

BURIAL SOCIETIES , AFRICAN RELIGION AND THE CHURCH

(The challenge presented by Burial Societies to the Church
to respond more adequately to the religious needs of
an African township community during times of mourning)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates three particular burial societies in Bohlokong Township (Bethlehem/OFS) and the challenge they present to the church to respond more adequately to religious needs of an African township community during times of mourning. In describing them, their work and involvement, it has become clear that they are socio-religious groups which revolve around the *rites de passage* with a definite emphasis on assisting in burials. These societies are rooted in African cultural and religious traditions and aspirations, which are occasionally combined with Christian elements of worship.

With regard to their challenge to the church, this study attempts to investigate their method of counselling and the need to enter into meaningful and critical dialogue with them. With regard to this issue, a first step is to try and link their involvement in cases of death to the phases of mourning. It has been observed that burial societies are present and involved in these phases to a varying degree. A close link between rituals closely connected to the family and rituals involving the community, was also observed. However, their stabilizing contribution throughout lies in providing a network of practical and spiritual assistance. The study goes on to deal with aspects of traditional concepts of salvation, which are a relevant challenge for the church with regard to counselling.

Thirdly, the study gives a short analysis of the Lutheran liturgy for unveiling of a tombstone and burial and argues for an integration of African aspirations. Yet, the study tries to show that one has to go beyond a mere integration of African aspirations in order to communicate biblical challenges to issues related to African religion.

PREFACE

In my work as a missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church I realized how significant the work and influence of burial societies in general are. Every Society of this nature has its own history and character. There is however, a common denominator. In essence they are groups of mutual assistance and aid which revolve around some of the *rites de passage* i.e., weddings, funerals and *the unveiling of a tombstone* and play a lead role in shaping these occasions.

Some of my own parishioners are leading members of burial societies and dedicate some of their time and energy to the work of their societies. They assisted me in gathering information and insights into these societies. For this assistance and their trust in me, I am grateful and duly want to acknowledge this. In particular, I want to thank Teacher D.D. Tshabalala, one of our church elders, who helped me in translating the questionnaires into Sotho and Zulu. He also assisted me during the interviews conducted with the chairladies and the executives of the three societies involved in my investigations. I am grateful to the chairladies Mrs. E. Nhlapo, Mrs. E. Montsusi and Mrs. L. Dlamini and the respective Executives of their Societies who were prepared to share with me their information and insights and allowed me to participate in their meetings. Without their willingness to co-operate, this study most probably would never have been undertaken at all.

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0 Introduction

0.1 Subject and problem:

The main issue at stake in this study is an investigation of burial Societies in a black South African township and the challenge they represent to the Church. viz, to respond more adequately to the religious needs of an African township community during times of mourning. burial Societies are not a new phenomenon. They are to be found all over South Africa and even beyond. For the purpose of this study the number of societies had to be limited to three. The names of these three societies are:

1. *Kopano ke Matla*
2. *Itshwareleng Helping Society*
3. *Thusanang Women's Club*

These societies are part of the broader community of Bohlokong Township/Bethlehem in the Orange Free State.

On taking a closer look into the essence of burial societies, one finds that they are linked in a definite way to African religious and social aspirations. They are essentially socio-religious groups. Their social function is particularly evident with regard to the practical aspects of burials. Their religious roots, however, are implied. They are largely responsible for arranging and organizing funerals (from the time of death to burial and beyond that), all of which are very important to African people. Some of them are also involved with weddings and the 'unveiling of tombstones'.

This seems to indicate that they are centred around the *rites de passage* which in themselves are linked to socio-religious concepts. A fundamental issue in this study is: Why and how does this kind of group centre and form itself around the *rites de passage*? My hypothesis is that, not only

socio-cultural aspects, but also traditional religious beliefs lie behind the founding of these Societies. In other words, burial societies in Black townships are constituted by external and internal factors, namely socio-cultural and religious factors. This study tries to determine whether there is indeed evidence in their lives and existence of an interaction between the socio-cultural and African religious sphere.

Therefore, to discover more about the assumed interaction between these spheres, one has to look into the life and identity of these societies against the background of African religious aspirations. One has to start with the societies and their identity. Later on African religious concepts of life and death, and how these are related to the societies, will be considered.

The first sub-problem we have to deal with, is as follows:

How do the societies view themselves and what do they, as groups, reflect with regard to the socio-cultural and religious sphere?

In order to tackle this sub-problem, we have to describe the societies as they presented themselves. To begin with, we will look into their history and identity. Part of this process will be to deal with aspects relating to the structure of the societies, their aims and objectives, the attitudes of members and of course the societies' practical involvement in funerals and beyond.

In the course of this largely descriptive first part of the study, we attempt to indicate that African socio-cultural and religious forces are at work in and around the societies.

In the second part of the study we shall attempt to attain a deeper understanding of the societies by relating the phenomenon of burial societies to the background of African concepts of life and death as well as concepts of community and mutual assistance.

Although the approach is mostly theoretical when describing this relevant background, the leading question remains:

Is there evidence that burial societies relate to these concepts which, in essence, are socio-religious?

With this question in mind, we have to consider two main areas. We shall describe and discuss basic aspects of African concepts of life and death. Neither areas are dealt with comprehensively. African concepts of life will enjoy brief discussion under four related aspects:

- 1. Essential aspects of the concept of ancestry;**
- 2. The individual and the community;**
- 3. Concepts of mutual assistance and sharing;**
- 4. Ritual and dynamistic aspects of life.**

In a second phase we shall discuss the concept of death and the impact it has on the living in an African perspective. Different aspects of dying and death will be dealt with:

- 1. Linguistic aspects relating to the phenomenon of dying and death;**
- 2. The custom of *ukuvalalisa* (farewell dinner);**
- 3. Death as transition;**
- 4. Death in the community;**

5. **Death and the status of a person;**
6. **Attempts to explain the phenomenon of death;**
7. **Death as a contagious force.**

In a related sub-paragraph we will discuss the issue of transition, transitional rites, taboos and the impact of these features.

Then follows an analysis of the burial societies that were studied in connection with the empirical study and African concepts of life and death, communion and mutual assistance. In the analysis we attempt to show how the burial societies fit into the different concepts described and discussed before.

In addition to that we shall highlight areas where the societies have successfully adapted themselves to a modern environment and Christian influences.

In part one and two we focus on a phenomenological description of the three burial societies and their African- religious and social background. As we have already mentioned, we shall attempt to prove that African heritage functions in these societies. Thus the Church is directly challenged by African religious heritage and indirectly by the burial societies which assimilated aspects of African religious and social beliefs.

This leads us to the third and main part of our study. Here the focus will be on the challenges to the church as such. The focal point will be the question implied in the subtitle of our study, viz,:

To which extent do these societies, with their African heritage, pose a challenge to the church?

My hypothesis is that to some extent the churches do not satisfy all the needs of Africans concerning death, its effects on society and the mourning procedures followed by the bereaved. Could it be that African Christians, in forming burial societies, found a more holistic approach to the problem of death and its effects on the living and their society as a whole? Do burial societies provide an alternative to or perhaps supplement the burial function of the Church? Do they offer their members a more comprehensive 'salvation' with regard to death than the Churches do?

My hypothesis is that in their existence there are indeed socio-religious factors at work. By filling a vacuum, which the churches have not yet filled, they function as an alternative or supplement to the churches, because they have assimilated elements of traditional African concepts of life and death and elements of traditional communal involvement like mutual assistance and caring. Subsequently they provide a more comprehensive view on salvation for Africans than the churches do.

In order to deal with the questions raised regarding the 'challenge' posed by the societies to the church, we firstly consider counselling as an issue. Counselling as such has to be understood in a broad sense. Not only does it refer to an attempt to help people by communicating with them about their problems, but also to provide them with practical assistance. The Western phrase, **mourning**, will subsequently have a limited meaning when used in relation to the societies' involvement in the process. The correlation will not be done in a comprehensive way. The intention is to prove that societies are involved and to describe their practises during these phases.

From there we discuss the counselling efforts of the societies as a challenge to the church against the background of traditional aspects and concepts of salvation.

From this discussion, statements and theses will emerge which are intended to stimulate a meaningful and critical dialogue between the church and the societies.

In addition we will explore challenges posed to the Lutheran liturgy of *unveiling of tombstone* and of the funeral service. Here we argue in favour of integrating African aspirations. At the same time, however, we try to uncover their weak points by placing them in biblical perspective.

We will close the study with a short summary of the findings and a personal note.

0.2 Existing literature on the subject and the intention of this study

Relevant literature regarding burial societies seems to be limited. P. Sihlangu (1969:94-100) gives an introduction to the phenomenon, which elaborates on some aspects of their organisation and efforts to counsel their members. Häselbarth (1972 : 82ff) briefly refers to burial societies and their work. Brandel-Syrier (1962), in her book **Black Women in Search of God**, provides some useful insights into burial Societies. However, she mainly deals with leadership issues.

Concerning their history and identity, there are a few remarks made by Lukhele (1990) and Dandala (1990). Lukhele categorizes the burial societies under the *stokvel*-movement by saying:

Burial societies, a type of *stokvel*, were established in the latter part of the nineteenth century as blacks, caught up in industrialisation, faced the high cost of funerals, which play an important role in black culture (1990:16).

Stokvel is a kind of mutual loan society. A group of people join together and agree to pay a certain amount of money either weekly, fortnightly or monthly into the society's funds. Thereafter, according to the rules and regulations of the society, all the money or part of it, is re-distributed.

Payment is made either on a rotation basis or paid out in times of actual need. Lukhele not only classifies the burial societies as a kind of *stokvel*, but he also indicates that they are born out of a change of economic circumstances. People from rural areas flocked in great numbers to the new industrial centres to work and live there, far away from their families. In rural areas the social networks provided ample mutual assistance in case of death. The resources to bury a person appropriately, were readily available in a rural context and the expenses were not as high as in an urban set-up. Furthermore, he observes that funerals play an important role in black culture.

These observations indicate that not only socio-economic, but also religious aspects seem to be involved in the founding of burial societies.

It is correct to classify the burial societies under the *stokvel* movement or generally under the 'new institutions, developed by urban dwellers to meet their needs in town...' Dubb (1974:446).

It is also true that burial societies provide a certain solution for people, who in the event of death, are faced with high costs to cover a funeral. Besides the financial assistance, they have a 'valuable social and entertainment function' (Lukhele 1990:1).

As indicated earlier (0.1), this study will consider whether there is evidence of an interaction between the social and religious spheres in the three burial societies and how the church is challenged by this. A similar study has, as yet, not been found in literature.

0.3 The type of burial societies under investigation

According to Lukhele (1990:17f) there are mainly two types of burial societies. In the first type a group of people form a kind of loose association. They do not have a written agreement or even a constitution. Mutual consent exists as the basis of their decisions regarding the extent of contributions in case of the death of a member or a close relative of a member.

The members of this type of burial society take their contribution to the bereaved family to cover at least a part of the costs of a funeral. This kind of burial society usually has only a few members and they do not have a bank account. Related to this kind of society are the spontaneously or regularly organized collections done within a street, a block or the neighbourhood in the event of a death occurring in their midst. Burial societies whose existence are based on written rules and regulations (constitution) form the other type. The members are obliged to pay certain fees which are collected on a weekly, monthly or annual basis. The most common method is the monthly collection which is done during their monthly meeting. Collections done on a weekly and annual basis are very scarce. These societies have a bank account and the running of the society is based on a constitution. In size, these societies differ from the first type. The societies investigated in this study, belong to the organisations which have constitutions and more than thirty members.

0.4 The sources of material and the methods used in this study

In order to gather material for this study two questionnaires were developed (cf. appendix). The first questionnaire was developed for leaders and executives of the societies and used in interviews with them. For each interview we took minutes carefully to secure data and information given.

