham's death was a gathering in to his ancestors; Moses' death scene has been the subject of multiple *midrashim*. God supposedly extracts his soul from his body through a kiss. Each of these deaths is entered into, understood, and accepted within the value system of the people" (Ochs, 2001 p.171). From the Christian point of view, we believe in what St. Paul said, "For no one of us lives for himself, and no one of us dies for himself alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the Lord. This is why Christ died and came to life again, to establish his lordship over the dead and living" (Romans 14:7-9).

Ochs wrote that the Asante ways of understanding death are shaped by their values and their beliefs. These beliefs help them to understand that death is not an end, but a form of change. An Akan proverb, "*Boyars bewu, wongyene boo*" literally means everybody will die one day. This brought deeper meaning of death to the Asante. As Ochs put it, "How we regard death shapes our view of story, love, suffering, body, work, prayer, and community, but they in turn influence our view of death" (Ochs, 2001, p.172). This brings the family together to fight a common goal about how to deal with the dead because we are born into a specific family and belong to a community.

There are so many things that confront the family members when death occurs among them. One of them is prayer, prayer that addresses the death. For instance a prayer which reads, "O Lord you sustain the living with kindness, and revive the dead with great mercy; you support all who fall, and heal the sick; set the captive free;

raise the dead; and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust” (*part of the eighteen benedictions that form the Amidah*). When the family hears this prayer they believe that their deceased member is in a safe place. It gives them joy and understanding. We honor our departed brothers and sisters, wives and husbands, “grandpas” and “grandmas,” and other loved ones who died before us with fitting burial and funeral celebrations.

1.3 DESCRIPTION OF ASANTE FUNERAL RITUALS

What is often striking about a funeral ritual is its stereotypical character. The same actions are repeated sequentially, over and over, at regularly prescribed times. From one ritual to the next, and from one generation to the next, the words and actions of a Passover Seder, the Islamic Ramadan Feast, or a Catholic Eucharist are repeated. To perform this ritual, a person must participate with body as well as mind.

Turner defined ritual as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects.” He viewed the performance of ritual as “a process by which a culture adapts both to internal changes, such as group conflicts over relationships or values, and to external changes, such as erratic weather patterns or natural disaster. Ritual provides a direct way to participate in symbolic expression.” (Turner, 1982 p.79).

Symbolically, a funeral ritual permits entities that appear as separate totalities in everyday life. For example, nature and society, ancestors and humankind, people as

individuals and family are recognized as interdependent parts of a whole, in a unity that the ritual action creates.

For the Asante the first indication that an individual has passed is through the “flyer”, like ad about the individual. It includes the name of the individual, their age, when they died, where and when the wake, burial and the funeral rituals takes place and most importantly, it includes the individual’s family names. It is most likely passed around through the villages and even sent out to the family and friends that live miles away, even overseas.

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, most especially, Asante in Ghana, funeral rites are profoundly important rituals. They are creative, colorful affairs that affirm the continent’s most powerful traditions and beliefs. The rituals accompanying respect for the dead include the funeral vigil (wake), the funeral itself, and the burial of the body at the cemetery and rituals such as the ‘*ritual bath*’.

The Asante women were arguably the most important participants in this ‘*ritual bath*’ occasion in each family. They ensure that the deceased body is suitable for the spirits by cleaning and bathing him/her. The women bath the body and then splash him/her with camphor and talcum powder. They comb his/her hair and for men their beard and mustache. In the sweltering room, they grunted and clenched their teeth as they bent the stiff limbs. The women then wrapped the body in three layers of garments, a combination that the deceased used to wear both at home and at work. The women used bowls overflowing with cotton wool, numerous bars of soap, sponges, razors, talcum powder, camphor balls, a plastic drinking cup, a spoon, and

white cotton. The reason for the abundance of supplies is that they are giving him everything, so that he may need nothing in the spirit world.

During funeral rites the Asante have some colors and gestures which are used to communicate in a non-verbal way to the family. I will describe some of the colors and gestures and their meanings which we use during funeral celebrations. I will start with the colors:

Black ("*tuntum*") is often used at funerals especially by very close relatives of the dead person. The name given to this type of cloth is "*birisie*" or "*brisi*" meaning time of darkness, mourning. Red ("*kokoo*") is the color of the Asante, signifying that they are ever prepared to defend their state and family in times of difficulties with their blood. They also wear deep dark red when bereaved. The Asante wear white ("*fitaa*") to express joy, victory and success.



Fig. 1

Figure 1 shows the funeral celebration with dignitaries wearing black funeral clothes indicating their relationship with the deceased. The picture shows His Excellency President John Agyekum Kuffour (second from right), First Lady Mrs. Theresa Kuffour, the former President John Jerry Rawlings (first from left), Asantehene Otumfo Osei Tutu II (first from left), the King of Asanteman (kingdom) and the Minister of Culture and Chieftancy, Mr. S.K Boafo.

The Asante wear white for funerals in two ways: First when the dead person is ninety years and above we celebrate his or her life because God gave us seventy years and those who are strong go beyond that. Therefore, the family wears white as a sign of joy. Secondly, the family of the deceased wears white on Sunday for the thanksgiving mass or service to thank the congregants for their support during the funeral celebration.

Some of the other gestures include: Clapping both hands to call someone or a sign of approval. On the funeral grounds the most common gesture is a handshake. The entire family of the bereaved will line up and the people will shake hands with them to show they sympathize with the dead person's relatives.

Among the Asante, when a family member dies, the family members in the immediate surrounding area will usually lament, cry or shout as a result of the shock and pain of the death. The head of the clan or the family, "Abusua-panin", will be informed. He, in turn, will formally send some family members with two bottles of wine (imported not local) to inform the chief or the king in the village or the town about the death of their brother or sister. Later in the day they send people to inform the rest of the family members who live far from home. Family members living

overseas are informed either by letter or phone. The children of the deceased will be informed officially. A meeting will be organized to decide the day for the burial and the funeral rites. If the time for the burial is postponed then the body has to be preserved. In the olden days, herbs were used to preserve corpses but these days there is the morgue system so bodies can be kept for weeks, months or years until the bereaved family members are ready. The family explains the reason for keeping the body in the morgue for months or years before burial to the community. According to my family, upon the death of my grandmother my uncles explained that it is better for her children both home and abroad, relatives, friends and even those who did not like her as well as loved ones to come and give their last respects and witness how the body will be decorated.

Mourners and sympathizers come to send the deceased a message for the other world. There is the belief that as soon as a person dies he or she becomes a being or spirit that can perform wonders. Therefore, as the corpse lies in state, the sick, the barren, the wretched or poor stand by it and ask it to intercede for them. People believe that such faithful people receive positive results. If the body is to be buried immediately, then it is washed, dressed and laid on a decorated bed. If the family wants to wait for some time, the body should be kept in the morgue and the washing could be done before it is put in the refrigerator. Traditionally, it is the responsibility of the children of the deceased, and his/her brothers and sisters to wash the body.

Libation is made to implore the blessings of God the spirits and ancestors so that no evil will befall them as they wash the body of their father/mother. It is claimed that hot water is used to wash the corpse and that cold water is used to wash a newborn

baby. My grandmother told me, “Nana you see when you cook (boil) water then you kill it and so cold water is for life” (because the new-born is not used to any kind of temperature around him/her the cold water will make him/her cry or to make sound like *wei, wei, wei* and the baby will acclimate him/herself into the world).

At funerals, children of the deceased are given new parents due to their departed mother or father and the new parent will take care of them. Mourners hold long, passionate conversations with the dead as they pass around the body lying in state. The families usually scratch together enough funds to provide a decent ceremony for their beloved even if it buries them in debt. Participation in these rituals enables friends and others to demonstrate reverence for the deceased, to pray together for the eternal repose of the deceased, and to give the family of the deceased prayerful support.

Dealing with the death of a loved one, a friend or family member is one of the most difficult things we face in life. The last thing you want to confront at such a time is the task of making funeral arrangements. Among the Asante, a funeral is a social and family gathering. It is for this reason that people spend an amazing amount of money and time on funerals.

Funeral rituals are great public events where families compete for prestige and respect by showing off wealth and by publicly conforming to norms of solidarity and respect for the dead. Weeks, months, years and thousands of Ghana cedis (money) are spent in organizing funeral celebrations, which impresses everybody. These funerals are extremely expensive for the family in question. Cattle, sheep, goats and poultry may be offered in remembrance and then consumed in the festivities. In Asante, a

funeral celebration is more important than a wedding or any other ceremony and should be grand and successful. Some families make expensive T-shirts and key holders with the deceased's picture.

Today the Asante often put the deceased in elaborate "fantasy coffins" the color and shape of a certain object, such as a fish if the deceased is a fisherman, crab or fishing boat if the deceased is a fishmonger and even an airplane if the deceased is rich. The funeral celebrations of today are seen as occasions of boasting and show but not the actual mourning as we all knew it in times past.

On the roadside in each of the villages, towns and cities there are painted signboards which inform the people about their readiness to loan money to families and individuals for funerals and other expenses. There is one particular signboard closer to my hometown, which reads:

Okyeba Funeral Services

For all your funerals, weddings,

Outdoorings etc.

With a lot of people willing to spend more and more money for their family members' grand funeral celebrations, the funeral business is booming in Asante's state.

One of my interviews was with, a woman by the name of Akua Baatanyaa, a 56-year old successful business woman from Kumasi in Asante region. Baatanyaa is married with five children. She told me, "Due to the excessive funeral services many individuals have been taking advantage and using funeral rituals to exploit family members with huge sums of money. Some funeral directors will come to you with

sweet words of giving you loans for the burial and the funeral rites and at the end they charge you more money. At time some families have to go into bankruptcy.”

Many families develop so many problems after the funeral rites, both psychologically and spiritually. In the past everything regarding a funeral was done by the family members themselves or by other close relatives who had money. The family did everything concerning the funeral celebrations. Nowadays more and more elements of the funeral celebrations are contracted out to other individuals, so the Asante funeral rites have been secularized and now businesses have replaced the family in the mourning rites. Instead of members of the family and the community performing certain sacred tasks like the bathing and clothing of the dead body, digging the grave, carrying the coffin or casket which creates a sense of community, now strangers who specialize in those things and make it their job are doing all these tasks. I think because of this role being taken away from the community, the duty as a community is totally undermined. Keeping the corpse in a mortuary is another area that has been taken over by professionals.

It has been determined that one of the major causes of expensive funeral celebrations is the mortuary expense. Family members were doing this work since the beginning by using local herbs to cover the dead body for at least two days. With the introduction of the mortuary, it was decided that a corpse must be kept in the mortuary for weeks for ordinary people while Chiefs and Queen mothers should go beyond six months. Now the burying of the dead is a profession. According to Marleen de Witte, “the growth of the funeral industry in Asante should be understood against the background of the evolution of a money economy, which started with the

introduction of cocoa at the beginning of colonial rule, and the accompanying development of marketing, paid service, paid labor (with its emphasis on education, skills and career), individualism, and the press” (De Witte, 2001 pp.103-104). Arhin also sees the commercialization of funeral rituals as a “result of social changes like urbanization, migration, expanded transport and communication systems, the public health sector and changes in religious belief” (Arhin, 1994 p.313). The installation of money at the center of social relations proceeds at an increasing pace, so that the funeral celebrations have become opportunities for moneymaking.

This escalating cost of funeral rites symbolizes that the effectiveness of Asante funeral rites and its spiritual meanings has diminished. Many groups including the Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference, the Christian Council of Churches, the Parliament of Ghana and other individuals criticize the expensive nature of Asante funeral rites. Now begins the critique of the Asante funeral rituals.

1.4 CRITIQUE OF THE ASANTE FUNERAL RITUALS

The commercialization (the risen cost) of death has evoked a fierce discussion in the media and Parliament of Ghana. There has been some discussion on the escalating cost of funeral rites in Asante. The latest was an article on Ghana web on October 28, 2008 by John Kesse who argued, “Asante has gradually drifted towards a society of funeral lovers other than lovers of life.” He suggested a change in our mindset and attitude and believes that diverting resources to care for the living would be a way out, or else “we will be stuck in the 19th century instead of edging with competition into the 22nd century.” Is John Kesse saying that because some people have chosen to

spend so much on funeral celebrations Asante is still in the 19th century? Kesse believes that these traditions have become so excessive that they are wasteful.

In a debate on the floor of Ghana's Parliament (Ghanaweb.com 11/29/05) the Minority Leader Alban Bagbin said that "we are investing in the dead more than the living through expensive funeral celebrations and that is bad." He added that the dead should be given decent and not expensive burials knowing very well that whatever was done to the dead it was destined for the grave. In the same debate Alfred Agbesi, Member of Parliament (MP) for Ashiaman, who revealed he had bought 13 pieces of mourning cloths in one year called for the introduction of one cloth for all funeral rites. He argued among other things that, "after spending money on expensive cloths, coffin or casket and keeping the corpse in expensive morgues, the widow and children are left with nothing and are expected to fend for themselves." Mr. Ado, New Patriotic Party MP for Okere constituency extolled the Islamic principles of the funeral celebration and burial which to him was less expensive but still decent, while Mr. Kunsu (Member of Parliament) called for by-laws to minimize funeral costs. It is interesting that this issue had reached the floor of Parliament (Kwabena Mensah, Funeral Celebration – Costly to the Economy, 01/18/2007).

A lecturer in sociology, Dr. Obiri Yeboah says the increasing trend in extravagant spending on funeral celebrations contravene Ghanaian customs. He therefore supports moves by certain traditional authorities in parts of the country to regulate certain aspects of funeral ceremonies. Dr Obiri Yeboah commented on reports which suggested that in some major cities in the country, such as Kumasi (Asante), large billboards have been put up advertising the final funeral rites of some personalities.

Dr. Obiri Yeboah, the dean of the School of Business at Accra Polytechnic, says it makes little economic sense for families to spend huge sums of money on the funeral celebrations of their deceased only for them to turn around and solicit for funds to clear debts accrued as a result of the frivolous spending (Ghanaian Daily Graphic, February 23, 2008).

Over the years attempts have been made to control both the cost and the size of funeral rites. Each attempt has impacted both positively and negatively on the nature of the event in the country, especially for the Asante. Two such attempts are of significance here. In the 1970's the late Otumfuo Opoku Ware II directed the Asante to stop serving beers and liquors at funeral rituals. This was his reaction to the rising cost of the funeral celebration. The Asante responded by keeping those drinks at home or specified places and serving them according to the status of guests before they went to the site of the function.

The minister of the Methodist Church in Kumasi (capital city of the Asante) in his desperation limited the whole funeral celebration program to the fortieth day of the death of an individual. Such an attempt has rather evolved into a function of its own making funeral celebrations more glamorous and fanciful.

Many other prominent people in Asante continue to make their voices heard regarding the direction that funeral rituals is moving toward in the Asante region. Recently, Nana Ogyabea Badu Ehuren, Sanahene of Ogyakrom issued: "a ban on drumming and performance of funeral rituals in the Ogyakrom communities would take effect from August 2008 to August 2009 to enable the Ogyakroman Council to investigate whether family members of the deceased will still be indebted to the

banks in the town or the individuals.” He warned churches, group leaders and family heads to comply with the order to ensure peace and stability. Nana said the Council would give stiff punishment to individuals and groups who would flout the order. Nana Ehuren said the ban would assist the chiefs and the Local Council of Development Committee to promote progress and development in the area. (Nana Ehuren, Ghana News Agency, May 16, 2008). The Sanaahene noted that negative reports had been received about some unscrupulous people who spend more of their money in their funeral rites and are organizing a massive demonstration to protest the ban. Nana called on the Assembly members, opinion leaders, Christian and Muslim groups, market women and other identifiable groups to get involved to ensure its success (Nana Ehuren, May 16, 2008).

The following is a recap of a conversation I had with Enoch Afum, the Head Pastor of the Washington, DC Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventist Church when I was there to interview him and some of his church members about the escalating cost of funeral rites in Asante. The Head Pastor said, “Ghana is gradually being crippled by a lifestyle of endless self-indulgence which is leading to the destruction of family life, apathy to others’ welfare and consequently, the breakdown of love and concern for one another in society”. He said the extravagancy in funeral rites and other expensive lifestyles in Asante in particular, are gradually gaining undue root to the detriment of ensuring the welfare of the needy in the society. The pastor continued, “People of late gratuitously spend huge sums of money and time on dead bodies rather than concentrating on issues that would enhance societal progress”. He cited an instance where people live in very dilapidated homes but when they die, their funerals are

delayed to enable family members to build new houses and rehabilitate old homes before the dead body is laid in state there. He questioned the sense in this. The pastor said, “as we live in this world some would continue to be poor while others would be rich and God in his wisdom provided wealth for some of us to be a channel of blessing to others who through no fault of theirs are poor”(August 13, 2008).