Oral information formed the basis of the descriptive part of this study. This oral information was compared and interpreted. A second questionnaire was developed for single members of the societies. The main purpose was to determine their attitudes towards their society and related matters. It was distributed to members of all three societies with the request to submit written answers in due course. Fifty questionnaires were handed out and fifty percent were completed and returned. The questionnaires were evaluated by compiling a synopsis for each question. This synopsis contains a true reflection of the feelings, thoughts and arguments of those members of the societies who returned the questionnaires. As fifty percent returned the questionnaire, its significance lies in the fact that it reveals certain tendencies. The relevant part of our study will reflect this.

Personal participation in their meetings was another part of gathering of material and gaining insights. Again I took notes on information and observation. Wherever possible and necessary, I asked members to explain their methods and the implied significance. This method entails primary observation of the phenomena followed by analysis. In other words, the inductive approach was used. For other parts of this study, I drew on relevant literature, especially where I describe and discuss African concepts of life and death, communion and mutual assistance. The same applies to the section in which I briefly attempted to correlate the involvement of the burial society to the phases of mourning. In the description of the four phases of mourning, we relied mainly on Spiegel (1989). Apart from that, personal experiences and observations found their way into this study. A description and analysis of the relationship between burial societies and the church could not be found in literature.

0.5 Delimitations

Delimitations not yet mentioned in this introduction, will be made in the text itself.

PART I

THE HISTORY AND IDENTITY OF THREE BURIAL SOCIETIES UNDER INVESTIGATION

Where people come together to form burial societies, there has to be a special need, concern or social necessity. The history and identity of a burial society provide insight concerning the motives and reasons for forming a burial society.

The burial societies under investigation are fairly new. They were founded in the seventies and eighties of this century. Yet they are an integral part of current history of this phenomenon. The first burial society in South Africa date back to the latter part of the nineteenth century. People caught up in the industrialisation process and living in fast growing townships, felt the need to form burial societies to cope with the high costs of funerals. Lukhele notes:

The burial societies of today have their roots in tradition. It was customary for neighbours to present a bereaved family with calabashes of sorghum beer, maize meal, chickens and other assorted edibles to try to alleviate the burden on the family on the day of the funeral, when all the guests have to be fed (1990 : 17).

Already two important aspects emerge from this statement. burial societies are a response to the needs of people, who in urban circumstances, lack the support of a rural community, which used to assist in community events like

funerals. They are also born out of traditional values, i.e., the funeral itself, as well as the customary and religious African duties surrounding it, has to be of a certain standard.

One of the pioneers of burial societies in the Orange Free State was the late Dr. James Moroka, a founder member of the African National Congress. He saw that the majority of the people were in need of assistance to perform funerals, which had to be in line with *ubuntu* (being human). In the early 1930s he formed the Goodwill Burial Society. His idea spread rapidly to other black areas. By 1944 almost two-thirds of the households in Western Native Township were members of burial societies (cf. The Sowetan, 11 May, 1989 p.6). Lukhele notes further:

Today, the well-established Orlando East Goodwill Funeral Undertakers is an off-shoot of Dr. Moroka's Burial Society (1990 : 17).

The process of founding burial societies has not been completed. The three burial societies under investigation in Bethlehem/OFS, are examples of this dynamic process. Who were the founders of these three burial societies in Bethlehem? What motivated them to establish their society? What were the circumstances which led to their founding?

1.1 *Kopano ke Matla* (Unity is Strength)

This burial society was founded by Mrs. E.M. Nhlapo and the late Mrs. F. Mavundla back in 1981 (6th March). Both were dedicated members of the Methodist Church. Both were prayer women, lay preachers and leaders in their church. Touched by the plight of the people who struggled to bury their deceased with dignity, they felt the need to start a burial society to assist one another. Funerals, which are not only family -, but also community events, are quite expensive. In many cases the income of a family is too small to provide

for all the expenses involved in a funeral. The preparations for a funeral also required many helping hands. A family should not be left with a lot of debt after a funeral either.

All these considerations inspired the founders to establish this society. Throughout the process of founding, they were inspired and encouraged by a certain Mr. Mofokeng from Germiston. He had valuable knowledge of how to start, organize and to run a burial society. Back in 1981 they started with a few members, all of whom were neighbours. People saw the performance of this small group when it assisted in funeral arrangements, and gradually more and more people applied for membership. Today *Kopano ke Matla* has two branches, one in Bethlehem and another in Qwaqwa with a total membership of 98.

For more than nine years, though, the society, known as *Kopano ke Matla* (Unity is strength) functioned according to a provisional yet binding constitution similar to the present one. The provisional constitution was drawn up by Mr. Mofokeng and the two founders of the society. Since 1990 (2nd May) the society has had a legally registered constitution. This step was undertaken by the present Chairx and co-founder, Mrs. E.M. Nhlapo in agreement with all the members of the society after the death of Mrs F. Mavundla.

All members who join the society, are legally bound by the rules and regulations of this constitution. The existence of a legally binding constitution, as well as group pressure, are only two of the many stabilizing factors of the society. A more detailed study on this issue will follow.

The name of this society, which is part of the founding history, also functions as the motto of the society. Like a seed, which actually contains the whole plant, the name *Kopano ke Matla*, pre-supposes a plan of action. Through unity, the aims and objectives of the society are to be achieved. Unity binds together and empowers people to work for a common goal. The goal in this

case be to assist one another in the event of death, which constitutes a major crisis , or to help members with events such as weddings and *unveiling of tombstones*.

1.2 *Itshwareleng Helping Society*

The history of *Itshwareleng Helping Society* dates back to the early seventies. Initially the workers of United Cold Storage in Bethlehem formed a *stokvel*-group with the aim of assisting one another. The purpose at that time was to collect money from the members on a monthly basis and to circulate it among the members according to a rotating system, as mentioned above. But in 1979, a certain Miss D.L. Mhlambi tried to convince the members of the *stokvel* to abandon it and to start a burial society, from which all who joined, would benefit in case of death. Miss Dlamini, who initiated the change from a *stokvel* to a burial society, is still alive and a member of *Itshwareleng*.

However, she is no longer the chairlady of the society. Some dissatisfaction among members arose concerning her leadership. Subsequently , four years ago, members elected the present chairlady Mrs. L. Dlamini . She is a member of the Methodist Church and a leading prayer woman, a teacher and a housewife.

When the change from a *stokvel* to a burial society was undertaken, Miss. D.L. Mhlambi in particular, felt that the basis for mutual assistance had to be broadened beyond merely circulating money to increase one's income. Experience had taught her the value of willing and able hands to lighten the bereaved family's practical burdens in terms of preparations for and organisation of the funeral itself. Experience had also taught her that financial assistance was crucial, due to escalating funeral costs.

Itshwareleng Helping Society is the official name of the society. The meaning of *Itshwareleng* in this context, was translated to me as "do it yourself", "take

your matters into your hands; there is nobody else, who can do it for you". The literal translation however is "to control oneself, to be in control".

When considering the meaning of the word *Itshwareleng*, the name *Itshwareleng Helping Society* also conveys the motto of the society. The society helps people to be in control of certain aspects in life. It helps to take matters into one's own hands. The members of the society help one another with funeral arrangements, weddings and the *unveiling of tombstones*. *Itshwareleng Helping Society* presently has 149 members. For practical purposes they are divided into three groups or branches. As soon as a branch has a membership of sixty, a new group is formed under the umbrella of *Itshwareleng Helping Society*, because a smaller group can be managed more easily.

1.3. *Thusanang Women's Club*

The *Thusanang Women's Club* in Bethlehem is a sub-group of the country-wide organisation carrying that name. This organisation has many sub-groups in South Africa, Transkei and Bophuthatswana. In its first section, **Area of Jurisdiction**, the constitution stipulates that the sub-groups are semi-autonomous. Matters concerning the whole organisation are dealt with in the annual executive meeting.

The founder of the Club is a certain Mrs. Vivian Setumo. She is a sister by profession and founded the Club in 1974. It started with a dream she had had. In her dream two white doves appeared and she was told to love both of them. The essence of the dream was to start an organisation with a wide range of aims and objectives, which are laid down in the constitution. *Thusanang Women's Club* started in Tembisa, where Mrs. V. Setumo still lives. With the help of some other women, she began to care for epileptic and mentally retarded children. All other aims and objectives of the club evolved from this, as is mentioned in the Constitution :

1. To build fellowship amongst women and to help each other in all aspects of individual and community life.
2. To encourage co-operation amongst different women's associations and to avoid, as far as possible, any duplication of services.
3. To act as a mouth piece in case representations concerning matters affecting women members to local authorities are called for.
4. To stimulate interest in concerns of life in general, and assisting in procuring know-how in leadership.
5. To enhance know-how amongst mothers regarding health and such things as family planning by inviting experts in such field as and when it is deemed necessary.
6. To educate mothers in matters relating to cooking and baking by providing live demonstrations.
7. To organize and arrange Girl's Clubs, teaching them matters related to biblical studies and indoor games.
8. To assist, through recognized institutions, epileptic and mentally retarded persons in any manner that the club may deem fit and within the precinct of the law.
9. To enhance a spirit of competition amongst residents by organizing gardening competitions and the like.
10. To assist members in case of death in the manner detailed in the addendum and the conditions referred therein.

These aims and objectives reveal the genuine concern of the founder. As a sister, she is aware of the social problems of the people and strives to improve the individual and communal life. Instrumental in achieving these goals are issues such as fellowship and mutual assistance. These include practical means like educating mothers and the community in different areas of life. It also includes organizing girls' clubs and teaching them matters related to biblical studies and indoor games. Part of this effort is to organize gardening competitions, from which the people involved will benefit, as their diet can be supplemented.

Although mentioned only at the end, assistance to members in the event of death, is a major concern. The local *Thusanang Women's Club*, which was founded in 1977, is mainly geared to assist members in case of death. The other aims and objectives mentioned above play a marginal role in the local Bethlehem club.

1.4 A brief comparison of the of the History of KOPANA KE MATLA, ITSHWARELENG HELPING SOCIETY and THUSANANG WOMEN'S CLUB

From what has been said concerning the history of the three societies, it is obvious that they started off in a unique way in the sense that they were founded by different individuals at different times. They are also part of the dynamic history of the founding of burial societies. Although not yet described in detail, the aims and objectives of *Kopano ke Matla* and *Itshwareleng Helping Society* are greatly confined to cases of death, *unveiling of tombstone* and weddings. *Thusanang Women's Club* does include these aims, but according to their constitution, its aims and objectives cover a broader area. In practice, however, this specific club is mainly involved in the same 'business' as the other societies.

As our description progresses, even more differences and similarities will surface. Suffice it for now.

1.5 Reasons for founding or joining a Burial Society.

The history of the three burial societies already discussed, contains reasons for founding or joining a burial society. In this section we consider them in a more contextual way.

Social concern seems to be the most common driving force behind the founding of a burial society. , i.e. , the need and plight, which arise in cases of death and the sharing of resources. In referring to the urban situation, Dandala says about those who started burial societies:

They have shown that *ubuntu* (the African way of sharing and showing humanity) is still effective in spite of the social upheaval caused by industrialisation (1990:1).

This statement underlines what has been said by the founders and also proves that the traditional African value of sharing is one of the motives involved in founding a burial society. People in need cannot be left destitute. In sharing, resources are made available to assist one another in need. As was mentioned earlier, urban circumstances fall far short of the rural rescues and the 'natural' or rather the traditional neighbourhood assistance in cases of death. burial societies stepped in to bridge this gap between modern urban circumstances and values of the traditional system in which the whole community was involved with a funeral. In the traditional system one could provide enough food for all who attended the funeral feast, with of course, the aid of the community.