A woman in the congregation who spoke anonymously said “it is sad to note that there are millions of Ghanaians who find it extremely difficult especially during this period of global hardship, to provide one meal a day for themselves”. Most of these people have relatives living very spendthrift lives here in the Diaspora ‘only to vote huge sums of monies for the funeral of these poor ones’. This woman focused on what she described as miring the once beautiful oneness in families and the care of the poor and the aged and noted that many people no longer care about what their parents eat or how they sleep but care greatly about how they will bury them. This does not make sense the woman emphasized. She observed that if a small percentage of monies spent on funeral celebrations had been used on the living for their survival such victims perhaps would have lived longer. She noted that it is not completely wrong to celebrate a befitting funeral for parents, friends, relatives and loved ones, but let us look after them well whilst they live and by so doing they may have their funerals postponed by living a bit longer.

This reminds me of my own mother, when her children celebrated her 80th birthday on August 14, 2007. She said, “My children I am happy that you did this in my life time. I have seen that when I die I know you will do more than this”. She turned to the people gathered and said, “Please, take good care of your parents while they are

living or in their life time and don't wait until their death. Take care of them on their sick bed, renovate their home and don't wait until their dead time, they will not see your good works. Look at what my children have done; do the same for your parents" (Abena Amparatum Tawiah, August 14, 2007).

The woman again touched on the way most funerals are celebrated currently in Asante and said, "It is completely out of tradition and customs of old." She continued, "Today's funeral celebrations are full of bad behaviors like adultery, drunkenness and in some cases accidents and chaos, and this is why many people look to the death of other people just to have time to do their own things." She commended some traditional and religious leaders who are working hard to bring sanity into the way funerals are held in Asante.

1.5 AREAS WITHIN THE RITUALS THAT NEED TO BE CHANGE

The traditional processes and ideas behind the funeral rites for a loved one was once considered the time to express the love for and celebrate the life of the one who has died. It was a time to remember them and their advice and live on with it. However, some of those traditional ideas do not really exist anymore. If they do, they are hidden under all of the money and elaborate decorations. Events that have really seemed to change are the rituals that the women used to participate in and now do not.

In the 1970's women used to shave their heads and fast when their husbands died. Traditional drums were beat to a constant rhythm to express their emotions. The idea of the funeral rites was once a time for sorrow and mourning. Now, the ceremonies

include commercialized highlife music and bands that are hired. A very good reason for many of these changes has to do with the progression of technology. For example, in the 1970's traditional drums were used when somebody died but due to the growth of technological innovations, mass media and electronic apparatus have given the funeral new dimensions. This technology makes it expensive; it has become an easier way to perform and expand the elaborateness of the funeral.

If the family can prove that they can provide everything and anything including the music, video, pictures, painting, t-shirts, new home and decorations, it proves to others that they are well off and wealthy and can now be looked at as a family, not because of the one who has died, but as prestige to the community. So hired photographers, video recorders, portrait painters and caterers are now used, instead of the family performing their own practices. The food and drinks that are provided was once for the deceased but is now for the guests to enjoy and swoon over. Another large portion of the entire funeral also has been removed from the family. When the death of a family member is known and the family is informed, the deceased is now taken to the mortuary. In the past the family would keep the body for a day and the burial followed. This makes today's funeral rituals different from the traditional rites. The funeral process is not only long and extensive, it can last for weeks, months or at times even years depending on the wealth and the prestige of the deceased. The money involved in this occasion is extremely valuable. The family members take part in contributing to the funeral expenses, but do not take part in the actual rituals.

Money is a very important aspect of funeral rites in which the Asante people consider to be a part of the beginning, middle and end of the individual's life. If the

deceased has left debts, the process of having to pay them off is a very extensive process that involves the family members, *abusua*, the creditor and the heir.

Many other changes have occurred within the family. Because money has become involved, many people that are not even part of the family want to be the ones to take the credit for the funeral rites. Many conflicts develop among the family and friends when they find out that one person has taken the deceased's possessions without consulting the family head or the family. So now, instead of the funeral involving the symbolism of the dead, it is now the symbolism of wealth and prestige. These are the areas in the rituals which need to be changed. The Asante have become observers rather than participants in the passage of death.

1.5.1 ELIMINATING THE SECULARISM OF THE RITUALS

The biggest question here is why? Why do family members spend all this money on someone who cannot even enjoy it when we have some family members who cannot afford to pay their children's school fees or send them to college? Why do some family members prefer to spend an extravagant amount of money on the funeral rites and services which are not important in today's world?

One of the major causes of expensive funeral rites is the mortuary expense. Now rules govern this portion of the funeral rites. To avoid such a costly expense and unnecessary extravagance which mitigates Asante traditional values, the Asante Regional House of Chiefs has created the following new rules:

1. Even though keeping the corpse in the mortuary is not customary, it was decided that a corpse must not be kept in the mortuary for more than four weeks.

2. The wake keeping and the eightieth day celebration, which can just as well be regarded as customary, should be abolished because it is very expensive and energy sapping. The practice of decorating a corpse gorgeously with expensive materials is abolished.

3. Paneling rooms in which the corpse is laid in state must be stopped. Much as the "House appreciates the involvement of private undertakers, it was agreed that where an undertaker provides his/her own materials for the decoration, she or he should not be paid more than GHC 200. In the case of an undertaker not providing his/her own materials, the expenses should not exceed GHC100."(The Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs)

4. Donations by individuals at any funeral shall not exceed GHC 50. The practice of announcing donations to the general public through the public address system must be stopped. It must be emphasized, however, that donations shall be made known to the bereaved family only.

5. Food and drinks are also contemporary expenses. Some families started serving drinks and food, even to the extent of pounding "*fufu*"! (Local food for majority of the Asante). People who could not afford this got into trouble because people only went to funerals because they knew they would be fed a lot. If people do not serve drinks or food now, it is not a shame, because it is not allowed any longer to do that. So it is not a sign of poverty. Indeed, as a woman told me "It is no longer a disgrace when no drinks are served, when there is no "*adekyeredee*" show, when the whole funeral rite is indeed simple." (The Pioneer, September 11, 1980)

All these practices should be eliminated since they are alien to Asante custom and tradition; the unnecessary and often scandalous waste and the general exhibition of wealth and the “show off” which have increasingly characterized the performance of these traditional rites among the Asante, which have tended to scare the less privileged man or woman from these essential rites.

The above stated elimination of secularism has been taken up by the funeral regulations by the Asante chiefs which said, “The elimination of this secularism is a clear example of the state’s close involvement in shaping Asante funeral rites.” (The Pioneer, September 11, 1980). This secularism needs to change so that everybody does it moderately and this lessens social pressure and resentment and creates a sense of equality among the classes.

1.5.2 RETAINING THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE RITUALS

Many cultural aspects must be retained. In consonance with Asante custom, the traditional mourning cloth of ‘*kuntunkuni*’, ‘*kobeni*’ and ‘*brisie*’ must be used at funerals. It is customary that the corpse be buried with items like a piece of cloth, ring, handkerchief and a small amount of money referred to as “*adesiedie*.”

Anniversary Celebrations:

The one week celebration and the celebration of the fortieth day of death are found to be inconsonance with the Asante custom and must be so observed and celebrated. The significance of the one week celebration is to remember the deceased and also afford the bereaved family the opportunity to plan and prepare for the funeral rites of their beloved relation. However such celebrations should be very simple.

The significance of the fortieth day celebration is for the bereaved family to elect someone to inherit the deceased person (take the person's property). The celebration of the fortieth day of the death is customary and must be retained and celebrated. The celebration however must be limited to the deceased's family and relations and no drinks shall be served. Only drumming will be permitted. It is customary to celebrate the one-year anniversary. It should be limited to the deceased's family and relations and no drinks and drumming should be allowed. A Memorial Service should be performed at the one-year anniversary only. This brings the spiritual meaning of death to the bereaved family.

1.5.3 THE SECULAR AND DIOCESAN CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY FUNERAL RITES

Making money out of death is an issue that evokes negative sentiments. Much of the contemporary Akan popular culture that has crept into funeral rites can be viewed as commercial exploitation. For many years now there has been some protest among small group of citizens from Atwedee in the Asante region of the commercialization and the increasing expenditure of funerals in Asante. The commercialization of funeral rites has also evoked a fierce discussion in both Ghana's Parliament and in the media. This has become a tug-of-war between those who argue that funeral rites are contributing to the economy and those who say that funerals are only swallowing money badly needed for other developmental projects either for our families or our communities.

As a result of the above mentioned difficulties, the following constitute the new funeral rites proposals from the Catholic Diocese of Konongo-Mampong, which has been partially accepted and plans are being discussed for its implementation by the Asante.

First, it has been established by the Konongo- Mampong Diocese that, when the bereaved families don't have enough money required for their funeral rites, some rural bank such as Nwabiagya Rural Bank at Bare-Kese grant the families what they called "funeral loans" to pay for the expenses. The head of the family and another person are also required to stand as security. The interest rate on the loan is five percent at the Nwabiagya Rural Bank (Arhin, 320). Not only individuals who run small businesses benefit from the funeral rites, but also larger companies like banks profit from the Asante funeral obsession. The diocese advises that the families should stop borrowing from the banks and celebrate the funeral according to their own means to cut down costs.

Secondly, just as guests are accorded a seat, they are also being served refreshments at funerals. Despite the Asante tradition of fasting in times of bereavement, it has become more and more common, mainly in the cities, to provide funeral visitors not only with drinks, but also with snacks or meals, as rich as possible. Due to this expensive nature of food serving, the diocese recommended that the bereaved families stop buying drinks for the wake keeping, expensive coffins and food for the visitors.

Thirdly, apart from the established media of newspapers, radio and television, people also make their own small "media" to publicize their dead relatives including

T-shirts, handkerchiefs, key holders, bottle openers, and even plates and pens with pictures of the deceased. These things make funerals expensive. The diocese recommended that radio, newspaper, and television announcements and other materials to enhance funeral prestige should stop immediately so as to use the money for their children's education.

Lastly, a funeral without any type of live music is not considered a good funeral. There should always be at least one drumming group “(*kete* or *adowa*)”, “*nnwumkoro*” singing group, or a popular highlife, gospel, or brass band, but preferably two or even three, to provide the best entertainment possible. These groups are paid GHC 300 for their performance, plus food and drinks. Some of the group's performance at funerals is their only source of revenue. The diocese recommended that only one group should be present at each funeral because two or three groups are a waste of money and increase the cost of the funeral rites.

The above chapter introduces this project into chapter two whereby I will discuss or deliberate the religious and clinical principles of funeral rites in the Asante.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS AND CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

“I will pay the price to free them from the power of the grave. I will save them from death. O Death where are your thorns? O Grave, where is your power to destroy? I will have no loving pity.”

HOSEA 13:14

*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let Perpetual Light shine upon them.
May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace. Amen.*

2.1 RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES THAT DEFINE THE CONCEPT OF FUNERAL RITES

It has been the Catholic Church’s custom in its funeral rites not only to commend the dead to God but also to offer Christian hope to the people and give witness to its faith in the future resurrection of the baptized with Christ. Jesus Christ is the Christian Savior and the only way to salvation is through Him. According to John’s gospel, “In very truth, anyone who gives heed to what I say and puts his trust in him who sent me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgment, but has already passed from death to life” (John 5:24). In the face of death, the church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death

that bound humanity. Christ achieved his “task of redeeming humanity and giving perfect glory to God, principally by the paschal mystery of the blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension” (*Order of Christian Funerals* [OCF, 1]).

At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that “...death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting words of God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist.” (OCF, 4). Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life, which has now been returned to God, the author of life, and the hope of the just. Through the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the Vigil for the deceased, the Funeral Liturgy, the Rite of Committal the Church calls for the active participation of all.

2.1.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND NORMS OF THE FUNERAL RITES

In the funeral rites the Catholic Church celebrates the paschal mystery of Christ. Those, who in baptism have become one with the dead and the risen Christ, will pass with him into eternal life, to be purified in soul and then welcomed into the fellowship of the saints in heaven. In the Catholic Diocese of Konongo-Mampong, the *Order of Christian Funeral Rites* is to be used as the normative liturgical ritual for the celebration of the funeral rites.

The three principal ritual moments in the funeral rites are: the *Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers*, the *Funeral Liturgy* and the *Rite of Committal*. While there are distinct ritual moments, the funeral rites as a whole are a single movement of prayer which needs to be celebrated integrally. The General Introduction and the Introduction to each rite or group of rites set forth guiding principles for the proper liturgical celebration of these various rites. It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that these liturgical principles are respected, understood, and used with pastoral sensitivity by all those, namely, priest, deacons, and lay persons, who participate in the ministry of consolation: to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the pastor to both inform the secular funeral service providers of the proper order and liturgical expression of the funeral rites as set forth in the *Order of Christian Funerals* and to ensure that they are followed according to the desire of the Church.

The Church encourages the full celebration of the funeral rites, especially the Funeral Mass, for her faithful deceased members. No one should be denied the Church's funeral rites because of the neglect of the practice of the faith of their family members. It is the responsibility of the Pastor to ensure that the funeral rites are available for these persons. Every Catholic, unless specifically excluded according to the norms of the Church law, is entitled to the Church's ministry at the time of death.

2.1.2 FOLLOWING NORMS OBSERVED IN THE DIOCESE OF KONONGO-MAMPONG

Apart from the sacraments, there are other signs and forms of worship established by the Church to bring spiritual benefits to the faithful. It is at this time that the Asante people need to be reminded to focus not only on their loss but also on the more important aspect of this event. For example, the families are mourning the loss of their loved one but they must bear in mind that their loved one has moved from this world into a better life. The Church understands that the family and friends need to articulate their grief for the loss of their loved one, but also understands that this must be reasonable and within the parameters of the spirituality of this event. To assure that the family understands the correct priorities of the funeral rites and maintains the necessary spiritual environment, the Catholic Diocese of Konongo-Mampong recommends the following norms be observed at the times of death:

1. It is recommended that the Vigil (Wake) is the most appropriate time for members of the family and friends to share memories of the deceased or to pay tribute to the deceased through vocal remembrances, photographs, or favorite songs.
2. If a family member wishes to express appreciation or say something in remembrance at the Eucharistic Mass, the Diocese recommends the following:
 - Only one family member or a friend is to speak.
 - The words to be shared must be in writing and approved in advance by the priest celebrate.

- Because of the intensity of emotions at the time of a funeral rite, the person who will speak must keep it brief, that is, no more than five minutes.
- This faith remembrance is to take place *after* the Prayer after Communion.
- Because this is not part of the Liturgy of the Word, this remembrance is not to take place at the ambo, but at another appropriate place of the priest celebrant's choosing.

3. The reception after the burial is another appropriate time for remembrances because there is less of an emotional burden and the context is looking toward the future in a more positive manner.

At this point the church advises that families and friends should try to exercise patience in times of the death of their love ones.

2.2 THE ETHICAL ISSUES IN WORKING WITH THE FAMILY

Other problems which detract from the proper focus on the soul's transition from this world to eternal life include: the length of time between death and the Catholic funeral rite; unnecessary expenses incurred in mortuary fees, expensive wreaths, coffins, shrouds, drinks, and food. These expenses and other additional services clearly show that the Catholic elements or spiritual meanings to the funeral rites are being lost by the excessive socialization and commercialization of the rites that the church leaders have witnessed in recent times. Against this background, the Catholic

Diocese of Konongo-Mampong published *Diocesan Statutes* (2007), which discusses the above ethical issues for funeral rites.

2.3 THEOLOGICAL EFFECTS ON THE FAMILY

Death viewed according to the senses terrifies and causes fear; but when viewed with the eyes of faith it consoles and becomes desirable. Death appears terrible to sinners, but lovely and precious to the saints. Yes, death is the end of labor and toil, but the Catholic funeral liturgy tells us that life is changed, not ended. According to the Prophet Isaiah men and women should not be afraid because, “On this mountain the Lord will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; and the Lord will destroy death forever. The Lord will wipe away the tears from every face” (Isaiah 25: 7-8). Isaiah said this in connection with what the Lord said in the book of Genesis. “Out of love God created men and women in his own image and likeness given a privileged place among creatures, and commanded to exercise stewardship over the earth” (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:5). God always loves us and cares for us and promises never to forsake us when he said, “I am with you always, even until the end of the time” (Matthew 28:20).

In the dialogue between Martha and Jesus just before the raising of Lazarus, Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her “Your brother will rise.” Martha responded, I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus told her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he (she) dies, will live, and everyone who lives and

believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, Yes Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world (John 11:21-27).

I believe that it is the nature of God to love us. Out of love, God sent His only Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. So being followers of Christ we must always take consolation from Jesus Christ our Savior. With an everlasting love God cares for us and promises never to forsake us, for Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life....” (John 11:25). This indicated that Christians, who follow Christ and obey his commandments and die, will have an everlasting life and on the last day will be raised with him to the new life. This is our faith and our hope that one day we shall see Him as He really is.

The Lord continued to be with us when Jesus said to His followers, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith in me also. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way” (John 14:1-5). The bereaved family should have faith that God is always with them in their pain and anxiety. In their times of difficulties, he is there to support and protect them. Even when the community members, families and friends forget them God will never forget them, rather he will always be there, 24/7, for them.

Death, as we know, is considered inevitable and universal among people. Death has no respect for anyone: young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, Christian or

Muslim, Hindu or Buddhists, Gentile or Jew. Older people in my town, called Besease in the Asante, look forward to death. They see death first and foremost as a welcome rest after a long and strenuous life. For instance, my grandmother Nana Akosua Boatemaah who died at the age of 120 years always said, “Nana Yaw, (referring to me) there is much in our culture that distracts us from reflecting about death or our final destination, but I want to go meet my Father (God), because I have seen a lot in this world. I wish for God to take my life.” My grandmother accepted whatever comes, including the knowledge of her own mortality. The book of Revelation 14:13 states “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, yes says the spirit that they may rest from their labor and their works follow them.” The inevitability and universality of death is expressed symbolically by figures 2 and 3 below.

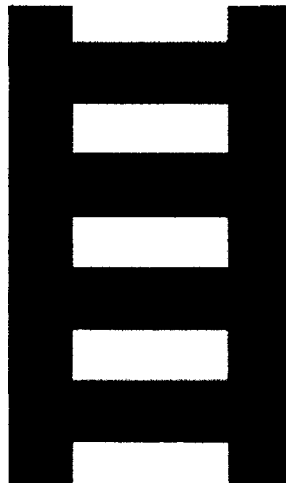


Fig.2 OWUO ATWEDEE “the ladder of death”

Figure one is a symbol of mortality: a reminder of the transitory nature of existence in this world and of the imperative to live a good life to be a worthy soul in the afterlife.

("Culture of the Asante People." Ghana Home Page

http://www.welltempered.net/adinkra/htmls/adinkra_index.htm. Copyright 2001-2007, accessed April 17, 2008). Their readiness for death does not however include an acceptance of euthanasia, but rather a natural death. Both young and old hold the view that life and death are and should remain in God's hands.

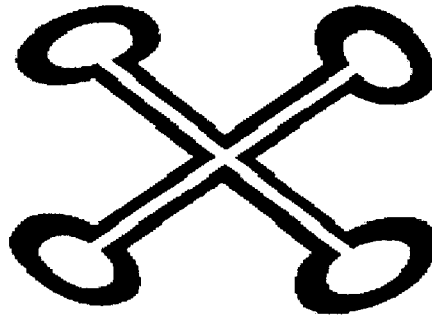


Fig. 3 **NYAME NNWU NA MAWU** "God never dies, therefore I cannot die"

Figure three is a symbol of God's omnipresence and the perpetual existence of man's spirit. This signifies the immortality of man's soul, because the soul rests with God after death, it cannot die. (Well-Tempered Web Design. "Culture of the Asante People." Ghana Home Page

http://www.welltempered.net/adinkra/htmls/adinkra_index.htm

Copyright 2001-2007, accessed April 17, 2008). For the Asante the combination of these two symbols give meaning to their existence and signify the immortality of man's soul believed to be part of God as found in the Book of Genesis, "God said, Let us make mankind in our own image and likeness..." (Gen.1: 26).

Not only does the Asante culture define the immortality of the soul, but it also reinforces the argument for simplifying the funeral rites. The Bible supports that funeral rites should not be secularized and commercialized. Jesus often refers to death and His words teach us our attitudes towards death, for example in Matthew 8:22, 18-23; Luke 9: 57 Jesus said “Allow the dead to bury their own dead.”

In Matthew 8: 18-23; Jesus converses with the scribe who said to Him, “Lord permits me first to go and bury my father.” (vs. 21). But Jesus responded: “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their dead.” (vs. 22). Again in Luke 9:57-62; the same type of scenario develops. Jesus instructs the man to come and “Follow Me.” But the man said, “Lord permits me first to go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him “allow the dead to bury their own dead; but you go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God” (vs. 59-60). Jesus’ statement “let the dead bury the dead” is one of those passages that have troubled many Christians over the years.

If this text is considered spiritually and not so much in the physical realm then Jesus’ words take on a new meaning. We are to honor our parents in their lifetime, and to encourage others to do the same. Honoring ones mother, father, sister or brother should include burying him or her after he or she has died, but since the body no longer contains the spiritual essence of the person who was honored in life, elaborate and expensive items are not necessary. Without the soul the dead body is a mere empty shell and no longer contains the image and likeness of God. But more importantly, we are to honor our Father who is in heaven and who never dies. This would include respecting and caring for the whole of His creation (our fellow humans, the animals, and the environment in which we all live), and dispelling the

forces of evil that seek to destroy it. This passage might sound harsh but it doesn't mean that we are not allowed to bury our loved ones when they die. It is said in the context of separating heaven from hell; of directing people toward heaven, and the degree of commitment that task requires. Jesus is telling us not to spend our resources to bury the dead but rather to use our resources to do good by helping the needy and the poor among us. The key message is that serving God is more important than serving people. Jesus' words reach the hearts of our families who are weighted down with the death of their loved one, the demands of their roles, and the family's own inner tensions. When Jesus said, "Come all of you who are tired and who carry heavy loads. Learn from me, my yoke it is easy and my burden is light," He speaks to those who mourn.

Our lives are a series of entrances and exits, beginnings and endings, all of which are turning points of change. To know the importance of an entrance, one has to watch a play. An actor makes an entrance and the whole scene changes. It is the Lord who knows best and directs our entrances and exits. We belong to him whether we live or we die. So as family and friends we must always know that there is an appointed time for everything under the sun.

*"For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born and time to die
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
a time to kill and a time to heal;
a time to break down and a time to build up;*

*a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones
together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing...*

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

God always embraces us. This “limitless other” has been present in every stirring of our existence. He has been within us as our deepest mystery. “Death has worked within all the elements and causes that have formed us, moving us toward an eternal destiny. In the light of God, we are brought to a moment of final decision” (Boros, 1962, p.103).

In moving to an explicitly Christian focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians believe that at the end of their lives on earth they shall see God as He really is. The previous quotations also present a very important contextual spiritual message to the bereaved families about having faith in God. Christians believe that Christ has conquered death; therefore his followers have every cause to rejoice. When Saint Paul said, “When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory, O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Death as we know it would be man’s natural end, but not supernatural end.

Despite the above explanation by Christ and Saint Paul many Asante continue to ask series of questions, such as “What is the origin and destiny of mankind?”, “What

awaits us at the end of our earthly existence?” Saint Paul again addressed these deeper questions when he said, “Jesus Christ has redeemed us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and the grace which was granted to us in Christ Jesus before the world existed, but is now made known by the manifestation of our Savior Jesus Christ. He has destroyed death and brought to light life and incorruption by the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9-10). Saint Paul again said, “For if we believe that Jesus Christ died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus bring with Him those who have fallen asleep” (Thessalonians 4:14). This really gives relief and consolation to the family because they know that their loved one is in safe hands with the Lord. It gives the family less stress to think about where their relative is after death. As one lady from Saint Raymond’s Parish told me after the funeral mass of her father in December 2008, “Father, I know my father is in heaven. He is with the Lord.”

2.4 ESCHATOLOGICAL BELIEFS OF THE FAMILY

The Asante believe in an afterlife. The Asante family believes that their departed ancestors are in the world of the dead to watch over the affairs of the living members of their lineages and promote their well being. The Asante family believes that bodily death is not the end of life but only the inauguration of life in another form. The Asante do not see death as the end of their life and therefore, those who have died must be given food and drink from time to time. Death to the Asante, “is regarded as a departure of the soul, itself a kind of body, from the physical plane to another plane of existence” (Kyeremateng, 1996).

Older people in my town and most Asante states indicated that they look forward to death. Traditional ideas of ancestorhood, reincarnation and modern Christian beliefs about life after death had much influence on their lives. The Asante believe that there is a universal God ("*Onyankopon*") but this does not exclude gods associated with a particular religion or spirits ("*obosum*") by whom their traditional priest may be possessed. The people believe that there is no doubt of the existence of the kingdom of the Dead ("*Asamanado*") so custom requires that great attention be paid to the proper conduct of burial and funeral rites. The Asante believe that words, objects and ritual gestures are entirely subjected to a work of persuasion that affirms that the dead are not dead, but rather the victory of life over death. This is the myth of Asante survival. It has been said, "The good people when they die would be rewarded only when they left this life." Sometimes people who believe in an afterlife often say that they have seen the presence of someone close who has died some years ago. This experience at times is very hard to believe, but at times it is convincing for those who have had it. There are many instances, but I will share my grandmother's experience that she shared with us before she died.

Nana Akosua Boatemaah lived to 120 years. Nana gave birth to eighteen children; three triplets (making 9 children), two sets of twins (making 4 children) and the rest one after the other. The night before Nana died she called my mother (Abena Ampratwum) who was the eldest child among her children and told her, "This night your father (Kwadwo Berko, who died about 20 years ago), came into my room and held my hands and said he has missed me and he wants me to come with him to where he lives, because he cannot get anybody to prepare food for him." My

grandmother responded to her late husband, “No! I want to take good care of our children. If I go with you, nobody will take proper care of them, especially the twins.” The dead person (my grandfather) answered, “No you have to go with me.” My grandmother said to my mother, “Your father is still living with us. He is moving in and around our home. I always feel his presence, but I don’t tell you.” The same afternoon my grandmother passed. In the Book of Kings we read, “The spirit of Elijah came to rest on Elisha” (2 Kings 2:15).

These experiences with dead ancestors make the Asante believe that there is life after death. For example, in the Asante culture when there is an important feast or funeral rite, tradition demands the pouring of libation for the deceased members. When it takes place the names of the ancestors are invoked, all the dead in the family are invited to be present at the function as a witness.

2.5 CHURCH TEACHINGS ON FUNERALS

The Church respects the human body that housed the soul and therefore created funeral rites which provide a respectful remembrance of that individual’s life on earth. While the Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained, these rites must follow specific church format.

2.5.1 GUIDELINES ON THE FUNERAL RITES

The *Diocesan Statutes* is rooted in the Church’s Canon Law, which prescribes that Christ’s faithful deceased be given Church funeral rites according to the norms and Law (Canon 1176 par. 1). Canon Law also directs the Church to pray for the spiritual

support of the dead, to honor the physical bodies of the dead, and at the same time, to bring comfort and hope to the living (Canon 1176 par. 2).

Those to whom Church Funerals are to be allowed:

1. Christ faithful, all baptized Catholics.
2. All catechumens, i.e. those studying catechism in preparation for baptism (can. 1183 par. 1).
3. Children whose parents had intended to have them baptized, but who died before baptism, may be allowed Church funeral rites by the local Ordinary (can. 1183 par.2).
4. Baptized non-Catholics whose ministers are not available may be allowed a Catholic funeral rite by the local ordinary (bishop) unless the deceased in his or her lifetime did not wish to have the rites (par. 3).

Those to whom the Church funerals are to be denied:

Church funeral rites are to be denied to the following, unless they gave some signs of repentance before death (Can. 1184):

1. Notorious apostates, heretics and schismatics;
2. Those who for anti-Christian motives chose that their bodies be cremated;
3. Other manifest sinners to whom a Church funeral could not be granted without public scandal to the faithful.
4. The funeral ceremony of a diocesan Bishop is to be celebrated in his own cathedral church, unless he himself has chosen another church (Can.1178).

5. If a parish has its own cemetery, the deceased faithful are to be buried there; unless another cemetery has lawfully been chosen by the deceased person, or by those in charge of that person's burial (Can.1180 par. 1).

Other considerations are also important. All the faithful should be given a simple burial devoid of all extravagances. To accomplish these goals, The Catholic Diocese of Konongo- Mampong has created the following guidelines for simple burial devoid of all extravagant expenses:

1. The time between death and burial should not be too long. The mortal remains of a Church member should be laid to rest as soon as possible. This means that the family should avoid keeping bodies in funeral homes and mortuaries for more than *two weeks*. In those exceptional cases where close relatives of the deceased are abroad, the period should not exceed *six weeks*. Six weeks may appear to be an extraordinary long time but occasionally individual deprivation and financial needs must be considered.
2. Expensive accoutrements such as luxurious coffins, elaborate wreaths, ornate shrouds, and other items should be avoided. The money can be put to a better use, such as the future care of the widow/widower and the children. The elimination of the wreaths should be stopped for additional reasons. Not only could the money be given to the bereaved family to defray the funeral expenses, but also this new tradition is foreign to the Asante culture and merely an imitation of foreign culture. In addition, the flowers are not even natural; they are all artificial and causing environmental pollution.

3. Video coverage is allowed on the condition that only one video cameraman covers the program.
4. The provision of alcoholic drinks at funeral rites should be stopped, since this tends to lead to drunkenness, disorderly conduct and accidents.
5. In the interest of cutting down cost and eliminating a party atmosphere, the feeding of visitors should not be extravagant. Feeding should be limited to visitors who come from far away places and only as a matter of need. People from the locality should not take advantage of funeral rites to get fed.
6. These expenses emphasize the secularization of the event, and therefore the *Diocesan Statutes* recommend that wakes for all Catholics (including bishops, priests and religious) are hereby stringently limited. Rather than a lengthy wake, on the day of burial the body can be laid in state for a few hours before the funeral Mass.
7. Widowhood rites should be devoid of all observances that connote some form of social restrictions. Widowhood rites should be reduced to last for three months. This will enable widows and widowers to resume their normal life and roles in the community.
8. One practice that has crept into our Catholic tradition is a thanksgiving or memorial service on the Sunday following the burial Mass. Originally a Protestant practice, this seems to have become a part of our Catholic tradition. It is customary on such occasions for the bereaved family members to come to Church in the expensive cloths. We want all Catholics in this diocese to put an end to this practice of “*ntoma twa*”, since it is very expensive and

unnecessary. Bereaved family members should come to church for the thanksgiving service in the normal Sunday clothes/cloths, but not any special clothes worn by the family. The money spent on the “*ntoma twa*” can be used for the education of children in the family. (Most Rev. Joseph Osei Bonsu, Bishop of Konongo-Mampong Diocese. Mampong, *Diocesan Statutes*.

February 21, 2007)

In addition to what has been said in general about funeral rites, the following must be observed in the funeral rites of a priest in the diocese:

1. The burial rites of the Bishop and diocesan priests shall be the direct responsibility of the Diocese.
2. All funeral expenses of the priest and religious working in the Diocese will be borne by the Diocese.
3. Ordinarily, the Bishop will preside at a priest's funeral. If, for some reason, it is impossible for the bishop to do so, he will ask his Vicar General to represent him by presiding at the Mass of Catholic Burial (Diocesan Statutes no.54).

Canon Law does not forbid cremation, unless this method of burial is chosen for reasons that are contrary to Christian teaching (canon 1166 #. 3). Traditionally the Asante did not consider cremation, but now, because of Western influence cremation is now an option.

2.5.2 REVIEW OF RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

The Catholic Church expresses much concern for its members in time of pain, sorrow and mourning. The Church's Code of Canon Law places more emphasis on funeral rites in order to give proper meaning to the understanding of death. The Church also expresses this in a wider range of religious literature. The Catechism of the Catholic Church places emphasis on the funeral rites with these words, "The Christian who dies in Christ reaches at the end of his earthly existence the fulfillment of the new life which was begun in Baptism, strengthened in Confirmation, and nourished in the Eucharist, the foretaste of the heavenly banquet. The meaning of the death of a Christian becomes clear in the light of the death and Resurrection of Christ our only hope. The Christian who dies in Christ Jesus goes 'away from the body and at home with the Lord' (2 Corinthians 5:8) [CCC #s 1680-1683].

A farewell to the deceased is his final "commendation to God" by the Church. It is "the last farewell by which the Christian community greets one of its members before his body is brought to its tomb" (Order of Christian Funeral 10). This is seen in other religious traditions as well. The Byzantine tradition expresses this by the kiss of farewell to the deceased:

By this final greeting "we sing for his departure from this life and separation from us, but also because there is a communion and a reunion.

For even the dead, we are not all separated from one another, because we all run the same course and we will find one another again in the same place. We shall never be separated, for we live for Christ, and we are united with Christ as we go towards him ... we shall all be together in Christ" (Saint Simeon of Thessalonica, *De ordine sepulturae*.336: PG 155, 684).

The general introduction of Order of Christian Funeral (The Rite) states that “In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity ...resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension” (Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 5).

The Church gave meaning to its members regarding the importance it puts into the funeral of its members and their final destination with the Lord. The Holy Bible is the ultimate source for the meaning of death and everlasting life and meaningful words of encouragement to the bereaved families. For example, when it was said, “If one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with him/her, or if one member glories, all members rejoice with him/her” (1Corinthians 12:26).

2.6 CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

The basic models that organize my clinical work with those who are bereaved are many. For example, in the state of vulnerability the following can be seen; despair, helplessness, isolation, resentment and sorrow. This is the clinical principle, meaning that it is conceptually simple enough for a clinician or pastoral counselor to keep in mind while engaged in a reflective dialogue with the bereaved family or person to find out his or her problem(s). Many people find coping with bereaved families and friends an awkward and difficult situation. Everyone knows stories of people who would rather cross the street than face what they feel would be a potentially embarrassing conversation with someone who has been recently bereaved. Dealing

with a widow/widower or even families or children in times of isolation, despair or sorrow during the death of a loved one is not an easy thing to do at all. Dealing with these groups of people, many other things are involved, such as psychological effects, sociological effects, and economical effects. Even how to communicate to the bereaved family introduces very complex issues. If you are able to penetrate through their defenses it becomes easier to help guide them and stop them from dwelling only on their grief.