In urban areas, a funeral feast involves very high costs, which has to be borne by the bereaved family itself. The family not only has to pay the costs for the

service rendered by the burial institute, but also has to pay for the grave site, food to feed all the guests, and in many instances, for travelling expenses of relatives who have to travel far distances to attend the funeral. In other words, many African people do not have the financial resources to cover the funeral costs.

However, the majority of African people can be classified as poor. One of the benefits of burial societies which surfaced during the interviews, was financial peace of mind. because of the financial aid they provide with the every-increasing costs of funerals. In support of this benefit is the fact that a funeral has to be of a certain standard. A funeral without an ox and enough food, is viewed as a disastrous and an unthinkable shame for African people because, as Lukhele says:

Blacks like to give their dead big send-offs: indeed, one could be forgiven for mistaking funeral arrangements for wedding preparations in the black areas. It is customary to slaughter an ox and prepare food and large quantities of beer. The beast plays an important ritual function. Its blood (and?) entrails are used in a special way to lay to rest the soul of the departed and to appease the spirits (1990 : 17).

It is not far fetched to conclude that the burial societies provide a space and an opportunity to do what has to be done according to traditional beliefs in the event of a funeral. As a member of one of the societies said:

We need to respect our dead and bury them in an orderly way.

Observations have shown that African people, if it comes to funerals, are eager to avoid mistakes. Sundermeier also confirms the fact that in the African context the dead need a decent funeral. He says:

The dead need the orderly burial, lest the spirit roams about, maybe as an evil spirit (1989:154) (my translation).

Another motive for forming or joining a burial society is listed under the aims and objectives of one society, viz. -"to build fellowship amongst women and to help each other in all aspects of individual and community life"-(*Thusanang*).

This motive is not explicitly mentioned in the constitutions of the other two societies, but the interviews confirm that for them, creating fellowship, is regarded as an added bonus and help. Some constitutions even refer to the society as a sort of 'family', a substitute for the relatives who are often scattered across the country.

In general members of the burial societies take pride in what they are doing. They feel that they are indeed in charge of their affairs. Nobody will be able to patronize them. They are capable of independent decisions as a group and as such they are able to determine their course of action. This kind of independence enhances the self-confidence and self-esteem of all members right from the executive down to the ordinary member.

Asked why they do not opt for commercial insurance policies, members of the societies said that a burial society did more than merely guarantee financial aid for a funeral. Financial assistance, although vitally important, is only one of many important aspect surrounding a funeral. In this regard commercial policies are specialized and helpful. Yet many African people do not rely on them alone, because they cannot provide sympathy and empathy, i.e. the feeling of emotional support . Commercial policies do not provide mutual assistance, practical help with actual arrangement or other benefits as the burial societies can.

The whole range of motives and reasons for joining or founding a burial society given so far, seem to support the argument that their founding can be regarded as an African solution to the urban dilemma, viz, a severe lack of the traditional social and financial support in the event of death.

Different aspects of this conclusion will be highlighted as the description and analysis of the societies continues.

Subsequently, we turn to the social aspect of the three burial societies. We have to ask ourselves if the rules and regulations, aims and objectives of the societies are indeed a solution to a social need. In an attempt to establish this, we need to turn to the constitutions of these societies.

2. Social and financial aspects of the Burial Societies as reflected in their constitutions.

The constitutions of the three burial societies explain the social and financial aspects of their existence only partly.

A major problem is that the constitutions are not up-to-date. They are unrevised. One gets the impression that drafting and legalizing a constitution is a kind of concession to Western practices. Initially, the societies existed without a written constitution. Only recently unwritten rules and regulations were written down and legalized.

Currently, most decisions taken by the societies - which only appear in the minutes but not in the constitution itself - are binding 'laws' for all members. It seems as if significance is not merely linked to the letter of the constitution, but in executing their practical aims and objectives. Therefore the constitutions only hint at the social and financial aspects of the societies. Some details mentioned here, therefore, had to be taken from the interviews, as they also reflected the latest decisions. In this paragraph we basically deal with some

social and financial aspects of the societies.

More details about their financial side and social involvement will be looked into later, when describing their actual work.

2.1 *Kopano ke Matla*

The unrevised edition of their constitution indicates that this society only renders services in case of death. The party to receive aid is clearly defined. The party can be the member, her husband (or vica versa), her parents, the in-laws and all her children. All of them have to be blood relatives. The fees which are paid in case of death differ.

The Society contributes R 300 for the funeral of children between the ages of one month to ten years .

From the age of eleven years upwards, the society's contribution is R 500. The society contributes R 800 towards the funeral of a member or any other adult covered by the member. In the past an additional amount of R 60 was paid for travel expenses. This payment is no longer made.

As the constitution does not mention still-born children, they seem to be excluded. This seems to be linked to the fact that such a funeral would generally be small, involving limited attendance and expenses. Also, cultural tradition calls for the involvement of the entire family in case of a still-birth. The society will not be called upon to assist in practical matters. However, they will offer sympathy and empathy by comforting the mother and family.

The constitution provides for an increase in money put forward, provided of course that the money is available in the fund.

What the constitution fails to mention, but what emerged from the interview, is that the society helps in the *unveiling of tombstone*. Although the constitution fails to mention it, provision is made for aid when unveiling the tombstone. This was revealed during the interviews. Each member donates R 5 for this occasion. Providing assistance for weddings has been considered, but not finalized as yet.

From the initial constitution it is clear that the social concerns and efforts of the Society mainly revolve around the funeral, the *unveiling of the tombstone* and perhaps at a later stage in weddings. This would suggest that there is a definite focal point in their activities. One has to bear in mind that these events as *rites de passage* have an important social and religious function in African culture. Social interaction also takes place amongst members during their monthly meetings. The members experience this encouraging factor in their support of one another. This of course is not reflected in the constitution. The aspect of social interaction within the group will be dealt with fully at a later stage.

The observation regarding the emphasis of the Society's activities and the interaction within the group, applies to all societies.

2.2 Itshwareleng Helping Society

Although there is no paragraph in the constitution which makes provision for changes and additions to the constitution, changes and additions can be made and are legally binding to all members. A comparison with *Kopano ke Matla* provides a similar scenario regarding the rendering of services. *Itshwareleng Helping Society* serves and assists their members with weddings, consolations (funerals) and *unveiling of tombstones* and *amaduduzo*, which is a festival similar to *unveiling of tombstone*.

According to the interviewees, *amaduduzo* differs in as much as no unveiling is covered. Eight people including the member (per family) are covered. The member, her husband, the member's parents, her in-laws and two additional people are covered. These can be close relatives, who are not provided for otherwise.

If a new member joins, all eight beneficiaries have to be registered. Children are included automatically and are not referred to in the constitution, as this number can differ from family to family. In the event of death, the society currently contributes R 940. For children the amount is R 500. An increase in these amounts depends on a decision of the executive in collaboration with the members. The conditions for a still-born child are the same as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Their burial is considered to be a family affair. The financial assistance in case of '*unveiling a tombstone*' (*amaduduzo*) is R 2 per member, which is included in the monthly fee.

2.3 *Thusanang Women's Club*

Thusanang Women's Club is an organisation, which has numerous branches across South Africa. The aims and objectives and therefore their social concerns cover a broader spectrum (cf. aims and objectives above), when compared to the other two burial societies.

The local club in Bethlehem however, has decreased its aims and objectives. Currently their sole function is that of a burial society. As such they extend their services by helping their members with funerals, *unveiling of tombstone* (*amaduduzo*) and weddings. When considering their aims and objectives, they are reminded of their potential to cover more ground. At this stage the club, as burial society, contributes R 800 towards the funeral of a deceased member. For any other adult or child insured by the member, R 500 will be paid. In addition to that, all members pay R 5 for vegetables and R 5 for cake-baking, which is collected during the week before a funeral and handed out to the

bereaved family. Another R 5 has to be spent by each member to buy soap, candles and matches. This is handed over to the bereaved family after the funeral. In the beginning, each affiliated club donated R 20 in the event of the death of a member or her husband .

This no longer applies. The club assists with weddings and the erecting of tombstones by contributing R 200. In the case of a still born child, this club differs from the other two in so far as they assist the bereaved family with an amount of R 100. It is merely a financial token of comfort. Members will offer words of condolences and in doing so, provide comfort. However, they do not involve themselves as a club in the funeral of a stillborn child, as it is considered a family matter.

2.4 Financial contributions of Burial Society members and administration of funds

So far we have given a brief description of the field of the societies' involvement, the amounts given to the families in cases of death, funeral, *unveiling of tombstone* and weddings. All the societies finance their payouts with the fees they charge from each member. This is their basic income. Occasionally they make some efforts to conduct fund raising projects. In these instances, they try to involve other societies to help them. Assistance is then on a mutual basis. This constitutes the only interaction they have with other societies.

The system of fund raising is called *umjikelo* .It means a collection of money while singing and dancing around a table and putting down one's money to the rhythm of the dance and the music. The same system is occasionally used in the churches. The financial contribution system of the three societies differs slightly from one another. The fees, which are collected on a monthly basis, vary according to the contribution.

2.4.1. *Kopano ke Matla*

New members pay an initial R 50 joining fee. Thereafter they pay a monthly fee of R 15 plus R 2 for petty cash like all existing members do. Annually during February each member has to renew the membership by paying R 10. For *unveiling of the tombstone (amaduduzo)* each member donates an additional R 5.

Another source of income is the existing fine system. If a member does not attend a meeting in uniform a fine of R 1 is payable. For tardiness *Kopano ke Matla* does not impose a fine. The R 5 mentioned above is then given to the family, which will be unveiling a tombstone or having just the *amaduduzo* festival. The member's income is not considered when determining membership fees. All members pay the same fees to the treasurer, who keeps records.

The constitution stipulates that all the money received by the treasurer must be banked. The money must be banked within three days of the monthly meeting. She is allowed a petty cash of R 1000 which can be used for current expenses, for buying vegetables, which are used to prepare meals in case of a funeral or *unveiling of the tombstone (amaduduzo)*. This arrangement is mostly to the benefit of members who live on farms. They receive contributions immediately on reporting a death. They need not come to the township, where the headquarters usually are, twice.

Although not stipulated in the constitution, the treasurer gives a short financial report during the monthly meeting. At the end of the year, she gives a statement for the whole year. The chairlady jointly signs withdrawals at the bank. The treasurer alone is responsible for book keeping and the safeguarding of the money.

2.4.2 *Itshwareleng Helping Society*

Itshwareleng Helping Society also has various sources of income. Members have to bring their fees to the monthly meeting. They to pay R 22 for eleven months (R 2 of which is always put aside for vegetables). There is no payment in December, as it is a month of holiday and family festivities. The term vegetables means the contribution of the Society given to a family in case of *unveiling of a tombstone amaduduzo*) and weddings. New members have to pay an initial R 20 joining fee. This R 20 is paid by all members in April and there is no grading of fees in terms of a member's income.

Other sources of income for the society are their fine system, which is clearly referred to in the constitution: 'If a member is not wearing the uniform she will be fined R 5.' 'If a member arrives late at the society's meeting, she will be fined R 1. And a member must pay R 5 if she/he is in arrears with the monthly payments, also for not coming to the society without a report stating valid reasons'. If one compares the fine system of *Kopano ke Matla* and of *Itshwareleng Helping Society*, it is obvious that it covers more areas. Concerning the interaction between different societies, the same applies to what has already been said with regards to *Kopano ke Matla*.

The constitution of *Itshwareleng* does not mention the executive of the society at all. It seems as if their position and work is not in question. Concerning the work of the treasurer, nearly the same picture emerges (see interview) as in *Kopano ke Matla*. Only a few differences exist. The treasurer also has to bank all the fees she receives. She writes up the books and is responsible for all the money. In case of withdrawals, she and the chairlady have to sign jointly as it is common practice with associations. Only once a year she gives an extensive financial report. Otherwise, a summary of financial matters appears in the minutes of every meeting which are duly recorded by the secretary. The minutes are read, approved and discussed in the following meeting, so that each member is up-to-date concerning the 'business' of the society.