The following modes of operation are often successful in interacting with the mourners and alleviating the extreme difficulties of the bereavement period.

Make Contact

It is important to make contact as soon as possible. Contact the bereaved person or families immediately to tell them how sorry you are when you hear of their loss. Send a letter or card if appropriate. Most people I spoke to during my interviews say that reading the letters and cards they receive provides valuable support and comfort, particularly during the many sleepless nights they endure when they are alone and without company. They use that moment to read the letters and the words in the cards.

Maintain Contact

Keep the contacts going with visits and phone calls, particularly as the weeks and months pass by. It is about this time that the reality of the loss hits home and yet others are assuming that by this stage, people are over the worst. Continue to invite

them to events and functions. They can always say no, but don't make that assumption yourself.

Listen and let the Bereaved Person Talk

Talking is recognized as one of the most important elements in the grieving and healing process. Let the bereaved person talk about the person who has died and don't be embarrassed by their tears and anger. Don't use platitudes or any trite remarks. Kate Boydell on her excellent website www.merrywidow.me.uk says, "People use platitudes as a replacement for personal experiences, substituting insensitivity for insight." If you have doubts about the success of your statements, don't say anything

Talk About the Person who Died

Many people feel that they shouldn't talk about the person that has died as this will bring on another wave of grief. From my interviews, however, most bereaved people say to me that they find it very hurtful if the deceased is not mentioned, almost as if they had never existed. Remember happy times, things they liked or didn't like, funny things they said. It all helps to keep the memories strong and bring some comfort to the bereaved person or family.

Offer Practical Help

Consider what practical support you can give or offer, such as fetching water, cutting firewood, washing their clothing, taking care of the children, preparing food or helping with any funeral arrangements. For instance, Muslim tradition requires that mourners do not cook for themselves for 40 days after death. Therefore, your

practical support will be needed to supply the food. I saw that trying to maintain regular help for as long as needed or possible make the bereaved person or family happy. This help was offered to me when my father died. Friends around me kept me informed of everything I needed to do and also reminded me to handle the arrangements, such as sending invitations to other friends and many other items.

There are other things that one should not say to the bereaved person or the family. For example, “Give me a call if you need anything,” I think help needs to be freely given without the bereaved person or family having to ask for it. When a loved one is lost, it is often the comfort and caring of friends and family members that helps the most. With thoughtful and practical advice, it helps the bereaved person or family in dealing with a devastating loss and start to recover.

2.6.1 REVIEW OF CLINICAL LITERATURE

Since so many people are uncomfortable with death or confused over the proper way to handle it, the following literature can offer good ideas to help a bereaved person or family establish peace with their loss:

Harold Ivan Smith. (2003) *Grieving the Loss of a Mother*, Augsburg Fortress Publishers. Smith states: “A mother’s death can make a shambles of schedules, priorities, agendas, commitments, and sometimes, even our most important relationships. A mother’s last breath inevitably changes us. “Drawing on his own experience of loss, as well as those of others, Harold Ivan Smith guides readers through their grief, from the process of dying through the acts of remembering and honoring a mother after her death. Our life has not lost its meaning indeed, it has

taken on new meaning as we bury part of our past and write a new chapter in our lives” (Smith 2003).

Marleen de Witte. (2001) *Long Live the Dead*, Aksant Academic Publishers.

Witte places more emphasis on the dead when she says, “One could expect traditional rituals, centered on the extended family and belief about death and ancestorship, to limit the importance of modern funerals in Asante, Ghana. The opposite scenario is taking place. In Asante, technological innovations like mortuaries, mass media, and electronic apparatus have given the funeral new dimensions. This describes how the Asante shape and give meaning to burying its dead through creative interaction. The large amount of time, effort and money that people spend on funeral rites not only reflect transformations in society, they also offer the Asante people opportunities to work out changing social patterns, differences between cities and villages, lifestyles and cultural preferences.” (Witte, 2001)

Maggie Callanan & Patricia Kelley. (1992) *Final Gifts, Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying*, Bantam Books, New York.

Callanan & Kelley say, “Beyond coming to terms with the loss of someone you care and love, we find ourselves with a jumble of conflicting emotions shaken loose by confronting human limitations and mortality” (p. 2). I saw this during the death of my father. When someone you love is dying you may not see gifts, but grief, pain, and loss. The person dying experiences things that his or her family cannot understand which makes the family members and friends say, “His or her mind is wandering.” In reading *Final Gifts*, I discovered how to listen to a bereaved family or friend who has lost a loved one, how to weigh their gesture and meaning so as to avoid responses that

alienate and frustrate. It also allowed me to see how a bereaved person or family approached a death in their lives in ways that have brought comfort and peace, even joy to them. In that circumstance I also gained a peace and comfort as well as a greater awareness of the power of the dead. At the end of this reading I realized that death is not the worst thing that can happen to families and friends or even to myself, but rather estrangement can be worse.

Some people will not know what to say to you when your mother, father or loved one dies. People may even avoid you entirely. This is just a fact and you should not allow it to hurt you too deeply. When it happens expect changes in your relationships. Avail yourself of practical help to ease your adjustment. Of course, always pray for guidance and peace.

Religious and clinical principles discussed in chapter two introduce this project into the next chapter whereby I will describe the materials and the methodology used.

CHAPTER THREE

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

“Weep and you weep alone! - What a lie that is! Weep and you will find a million crocodiles to weep with you. The world is forever weeping. The world is drenched in tears.” Henry Miller, *Sexus*

The respondents in my project are all from Asante which has a land size of 24,390 sq. km, which is about 10.2% of the land area of Ghana. The region has a population density of 163.8 per sq. km. This affords me the opportunity to elicit answers from all walks of life including urbanites and rural dwellers; all ages, both male and female; a wide educational level and different socio-economic range and different degrees of attachment to the Asante culture and heritage. The purpose of this questionnaire is to elicit various understandings concerning death and different attitudes toward the funeral rites. The questionnaire was distributed among 103 friends, acquaintances and strangers. Others introduced the people whom I did not know to me. The questionnaire included a broad range of questions about the individuals' experience with death and the Asante funeral rites. In addition to the questionnaire, I conducted two interviews for the following reasons. First, I wanted to discuss this issue not only from the personal issues but to see these perspectives from the issues of a professional funeral director. Secondly, after reading the results of the questionnaire, I realized that I needed additional information from someone still mourning and thus still

emotionally and psychologically traumatized by the recent death of the close loved one. My interviews were with a professional funeral director and a young man who recently lost his wife.

Based on the answers from the questionnaire and interview, I was able to grasp the Asante's rationale for their concept of death and the need for elaborate expensive funeral rites. I then needed to create a format to educate the Asante and reform the current trend in funeral rites. I devised a local workshop format to present the teachings of the Church based on the Bible, Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Diocesan Statutes. To convince my people, the Asante of the need to reform their funeral rites, they need to believe they are involved in the process of reform.

The workshop is the proper environment for the Asante voice to be heard and for the wisdom of the Church to be shared with my people.

3.1 SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

Below is the questionnaire I used to gather the data for my project.

Questionnaire for project on Funeral Rites among the Asante peoples of Ghana.
Please answer every question to the best of your ability. Answers should be provided from personal experience. If an answer comes from second hand knowledge please indicate the source in your answer. The purpose of this questionnaire is for my Doctor of Ministry Project in Pastoral Counseling.

Personal Information

1. Name:

2. Address:

3. Date and place of birth:

4. Present occupation:

5. Sex: M F

6. Age (circle): 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 66-75

7. Telephone Numbers (Home) (Cell)

Educational background: (circle)

8. Diploma First Degree Masters Doctorate None

Relationship with the Deceased Person

9. How long did you know the deceased person?.....

10. When and where did you get to know the deceased?.....

11. What was your impression about him/her before death?.....

12. How was your relationship with him/her during his lifetime?

13. How did you feel after his/her death?

14. What bothered you most about his/her family?

15. In what way did his/her death affect you?

16. What is your attitude towards his/her funeral?

17. What can you say about his family concerning the funeral rites?

18. What is the source of your information: First hand (you) Second hand (someone else)?

.....

19. How did he/she live his/her faith?

Funeral Rites

20. How did he/she prepare for his/her death?

.....
.....

21. How was the family preparing for his/her funeral?

22. What was the family participation at the funeral?.....

23. What was said about him/her at the funeral?

24. How are funeral rites celebrated in Asante?.....

25. Have you ever participated in funeral rites before? : Yes No

26. How was it organized (circle): Expensive Very Expensive Normal

27. Was it a drain on the family? Yes No

28. How do you see today's funeral rites as compared to the old ways when the family used to do everything by themselves without any "foreign hands"?

.....
.....

29. How did the funeral affect you? (Circle all that apply or just one)

a. Psychological b. Social c. Emotional d. Disturbed e. Very Disturbed

30. Can you describe the effects in three or more lines?

1.....
2.....
3.

31. What are your suggestions regarding the above?

1.
2.....
3.....

32. Do you think the Asante funeral rite is Expensive? Yes No

33. Do you want to see some changes in the Funeral rites? Yes No

34. What changes do you want to see in the Asante funeral rites?

.....

.....

35. How does the family treat the widow/widower and the children?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3.2. INTERVIEWS

FAMILY MEMBER INTERVIEW:

My first interview was with Kwabena Bosompim, a 37-year-old medical doctor at St. Matthias Catholic Hospital at Yeji in Ghana. Kwabena was married to Augusta for one year with no child. Kwabena and Augusta were a happily married couple from the same town, Manhyia, near Besease. Both were hard working, either in their work place or in the church. People speak well of them with their generosity to those in need and their care for the sick. That earned them a name “Okunpa ne Oyerepa”, literally meaning “Good husband and Good wife” among their peers.

Kwabena came to describe to me how he lost his beloved wife, Augusta a 28-year-old nurse. On July 25, Augusta was involved in a car accident while she was returning from a visit to her hometown to visit her aging mother. A driver who was negotiating a curve with a Toyota taxi hit the 38-seated Mercedes Benz bus on which she was a passenger. Of the total passengers on the bus only Augusta died as a result of the vehicular accident.

Kwabena told me, “Father, my wife Augusta touched a lot of lives in her short 28-years on earth.” This was demonstrated by the hundreds of mourners who came for her wake and final funeral rite, many of them in their twenties. “She had a lot of friends,” said her brother Kwaku Manson, a 34-year-old engineer. According to a family member I interviewed, “Augusta was too big for her neighborhood; we found out that she knew people from all walks of life.” The following interview took place at Augusta’s family home on July 16, 2008:

IT – INTERVIEWER, FM – A FAMILY MEMBER

IT1: Good afternoon. How are the spirits of the family?

FM1: It is not easy, but we are all coping with Augusta’s death.

IT2: I hope things are taking shape gradually with the help of your church.

FM2: Sure, each day it gets better and better. More so, the church has shown good solidarity with us. We do appreciate their efforts.

IT3: How was it for the family?

FM3: In fact the experience is multi-layered; the family has incredible feelings of frustration, pain and grief over the death of Augusta.

IT4: I pray that with time all will be well for the family.

FM4: *The father of Augusta entered the room and interjected:* Thank you. Do you know something? Some of the family members are in trouble and depressed. We don’t even know what to do. The death of our daughter has really disturbed us; most especially the longer stay of her body in the mortuary for months is making it more painful because of the family head [Oldest male of extended family]. Some of us

don't understand why we are keeping the body for weeks in the mortuary. The reasons he gave were that he wants the family and relatives to organize themselves adequately to give fitting funeral celebrations to our beloved daughter. Such preparations are expensive and involve a lot of money. Normally, the family has to make room for the following: coffin/casket, food, refreshment for the invited guests, and provision of music, usually a hired band, public address system, and radio and television announcements. Why so much concern about dead?

IT5: Yes, I know it is expensive. But what is the family saying to your elder of the family?

FM5: *Husband of Augusta resumed conversation.* You are from Asante and remember the Asante give much importance to their dead, because of their worldview that a meaningful life is found in maintaining harmony with the spirit of the ancestors, the 'living dead'. As a saying goes, "The spirit of the deceased will continue to influence the lives of her living relatives with blessing or curses depending on how she was treated (or buried) by the living." Then we have a long way to go if that is in the spirit world. I wish the present-day Asante with the King being Christian will shape and give meaning to our funeral celebrations. Our funeral celebrations need to be transformed in such a way that it leaves room for creative interaction and the dynamic nature of Asante funeral celebrations. I want to paraphrase a phrase from my favorite author Marleen de Witte an anthropologist, "Funerals not only reflect transformation in society, they also offer people a space to work out changing social patterns, differences between city and village, lifestyles and cultural preferences, in fact, to stage images of life. By shaping death and remembrance, the Asante at the

same time create life. Current transformations of funeral practices then allow us to grasp the way in which people deal with the process of cultural change in Ghana.

IT6: Please if I may ask. Do you pre-plan your funeral celebrations?

FM6: Really, we don't pre-plan. That is why we are always in debt.

IT7: Like almost everything else in our world, the cost of funeral celebrations will continue to rise as the year, months and weeks go by.

FM7: In addition to removing the financial burden your loved ones may experience at the time of your death, preplanning can also save up to thousands of Ghana cedis.

IT8: I am happy that you agree with what I said.

FM8: I saw that when you prearrange funeral celebrations the family guarantees tomorrow's services at today's lower prices.

IT9: Better yet, you can choose from a wide variety of payment plans to meet your individual budget.

FM9: It's that easy.

IT10: So if you were to plan funeral celebrations today would you know what to do?

FM10: Few of us would. We all realize that the best decisions are always those that are made calmly, rationally, and with ample information in hand. That's why it makes such good sense to plan ahead by taking care of as many plans as possible in advance so that difficult decisions won't be left to your loved ones at a time of confusion and grief.

IT11: How can you ease your family's emotional burden in times of death with unplanned funeral celebrations?

FM11: As we all know, we want to protect our family and loved ones from unnecessary emotional hardship.

IT12: If that is the case, why then do so many people leave someone they love with the tremendous and often-agonizing burden of making final arrangements at what is already a very difficult time?

FM12: When a death occurs, there is an overwhelming number of things that must be done, including dozens of decisions that must be made, documents and information that must be gathered, and hundreds of details that must be taken care of.

IT13: When you plan ahead, much of this responsibility is removed from your loved ones.

FM13: Oh yes. We need to start doing something about the pre planning of funerals.

IT14: Are there any benefits and advantages to the pre planning of funeral celebrations?

FM14: Throughout our lives we plan for many things, wedding, new homes, children's college tuition, vocations and retirement. We all want to protect our families and make sure that important events are planned for and that the correct financial choices have been made. This will bring both benefits and advantages to our funeral rites in our communities.

IT15: Thank you very much for your time and concern.

FM15: You are welcome.

INTERVIEW WITH KWASI ADJEI

I had a second interview with Mr. Kwasi Adjei, a 48-year-old man from Konongo, Asante-Akim. Kwasi is a well-known and successful man in the pre-planning of funeral rites. His funeral home is situated in the Asante regional capital, Kumasi. Kwasi is married to Solace with three beautiful children, two boys, Joseph 17 years old and Peter, 13 years old and the younger child of 10 years old called Natasha. Mr. Kwasi Adjei has been involved in pre-planned arrangements for 16 years and people in the city spoke well of his business. I never met him, but a friend of mine introduced me to him when I needed to speak to someone in that profession.

Mr. Kwasi Adjei received me very well. He offered me a cup of water as custom demands from the Asante when a visitor comes to your home. Mr. Adjei was open about his business and told me anything I wanted to know. He answered my questions as we toured his funereal home.

A = Adjei IT = Interviewer

IT1: Good morning sir.

A1: Good morning. Please can I offer you water?

IT2: Thank you.

A2: Please what brought you here this early morning?

IT3: My mission is simple. I am researching a project for my doctorate degree on why funeral rites in Asante are expensive and why people need to pre plan their funerals.

A3: This is good news. I wish people could come to us to do this kind of project. I think this will even increase our advertisement and the people will get to know us more. Thank you for coming. So please, what ways can I be of help?

IT4: Mr. Adjei, as you know death is inevitable, so is a funeral rite. Mr. Adjei, can you tell me more about the pre- planning of funeral celebrations since rich people in our communities are becoming interested in your business?

A4: The most practical thing everybody can do is to arrange his/her own funeral before he/she dies, to relieve those left behind of the burden. Unfortunately for the bereaved, very few people do this. Perhaps a superstitious feeling lingers that to make plans for one's funeral may invite the approach of death. Pre-planning is an avenue to pre-fund funeral expenses in advance. The reasons to pre-plan are varied and it is our hope that this will address the many problems the family members encounter when death strikes in the family and most importantly the peace of mind that pre-planning will afford you or a loved one.

IT5: Why pre-plan?

A5: There are many advantages in pre-planning funeral celebrations. Pre-planning makes things much easier at the time of death, relieves loved ones of making decisions at a stressful time, lessens future burdens, and encourages wiser financial decisions. Pre-arranging assures that personal preferences are documented and monies are safely invested in a Burial Trust for future use. Pre-planning also offers flexible plans and can be revised at anytime.

IT6: Who arranges the pre-planning?

A6: Pre-planning can be completed by yourself or for a spouse, parents and children. Attorneys, executors, guardians and a power of attorney can also complete pre-planning arrangements.

IT7: What are the means of financing?

A7: Financing a pre-arrangement can be completed with a lump sum deposit into a Burial Trust account which was established by the Asante State during the formal King Nana Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, or payments can be made yearly, semi-annually, quarterly or monthly.

IT8: Are there different types of Burial Trusts?

A8: There are two types of Burial Trust accounts, revocable and irrevocable. A revocable trust is an account where monies deposited can be withdrawn or cancelled without penalty. An irrevocable trust is an account that is established for an applicant's benefit. Monies in this Irrevocable Trust may not be withdrawn or cancelled and may only be used as payment for the funeral of the beneficiary.

IT9: What type of expenses can be included within the trust?

A9: All expenses that pertain to the express purpose of the burial can be included within the burial trust. The trust may include monies for all funeral home expenses, cemetery/cremation expenses, flowers, clergy expenses, monuments, inscriptions, newspaper notices and certified copies of death certificates.

IT10: Are the accounts transferable?

A10: Oh yes, one can transfer without penalty.

IT11: What happens to excess funds?

A11: In the event that there is an overage of funds in a revocable trust after the beneficiary has died, the excess funds are returned to the legal next of kin. In the event that there is an excess of funds in an irrevocable trust upon the beneficiary's death, the overage must be sent to the family to support the children.

IT12: What is the process of establishing the burial trust?

A12: When you are ready and you come to our office you will meet with a knowledgeable funeral professional from my funeral home and they will assist you. There are many types of personalized funerals and services that you can select. Once the details have been defined, your funeral professional will prepare a pre-arrangement and itemized statement for your review. The pre-arrangement has the flexibility to be changed at anytime.

IT13: Do you have any information that will be needed to complete a pre-arrangement? **A13:** Oh yes, we have helpful information. For instance, on the final two pages of our pre-planning guide you will find a helpful list of information that will be needed to complete a pre-arrangement. We encourage individuals and families to call and consult with one of our funeral professionals to answer their questions.

IT14: Can you get me one of the pre-planning forms?

A14: Yes, I have one with me (*he gave it to me*). Below is the detailed information on how they plan the funeral rites for the individual families:

Advance Planning Information Needed:

Name (*Full Legal Name*)

Maiden Name/Surname/Alias/ Sr. / Jr.....

Date of Birth.....

Social Security Number.....

City, State and Country of Birth.....

Citizen of What Country.....

Marital Status: Single/Never Married, Married or Separated, Widowed or Divorced

Surviving Spouse (*Maiden Name*).....

Surviving Spouse Date of Birth.....

Race: Black White Other (*Please Specify*)

Education Level: Elementary Secondary Tertiary Other

Occupation (*Do not enter "Retired"*).....

Type of Business.....

Address.....

Father's Name.....Mother's Maiden Name.....

Name of Information (Legal Next of kin).....

Address.....

Telephone Number (s): Home.....Business.....

Church Affiliation (*If Any*).....

Religious/Civic/Fraternal Organization(s) Affiliations.....

Cemetery Information.....

IT15: Thank you very much for your time.

A15: You are welcome. I hope you enjoyed our interview. Please find time to visit our new and only funeral home again in our district any time you come to the city.

IT16: I will.

After the interview I reflected upon Kwabena's ideas and I concluded that Augusta's family members were worried about the escalating cost of the funeral rites. In addition to the understandably emotional reaction of depression about the death of their beloved, most of the family members were also worried about how they would find money to finance the funeral rites of their loved daughter. The family members were afraid and feeling the pain that people would laugh at them if they did not provide fitting funeral rites for Augusta since many people know her. Her husband told me "family is expecting many people before and during the funeral rites."

3.3. ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I. BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

SEX

Male.....	30representing.....	29.13%
Female.....	73representing.....	70.87%
Total number	103representing.....	100%

AGE

The following is the age breakdown of the 103 people I interviewed during the month of July, 2008 about the escalating cost of funeral rites:

18 – 25.....	21representing.....	20.4 %
26 – 35.....	20representing.....	19.4 %
36 – 45.....	42 representing.....	40.8 %

46 – 55.....	10representing.....	9.7 %
56 – 65.....	7representing.....	6.8 %
66 – 75.....	3representing.....	2.9 %
Total number.....	103representing.....	100%

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Diplomas.....	13representing.....	12.7%.
First Degree.....	10representing.....	9.7%
Masters.....	10representing.....	9.7%
Doctorate.....	8representing.....	7.8%.
None.....	62representing	60.1%.
Total number.....	103representing.....	100%.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC LEVELS

The following is the breakdown into sub-categories of those I interviewed according to their jobs:

Medical Doctors.....	4representing.....	3.88%
Lecturers (Ph.D.).....	4representing.....	3.88%
Mechanical Engineers.....	5representing.....	4.85%
Business Men & Women.....	15representing.....	14.59%
Farmers.....	18representing.....	17.47%
Nurses.....	9representing	8.73%
Teachers.....	12representing.....	11.68%
Market women.....	10representing.....	9.70%

Unemployed.....	7representing.....	6.79%
Students.....	6representing.....	5.82%
Accountants.....	6representing.....	5.82%
Priests.....	7representing.....	6.79%
Total number	103representing.....	100%

II CORE ISSUES

The following questionnaire became the core issue of this project due to the way and means the respondents answered it and the emphasis they had shown towards the questions.

1. Amount of expenses paid for funeral?

The responses were:

Normal.....	0 representing.....	0%
Expensive.....	30 representing.....	29.13%
Very Expensive.....	73 representing.....	70.87%
Total number	103 representing.....	100%

2. When they were asked, “How did the funeral rites affect you?”

The responses were:

Psychological.....	14 representing.....	13.59%
Economic.....	60 representing.....	58.25%
Emotional.....	10 representing.....	9.70%

Disturbed.....	4representing.....	3.88%
Very Disturbed.....	15representing.....	14.58%
Total number.....	103representing.....	100%

3. Do you think the Asante funeral rites are expensive?

Despite age, gender, educational and socio-economic differences the responses were:

Yes.....	10 representing.....	100%
No.....	0representing.....	0%
Total number.....	103representing.....	100%

5. Do you want to see some changes in the Asante funeral rites?

The responses were:

Yes.....	93representing.....	90.29%
No.....	10representing.....	9.71%.
Total number.....	103representing.....	100%

6. What changes do you want to see in Asante funeral rites?

The responses were:

Reduce cost of funerals.....	86representing.....	83.49%
Churches should intervene.....	4 representing.....	3.88%
Do not keep the body.....	13 representing.....	12.62%
Total number	103 representing.....	100%

7. What is the source of your information?

The responses were:

First hand.....	96representing.....	93.21%
Second hand.....	7representing.....	6.79%
Total number	103representing.....	100%

COMMENTS PROVIDED BY RESPONDENTS ON PARTICULAR ISSUES

The following is a random sampling of awareness to some pertinent questions that ran through the interviews. Below are descriptions of the randomly selected respondents and their responses:

Do you think Asante Funeral Rites are expensive?

Adwoah: Adwoah is a 31-year-old teacher. She holds her masters degree in education. Adwoah is married to Mike, a senior accountant at the University of Science and Technology, with two beautiful children; Ama three years old and Yaw seven months old. Adwoah's response to the question is as follows:

Funeral celebrations these days have become more or less like an outward expression of wealth and social status rather than a solemn prayer for the deceased and consoling moment for the family of the deceased. She expressed her concern that funeral rites today are very expensive and need to be changed.

Kwasi: Kwasi is a 36-year-old medical doctor, working in the Komfo Anokye Teaching hospital in Kumasi. He is married to Joyce with three children. Kwasi has been working in this hospital for six years. His response to the question is:

Simply said, funeral celebrations are very expensive and unnecessary. We need a change.

Abena: Abena is a 45-year-old lecturer at the University of Science and Technology. She is married with four children. She is married to Dr. Peterson, who is also a lecturer at the same university. Abena has been a lecturer for five years with a good background in mechanical engineering. Her response to the question is:

Funeral these days are very expensive. Very close family members pay for all expenses that put the some family members into economic crises.

Agya: Agya is a wealthy farmer in the Asante region. He is married with eight children and the youngest is 34 years old. Agya holds his masters degree in finance. He is 68 years old. He is married to Cindy. The two owned a big cocoa farm, palm plantation and six big fishponds. Agya always talks about the expensive cost of funeral rites, therefore, this interview was a platform for him to elaborate his point. His response to the question is:

The Funeral is much more expensive compared to the old days. In the olden days funeral rites were not costly because everything was done by the family. The families were not serving or giving any food. The local drinks, "Odoka," palm wine drinks were served.

From this random sampling of interviews, of the 103 people I spoke to 100% expressed their displeasure that funeral rites of today are very expensive.

How does the family treat the widow/widower and the children?

The responses were:

Dr. Kwabena Ofori: Dr. Kwabena Ofori is a lecturer at Ohio University, in the United States. Dr Ofori is married to Tina, a nurse with two beautiful girls. Dr. Ofori is 56 years old. He has always been an advocate for the reform of funeral rites. His response was:

The widow/widower is not maltreated these days. In the past the widow/widower was required to go through painful rituals such as fasting for nine days.

Yaw Owusu: Owusu is my brother-in-law. He holds his Masters degree in public finance. He works at the United Nations. He is 28 years old with one son named Thomas with his beautiful wife called Birago. When the question was asked, his response was:

It depends on the relationship and if the property left by the deceased is without a will.

Fr. Richard: Fr. Richard is a 63-year-old Catholic priest, who has been ordained for the past 22 years. Fr Richard holds his Masters degree in moral theology from Urbaniano University, Rome. Fr. Richard is a lecturer at Saint Peter's Regional Major Seminary, Pedu, Cape Coast for the past 10 years.

Sometimes some family members can confiscate the property of the deceased persons. However, the PNDC Law 111 of the Republic of Ghana has come to settle this anomaly that comes about as a result of interstate succession laws. Some families however try to take proper care for the deceased person's spouse, children and dependants, if any.

Raphael Peters: Raphael is a student at the University of Ghana. He is 21 years old. Raphael is studying business administration as his major. He is single and a best friend of my younger brother who shares the same room at the university hall. His response to the question was:

Sometimes the family of the deceased drive the widow/widower away just after the burial. At times they were asked to pay huge amounts of money and to buy an expensive casket or coffin.

My analysis of this information suggests that nearly nine of ten people I interviewed agreed that funeral rites of today among the Asante are much more expensive than before. My specific observations about funeral rites imply that upon my reflections on the bereaved families, their self-presentation strategies may be extended to other aspects of their social and economic lives so as to assist them financially.

3.3.1 GENDER STUDY

Of the 103 respondents, 73 were women and 30 were men. Someone may ask, why is the majority of the respondents women? The answer is very simple. First and foremost, women attend funeral rites celebrations more than men and women's participation at funerals is also more inspire than men. Women perform many more functions at the funerals grounds than men. It is the women who serve drinks and

water as well as food to the guests. At the same time the women go around the entire funeral grounds (open area) where the ceremony is taking place. The women shake hands with friends and neighbors as well as the well wishers who donated money to the bereaved family. These contributions are meant to reduce the cost incurred during the funeral rite. This is a practice in the Asante culture. People give donations to show their love towards the dead or some family members.

The women from the bereaved family also perform another important function by giving receipts to people who make a donation to the bereaved family. People give donations depending on the person's affiliation to the family, the dead person, the widow or the children of the dead. These donors need to be thanked in front of the gathering to show the family's appreciation. The family shows appreciation to all those who mourn with them. The women in the family go around the whole community thanking and shaking hands with people who donate money to the family and also showing gratitude to all the community. Some families also hire some people to beat "gongon" (announcements) to thank the whole community for their support during the funeral. Below are examples of the receipts for donations people made to the bereaved families during the funeral ceremony.

DONATION RECEIPT


The families of
MAD. ADWOA MENSAH
 wish to express their kindly gratitude to your donation

Name: Elder Ampofo


Amount: \$ 20.00

Date: 5th January, 2008

God bless U


 Aged 95yrs

The Late


DR. KOFI DIAW
 AGED 52

Name: Elder & Mrs Dei Ampofo

Address: _____

Amount: \$ 40,000

Date: 20/8/07

Signature: [Signature]

The family of the late
DR. KOFI DIAW
 express their sincere gratitude to you for your kind donation.

Fig.4. Examples of donation receipts.

An Akan proverb says: “Women attend funerals more than men”, simply because men do not do as much work at the funerals as women do. Women devote much of their time to support and help the family at times of funerals, just as they do in naming ceremonies, cooking and weddings. Men will rather find excuses, such as to see a friend to share bottle of beer or local wine with before getting ready to attend the funeral rites. That is why women are more visual at the funerals.

Thirty of the men I interviewed did perform different functions, like sitting at the donation tables collecting funeral donations from friends and well wishers, arranging of the chairs, canopies and entertainment. As a whole, more women go to funerals than men. Since women are more involved with the funeral ceremonies, stress responses detected among the women were more dominant than men.

Of the 100% asked whether funerals were expensive, 68% of women and 38% of men answered in the affirmative.

3.3.2 AGE STUDY

The bar chart below shows the age distribution of the respondents I interviewed. I considered those from 18-35 years as the younger generation and they form 39.8% of the total respondents. Those from 36-55 years are considered the middle age generation. They constitute 50.5% of the total respondents. Finally, those from the ages of 56-75 years are the older generation. They represent 9.7%.

The bar chart below shows the age study of the respondents:

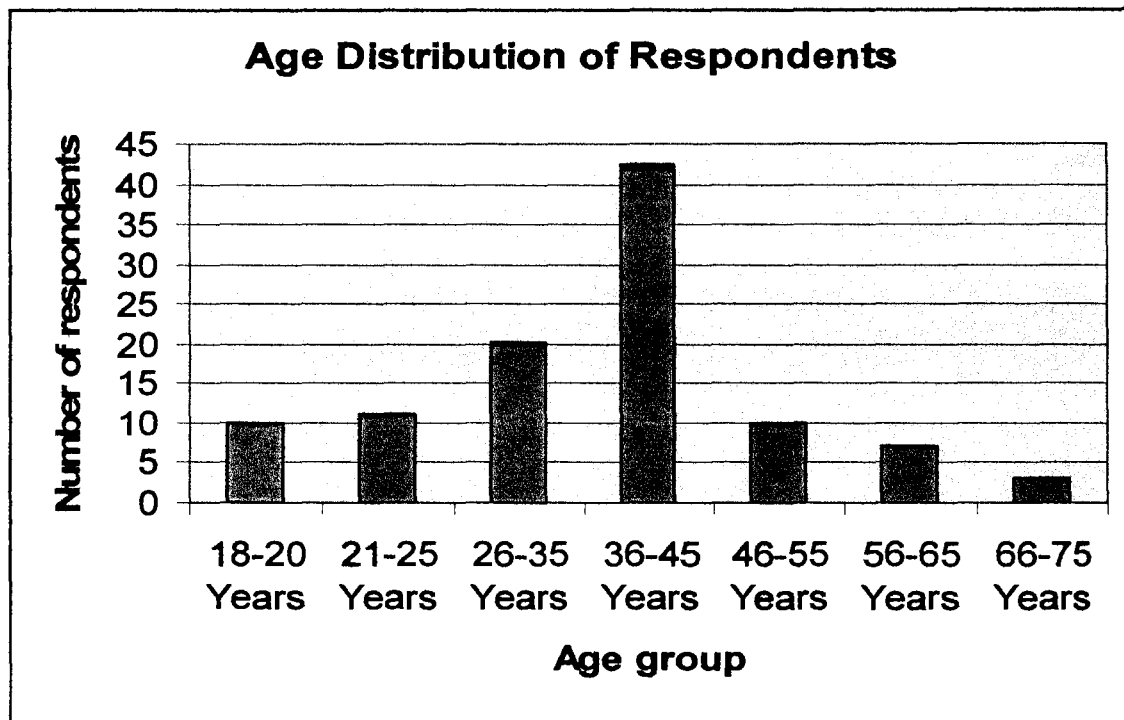


Figure 5: Age Distribution of respondents

Figure five shows the age distribution of the respondents of the interview. The age groups have been divided into seven: 18-20, 21-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65 and 66-75. Of these respondents, 30% are between ages of 18-35, representing the youth, 25% are between the ages of 36-55 who represents the middle age, and 13% are between ages of 56-75 representing the older generation. When the question was asked, “Do you think the Asante funeral rites are expensive?” all the respondents responded “Yes” which represents 100%. This shows that every participant and the people accept that the costs of funeral rites in the Asante are very expensive. These responses reflect the opinion that funeral rites are draining to the economic growth of the families and communities of Asante.