A kind of income, which is used for outings at the end of the year, is collected shortly before the outings takes place. Record is kept of the money which was collected, but it is not banked, because expenses for the outing are paid with this money. The treasurer only banks money which is left over after expenses have been covered. In this regard, there is no difference between the two societies mentioned so far. The same applies for *Thusanang*.

2.4.3. *Thusanang Women's Club*

As the current constitution of *Thusanang Women's Club* is not revised, the most recent figures were taken from the interview. Although outdated on figures, the other information given in the constitution are still in force.

Members of *Thusanang Women's Club* are obliged to pay an initial fee of R 33 at the beginning of the year. R 30 of this amount is for the funeral fund and R 3 is for registration. The registration or rather re-registration is done annually. It is a token of the member's commitment as she commits herself anew the cause of and involvement in the society. In other words she says: 'I'm prepared to go on.' A similar re-registration fee is known in church circles among the prayer women and the men's leagues. After this initial fee, members contribute R 12 monthly for up to seven months (R 84 per annum).

New members pay an initial R 20 as joining fee on the day they join. Thereafter the other rules apply. These include R 5 for vegetables, R 5 for cake-baking and R 5 for soap, candles and matches. This amount (R 15) is paid by all members in case of a funeral. In case of 'unveiling' the members do not collect the money, as it is withdrawn from the coffers of the society. In the event of a wedding, the members donate a small amount to cover the R 200, which is donated to the family of the member who hosts the wedding. Additional expenses are incurred when the year is closed with an outing. Members have to pay a certain amount, agreed upon at a previous meeting.

The local branches of *Thusanang* are run according to the rules and regulations given in the club's constitution. Therefore the rules concerning the administration of finances also apply locally. A clear set of rules and regulations is provided within the constitution. The local club in accordance to the association as a whole, has a bank account.

The treasurer is responsible for book-keeping and safe-guarding of the money. Withdrawals have to be signed jointly by the treasurer and the chairlady or her vice. Receipts are issued to any payee and received from any debtor for all payments made. The treasurer has to furnish a financial statement at every executive meeting, which on local level, usually occurs quarterly. A summary of money received and money spent, also appears in the club's minutes. These are written during every meeting of the club. All in all, these rules and regulations are part of common, generally accepted business practices.

Fund raising projects do not differ greatly from those of *Kopano ke Matla* and *Itshwareleng*. The same pattern prevails.

2.5 The Executive of the Societies

In this paragraph we consider the leadership of the three burial societies. The aim is to describe the composition of the executive and the dynamics which are at work.

In referring to women's groups and funeral societies, Brandel Syrier states:

...the powers of the president, who generally is the founder, are absolute; no one dares to question her decisions or examine "the books". An elaborate ritual and strict formal procedure instills and perpetuates the respect she deems essential or the execution of her role.

...the President or "Chairlady" once established

shows marked tendencies to stay. The members seem to be quite contented. "After all she founded it", they say, or "If she is doing the work properly...."

Group coherence is maintained by personal loyalty to the leader who act, encourages, admonishes, advises and resolves quarrels. Her word is believed implicitly and she allots task (1962:66).

Many of Brandel-Syrier's observations and conclusions concerning the attitude of Society members and the comments referring to the leader(ship) are still valid. In describing the findings made in connection with the three societies in Bethlehem however, some small modifications may occur.

Kopano ke Matla has an executive consisting of seven members. These are the chairlady (her vice - not mentioned in the constitution), the secretary (and her assistant also not mentioned in the constitution), the treasurer and two additional members. The only permanent member of the executive is Mrs. E. Nhlapo, who is the leader or chairlady. Her position is unchallenged, because she obtained leadership position as one of the founders. This makes her a 'mother', a 'father', even a 'chief', or 'king' and a 'senior'. According to African traditions it is not easy at all to question the authority of a person having reached this status (cf. Nürnberger 1991:312).

However, as Mrs. Nhlapo pointed out, being unchallenged depends on a good performance of her duties as chairlady. Inefficiency in her office would cause great damage and jeopardize her position. Legally, it would not be easy to depose her. (cf. Nürnberger 1991:307). However, once harm has been done, the balance of mutual trust and a good working relationship would be undermined. Her authority and the power she yields are not ends in themselves, but ultimately means of care for the well-being of the group. Therefore she presides at all meetings with great care to uphold the aims and

objectives of the society. She ensures that mutual trust and good relationships are maintained.

She has to sign the minutes of the society written for all meetings as well as for all the money received by the treasurer (see constitution). She and the executive have control over the property of the society (e.g. the dishes) and she and the executive are responsible for the agenda of the meetings held once a month on a Sunday afternoon. Matters to be decided upon are tabled by the chairlady and freely discussed by all members. They do not vote about such matters, but decide 'by reason according to what looks sensible to participants'(Mpumlwana 1991:376).

When consensus is reached, the matter is approved and thereafter considered to be binding for all members. The chairlady does not involve herself too much in the discussions. If she feels a matter has been discussed at length, she announces the decision, taking into account what had been said. In this procedure the chairlady closely resembles the traditional African chief and his council at work. There is no unilateral decision making on the part of the chairlady. The purpose is to arrive at a corporate decision through the process briefly described before (cf. Nürnberger 1991:305).

A one-sided decision would split the ranks of the society. Therefore to reach consensus is vitally important for ensuring the cohesion of the society as well as for the office of the chairlady. Can one, in a case like this, really say, as Brandel-Syrier (1962:66) did, that in the women's funeral societies the powers of president, who is generally the founder, are absolute? A closer look suggests that the power of the chairlady (or president) is balanced by a kind of mutual consensus and the dynamics of the societies and their rules and regulations. However, by virtue of the fact that she was founder of the society, the chairlady enjoys a position of respect and has certain powers. This means the other part of Brandel-Syriers argument still holds forth.

The chairlady's powers are far reaching concerning the choice of the executive members (this is not stated in the constitution). All other members of the executive are appointed and selected according to their performance. They are initially chosen by the chairlady and they usually stay in office as long as they want to or live. However, good performance on their side is taken into account. In case of substituting a member of the executive, the executive proposes a society member whose qualities are well known.

The proposal is usually accepted by all members and consent is given by raising hands. *Kopano ke Matla* does not employ elections at all [at least not according to the European concept of democratic elections.] The set-up of *Itshwareleng Helping Society* is slightly different to that of *Kopano ke Matla*.

The current executive was elected, although not by secret ballot. As pointed out earlier, the founder is no longer the chairlady. As the society has three branches, it also has three executives. These do however convene for important meetings in which modifications of membership fees and constitutional changes are decided upon. This kind of meeting is chaired by the chairlady of the 'mother branch'. In running the branches the respective executives are independent.

Each branch has a chairlady (her vice), a secretary (her assistant), a treasurer and one additional member. All members of the executive are nominated and elected by means of consensus. No secret ballots are used. When proposals or new executive members are required, they look for trustworthy, responsible members, who would be able to do the job.

The entire executive is judged on the strength of their performance. During the annual renewal of membership in April, an election is held. However, the outcome seldom results in any change in the executive. Again Brandel-Syrier (1962:66) remarks that "the president or chairlady, once established, shows marked tendencies to stay". This is not only true of the chairlady, but also of

the whole executive, provided that they have a sound knowledge of running the society. I am of the opinion that the tendency to retain the chairlady and the other members of the executive in their positions, is directly related to the African concept that a good leader or 'body' should not be dismissed merely because an election is at hand. It is unjust to apply European concepts of democratic understandings to these societies. They are democratic in terms of the African way of understanding. There is no need for change, if the 'leading body' is functioning well and taking care of the wellbeing of the group.

The judgement of Brandel-Syrier (1962:66), that "such organizations (she is referring to different women's organizations) are democratic only in appearance", is understandable, when judged according to European democratic standards. According to my observation, they use numerous democratic elements, eg. voting. These however are combined with African concepts of leadership.

A rather peculiar phenomenon is that the structure of the executive fails to be mentioned in the entire constitution of *Itshwareleng Helping Society*. The only reference to the executive appears in connection with the application of members to leave the Society. It seems as if the executive structure is taken for granted. The positions held by the members of the executive seem to be unchallenged.

The local branch of *Thusanang Women's Club* has an executive, which is structured like the national executive of the club. The structures are mentioned in the constitution. The executive, which was elected in 1977, when the local club started, consists of the chairlady - a dedicated Methodist prayer woman - and the vice (or assistant), the secretary and her deputy, the treasurer and two additional co-opted members.

It is significant that the constitution itself, which is clear on other issues, does not provide details on how to conduct an election. Only two references under "General Meetings" ('Elections of office bearers' and "Period of Office" 'Elections to be proceeded by branches') exist. No other details are given. The local branch in Bethlehem holds elections every third year. Usually there is no change in the ranks of office-bearers. This only occurs when a member of the executive dies, if there is deep-seated dissatisfaction with a member of the executive, or if somebody resigns from an office . Voting on Club matters has never been a problem. All meetings are attended regularly. Virtually all members are always present. Decisions are made by consensus following thorough discussion. No secret ballot is taken. The ideal is not majority rule or grouping, but consensus of the group, which is held in high regard. This principle of group-consensus is part of African heritage and was observed in all societies.

2.6 Aspects concerning membership and perceptions of members

To get a better insight into the structure and function of the society we now turn our attention to aspects related to membership and perceptions of members. A whole new range of issues present themselves. These issues will be dealt with in a synoptical way.

2.6.1 Growth of a society and introduction of new members

Kopano ke Matla , *Itshwareleng Helping Society* and *Thusanang Women's Club* do not actively engage in campaigns to canvass for new members - at least in as much as no planned strategy for canvassing exists.

However all three societies realize that their growth and the recruiting of new members are directly related to their performance as a society. People notice the spirit which prevails within the group. They see the effectiveness, the soundness and the activities of the society. As most people require some form

of security in the event of death, they join a society which will meet their needs. These two aspects seem to be the main incentives for growth to take place. Furthermore burial society members fully attest to the power of mouth to mouth propaganda as another factor of growth. There is only one instance, which could be considered as an intentional attempt to promote the society and thereby indirectly canvassing for members.

The AME minister, who was a member of *Kopano ke Matla*, had his farewell party in the Church. The society gave him a large sum of money and gifts. These were presented to him in fine African style by singing and dancing and wishing him a really fond farewell. The result was that another AME minister, from another town, joined the society.

On average, a society grows with one to two members per month. Members come from all over the township. Even people from farms apply for membership and they are gladly welcomed. The three societies transcends all urban/rural distinctions. They operate in both urban as well as rural conditions. The growth of a society is perceived as positive, as it ultimately result in an increase in 'power' and influence. Dandala points out, that 'organized strength membership ranges between 30 and 500 people per society' (1990:12).

The membership of the three burial societies under investigation in Bethlehem ranges from between 60 to 150 members. When the increase in numbers is too big, the groups are intentionally split into smaller units (branches), which are more manageable. Although the societies split in this way, their sense of unity is very strong. The founder (chairlady) and the executive are responsible for fostering this sense of unity.

The introduction of new members into a society is similar in all three societies. The procedure in *Itshwareleng Helping Society* is as follows:

The chairlady stands up and announces the names of the new members, who are already dressed in the society's uniform. The new members have to stand up. A chorus is sung. The chairlady makes a brief speech in which she addresses the need for caring. This she says, largely rests on the shoulders of women, as most men hardly ever involve themselves in 'domestic affairs'. The chairlady goes on to say that the new-comers are probably well aware of the good work done by the society and that this was what had motivated them to join. She stresses the fact, that in cases of death one had to have someone to lean on - financially and otherwise.

After the speech, the constitution is read, in which the basic rules and regulations, duties and benefits of a member are mentioned. The new members then have to come forward and face the other members. Again a chorus is sung and they are welcomed by shaking hands. This procedure involves all present and it confirmed that they are accepted as new members.