3.3.3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY

When this question was asked, “Do you think the Asante funeral rites are expensive?” 100% of the total respondents of 103 said, yes, funeral rites of today are expensive. Of these respondents 45% are men and a total of 55% are women. Forty Five percent of respondents were between the ages of 18-35 and represented 25% of my study. Of this portion 18% are in a working class, 3% working farmers, 3% are students and 1% unemployed. The other percentage of the men between the ages of 36-55 represents the middle age representing 15%. From this there are 9% working classes, 5% farmers and the other 1% is unemployed or a gardener. Lastly, the remaining 5% are from the ages of 56-75. Mostly, these men are retirees.

The points of view of the women’s profile based on their ages are as follows: Of the respondents 55% are women. Those between the ages of 18-35 representing 40% of my survey are the largest group. Of these 30% are engaged in other socio-

economic activities, such as an engineer, lawyer, nurse, teacher, medical doctor, accountant, journalist and many more. The other 10% are self-employed in the fields of seamstress, wood engineers, petty trader and mechanics. The remaining 5% are mostly farmers. Some women are engaged in poultry farms, palm plantation, cocoa farms, coffee, cassava, plantain, and other root crops.

Despite the age, gender, education and socio-economic differences, all respondents agreed that funeral rites in the Asante are expensive.

3.4 EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

THE ESCALATING COST OF ASANTE FUNERAL RITES HAS DIMINISHED ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND SPIRITUAL MEANING

Description of Project Workshop

Based on my experience attending approximately five workshops offered by the diocese on trying to limit the cost of the expensive funeral rites, I believe to some extent they did not work due to its organization without follow ups. Therefore, I decided to write this project. I created a different format of workshop to educate my people concerning more proper and financially acceptable funeral rites. The question is: How can my workshop be different from the diocesan workshop? With this question in mind I tried to organize my workshop from the grassroots. I sent my letters to the parishes and picked some individuals outside the church to attend. The diocesan workshop was in the form of a lecture but my workshop was based more on interaction than the pure lecture. After the presenters finished their presentations the participants divided into smaller groups themselves and discussed the topics in order

to and develop a solution. I included many people from the laity. This workshop became theirs, not mine. Below is the sample of the workshop announcement sent out to the participants.

Workshop Announcement

Escalating Cost of Funeral Rites: How you can help!

Workshop Location

Workshop Date and Time

With the growing concern over the increasing of cost of funerals in Asante, many families are finding it difficult to pay for their children's school fees and are unable to send their children for medical treatment resulting in unwanted death, pain and bankruptcy. This workshop will assist the Asante in stopping the escalating cost of funeral rites and retain the spiritual meaning of the funeral rites. The Catholic Diocese of Konongo-Mampong in conjunction with the Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference is organizing workshops to limit this problem affecting our communities. This workshop is an opportunity for participants to take a frontline defense against escalating costs of funeral rites. The Diocese is encouraging all of us, both participants and non-participants to take preventive measures to help stop the spread of expensive funeral rites.

This workshop is one of a series of opportunities to help train its parishioners before our communities and the church run into serious crisis. Workshops are open to adults and our future leaders (youth).

Hope to see you there.

Rev. Fr. John Adusch Poku

Below was an available forms sent out with the announcement.

How to organize the Workshop

Registration Form

Name:

Parish/School:.....

Address:.....

Town/Village:.....

Phone Number:.....

E-mail (option):.....

Please tell me what you want to achieve, or take home from the workshop.

.....

.....

.....

Signature of participant

Date

In case of emergency, contact:

Name:.....

Home Phone:.....Cell Phone:.....

Checklist

Before the Workshop

Date Confirmed.....July 21, 2008

Site secured.....Spiritan Retreat Center

Welcome: Program overview.....Ms. Abena Achia

Yamoah

Presenter: **Escalating cost**Dr. Kwame Dei
 Ampofo
 Presenter: **Economic Effects on Funeral**.....Dr. Paul Mensah
 Presenter: **Bishops Conference Regulation**.....Bishop Osei Bonsu
 Presenter: **Traditional Asante Funeral Rites**.....Nana Ampim Kutupa
 III
 Wrap-up.....Fr. Peter Amoah
 Equipments: VCR, TV, Projector, Screen.....Mr. Samuel Tutuka
 Mailing (date, time, directions to site).....Mr. Yaw Baawuah
 Refreshments.....Mrs. Theresa Odum
 Bathrooms (make sure of accessibility).....Manager (SRC)
 Publicity.....Mr. Kingsley Derchie

At the Workshop

Registration table.....Ms. Abena Pomaa
 Equipment: VCR, TV, Projector, and Screen.....Mr. Samuel Tutuka
 Assigning groups.....Fr. Emmanuel Gyamfi
 Welcome.....Mrs. Augustina Amoako
 Telephone.....Mr. Kofi Amah
 Evaluation (collection of completed evaluation forms)...Fr. John Aduseh Poku

After the Workshop

Publicity.....Mr. Kinsley Derchie
 Evaluation assessment.....Fr. John Aduseh Poku

Workshop Agenda

Location: Spiritan Retreat Center
 Date: July 21, 2008
 Time 9:00 am

Part one

Meditation: Examine how you are living this day.
 Begin with the first sensations you can recall.
 How did I wake up? How did I greet the day?
 How did I feel when I woke up? Something is happening.
 What is it? What led up to that moment? How did I act?
 Was I able to see God in that moment?
 Remember that any new practice takes time to establish a pattern.
 Always be ready to receive a new insight.

Holy Mass – Most Rev. Joseph Osei Bonsu (Bishop of Konongo-Mampong)

Breakfast

Break (20 minutes)

Part Two

Welcome and Introduction: Very Rev. Dr. Paul Attah Nsiah

Speaker: Workshop Host

Speaker point:

Welcome participants to the area

Introduce workshop speakers by Dr. Mrs. Augustina Osei Owusu

Explain the escalating cost of funeral rites by Rev. Fr. John Aduseh Poku.

Program purpose: The workshop was established to stop the spread of expensive costs of funeral rites.

Workshop goal: change of mindset of the Asante

Part Three

Presentation: **Economic Effect of Funeral Rites on the Families by: Dr. Paul Mensah**

Break into small groups

Groups: time period (30 minutes)

Groups return: reports (30 minutes):

- (a) 5 minutes update
- (b) 5 minutes clarification
- (c) 15 minutes discussion
- (d) 5 minutes speakers remarks
- (e) 5 minutes presenters respond

Leader

Secretary

Reporter

Individual take note

Discussion: Pro/Cons on the topic

Lunch

Break (30 minutes)

Part Four

Presentation: **Escalating Cost of Funeral Rite by: Dr. Kwame Dei Ampofo (Ph.D)**

Groups break away to create New Funeral rite proposal

Part Five

Presentation: **Notion of Death and Asanteman Funeral Rites** by: **Nana Ampim IV.**

Group discussions

Presentation: **Bishops Conference Regulations** by: **Most Rev. Joseph Osei Bonsu**

Group discussions

Workshop Evaluation

Please take the time to evaluate this expensive funeral rite workshop by filling out the form below. Although this is optional, your comments and suggestions will help the Diocese in dealing with these problems.

Date:Location of Workshop:

Have you previously attended a funeral workshop?

How did you hear about this workshop?

.....

Was the information presented in a clear and concise manner?

.....

Which parts of the workshop did you enjoy the most?

.....

How could the workshop be improved?

After completing this workshop, do you feel that you could organize/participate in

funeral workshop? Yes No Unsure

How will you utilize the information you learned at the training workshop today?

.....

.....

Overall, how would you rate the workshop? (Circle)

Excellent

Very Good

Good

Poor

Please provide any additional comments or suggestions about the workshop.....

.....
.....
.....

Return this form at the end of the workshop or mail to:

*Rev. Fr. John Aduseh Poku
St. Raymond's Parish
263 Atlantic Avenue
East Rockaway, New York, 11518*

3.4.1 THE NEW FUNERAL RITES PROPOSALS

After the workshop, the facilitators and the participants along with the representatives of the Catholic Church, other Christian leaders and some members of Ghanaian society who have expressed concern about the unnecessary waste of money spent on funeral rites stated the following new proposals for funeral rites. The new proposals are as follows:

1. Since the length of time between death and burial is too long, the mortal remains of a Church member should be laid to rest as soon as possible. This means that the families should avoid keeping bodies in funeral homes and mortuaries for more than *two weeks*. In those exceptional cases where close relatives of the deceased are abroad, the period should not exceed *six weeks* from the death.

2. All unnecessary expenses incurred on mortuary, wreaths, food and drinks should stop with immediate effect. In the reception and conveyance of the corpse from the mortuary to the cemetery for burial, actions that are glaringly unchristian or disrespectful or that smack of “paganism” should be avoided. These include “soroku” (Special local band).
3. The priest in charge of a parish should always be informed as soon as a member of the faithful dies. The fixing of the date of the burial and the making of the program for the burial Mass should be done in consultation with the priest. The family should not fix the date of the burial and then just go and inform the priest.
4. One practice that has crept into our Catholic tradition is the Thanksgiving or Memorial Service on the Sunday following the burial Mass. Originally a Protestant practice, this seems to have become a part of our Catholic tradition. It is customary on such occasions for the bereaved family members to come to Church in the same type of cloth. All Catholics in the diocese should put an end to this practice of “*ntoma twa*”, since it is very expensive and unnecessary. Bereaved family members should come to Church for the Thanksgiving Service in their normal Sunday clothes/cloths.
5. The widowhood rites should be devoid of all observances that connote some form of punishment. It is recommended that widowhood rites last three months. This will enable widows and widowers to resume their normal life and roles in the Church and the community as well as the Asante.

The participants of the workshop presented their new proposals on the funeral rites to the diocesan bishop and have suggested that they be implemented in his diocese.

3.4.2 PARISH VISITATION

After the workshop, the next level of reform was implemented on the parish level. According to the Code of Canon Law, “A parish is a certain community of Christ’s faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest (pastor) as its proper pastor” (can. 515 par.1). In the Asante region of Ghana a parish is comprised of different towns and villages coming together under one pastor. For example, when I was in Ghana my formal parish consisted of twenty-four towns and villages which we called a parish.

It became necessary that each parish organize a workshop to explain the outcome of the main workshop to its congregation in the form of a parish visitation. This visitation was comprised of two representatives from each of the towns and villages to represent the parish. This visitation was purely for Catholics and the community visitation was for all. I devised visitation followed up every three months by the pastor. Based on the Diocesan policy, each parish organized their own parish visitations by the priest and the parish parochial council on how to reduce the expensive cost of the funeral rites. I combined five different parishes in our diocese and explained to the representatives the ways and means the diocese can support limiting the expensive costs of funeral rites and bring more spiritual meaning to its people. The meeting with the parishioners from various parishes was to explain why

more emphasis should be put on the importance of the spiritual meaning of the funeral rites. The visitation was organized in the form of prayer service. I began with the following introductory prayer:

“Let us pray;

Father, God of all consolation, in your unending love and mercy for us you turn the darkness of death into the dawn of new life. Show compassion to your people in their sorrow. Be our refuge and our strength to lift us from the darkness of this grief to the peace and light of your presence. Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ by dying for us conquered death and by rising again restored life. AMEN.”

Then I began my instruction: It has been the Church’s custom in the funeral rites not only to commend the dead to God but also to support the Christian family’s hope and the future resurrection of the dead. Remember that in the funeral rites the Church celebrates the paschal mystery of Christ. Those who in baptism have become one with the dead and risen Christ will pass with him from dead to life, to be purified in soul and welcomed into the fellowship of the saints in heaven.

In prayer to the dead, the Church “acknowledged and is reminded that in some inexplicable way, Jesus has “opened a way” for our deceased members and a new quality of life, a way to regain a lost dimension of the spiritual meaning of the funeral rites, and bring in our intended, true, whole humanity. In celebrations for the dead, whether it be the funeral service or any other, more emphasis should be given to the bible readings rather than the entertainment. When we do that we proclaim the paschal mystery of God, support the hope of reunion in the kingdom of God, teach respect for the dead, and encourage the witness of Christian living.” Christians’ faith

was made whole when Saint Paul said, "...If we believe that Jesus died and rose, God will bring forth with him the dead those who have fallen asleep believing in him" (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-14). This charge to evangelism and ministry shapes our lives and the lives of all who hear it in ways we never dreamed of. Let us go out and join the crusade and transform our people's lives and communities and nations in limiting the expensive cost of funerals and put an emphasis on the spiritual meaning.

Remember that before Jesus' death, he reassured his followers, including you and me, that we would not be abandoned. The Advocate, the Spirit of God's truth, this forceful Spirit, would come to guide and inspire us. Let us go out to tell our stories to our people as the first disciples of Jesus who gathered in that upper room were able to go forth and tell the story, the Gospel story of Jesus Christ. Go out and share your story slowly with confidence, and make secure all that we have talked about at this evening gathering.

I ended the parish visitation with the following prayer.

"Let us pray:

Lord Jesus our redeemer, you willingly gave yourself up to death so that all people might be saved and pass from death into a new life. Lord watch over your people gathered here this evening so that we can go home and share your spiritual message with our family and the communities, so that we can bring the spiritual meaning to funeral rites rather than expensive cost. AMEN."

At the end of the parish visitation the representatives agreed that the funeral rites are very costly and something needed to be done to change the escalating costs which make the people suffer sleepless nights and cause the economic hardship the family

members go through in times of death. The representatives were so happy that at last a workshop of that nature has come closer to them, so, they too can express their views on the subject concerning them and their future.

3.4.3 COMMUNITY VISITATION

The second level of the funeral rites reform was implemented community by community. The community visitation is different from that of the parish visitation because it is for non-Catholics. The representatives are selected from all walks of life and the religious communities including the African Traditional Religion, literary known as traditional religion (those who worship small gods), Muslims, Protestants, agnostics and even atheists in the town or the village by their community leaders. The community members approve their nominations based on their community participation, for example, their participation in manual labor in the town or the village, and participation in social functions. The formula for this visitation comprised of ten different communities with each community represented by three representatives. It can either be two men and one woman or the other way round. The total number of participants was 30 members from the 10 communities. In visiting the communities I designed two forms of questions to be followed. The first group of questions is for friends and guests and the second group of questions is for the family. In our visitation we share ideas about how the Asante can limit the escalating cost of funeral rites. Members made a lot of contributions and the following questions came out. From the questions the following answers were received from the communities:

For Friends and Guests

Question: *What is the proper attire/dress to wear to the visitation/wake and funeral?*

Answer: For men, black shirt and black pants. Casual is fine for the visitation, however a native cloth is more appropriate for the funeral visitation. To avoid feeling out of place, avoid blue jeans, shorts and t-shirts. For ladies, black or red cloth is fine for the visitation and funeral.

Question: *What should one send to the family; food, flowers, card or donation?*

Answer: Often times, neighbors and friends will send food to the house after a death has occurred. Family, close friends and business associates should make donations instead of sending cards and flowers. Just showing up for the service and proving support and sympathy means a lot to the bereaved family. If you are not sure what to do simply call a family member and ask what the family needs rather than to send the family sympathy card or flowers.

Question: *What should one say to the family at the funeral or visitation?*

Answer: Just saying “I am sorry,” or expressing your condolences is often a way to greet a close family member of the deceased. A conversation may continue from there. If not, it’s okay. Remember just showing up means a lot to the family. Many people will often share a happy memory of the deceased with the family.

Question: *When is the proper time to leave a visitation or funeral?*

Answer: *During the visitation, once you have greeted the family members, it is up to your own discretion whether to stay or leave. If there are a small number of people at the wake, it is ok to stay as long as you wish, but don’t expect the family to serve you*

with either drink or food. However, if there are large numbers of people, the family will be talking to many people and you may want to keep the conversation brief.

After the funeral rite there shouldn't be any announcement of family receiving friends for a reception. If nothing is announced, it is safe to assume there is no reception and a brief goodbye to the family is appropriate.

For The Family

Question: *How many people should you expect at the funeral and visitation?*

Answer: It is never easy to guess how many people will show up for a visitation or funeral. If the deceased was very active in the community or had a large family in the community, chances are it will be large. If the deceased was older and had few family members in the area, it is likely to be a smaller funeral rite.

Question: *Should there be a reception?*

Answer: There shouldn't be any reception at all. At the end of the funeral rite, the family members alone can sit and share ideas about how the funeral went, and how to plan the future.

Question: *When is the proper time to send thank you notes?*

Answer: Acknowledgement should be sent as soon as possible because you may have too much going in your mind. Acknowledgements are usually written to those who have made donations such as food or money. It is not necessary to send a thank-you note to everyone who signed the register book or visited the family during and after the funeral.

3.5 CONCLUSION BASED ON DATA

The above data collected from the participants indicates that the funeral rites in the Asante are very expensive. Again it shows that the people pay much attention to the social, economic and entertaining aspects of funeral rites more than the spiritual meaning of the funeral. Both interviewers and participants of the workshop as well as the communities maintained that something should be done to limit the escalating cost of the funeral rites. A majority of the responders also want to see some changes. For example in the core issues # 5 a question was asked, “Do you want to see some changes in the Asante funeral rites?” 90% of 103, of the total respondents responded “yes” while 10% out of 103 said “no”. Those who responded “no” are mostly from the youth group who are single and do not have much experience with the cost of funeral rites. During the workshop, the participants listened attentively and respectfully to the topics presented and suggested that they would go back to their communities to share what they have learned together with each other and find how they can support their communities in dealing with the escalating cost of funerals.

The information culled from my research convinced me that reforms of the funeral rites were necessary for my people, the Asante.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Death is a crown of life – Where death is denied, poor man lives in vain; to live would not be life, even fools would wish to die.” Young

“I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure. Here I give back the keys of my door and I give you all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind words from you. We were neighbors for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corners is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.” Tagore, from Gitanjali, XCIII

The results of the survey, questionnaire and interviews culminated in the creation of a project that consisted of three workshops’. The purpose of the workshops was for participants to understand the reforms of the funeral rites and ceremonies.

4.1 ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM THE WORKSHOP

Three different workshops were organized at two different places, the parish, and the community with 30 participants in each. These participants are going out to serve as trainers in their own parish and communities. They too would train community volunteers to go around to educate the community members on the need to cut down the cost of the funeral rites.

I. BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

SEX

Male.....	40 representing.....	44.44%
Female.....	50 representing.....	55.56%
Total number.....	90 representing.....	100%

AGE

The following is the age breakdown of the 90 participants of the workshops during the month of July, 2008 about the escalating cost of funeral rites.

18 - 25.....	15 representing.....	16.66%
26 - 35.....	24 representing.....	26.68%
36 – 45.....	30 representing.....	33.34%
46 – 55.....	12 representing.....	13.33%
56 -65.....	5 representing.....	5.55%
66 – 70.....	4 representing.....	4.44%
Total number.....	90 representing.....	100%

SOCIO-ECONOMIC LEVELS

The following is the breakdown into sub-categories of the participants of the workshops according to their jobs:

Farmers.....	16representing.....	17.78%
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Catechists.....	15	representing.....	16.67%
Chiefs.....	13	representing.....	14.45%
Teachers.....	30	representing.....	33.34%
Market women.....	8	representing.....	8.88%
Students.....	8	representing.....	8.88%
Total number.....	90	representing.....	100%

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

High School.....	32	representing.....	35.55%
First Degree.....	40	representing.....	44.44%
Diploma.....	18	representing.....	20.10%
Total number.....	90	representing.....	100%

The following workshops were held at the Spiritan Retreat Center at Ejisu near Kumasi (Asante regional capital) on July 21, 2008. The workshops were organized by me for the purpose of my project, but with the help from the Diocesan Funeral Committee. The Diocesan Funeral Committee and the Diocesan Bishop paid for everything during the workshops, including the food, facilitators or presenters' remunerations as well as the transportation cost of the participants. The workshops were structured so that they could attract many people of all walks of life and to make it more attractive to the participants, also to find out why many families and individuals spend more money on funeral rites. The purpose of these workshops was to help the Asante to focus more on the living and the spiritual meaning of the funeral

rites rather than to spend more money on the dead, and how the people themselves can help to reduce the escalating cost of the funeral rites in their own communities.

EVALUATION OF WORKSHOPS

The following constitutes the evaluation of the workshops.

1. Do you agree to what was presented?

Yes.....	78representing.....	86.66%
No.....	7representing.....	7.78%
Unsure.....	5representing.....	5.56%
Total number.....	90representing.....	100%

2. After completing these workshops do you feel that you could organize funeral workshops?

Yes.....	80 representing.....	88.88%
No.....	6 representing.....	6.67%
Unsure.....	4 representing.....	4.45%
Total number.....	90representing.....	100%

3. Overall how would you rate the workshops?

Excellent.....	30representing.....	33.33%
Very Good.....	50representing.....	55.56%
Good.....	10representing.....	11.11%

Poor.....	0representing.....	0%
Total number.....	90representing.....	100%

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF OUTCOME

According to the methods and materials described in Chapter Three, the following outcomes were assessed: The questionnaires, surveys and interviews all of the respondents concluded that the cost of funeral rites in the Asante are very expensive therefore, there is a need to educate the people and examine the escalating cost of Asante funeral rites, and give more spiritual meaning rather than the fancy nature of the funerals of today. The question is, “How can the Asante be helped in the process of limiting the expensive cost of the Asante funeral rites yet still find a means that will help them process their grief?”

During the workshops many people expressed some positive ideas about the proposals presented to them as something good to help the people. Some of their opinions expressed during the workshops are as follows:

It became clear that in times of death family members cry for two things. First, they cry because of the vacuum created by their loved one within the family. The dead person may be the breadwinner of the family and his or her absence creates a great vacuum among the family, children, widow or the widower. Secondly, because of the high cost of the funeral rites the family members wonder where to get the money to pay the funeral costs.

One woman (name withheld) an interviewer said, “Father, it is our hope and belief that this workshop though we have attended one before but this particular workshop

will provide an honest, useful way with dealing with various stages of emotional pain, stress, anger, depression that the family goes through.”

Other members of the workshops also expressed their dissatisfaction with the way funeral rites are being conducted in their families. Some said, “If the family spends the whole money to buy a coffin to bury the dead, where do the family members get money for their needs. The families should eliminate lavish spending and shift their priorities to the care of the children of the deceased and others who are in need of help.”

Mr. Kwame Nsiah, a 46 year old senior accountant at Unique Trust Fund, Ghana said, “Father the cost of funeral rites in our society is so cumbersome that many young people cannot attend the high school and colleges of their choice due to the bad debts their parents incurred before, during and after the death of their loved one. I hope these workshops will open the eyes of my fellow participants and we will be able to become ambassadors of change, because this is killing our young economy. We need more education.”

Some respondents expressed the opinion that leaving the corpse in the mortuary for a longer period of time led to immoral acts among the youth, because of long wakes and prolonged dancing and drumming.

Ms. Abena Ampratwum, a 56 year old woman and a trader at Kumasi central market said, “I am amazed at the turn out of these workshops and the way people responded to the invitation is an indication that something good will come of these workshops and the questionnaires sent out. This is really amazing. I pray that people change their old focus on funeral rites and turn a new page.”

Andrew Kwame Duah, a 44 year old farmer with six children said, “In the beginning I thought the workshops and the questionnaires for this project would not work, but the way many people responded and their meaningful contributions to the topics during the time the groups broke into small sections for a period of 30 minutes for personal input, was indication that people and family members are fed up with the escalating cost of funeral rites and they needed some changes.” He continued, “In the beginning of the workshop I thought it would be like the previous workshops organized by the community leaders where people don’t show up and even if they showed up the people came late due to the way it was organized. But during the course of these workshops the way people participated was a surprise to me. These workshops and the topics are fantastic. I hope to carry these messages I heard from the workshops to Besease Township when we finish all of the workshops. I promise to do more this time because these workshops are totally different from those we attended some months ago on the same topic.”

Peter Amoako, a catechist and participant said, “The topics are more touching, the topics are meant for us, but the first one organized by Centre for Human Rights was totally a failure. First of all, their organization was different, the organizers did not provide any food or transportation money, they provided only water. But for these workshops, food was provided including water, transportation money was given to participants.”

Madam Agnes Birago, a 19 years old student said, “The facilitators were wonderful and they were down to earth, most especially the topic presented by Dr.

Paul Mensah “*The Economic Effect of funeral Rites on the Family.*” Thank you very much for your good ideas and your support for our communities and the parishes.”

Mrs. Estella Yaa Owusuwaah, a 34 year old medical practitioner at Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital provided additional suggestions after the workshop. She said, “Expensive funeral rites do not eliminate or delay grief. Lavish spending on excessive and unnecessary food and drink, flowers etc, does not bring the loved one back into the arms of those left behind. Expensive funeral rites only intensify the emotional stress of the mourners by adding worry over those debts to the grief over their bereavement.”

My experience with these groups of people from all walks of life and their enthusiasm of accepting the messages indicates to me that the workshops were successful. They are going back to their parishes and their communities to teach the reforms of the funeral rites of the Asante in order to save the future generation of the Asante. The young people of this region must not be saddled with debts that they did not incur, even if it involves their parents or close relatives.

At the results were assessed it became obvious that none of those interviewed, participants or the respondents, agreed with the escalating cost of the funeral rites. After the final assessment it became known that there were other factors that were not anticipated in my original proposals.

4.3 DEVELOPMENTS NOT ANTICIPATED IN THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

Despite some good and fruitful outcomes of the questionnaires, workshops and the interviews plus the way people responded to these methods and materials presented, I discovered that some other developments in the funeral rites were not anticipated in my project which need to be mentioned.

Some participants and respondents from both the workshops and questionnaire were of the opinion that “human beings die only once, so no matter the cost of the funeral rites, nothing should be done to change it. The family should be allowed to spend as much money as they deem fit for their loved one’s funeral without interference.” They further said that “if a man or a woman struggled all her life to make money, there is nothing wrong with spending a substantial amount of his or her wealth for the burial and funeral rites.”

To my amazement Peter Baah, a 59 year old chief of Ejisu - Manhyia, and a participant from the workshop raised his hand and said, “I don’t even know why you should research this topic because it is part of our cultural heritage to give fitting funeral rites to our loved one during his or her burial and the funeral celebrations. Are you doing this research in order to destroy our culture? Please, why are you bringing white man’s culture to destroy our own culture? It is time to do things on our own according to our tradition without foreign domination of what to do and not to do. It is our culture and not theirs, we need to respect our dead and offer them a fitting funeral rite.”

Speaking in anonymity, a family member said, “Every family by nature wants to see some fairness and openness within the family in times of the loss of a dear and loved one. No matter how well designed and planned your family funeral program is, not everyone in the family will be singing its praise. People resist change in the funeral rites for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from a straightforward intellectual disagreement over facts to deep-seated psychological prejudices.” I asked him to tell me more of the prejudices.

The family member continues, “Some of these prejudices include:

- Belief that the change initiated by the family head is a temporary change from tradition.
- Belief that fellow members of the family are incompetent or insensitive to make changes for the rest of the family.
- Loss of authority or control.
[For example, if the head is not wealthy, the wealthy members of the family would over-rule his pronouncement].
- Lack of faith in their ability to learn new things.
- Lack of trust in or aversion towards the family head.
- Loss of family or personal time.”

To my surprise, some family members also resist change in the cost of the funeral rites, no matter what good intentions it might bring to either the family or the society. These are due to different reasons such as to show off to friends that they have money. Adding to this complexity in the funerals, some family members sometimes hide their real reasons for their disagreement as their personal reason. For instance,

Madam Abena Mary, a 34 years old teacher and a participant of the workshop said, “The family also needs to recognize that members of the family go through a psychological change process as members give up the old ideas and come to either embrace or reject the new ideas.” She continues, “Typically, one thing I know is that family members often display an initial denial, and then begin to realize that they cannot accept change. Some strong feelings from family members may emerge, such as fear, anger. That is our tradition and we need to defend it. The people don’t need changes, it is hard but we love what we are doing.”

In my research it became clear that at times some family members accept the changes negatively, with feelings of not accepting the change with renewed enthusiasm to capitalize on the cost on the funeral rites to benefits themselves. Paul Peters, a 48 year old nurse said, “The family doesn’t need space to work through any stages, and the people are not ready to accept any changes in our funeral rites. We are content with the cost involved. We die once therefore the family members after our death have to spend so much for it because we work towards our funerals.”

Kwaku Obeng, a 57 year old farmer said, “Family heads should allow the family members to do what we want to do but not interfere on our funeral rites by asking us to reduce costs. We know it is expensive but that is what we choose to do for our beloved brothers and sisters.”

During the workshops a participant (name withheld) asked this question: “What is the essence of what you are doing? Is it because you are studying in America, that liberal country? Do you want to Americanize us or what? You were trained to evangelize in Ghana, but you are bringing in American culture to impose on us? This

is not our culture, our culture is to honor the dead with fitting funeral rites.” He continued, “Some of the priests we know who study in America came back and their lives are not the same, they have changed to the American way of doing things. I think you are not going to be like them.”

A prominent king, Nana Oboo Kyerefo III, Gyaasehene of Ejisu the birth place of Nana Yaa Asantewaah the woman who took the lead to fight the British during the colonial time said, “Father John, remember that in each family, no matter how well they are structured, there may still be some objectors who will object to any decision making. Objectors will display their resistance whenever opportunity arises; and most especially during any family gathering either a family death or even a wedding feast. These people are always there to challenge the family heads or even kings and chiefs. Some may disrupt meetings, not attend a family gathering, and refuse to carry out instructions from the “Abusuapanin” (family head). Those family objectors will continue to use old ideas when others are taking up the new ideas of doing things. They will try to convince other family members to hold on to the old ideas and resist the new ideas. In a family environment, resistance can take the form of I don’t care, lockouts, boycotts and some of the unscrupulous among them will spread untrue rumors about the family head so that they can win the sympathy of the family members.”

Kwadwo Peter, an economist at University of Ghana also said, “There is another group in our family system who called themselves “enthusiasts.” These people are intrinsically wedded to any change or new idea. These family members’ main idea of change will be that they may stand to receive some personal gain from the change,

such as gaining some portion of the family's land to sell and use the money for their own profit. At times the enthusiasts will make sure that the family spends huge sums money on the funeral rites so that at the end of the funeral rites they can also benefit personally either in kind or cash."

In managing and dealing with unanticipated things in times of death, it is necessary to have some tips for dealing with the members of the family who resist change:

- The family head should encourage the family members who don't want change to be more productive in their use of resources rather than simply forcing the family member to change.
- Think of how as a family head you can identify "the parts, exiles, managers and firefighters" among your family members and use this to transform the resistance into cooperation. [Managers and firefighters are both trying to protect your system and try to control your environment to keep you safe. Most managers also are concerned about pleasing people. According to Schwartz, "these three groups of parts' role (exiles, managers, and firefighters) exist because of all the pain and shame you accrued in your life and how you were taught to relate to that pain and shame. Since you did not learn how to heal that pain and shame, you had to exile it, which led to the need for all these protectors." (Schwartz, 2001 p.145)
- Get the family members together to explain to the "resisters" face to face how the current funeral rites celebration is damaging the family

structure Explain the disadvantages to the family in concrete terms.

Appeal to them to accept the changes so that the children in the family will not suffer.

- As the head of the family, put the resisters on terms that allow them to play some decision-making part in the change process, however small.

The family head's responsibility is to encourage the family members to talk about their differences and to discourage the resistant behaviors. He should endeavor to look at the world through the eyes of those difficult people in the family who don't want changes. Listen openly and honestly to what the family members are trying to say. The family head should examine his basic beliefs and assumptions. It may be the fault originates with him. The family head should try to engage those resisters, and be prepared to change himself when the need arises. The family head must not expect to convert all resisters to support the changes. He should try to persuade enough family members to support the change in the expensive cost of funeral rites program in order to achieve his goals and the goals of the other family members. This must be accomplished through understanding and by engaging the minds and hearts of people.

The above reactions to the things not anticipated during my project is equally important, but it fails to achieve the changes needed within the funeral rites which are so necessary to accomplish the ideals of a better spiritual understanding of death and afterlife, and realize the improved socio-economic conditions so necessary for the future of the Asante people. The priests, Chiefs, Kings also need to be more sensitive to their culture as they attempt to implement the necessary changes on funeral rites.

It became very clear that after the workshops, a majority of the participants agreed that there is the need for changes in the funeral rites, but some were also of the opinion that the culture has to be protected, therefore, there would be no need for any changes in the funeral rite. Despite the above criticisms that were not anticipated from the original proposal during the workshops, I am not discouraged. It rather opens my eyes and throws more challenges to me despite all the good responses by a majority of the participants. Still some of the participants are not ready for any changes. This can be seen from the question asked during the evaluation, “Do you agree to what was presented?” The following were their responses: 88.33% of the participants said “Yes”, 11.12% of the participants said “No” and lastly, 5.55% of the participants said they are “Unsure”. This proved to me that all is not well. The people need more education and several workshops and seminars to improve their understanding of why there is no need for the escalating cost of funeral rites. I understand their feelings about their culture, and that is my culture too, but I did not organize the workshops with the intention of changing their culture. The purpose was to educate them so that the people can put more emphasis on the living and the spiritual meaning of the dead rather than the deceased who don’t need or even see what the families are doing at his or her funeral.

Although some of their responses were harsh I did not take any of them personally because I saw that those who thought I was robbing them of their culture were expressing their feelings and emotions towards the changes I was advocating for. More so, I saw that they have no place to air their grief about the changes so they

decided the workshops were the proper forum to ask and express their anger or resistance. I saw it as constructive criticism but not an attack on my good intentions.