On the side of the new members this procedure also means an acceptance of the rules and regulations of the society, as "a member, on joining, binds, herself/himself to obey all the rules and regulations of the society" (see constitution). Each new member receives a copy of the constitution. The new member must supply the names of all those who are insured by her/him. The necessary documents are signed. All of these procedures are finalized before the induction ceremony and is not mentioned in the constitution either. The provisions made for new members in the constitution (2) become binding with induction.

In the case of *Itshwareleng* it reads as follows:

Assistance to a new member will be rendered after a period of six months. During this period she will be expected to make her monthly contribution. Full membership becomes effective after 12 months (one year).....

The trial period in *Kopano ke Matla* is also six months . The constitution does not contain a one year clause (for full membership). It was confirmed by the chairlady, that those who join, are considered to be full members after the six months. In the case of death occurring before the six months have lapsed, no aid will be forthcoming. The same applies for *Thusanang Women's Club*, although not written down in their constitution.

2.6.2 Responsibilities of members and conditions of membership

If a person joins a society he/she has to comply with certain conditions. On the one hand there are written rules and regulations of the respective constitutions. Then there are some unwritten conditions. These are implicit agreements. Both of these categories have to be examined.

Firstly, there is a trial period, which has been mentioned. It is linked with the moral obligation and duty to make a monthly contribution. The aid which the societies is able to render, largely depends on the members' disciplined and regular payment of fees. Should members fail to pay regularly, the society will surely be financially stranded and thus unable to render assistance to anybody. From a constitutional and legal point of view, members are obliged to be up-to-date with their payments. A law in itself does not always act as a safeguard against defaulting. Members are therefore constantly reminded and encouraged in the meetings to pay regularly by making adequate provision for their contributions in their budgets. Despite sincere efforts on their part, some members are in arrears with their payments.

Those who are in arrears, receive a public reminder to settle their debt during the meeting . The motive behind this seems to be discipline by means of peer pressure. Nobody takes a public reprimand like that in his/her stride! *Itshwareleng* encourages members to borrow money to pay their fees.

Some cases of severe defaulting do occur. These members are summoned by the executive to explain their position.

Another measure of ensuring disciplined payment is the fine system, as has already been referred to. In practice however, if a member's arrears are not too great, her debt is merely deducted from the payout.

Another option would be to leave the society once the debt incurred becomes too great. Practically, however, this is not an easy option. Two of the societies make provision for this option. *Thusanang Women's Club*, however, does not have this as an option.

Experience has shown that practically no member ever leaves the Club. Legally, they are indebted to the society. Peer pressure seems to be the most effective way to ensure regular payment and thus financial stability. The constitution of *Kopano ke Matla* makes provision for a member to leave the society. It is dealt with in two paragraphs (7c and 10). Once aid has been rendered to a member, it becomes increasingly difficult to leave the society. The member has to pay back the money received according to the conditions mentioned in the constitution (7c). A member, who leaves, receives no refund of her contributions. "She has to leave everything, which has been granted to her by the society, because she broke her promises" (10). Not only do the two paragraphs have a moral and financial basis. They also imply a kind of punishment - financially and morally.

The constitution of *Itshwareleng Helping Society* addresses the same issue in three paragraphs (2.7. and 8.). After one year (one is a full member now) it is possible to leave the society, provided that this is done one month after renewal and that no refund is granted. (2).

Should any disciplinary problems occur and the member wishes to leave, the executive must be notified in writing and her name officially taken off the book

of the society (7). Paragraph (8) encourages members to leave if they 'cannot obey the rules and regulations of the society'. They are asked "not to stand in the way of other members or the life of the society, because *Itshwareleng*, like a person, wouldn't like to be disturbed".

An interesting fact is that *Itshwareleng* is compared to a person who would like to live peacefully. The use of this symbol suggests that the society depends on the close co-operation, goodwill and willingness of the members to realize its aims and objectives. A body, in danger of being disrupted, cannot live harmoniously. Its unity is in jeopardy.

The members of all three societies have a commonly shared responsibility and 'condition' of membership which is expressed both verbally and in writing. On this issue the constitution of *Itshwareleng* reads as follows :

"If a member is not going to help other members, that member will not be helped either" (5).

Another 'rule', which all three societies have in common, is that all members have some church background. The denomination is irrelevant. The fact that the leaders (chairladies) themselves are dedicated church members, could account for this. The findings of Häselbarth (1972:86), that the burial societies today are one of the few official opportunities whereby Christians and non-Christians meet with a common purpose, does not apply in the investigated societies.

With regard to the ethnic orientation of burial societies, two tendencies prevail, viz, a distinct ethnic orientation and an openness to accommodate all ethnic groups. In this regard Lukhele points out:

It is common in this form of burial society scheme (he is referring to tribal orientated societies) for membership to be drawn from one tribe or ethnic group....

However, this tendency towards ethnicity is diminishing now that influx control has been scrapped. As more and more blacks live permanently in urban areas, there is increasing interaction between ethnic groups (1990:18 f).

Dandala makes similar observations:

Often membership is restricted to the tribe or clan but in time as need arises, other people are also allowed to join (1990:4 ff).

And a few pages later in another connection he makes the same remarks:

Clan members often have to join tribal or ethnic societies where membership is limited strictly to the tribe or clan... (1990:6).

Long before influx control was scrapped, the three societies permitted different people to join. *Thusanang Women's Club* contains a section in its constitution, which reads:

Any Black, Coloured or Indian woman,
who will have accepted the terms and objectives
as detailed in the constitution, will be eligible for membership.

This paragraph indicates an ethnic openness in its admission policy. Ethnicity does not seem to be a criterion for allowing members to join the society. Whites are not mentioned, but they are not excluded as such.

We have to remember that the constitution dates back to 1974, when the possibility of whites joining was highly unlikely or even unthinkable. The other

two societies do not have a written paragraph in their constitution concerning this issue. But they confirmed that they do not work along ethnic lines. All ethnic groups are free to join.

All three societies also draw their membership from various social backgrounds. They include members from all over the township and even from farms: labourers, housewives, domestic workers, teachers, ministers, self employed people, etc. As mentioned, there is no link between social class and contributions made. The fees and contributions are the same for all members of a particular society. However, there is a definite link between the amount of fees and contributions made and the pay out in cases of death. Those who want to join a society are free to choose the society according to what they can afford. In some instances, certain social classes are excluded because the fees are too high. Affordability often serves as a determining factor as to who will join and who will not.

Dandala refers to a case like this:

There are also professionally managed societies such as the Rand Mutual Society. These operate in rural and urban areas and are open to all social classes, but as they charge high fees, they are usually only used by the wealthy (1990:5).

High rates will exclude the very poor from the three societies under investigation. That does not necessarily mean that a very poor person will not be buried. I have seen poor people being buried according to an acceptable social standard. In a kind of community effort, neighbours, churches and even burial societies, made contributions towards a very poor person's funeral.

The majority of the members of all three societies are female. *Thusanang Women's Club* is a self-declared *Women's Club*, in so far as there is a certain restriction in its admission policy. *Kopano ke Matla* has a few male members.

Itshwareleng Helping Society has no male members, but has no objection should a man wish to join. The two societies which allow men to join are not worried at all concerning this issue. Male membership of a burial society is still the exception to the rule. The female society members are convinced that they will always be in the majority, because most men still regard domestic and family matters as the woman's responsibility. The female members do not see future male domination in their societies as a real threat.

2.6.3 Advantages and benefits of membership of the society

The financial advantages a member of the society enjoys (provided that she abides by her duties and obligations as written down in the constitutions and supplemented by the decisions of the societies) have already been dealt with. What the constitutions and the decisions of the societies fail to reflect, are the benefits based on the interaction between members of the society.

We will now focus on some of the main perceptions members have in this regard. The following question was put to members of the societies to determine their perception and feelings regarding their personal experience of interaction within the group. The question of course only touches on a specific area of interaction. The main emphasis is on the personal and social impact that societies have on their members.

It reads as follows:

What does the Burial Society mean to you, your family and the circumstances you live in? What other benefits, besides financial assistance in the case of death, exist? How and in which areas of life are you helped?

One of these perceived benefits is that of practical assistance for daily living. The extent to which this benefit is experienced, varies from member to

member. Some members experience comfort and assistance for themselves and their family, especially in times of crises. The sympathy and empathy experienced helps to lessens the burden of sorrow. The society is perceived by some as a substitute for the larger family, in which they support one another, rely on one another, give hope, build up trust and foster positive relationships amongst one another.

They receive spiritual counselling by intercession, Scripture reading and general advice on personal and family matters. Some said that the society taught them to set a good example, to be faithful and trustworthy within the family, the society, the church and to trust in God.

The society teaches respect, love and good neighbourliness (cf. the Good Samaritan), and provides knowledge about caring for the family and the community. When taking these answers into account, one can summarize by saying that the societies teach their members basic life-skills.

Values such as mutual concern, respect, practical assistance and counselling are taught. Some members even perceive a religious dimension at work. Being part of the community as such is perceived by some to enrich their lives.

2.6.4 Perceptions of burial ociety members concerning rules and regulations of their society.

The questions which were asked, were as follows:

How do you feel about the rules and regulations of your society?

Are they helpful - if so - in which way? Are they difficult - if so - Why?

What do they mean to you?

These questions were asked to obtain more insight into the perceptions of members regarding their society. Two main categories of answers prevailed:

Rules and regulations have a structural function which in turn promotes certain values. In that sense it is both binding (law) and beneficial (good news). Above all, members agree that rules and regulations presuppose a commitment on the part of the member. They enhance and sustain the aims and objectives of a society. When these rules and regulations are combined with the commitment and dedication of a member, they become easier to uphold.

Furthermore they are perceived as simple and helpful, as they serve as a guide to communicate with all members appropriately and respectfully. As one member said: "They help to communicate mentally, physically and spiritually". "They help to love and sympathize with one another".

On a more structured basis rules and regulations contribute towards honesty in administrative procedures of the society, to arrange assistance, to work together, to ensure payment of fees, to guard against destruction and to guarantee a secure and lasting contract. Rules foster self-discipline, unity and sincerity in the process of furthering the society's objectives.

Members realize that, in abiding by the rules and regulations, fairness is promoted amongst all members. Most of the answers by members reflected a positive attitude towards the rules and regulations. Only one member said that the rules and regulations were difficult, because they were binding.

2.6.5 The concept of *ubuntu* (being human) as reflected by burial society members

By questioning the members of the burial societies, we tried to find out whether it is true that, within their societies, *ubuntu* is expressed or applied. *Ubuntu*, or being human in African understanding, entails a whole system of interaction between people of the same age groups as well as different age groups. It includes the proper approach to the other person and to hierarchical

structures which are part of social life. To live in a sound relationship with others, is also part of *ubuntu*. At this point it is not possible to discuss the entire social - and religious background of *ubuntu*. Our aim is to give an account of how burial society members perceive *ubuntu* to be part of life in the society.

Members of the societies are convinced that they show *ubuntu* by respecting one another and adhering to the rules and regulations of the society. Consoling, reprimanding and advising one another is also regarded as being human (*ukuba nobuntu* - Zulu). To care for the other members is important. One member said: "Most members are old. They need love and comfort, which they get in the society. Forgiveness and humility also promotes *ubuntu*. By being a member, one builds stable, lasting relationships. It means one has brothers and sisters who work and stand together in a crisis. Because there is mutual understanding and assistance amongst members, they are prepared to leave their homes from the time death occurs and to be with the bereaved family until the day of the funeral. To live *ubuntu* also means to be self-controlled in one's behaviour and emotions. *Ubuntu* is also evident in aspects such as encouraging respect, faithfulness, loyalty and to carry out orders from one another and from the officials to the benefit of all".

Ubuntu is also evident in the approach to new members. They are always well-informed. They receive their copies of the constitution, which is explained to them. They are properly introduced to the existing members. Some members regard multi-racialism (there are no colour bars in the society) as a sign of *ubuntu*. Other members said that listening to one another and wearing the uniform of the society are signs of *ubuntu*. Here the uniform seems to symbolize unity. (We will come back to this topic later in more detail.)

It would seem that the concept of *ubuntu* (Zulu) or *botho* (Sotho) is an integral part of the communion of the societies. *Ubuntu* is experienced in the way

members communicate and interact. The framework for this interaction exists in the very purpose and objectives of the societies. *Ubuntu* is also experienced in the way members assist one another by being supportive in a certain areas of life.

2.6.6 The society and the church as reflected by society members

The society members belong to many different churches. Therefore the statements made by individuals of the societies are not directly related to any particular denomination. However their answers do reflect the influences of their particular churches. This at least was the implication of the question which was put to them. It read as follows:

What differences exist between your church and the society?

With this background in mind, the answers only portray certain perceptions, tendencies and feelings, which prevail among society members. Some members feel that there are no difference at all. The society makes provision for Bible study, intercession and prayers for the sick, the regime, prisoners and the bereaved. Society meetings are opened and ended with a prayer.

Some did mention the payment of money towards a decent funeral as a difference. Fund raising by the society is very similar to that done by the church and as such not seen as a difference. Some members agreed that there is a difference in terms of division of duties. The church performs the funeral service (supports spiritually), while the burial society gives practical help as well. Church members do not necessarily help with cooking, serving and washing up, as these are not part of their duties. The church does not necessarily involve herself from the onset of death right up to the actual funeral. One member said:

"The difference is great, because the church is for God and the burial society is for men".

If this statement is to be interpreted correctly, the society is perceived as an agent, who meets man's practical needs, whereas the church is an agent of God. The statement openly questions the church's practical involvement. The society definitely has priority for them.

The burial society is also perceived as a champion of the poor. This seems to suggest that the church does very little for the poor in terms of funerals. For others the difference between church and society lies in the absence of a minister of religion and the fact that members of the society are from different denominations.

Still on the issue of the relationship between burial societies and the church, a minister, who is a member of one of the societies, was asked to comment on the question:

What do the services of the church mean to the people who are members of a society?

He emphasized that an answer would vary according to an individual's perception of the role of the church regarding funerals. He also pointed out certain tendencies, which cast a light on the answers given by members concerning the relationship between society and church.

He discerned three tendencies:

- a) Some people do not regard the services of the church as essential. They would rather secure a decent funeral by first being good and faithful members of a burial society.
- b) Others think that the funeral service is essential to make the deceased more acceptable to be received by God, or in the life hereafter. The service fulfils this purpose and provides additional comfort.

- c) For some a church service is just prove to outsiders that the deceased was a church member. Their main concern is to have a smoothly-run burial, as many comment after a burial saying: "It really was a good work" (*umsebenzi omuhle*). The meaning of this is: There was no unpleasant surprise, no offending word against the deceased, his way was prepared smoothly.

One chairlady admitted to incidents of tension between ministers of churches and the burial societies. These tensions arise when societies try to 'hijack' church services for their purposes. The chairladies of the three societies in Bethlehem however, emphasized that they strove for and appreciated good co-operation between themselves and the churches. They stressed that the societies and the church had legitimacy in their own rights. There are of course obvious challenges to the churches. Dandala only briefly touches upon one of the challenges by saying:

The main strength of the societies is the way they promote a community spirit in urban areas where more and more Blacks are gaining permanent residence. In this sphere they may be said to rival the church.
(1990:12).

There are however additional challenges to the church. We shall deal with them later in this study.

2.6.7 Name of a society, uniforms and brooches.

We have already mentioned that the name of a society conveys the motto and portrays part of their aims and objectives. This seems to be true for most of the societies, as Dandala (1990:4) and Lukhele (1990:19) indicate:

Masingcababe (Let us bury each other), *Makgotla* (Home Council), *Itireleng* (do things for yourself), *Masibambane* (let us join hands together).

In all of these names the social element of togetherness, of mutual assistance and self-help is conveyed. The help experienced is threefold. Financial, social and moral support, which stems from the communion, which works together aimed at a common goal, the mutual assistance in weddings, in a crisis like death and the *unveiling of a tombstone*. This is also true for *Kopano ke Matla*, *Itshwareleng Helping Society* and *Thusanang Women's Club* in Bethlehem. The meaning of their names were given previously .

Uniforms and brooches have a similar function. They form an integral part of being a member of a society. This pertains to the code of conduct and respect that members referred to. Not wearing the uniform implies that a member does not take her membership seriously and that she is posing a threat to the morale and unity of the society . Here lies the origin of being fined for not wearing the uniform. As a member one is not only an individual , but also a member of certain group which in turn has a certain identity. This identity has to be displayed to the 'outside' world. The same applies to the brooches. Uniforms and brooches are symbols of the very heart and soul, the life-giving influence behind the group.

The members of the three societies in Bethlehem have two sets of uniforms. For their official meetings they wear the 'Sunday uniform', and when they are involved in practical work, they wear overalls to protect the 'Sunday uniform'. Every society uses different colours for their uniforms . Members of the same society wear identical uniforms. The brooches carry the name of the society. The colours of the uniforms are chosen at random and do not have any symbolical meaning. Uniforms and brooches as such point to the identity of the group and underline that there is, or has to be, a sense of unity.

2.7 The Burial Societies as communities of mutual assistance

During the course of the description of the three societies, we have already touched upon some aspects and elements of the burial societies as communions of mutual assistance concentrating on burials, *unveiling of tombstone* and occasionally weddings. In this section the focus of the discussion will be on the societies as organisations of mutual assistance.

The cohesion within the societies is strong. It is fostered by different elements, some of which have already been mentioned in another context.

- a) Regular monthly meetings are held. The primary objective of these meetings is to take care of the business side of the society. Nearly two-thirds of the time spent during the meeting is to collect membership fees. Reports from the chairlady encourage the members to continue the good work done at funerals and on other occasions. In parts of these reports the chairlady also reminds the members to be co-operative when it comes to the common goal of the society, i.e. to be prepared to help at all times. The sense of unity is also nurtured by assuring members that all members are vitally important. And indeed, all members are involved in the work of the society in one way or another. They are involved in practical aspects of the work as well as in the decision-making process which imparts self-esteem and pride.
- b) The practical aspects during funerals and other occasions adds to the cohesion of the group, because as members told me, to work together and to see that things go well, fills them with pride as members of the society.
- c) An outing, although only once a year, unites them on another level. They are able to leave the 'business' behind. Being together on a convivial level strengthens their feeling of being a big family. Members

themselves feel that it is good to have an outing at the end of the year, as it unites members even more. Dandala also reflects this feeling:

It is important for members to meet in a cheerful atmosphere as well, rather than only meeting in the shadow of death (1990:17)

- d) The cohesion of the members in the societies is also strengthened by the fact that members are prepared to give and take advice from one another in matters concerning their daily lives.

3. The practical involvement of the Burial Societies in the phase between the occurrence of death and the funeral

We now turn to the practical involvement of the burial societies in the period between the occurrence of death and the actual funeral. It seems that the presence of the burial society members and their practical involvement in arranging funerals contribute essentially to the success of a funeral and of separation from the deceased.

3.1 The phase between death and the beginning of the night vigil

The burial societies are very busy in the phase between death and the beginning of the night vigil. The members are involved in many practical preparations regarding the needs of the bereaved, the funeral guests and ensuring a high standard for the forth-coming funeral. These preparations include catering as well as traditional customs which are deeply rooted in the beliefs of the African people.

3.1.1 The presence of the Burial Society

When death occurs, the member has to notify the society immediately. The constitution of *Kopano ke Matla* deals with it in paragraph (8) "Announcement of Death", which reads:

The member shall announce the death of a person covered by her in writing. It must be sent to the chairlady including the death certificate before the society can help.

The immediacy of announcing the death to the society, although not expressed verbally, is implied. Members are anticipating receiving money and assistance from the other members as soon as possible. Paragraph 11 of the constitution of *Itshwareleng Helping Society* stresses this point more clearly:

If someone has passed away the society and its members have to be told first, so that they can help right from the start.

Thusanang Women's Club does not have a paragraph in their constitution dealing with this issue. But in practice the same applies to members of *Thusanang*. They too notify the society first. The obligation to produce the death certificate is mentioned in the constitution of '*Thusanang*' and *Kopano ke Matla*, but not in that of *Itshwareleng*.

Mention of the death certificate as proof of death is built in as security. Usually those who are covered by the member, appear in the books of the societies. Because members know each other, nobody would really try to cheat.

It is worthwhile to note that the society as a helping institution or organisation is the first to be notified about the death. It indicates that the assistance of the

society is conceived to be important. Second in line as a helping institution is the church. The situation will determine when the undertaker is notified. Once notified, the society members prepare to help.

First of all, the treasurer collects the money from the bank, intended to reach the deceased's family as soon as possible. *Itshwareleng's* constitution gives a time frame (12):

The money must reach the deceased's family
at least three days before the funeral.

The chairlady and the executive then announce a day on which all available members of the society go to the deceased's house to present the money. The money is not just presented in the way one would receive money from a bank. The presentation is combined with a kind of ceremony or 'service'. The members of the society enter the house. After being received, they go into the deceased's bedroom, which has already been prepared for the chief mourners. There they sit, rest and mourn. The main mourners never sit alone in this room. Soon after death has occurred family members, friends and burial society members are present to mourn, to be with them and assist them wherever the need arises. Family members, friends and burial society members are present day and night for the whole week before the funeral takes place. The ceremony of handing over the money contains the following elements:

- a) The society members sing a chorus or a hymn.
- b) The chairlady reads a word from the Bible.
- c) She delivers a short sermon intended to comfort the bereaved.
- d) She asks one of the members to pray, or anybody can say a prayer of her own choice.
- e) The money is handed over to the bereaved member (or in case a member died, to the next of kin).
- f) The one who receives the money has to sign for it.

- g) The ceremony is closed by a chorus or hymn.

This ceremony is very similar in all the three societies. There is no essential diversion.

3.1.2 The preparations in the bereaved's home

The handing over of money is not the first action of the society, but one in which all members appear jointly. After death has been announced to the chairlady, the matter is reported to all members and those who are available go and help in the bereaved's house. Some details have already been mentioned above. The first step in assisting the bereaved's family is to prepare the house. Not all preparations are finalized, because a lot of guests are expected to come.

There are also customary actions which indicate that death has cast its mighty shadow. The status of the deceased and that of the living have undergone a change. After the deceased has been taken to the mortuary, members of the society and some family members and neighbours start to remove the beds from of the deceased's bedroom. Only the heavy wardrobes remain. Small carpets are removed and replaced with grass mats. In some cases they place grass mats on top of the mattresses, thus making them slightly more comfortable to sit on for the chief mourner(s) and those who accompany them. *Icansi* or *ukhukho* (Zulu) is a traditional sleeping-mat made from grass. It is harder than a mattress. Sitting and sleeping on it in times of bereavement indicates that the loss of a loved one is deeply felt.

Not only the deceased's bedroom is prepared and rearranged in the described way, but other rooms also change their appearance. Pictures are taken off the walls or reversed, mirrors are covered with blankets (also done when lightning appears in the sky, because people believe the mirror attracts the lightning) and television sets are covered as well. In doing so, people indicate that

death and the shadows of death are present. Inverting certain things in this context symbolizes the fight against the destructive force of death and to deflect its powers from the living. Another explanation people give, is that inverting and covering things are merely signs of mourning. Both explanations or a combination of both are currently upheld.