In my personal reflection manner, I tried to convince the people that the project is not a betrayal of the culture of the Asante, but an attempt to educate them on the need to change their attitudes towards expensive funeral rites. I saw that it was an important step as it would remind them that they are capable of resolving any situation they meet, and remind them again that no situation, problem or challenge has gone unsolved. More so, I want to make sure that the participants understand the main points of change and come to the conclusion that expensive funeral rites are not right. Having worked in many parts of the country for many years as a priest, I had a chance to see different cultures and their way of holding funeral rites as well as gaining understanding that spending more money on funerals is not a healthy thing to do.

For two years in this program I have learned there are processes that are happening in the funeral rites outside the family members' conscious awareness. There is a lot going on that as a priest I need to inform them about and build responses for right in the very beginning.

To change their minds I was trying to address the conscientious objectors in the workshops by discussing the objections that they came up with. For example, when some of them thought that I had "come to destroy their culture with my liberal ideas." My purpose was that I know many of the participants have had that experience. I wanted to tell them it is all about changing the mind set on funeral rites to what is

important to our communities and the society as a whole and how we can make the changes happen.

Fellow participants, you know how hard we have worked in these workshops, using this process of change may enable us to quickly come up to speed on the important ideas and really sell the ideas to our people.

CHAPTER FIVE

Most live as though life is something yet to come. But as John Lennon pointed out,

“Life is what happens while we are busy making other plans.”

In Chapter two of my project, I stated that the church encourages the full celebration of the funeral rites, especially the funeral Mass for her faithful deceased members. Throughout my paper, I have discussed how these beautiful and faith-filled rites have been misused and misinterpreted by having elaborate funerals by many members of the parishes of Konongo-Mampong Diocese in Ghana and the Asante as a whole.

During the workshops, when a question was asked, “Do you agree to what was presented?” 11.12% of the total participants responded “No”, meaning they oppose the changes I was advocating for in the Asante funeral rites. Those who oppose the changes thought that I was robbing the Asante funeral rites of its traditional roots with my liberal ideas from the white man’s land (Western culture). My good intentions were not to rob them from their culture but all about changing their mind set of the escalating cost of the Asante funeral rites to what is important to the community and the society as a whole.

After the workshops, I cross checked those who thought that I was robbing them of their traditional roots and it became known that about seventy percent of the 11.12% were all too young to realize (understand) the ramifications of such costly funeral rites. Some of them were students in high school, and some were also learning a trade such as hairdressers, carpenters and others who don’t know what the actual

life situation is because their livelihood depends on their parents and they have nothing to worry about.

Those people thought that when the changes happen, it would deny them from their social aspects (wake) and their refreshment (food and drink). They forget that we are from the dust and the dust we shall return. They forget about the spiritual meaning of funeral rites. What they think about is their happiness the rest is their parent's responsibility, but not theirs.

In this chapter, I intend to illustrate that the church funeral rites are important and should not be abandoned or changed, rather the fore-mentioned reforms will remove the secularization and materialization of this important liturgy.

The results of my project will achieve this goal. This chapter will discuss how my project adheres to the religious principle of my church's funeral rites and applies clinical principles for the mental, emotional, and psychological betterment of my people in their time of bereavement. In addition, I believe that my project contributes to the ministry in a wider context and the implication of these reforms will contribute to the future ministry in Konongo-Mampong Diocese in Ghana.

5.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES

The Church teaches that no one should be denied the Church's funeral rites because of the neglect of the practice of the faith of their family members. In the face of death, the church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity. In the Gospel according to John 16:

21-22, Jesus said, "...you are sad for a time, but I shall see you again; then your hearts will rejoice with a joy no one can take away from you." From what Jesus said, the uniqueness of the Catholic funeral liturgy needs to be brought into focus so that while the relatives and friends of the dead are consoled, the entire Christian faithful may be helped to appreciate life and accept their faith in the eternal life God has prepared for his children. The Church as a body ministers to the deceased's family members and consoles them in the funeral rites with the consoling words of God and the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Canon Law directs the Church to pray for the spiritual support of the dead, to honor the physical bodies of the dead, and at the same time, to bring comfort and hope to the living (Canon 1176 par. 2). Saint Paul in 2 Timothy said, "Jesus Christ has redeemed us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace..." (2 Tim. 1: 9-10). These bible quotations are preached to the family members of the deceased to encourage the members during the loss of their beloved son, daughter, mother, father in time of their painful situation.

It has been the church's custom that the funeral rites not only commend the dead to God but also support the bereaved families. These rites offer Christian hope to the people and give witness to their faith in the future resurrection of the baptized with Christ. The church places more importance on the funeral rites on her members. The Church therefore celebrates the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ's Passover for the dead, and offers prayers and petitions for them. In the communion of all Christ's members, the prayers which bring spiritual help to some may also bring spiritual help to others.

The church has two kinds of service of prayer during the period from death to the funeral rites itself, these are:

1. A wake service or vigil in the form of a celebration of the word of God. This may take place in the home of the deceased person, in a funeral home or chapel, or even in the church. In the absence of a priest or deacon, it should be led by a lay person. This shows the importance the Church gives to their dead.
2. The church offers prayer at other times before the funeral rites. It employs the prayer of the psalms in the office for the dead to express grief and to strengthen genuine hope. In the prayers too, the Christian community expresses its faith and intercedes for the dead person so that they may enjoy eternal happiness with God.

Example of the prayer for the deceased person is as follows:

“Father, we entrust our brother or sister to your mercy. You loved him or her greatly in this life: now that he or she is freed from all its cares, give him or her happiness and peace for ever. The old order has passed away: welcome him or her now into paradise where there will be no more sorrow, no more weeping or pain, but only peace and joy with Jesus your Son, and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen”

(Catholic Prayer)

5.2 CONTRIBUTION TO CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

From the clinical point of view, the compassionate liturgy designed by the Church was to bring solace to the bereaved families and Christians as a whole. It became clear that the expensive cost of funeral rites distracts the bereaved families and shifts

their priorities away from the importance of the salvific aspects the Church talked about. The Church saw the escalating cost of funerals as destructive not only to the spiritual aspects of the funeral process, but also to the psychological well-being of its members, and thus I am convinced that the reform of funeral rites in the Asante is an unqualified necessity. My following guidelines were drawn to help its members: For example, all the faithful should be given a simple burial devoid of all extravagances. The time between death and burial should not be too long. Expensive accoutrements such as luxurious coffins, elaborate wreaths, ornate shrouds, and others items should be avoided. The rest of the reform guidelines can be seen in Chapter 2 section 2.5.1.

I admire the contributions that the pastoral counselors have made towards the counseling of patients, either in terms of grief, pain, happiness and other issues. In Chapter two it became clear that a clinician or a pastoral counselor dealing with the family in times of death did not have an easy time. Dealing with the family in a time of bereavement involves many things which the counselor needs to bring to the clients attention. If the counselor is able to penetrate through their defenses it becomes very easy to help guide the family and walk with them in dealing with their pain and grief. If they are not able to penetrate, then the counselor needs to refer the patient to someone who is more specialized in the field than him or herself to deal with the situation. In dealing with families in their loss, many factors need to be put in place to support them with their grief. Factors such as: making contact with the bereaved family as soon as a death occurs, listening and letting the bereaved family talk, offering practical help and being able to talk about the dead person to the family members. These factors help the family in dealing with their pain and sorrow.

Some clinical tools are available to support the families in dealing with their stress and pain, sorrow and depression, worry and guilt. For example, Jerusha Hull McCormack's (2005) book, "*Grieving, A Beginner's Guide*" listed the following:

1. You have a right to remain silent.
2. You have a right to cry, anytime and anywhere.
3. You have a right to express your grief in ways that seem appropriate to you.
4. You have a right to talk about your dead spouse, child, sibling, parents, friend as often as you wish and on whatever occasions you wish to do so.

If family members have had enough time (i.e., not a sudden, unexpected death) and have been given some help in working through the previously described stages, the family members will reach a stage during which they are neither depressed nor angry about their "fate." If the family had enough time they would have been able to express their previous feelings, such as anger at those who have died. The family would have mourned the impending loss of their loved ones.

According to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, "Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings, it is as if pain had gone, the struggle is over, and there comes a time for the final rest before the long journey" (Kubler- Ross 1969, p. 100). From what she said, this is also the time during which the family members usually need more support, help and understanding than the dead person.

5.3 CONTRIBUTION TO MINISTRY IN A WIDER CONTEXT

In this chapter I will examine how at one level community is comprised during funeral celebrations and how these extended relationships escalate differences and

cause conflicts. In a wider context a death in town is made known to the community by several means. The first announcement of the dead is the wailing of the people in the house. The news will further spread from mouth to mouth.

In a wider context, a death and its subsequent funeral rites enhances community-building. A death in town, and especially the death of an important or well-known person, is a major occasion for town solidarity. In the community, death brings together the people of the town in certain ways: the community members visit the bereaved family to offer their condolences, the community wears black or red funeral cloths; they spend a day or two attending the actual funeral rites; and they drink palm wine (local drink) together as a sign of unity. In the olden days fasting was generally done by all people of the community, which made them physically even more involved in the event of death.

Today, this is not done and it is usually only old and closely related people who may fast. The most important thing in helping the bereaved family to mourn is physical presence. The actual length of stay in the family house or at the funeral is not so important, but being there is what matters to the family. The absence of certain groups or individuals is noted and commented upon, not only by the family, but also by the other mourners.

The people in the community not only share in the grief, but also bear part of the financial burden of death. Community members make a donation to the family to alleviate the financial burden this recent death may cause the immediate family. In a society it is not surprising that investment in social relations is high. Money that circulates is not only the glue that binds two people, the donor and the recipient, but

the whole community. Funerals bring the rich and poor people together. They mix without discrimination.

My own experience is that a funeral is at the same time often the occasion for acting out differences between people simply because it brings them together in a single ritual. Differences and conflicts that exist among family members, or the family and the community leaders, or the people of the community itself, between different families, between rich and poor, between different church groups and differences that distinguish villages from the city people are augmented during this highly emotional time. This is often vented in an attempt to create an illusion of wealth or power which cannot be financially supported.

Obviously, the church is central to providing solace and often emotional and psychological intervention during these decidedly disturbing episodes. In addition to the above reform which the Church continues to offer as suggestions to its members on what to do in times of death and especially how to spend money, every parish should fix an amount of money to be given to the bereaved family. In order to regulate how much money is to be spent by the church on funeral rites, the Church should consider what goes on after the death of a loved one. In a wider context, to accomplish this goal, I believe that the Church should continue its education on how to moderate the funeral cost expenses to cover both Catholics and non-Catholics.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE MINISTRY

The participation of both ministers and the families in times of death calls for a collaborative and supportive ministry that involves all, the family, the community, the church, and the larger society in ministering to the bereaved families in the Asante. Clergy, rabbi or a minister, faith communities, and spiritual centers should actively seek and access opportunities for educating our congregants on how best the Asante can provide less expensive funeral rites and be able to support the less fortunate in their families with respect to immediate longer term needs rather than spending more money on the dead person's funeral. It may seem trite to say this, but the deceased does not know what is going on at his or her funeral celebration. The funeral rite is centered on the final blessing for the deceased.

The reforms that I have suggested in this project reach beyond my own religion. The ill effects of the extravagant wakes and funerals are bankrupting all of the Asante, whether Catholic or members of another religion. The elaborate services are deflecting the true spiritual effects for all Asante mourners no matter what religion they practice. For the success of this project to work in the future ministry, there should be an inter-religious dialogue in which they discuss their faith and through which they enrich and encourage one another through religious insight and practice. There must be good relationships between all religious communities: Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Protestants and all the other religions. The various religions should identify themselves as followers and servants of One God who communicates with humanity and is Lord of history. They refer to themselves as believers because for them their faith is a response to God's revelation. Each religion call themselves hearers of God's

word and message, living their lives as proper responses to what they believe God has revealed to them and through them to all humanity.

Christians, Muslims, Jews, Protestants are communities of believers who recite, pray, preach, and live according to their understanding of God's revelation. Both Christians and non-Christians must respect each other so that we can work together to change and provide meaningful but less expensive funeral rites for our loved ones when they die. Mutual respect allows all religions to form lasting bonds of friendship and to cooperate in projects for the good of society, especially for those who are in great need in times of death and funeral rites. In doing so, each religion believes they are fulfilling the requirements of their faith as they each understand how they should respond to the need of their brothers and sisters in their various communities and their society.

When I interviewed Peter, a young Catholic he stated, "If you are not a true Catholic, you are damned to hell." While this may be the belief of that individual, it must be understood that this is not the teaching of the Catholic Church. Just because someone is a Catholic does not mean he or she is guaranteed salvation. Catholics must follow their faith and accept the truth that has been presented to them. At the same time, just because people are not Catholic does not at all mean that they are damned to hell. God sees the soul of the individual, and judges according to what he sees there. Everybody has been given different gifts and has had different experiences throughout life. Some have had the opportunity to know more truth than others. The Catholic Church teaches that God judges each person according to what truth he or she has been given. Thus these funeral reforms which I have suggested in this project

will benefit all the Asante, but for these reforms to be implemented cordial relationships among the various religious bodies are needed to demonstrate mutual respect and understanding for the problem. There should be continued training programs which will foster an inter-religious dialogue to encourage these reforms which will successfully reduce the expensive cost of funeral rites in the Asante and thus lessen the burden of future debt for the future generations of my people, the Asante. Only then will the mourning process be restored to its rightful place.

CONCLUSION

It is almost universally acknowledged that Ghanaians, most especially the Asante adore their dead and will commit tremendous amounts of money to expensive and flamboyant funeral rites no matter how much pain or stress the family members suffer. This practice is as old as the earliest history books and contemporary as the morning newspaper. The dimension in which the contemporary Asante funeral rites assumed over the last decade gives a great cause for concern if not worry. While in other parts of the world people are busily working hard, sometimes seven days a week, the majority of the Asante spend their precious time on non-essentials celebrating funerals and neglecting the real economic hardships facing the communities, the country as a whole and the world at large. Surprisingly enough, although my own experience testified to it, our politicians, from the president in the Jubilee Palace (seat of government), parliamentarians, clergy and rabbi as well as ministers of the Gospel including the deacons, protestant leaders and other religious

leaders to the unit committee chairperson (leaders of the various communities) in my village of Besease attend these funeral celebrations every week.

Most of the participants in the workshops and some respondents complained that since most of the family members are poor and have other commitments, higher costs of funeral rites seem to be a misplacement of their priorities to commit so much of their time and money on the dead instead of using the money on the living. Mr. Kwasi Adjei, a 35 year old pharmacist said, “Today funerals across many Asante communities have been turned into carnivals spanning days and weeks depending on the social standing of the dead when he or she was alive. In a small town of about 10,000 inhabitants, it is not uncommon to come across at least ten different funeral celebrations on a weekend attracting hundreds and thousands of family members and sympathizers from across Asante.” Another participant from the workshops said, “We are not trying to say that families should not organize decent funeral rites for their beloved ones, but rather the funeral rites should be moderate or less expensive no matter ones financial background in the society.” I believe that a befitting burial or funeral rite for our dearly beloved departed soul has its place in our society, but without necessarily having to be as extravagant as the Asante custom.

My paper illustrates that the majority of the Asante believe that the funeral rites in the Asante are very expensive and it is causing financial loss to both the state and the families involved. My people saw the need for something to be done to curb the escalating cost to its lowers degree, so as to free all family members from their debt after the funeral celebrations of the loved ones. This was my primary concern which generated the creation of this project. Due to the expensive cost of funerals, the

spiritual meaning of death has lost its importance. With this project, many people have come to realize that there is an urgency to come back to the spiritual importance of death rather than the monetary aspects of funeral rites.

From time immemorial, man has been preoccupied with the pursuit of happiness in life, from the cradle to the grave. He works and struggles very hard to attain happiness, very often without knowing exactly what happiness means because of his ignorance of the nature of life. It is my hope and aspiration that the above reforms of my project would better the lives of my people, because funerals have a therapeutic value, bringing comfort and renewal of stability and harmony to the bereaved families. It is my hope that churches should provide models on which members of the larger community may base funeral rites which may not always be expressions of Christian orthodoxy but which minister to societal needs and aspirations. It is my hope through these programs built on my reforms, that the bereaved family members will strive to find meaning in and beyond the power of the death. The reformed funeral rites will be a prevailing witness to the family quest for spirituality in which the meaning of death is not an explanation for the loss of a loved one but an awareness of our connectedness with that loved one for eternity.

Lastly, it is my wish that the people of the Asante do not allow themselves to be exposed to a variety of “Western” influences which are disseminated through the mass media such as books and magazines, television, video cassettes and movies of funerals from the developed world. Presently this has resulted in the acquisition of distorted ideas regarding expensive accoutrements such as luxurious coffins, elaborate wreaths, ornate shrouds, and other items which should be avoided. Rather, a

reformed awareness of the more important priorities will help the youth to educate their parents in the interest of cutting down costs and eliminating the feeding of visitors. Families can then put the money to a better use such as the future care of their children and the future generations of the Asante. “For that does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?” (Mark 8: 36). From the Bible it was also said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be given you” (Matthew 6: 33).

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