Another task that society members are involved in is the cleaning of the house, which is done very thoroughly. This thorough cleaning is a prelude to other forms of ritual cleansing which will be taking place. Those who were asked about it, said that the house, in which death occurred and people mourn in, has to be very clean.

3.1.3 Burial society members' presence in the bereaved's bedroom

As previously shown, the chief mourner remains in the prepared bedroom from the day that death occurs until the day of the funeral. During this time burial society members are present day and night. Their presence provides relief and results in counselling for the bereaved. We could often observe that the chief mourner is free to mourn.

Society members lead the conversation. When visitors arrive, they repeat the circumstances of surrounding the death, i.e. when, where and how the death occurred. By hearing it repeatedly, the chief mourner can come to terms with the reality of death. It is not easily denied. When the feelings of the bereaved get out of control, the society members gently try to calm him/ her down by e.g., singing hymns or with words of encouragement.

They also care for the physical needs of the bereaved by lending him/her a hand, if he/she needs something. This means the bereaved is cared for emotionally and physically. He/she is not left alone in the hour of shock to deal with conflicting emotions. With their caring presence, society members help to structure the phase between the occurrence of death and the funeral.

3.1.4 Preparing of food, brewing of beer

The preparing of food and brewing of beer is an integral part of funeral preparations. The catering is not only done to meet the needs of the expected guests. Eating and drinking together at the communal funeral feast, is part of the communion which binds the living and the 'living-dead'.

Members of the society meet at the bereaved's house. With them they bring great quantities of vegetables. In a communal effort the vegetables are cleaned and prepared for cooking. The first communal meal will be served on Friday night during the night vigil. On the eve of the funeral, the family, neighbours and friends gather to pay their last respects to the deceased. It is common to serve bean-soup and bread. The preparation and serving is done by members of the society. In the days prior the night vigil, society members assist in baking cookies. The baking is done in the bereaved's house and in the homes of some society members. The cookies are served at the funeral feast.

The brewing of beer and ritual beer drinking is an integral part of having communion and separating from the deceased. Members of the society are involved in brewing beer, which has to be ready before Friday (day of the night vigil and day of ritual slaughtering of the funeral beast). According to my observations, it is mostly the men who are involved in ritual beer drinking, which is part of the communion with the shades or 'living-dead'. Beer is a special kind of food and has traditional, religious connotation. It joins the living to the already-departed.

Berglund confirms that ritual beer-drinking is part of the communion of the living with the shades. In referring to Zulu society he states:

In Zulu society there is a communion with the shades
through the medium of beer drinking (1975:209).

This ritual beer-drinking takes place before and after the slaughtering of the beast, which was chosen for the funeral feast. It involves all the men who participate in the funeral preparations.

3.1.5 The involvement of men

As we have shown, members of the society (mostly women) are largely involved in matters concerning catering. Men also have their part in funeral preparations. The husbands of society members and others join to build a tent in front of the house. The tent serves as an extension of the house to accommodate all those who come to pay their last respects to the deceased. Houses are usually too small to accommodate the number of people who attend the night vigil, and who have to be served after the funeral. Choosing the beast, fetching it and slaughtering it is the responsibility of male family members, neighbours and friends. The chosen beast, which varies in size according to the status of the deceased, has to be there before the corpse is fetched from the mortuary.

As the people explained, the deceased has to 'see' what belongs to him or her. At the latest, the beast must be there when the corpse arrives home. If, at this point things go wrong, it is seen as a bad omen. In case things really go wrong those involved explain the circumstances and apologize, in the presence of the corpse, to prevent any harm. Before the beast is killed the men dig a hole in the ground. Setiloane explains this act:

...all the blood of the slaughtered beast must be gathered into a hole especially dug for the purpose. Round it *badimo* gather, like cattle round a pond, to enjoy the blood. It is profanity to leave stray splashes of blood to be licked by dogs. After the slaughter is over, all traces

of blood must be revolved, and the hole neatly covered with a heavy object which prevents access by dogs. (1976:71).

After the beast has been slaughtered, the hide is put aside. Sometimes the coffin is covered with it, or it is stored away in a bag and buried alongside the coffin in the grave. In some instances the coffin is only covered with a blanket and a grass mat. Whatever procedure is used it, has to be in accordance with traditional burial rites.

The men cut the meat into big pieces. Then the women cut the meat into smaller pieces and start cooking it. The pieces of meat which are reserved for the men alone (e.g. the liver) are roasted on an open fire and consumed by them. This eating is accompanied by drinking home-made beer.

As already indicated, the slaughtering of the beast, the preparing of the food and home-made beer are deeply rooted in the customs of the people. Lukhele confirms this by stating:

It is customary to slaughter an ox and prepare food and large quantities of beer. The beast plays an important ritual function. Its blood (and?) entrails are used in a special way to lay to rest the soul of the departed and to appease the spirits (1990:17).

3.2 The phase of fetching the deceased from the mortuary, the laying-out in state, preparing the deceased and the night vigil

In urban areas and sometimes in rural areas, it is possible to leave the deceased in a mortuary for a longer period of time. This means that nowadays, a person is not buried on the same day or the day after death has occurred.

Keeping the deceased in a mortuary also affords the bereaved family enough time to inform all relatives and to prepare properly for the funeral.

3.2.1 Fetching the deceased from the mortuary

As funerals are mainly held on Saturdays, the deceased is fetched a day earlier, i.e. on the Friday. By fetching the deceased from the mortuary, the critical phase of preparing the way for the deceased to the other world, or world beyond, starts. It is the last time that the deceased is present in this form in the midst of family and friends.

There is no standardized pattern when it comes to fetching the deceased from the mortuary. Nevertheless, some observations could be made. In some instances, especially when the deceased was a prayer woman or a member of the men's league, the minister is asked to accompany those who are fetch the corpse. The presence of the minister emphasizes the status of the deceased in life, because to Africans, death is not the great equalizer. To pay their respect, prayer women and men's league members wear their uniforms. If the deceased had been a burial society member, some delegates from the society are also present in uniform. The next of kin of the deceased are also present. The chief mourner stays at home, where the corpse will later be prepared for the funeral.

When the corpse is taken from the mortuary, members of the fetching party address the corpse, telling it exactly what is happening. The corpse is also spoken to when it arrives home. On arrival, the coffin and corpse are brought to the main bedroom where the chief mourner and others have been spending the last days together. From now on it is the last time that the tangible, visible body of the deceased is among his/her kin and friends. The process of separating from the deceased is progressing.

3.2.2 Preparing the corpse for the funeral

The preparing of the corpse for the funeral is done by older women, who are members of the family. Burial society members involve themselves only when requested to. The corpse is washed and dressed. If the deceased used to wear a professional uniform or used to have one in church, he/she will be dressed in it. Again this shows that death is not the great equalizer. Distinctions do not lose their significance once a person dies.

Washing and dressing the corpse is commonly regarded as an act of respect and love. After being washed and dressed, some items are put into the coffin. This indicates that people have distinct perceptions about the world beyond. This issue will be dealt with at a later stage. People put seeds, coins, the walking-stick, snuff box, church-membership card and other things into the coffin. Some other things are put into the grave (see above). This largely depends on the bereaved family and what members of the wider family circle regard as necessary. The practice is diverse and sometimes confusing. We cannot deal with it in detail here.

A very common practice, which I observed during the more than forty funerals I was involved in, is that the main bedroom is divided by means of a white sheet. Two or four candles are placed at the top and at the bottom of the coffin, one by one or two by two. Berglund (1969:101) also observed this custom of lighting candles, but he does not explain what it means, except to say that they are a source of light. Becken (1972:95ff) in his thesis about the African Independent Churches in South Africa has also shown that candles are commonly used in these churches. He made it clear, however that the symbolic meaning of candles varies on different occasions. In case of a funeral he too does not explain the symbolic use of candles. In a township where electricity is available, the candles probably have a symbolic meaning.

Questioned about their meaning people said:

The lit candles are a symbol of life, they symbolize hope in the darkness of death and show the deceased the way to the world beyond.

These answers surely do not reflect the whole range of meaning people connect with candles and the light they give, as the answers depend on the personal background of an individual.

Candles belong to the phase during which the deceased is lying in state at home. Sometimes one even finds lit candles when the deceased has not yet returned from the mortuary. In these cases candles symbolize the deceased's 'presence'. They are seen as a substitute for the deceased. Becken (1972:75) has shown that healers use a lit candle as a substitute for an absent person whom they want to heal.

The lit candle as a substitute for the deceased can indirectly promote the process of healing wounds of sorrow and grief, as it reminds the bereaved of what has happened. Above we described that one society even supplies the deceased's family with candles. The other two societies do not do that, but in that case the deceased's family will buy the candles from the payout they receive.

3.2.3 The night vigil

In Zulu the night vigil is called *umlindelo*, in Sotho *moletelo*. The meaning is basically the same in both languages. In this context it means 'watching through the night', 'waiting up'. People sometimes refer to an *Umlindelo* as *ukuphelezela ofileyo* (Zulu), which means to accompany the deceased (home). This expression captures more clearly what an *umlindelo* is all about. It belongs to the phase of preparing the deceased for the way to the world beyond and thus it is part of an orderly separation of the living from the dead.

In other words both sides 'benefit' from the *umlindelo*: The deceased is prepared and sent off in an orderly way and the living gets another chance to work towards a sound separation. Statements and actions happen under the 'eyes' of the deceased. His/her spirit, which according to the people has left the deceased's body, is believed to be present.

Elements of the night vigil point to a holistic approach: The night vigil usually commences at 9 pm in the bereaved family's home. Family members, neighbours and friends are already gathered in the tent and in the house.

The minister's and the church elders' places have been reserved, as they have been invited to lead the night vigil. The evening will be opened by a word read from Holy Scripture and a short sermon held by the minister or a church elder. The people gathered are encouraged to participate in comforting the bereaved. Throughout the night the participants try to comfort the bereaved by praying or delivering words of encouragement. Most of the participants try to base their words of comfort on the biblical message that was delivered. Others focus on praising the good deeds of the deceased.

In general, no negative things are said about the deceased. One church elder told me that respect for the dead (*inhlonipho* or *ukuhlonipha* in Zulu) prohibits negative talk about the deceased. The deceased can no longer defend him/herself any more.

The deceased now also enjoys greater seniority than the living. Due to this, and to the fact that seniors are not criticized easily anyway, the deceased will not be judged negatively at all. Inappropriate criticism might also hamper the way of the deceased to the world beyond and bring harm to the living. It is believed that the soul of the deceased cannot rest in peace if any discord exists. Throughout the night the sermons or words of comfort alternate with songs and choruses. If somebody is flippant or talks too much, he/she will be gently interrupted with a song. Most of the participants in the night vigil understand this signal and allows somebody else to speak.

Inbetween, participants make their financial contribution towards the funeral expenses. The name of the donor and the amount is recorded. This donation, which is not organized by the burial society, but to which people are accustomed, is sometimes quite generous. It serves as an additional financial help for the bereaved family.

Members of the burial society are present throughout the night. Like the others, they participate by singing and comforting the bereaved. Long before the other participants arrived, they were preparing soup and bread, which they usually serve at about midnight. Before the midnight meal starts, a new word of Scripture is introduced. It serves as the primary message for the second half of the night vigil. Usually church elders or prayer women lead the second half of the night vigil. The minister (in this case it is I) leaves after the midnight meal, heading for home to be fit for the funeral which is to take place that same morning (Saturday). The basic pattern of the vigil, which has been described, prevails throughout the different denominations. The differences in details will be investigated at a later stage.

3.3 The involvement of the Burial Societies in the funeral

So far we described what happens in the phase between the occurrence of death, the night vigil and how the societies are involved. In this section we again take a look at the burial societies' involvement in funeral.

The question is: **To what extent, and how, do the societies involve themselves in this phase? How do they assist the bereaved?**

We have already discussed some areas where the society members and the society as a whole assist the bereaved in their need. The assistance of the societies act like a net. They help and assist the bereaved member with practical things and, in doing so, provide a space and give the bereaved an opportunity to work through his or her grief.

3.3.1 Negotiations with the undertaker

Dandala states that the burial societies have the ability "to bargain with funeral parlours for good rates" (1990:12f) and obviously some societies do. The three societies investigated in Bethlehem had not yet discovered their potential in this regard, which could be to the benefit of their members. Buying the coffin and arranging the involvement of the parlour is usually done by the bereaved family, unless the society is asked to assist.

The kind of coffin, of course, depends on the financial position of the family. However there is the tendency to buy expensive coffins. The price tag of the coffin is not removed, but displayed for everyone to see. It is a kind of 'showing off'. People want to show that money is not the issue. They also want to make clear that they respected and still respect the deceased. Very expensive coffins, once in the grave, are covered with a layer of concrete to make sure that it is not stolen. Another reason given by those interviewed, is that some people fear that parts of the corpse might be stolen by *abathakathi* (those who practice witchcraft) for their purposes.

3.3.2 Arranging transport

The three societies used to contribute a certain amount towards transport. As more and more people can afford cars nowadays, transport of the people to the church and from there to the graveyard and back to the bereaved's home is no longer such an issue.

Members of the society ask their husbands to organize friends with cars and to assist free of charge. The bereaved person, those directly affected and elderly people are eligible for a lift. Others walk to church and to the graveyard and back to the home of the bereaved despite long distances that have to be covered.

3.3.3 The catering

Catering for all the participants in the funeral is very important, because the feast or meal after the burial is a feast of separation. It is a feast held in honour of the deceased. Eating and sharing in this meal, which includes a lot of meat, also gives strength to carry on with life. I have already tried to describe the amount of time and energy society members invest in preparing for this occasion. The involvement of the society takes a heavy burden off the shoulders of the bereaved family, so that they can use the energy which they have left to work through their grief. This effect is not unintentional and not even mentioned, but the community effort and its results bear witness to the wisdom of past generations.

During the funeral feast the members of the society serve the food they prepared with great eagerness and devotion. Before the food is actually served, all participants in the funeral have to wash their hands in basins which were placed outside the premises by society members. In doing so, they follow a custom which is common among African people. Details concerning this custom will be discussed later.

Long after the last funeral guests have left, members of the society clean their dishes, which they supplied for this occasion. They also help to restore the inside of the house to its original state.

3.3.4 Cleaning and restoring the house to normality

As was mentioned, changes are made inside and outside the deceased's house: in the main bedroom, the living room and the tent as an extension to the house. Members of the society help to clean the house. Men are asked to clean the yard. The women assist in replacing the pictures on the walls. The bedroom, where the deceased lay in state, is cleaned and restored. Sometimes, on the day of the funeral, the windows of the house are covered

with a mixture of ashes and water. This is wiped off before the people return from the graveyard. The symbolic meaning will be discussed later on. The cleaning of the house and restoring the rooms are a practical issue that benefits the process of separating from the deceased and accepting that he/she has gone. This does not mean that the entire process of mourning is completed. As we will show later, there are more rituals and stages through which grief can be overcome.

3.3.5 The programme of the funeral and the Church Service

An official programme is drawn up for the funeral service. Many copies are made and handed out to the participants in the funeral before the service starts. Usually the family itself, or somebody who has been asked to do so, compiles the programme. The burial societies only assist if they are requested to do so or when nobody else is available. Whatever the case, some relative is involved, because he/she has to name the family members and friends who will be asked to say something during the service.

The elements of the programme are as follows:

- a) Hymn
- b) Opening prayer by the minister
- c) Remarks by the Master of Ceremony (he act as leader throughout the programme)
- d) Obituary of the deceased.
- e) Intermittent items : hymns, speeches by relatives, friends and officials (officials only get a chance to speak if the deceased enjoyed a high status in the community). If the deceased was a member of a society, a representative of the society will have a chance to say something as well.

Again nothing negative will be said about the deceased. The common tendency is to praise the deceased, who is addressed in person as if he/she were still

alive. In closing their speeches, the speakers wish him/her farewell and a peaceful rest. They for instance say in Zulu *hamba kahle* or in Sotho *tsamaya hantle* (go well) and *lala ngokuthula* (Zulu) or *robala hantle* (Sotho), which means 'rest in peace'. This indicates that the deceased is believed to be on his/her way to the world beyond the grave. The general notion of the speeches seem intended to prepare a smooth way and a peaceful rest for the deceased. He or she should not trouble the living.

Another item on the programme is the reading of the wreaths and collecting offerings from the participants in the funeral service. Smaller amounts are merely handed over, while larger amounts are usually placed in closed envelopes, which are opened during the service. The amount and the donors are announced. The minister's sermon and the church's agenda for the funeral are incorporated into the programme and placed at the end of the whole programme.

At the end of this part, the procession to the graveyard begins. Members of a burial society form a procession outside the church. The coffin of a deceased prayer woman is carried to the hearse outside the church by prayer women and afterwards escorted by them in the case of a men's league member, the same pattern is followed. The church flag is carried in front of the funeral procession by members of the leagues. church elders and the minister lead the procession. If an 'ordinary' church member is buried the procedures are similar, but the league members will not wear their uniforms. If the deceased was a member, only society members wear it and form a procession. This indicates that differences between people and their status are still acknowledged even after the death of that person.

The funeral service programme and the procedures show that the needs of African people are incorporated into the service.

The Lutheran Church's agenda for a funeral service, however, does not officially allow elements like speeches to be held in the funeral service. There is a conflict between aspirations of African Christians and the official liturgy. To this aspect we will come back later.

The aspirations surface in the speeches and, as shown before, aim at a decent and trouble-free farewell to the other world. In many details the speeches contain summaries of the speeches held during the night vigil. They underline the status of the person (in Zulu: *isithunzi*, in Sotho: *maemo*), his or her influence and moral significance, which is of great importance to those who stay behind.

In this context, from a theological point of view, a problem arises which we can only touch upon here:

What is the human person and what is his position in death? Where lie his responsibilities in the light of God's good news in Christ?

This aspect very seldom appears in the speeches. We will consider this issue later on in the study.

4. Summary and preliminary results

The founding history of the three societies investigated in Bethlehem, is part of the ongoing process of establishing burial societies. The founders, all of them active African Christians, were motivated to establish their societies because they saw the need to assist one another in times of crisis or transition. These include death, weddings and *unveiling of tombstone* (*amaduduzo*). burials, weddings and *unveiling of tombstone* (*amaduduzo*) belong to the *rites de passage* and are special turning points in life.

Within African cultures they demand due attention by adhering to certain rituals, including big feasts. In an urban area, this involves high costs and especially poorer families struggle to cover the costs involved. It is here that the burial societies step in and provide a network of assistance and shared resources. They provide the security, the necessary space and the opportunity for the members and their families to do what has to be done according to traditional understandings of funerals, weddings and *unveiling of a tombstone*.

With their presence and preparation for funerals, assisting the bereaved in a spiritual and physical way, they help to structure the phase between the occurrence of death and the funeral. The bereaved are not abandoned, as they experience the closeness of others who willingly share their burden.

According to their own testimony, members of the societies experience the interaction, which takes place within their societies, as an enrichment of their lives. The society resembles a big family, bound together in unity by their common goal: to help one another in times of crises and transition.

They see *ubuntu* (being human), as a goal. It stands for a range of African values including mutual concern and respect. The interaction between members and the running of the society rest on these pillars. For the leadership it is essential to work on a consensus-based decision making process. This style of leadership is rooted in a traditional African understanding of leadership and seems to guarantee stability within the societies.

The emphasis of their work undoubtedly is on assisting at funerals. A funeral, according to African tradition, is a significant transition in life and as such it affects the living and the dead.

Concerning the relationship between societies and churches, some tendencies

emerged. The leadership of the three societies, who are also active church members, emphasized that they would like to see good relationships, as their work and the work of the churches each has its own set of values.

Members have different views on this issue. Some see no difference between their society and the church, as they too read the Bible and pray. Others view their society as different from the church. Previous statements in this regard suggest that for some members, the society is a substitute for the church, as it provides sufficiently for their needs. The society should not be seen as a substitute for the church, as all members are affiliated to some church or other.

But for some the preference for the services of the society above those of the church is clear. They tend to be more loyal to their society. For others, it supplements the church, as it does not necessarily cater for the very practical side of a funeral. They try to be loyal to both, because according to them both society and church have their role.

In the next part of this study we will try to gain more insight by analysing the phenomenon of the described burial societies against the background of African concepts of life and death and the concept of community and mutual assistance. This will hopefully lead us further on the road to grasp the heart and soul of the societies.

PART II

Analysis of the Phenomenon of the described Burial Societies against the Background of African Concepts of Life and Death and the Concept of Community and Mutual Assistance.

0 Preliminary remarks

In the literature it is commonly accepted that there are different African traditions which vary according to the people one is involved with. Despite objections against generalization, attempts have been made to systematize elements of traditional life and religion of African people (cf. Muzorewa 1985). Wherever this is attempted, one has to guard against fiction and fabrication. One also has to be aware of the fact that traditions are in flux and are subject to change. This is particularly the case in urban areas, where people of different backgrounds live together and the society and elements of traditional beliefs undergo change.

Christian teaching and biblical patterns of thought also influence traditional concepts of life and religion. But generally speaking traditional concepts of life and death and basic understandings of community are still alive and to some extent shape the lives of the people. Within the new, the old is ever present and functional.

This part of the study will not give an elaborate description of changes and assimilations which have already occurred. Neither will a complete world view be developed in this context. Instead, African concepts of life and death and community are at stake here. It will be assumed that these concepts form the background and spine of the burial societies under investigation.

As already indicated, our description of these concepts is limited and is not intended to be comprehensive. Limitations naturally exist, because dealing

with these concepts involves tackling a complex reality. Besides that, the burial societies which have been investigated are in Bethlehem-Township(OFS). Although many different people live there, it is a predominantly Sotho-speaking area. Taking all these factors into account a certain generalization is inevitable in trying to outline the main features of these concepts.

1 The social and religious background

1.1 Essential aspects of the concept of ancestry : Basic concepts of the African understanding of life

Traditional African belief reveals that the dead have not simply gone, but are changing their status. After a while they become 'living-dead' or ancestral spirits. They provide a link with the life-giving spirit world and are believed to influence their descendants. Idowu states:

Ancestors remain... spiritual superintendents of family affairs and continue to bear their titles of relationship like 'father' or 'mother' (1975:184).

This statement not only refers to the influence of the ancestors, but also to the continued relationship of the living with the 'living-dead'. The relationship between the living and 'living-dead' can be viewed as an extended community, a community having links with the other world. This aspect provides a basis for a 'spiritual' understanding of the community.

As the 'living-dead' are closely linked with the living, there are also certain ways of communicating with them. Rituals, prayer and conversations are practised to appease them. Through all this, the relationship to the ancestors are a stabilizing factor in a given African society. They are 'factors of cohesion in an African society' (Idowu 1975:185) by binding the community together. However, it is worthwhile to note that ancestors are only linked to a certain family, clan or tribe.

The living have an intimate relationship with their nearest ancestors. They are the ones who watch over their own people by seeking to please them and by preserving their life and their living conditions. This kind of close relationship tends to exclude others. But as Muzorewa affirms:

This exclusive tendency of Africans is not necessarily a condemnation of other races. It is merely an attempt to affirm the culture of their own people (1985:13).

As we are going to touch on other areas of the concepts of life, death and community some additional aspects of the concept of ancestry will emerge.

1.2 The individual and the community

The enlightened European is deeply influenced by the perception of *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). This perception is alien to African people, because they are still deeply influenced by the experience: *communico ergo sum* or *participo, ergo sum* (I communicate, I participate, therefore I am) (Taylor 1965:78). Africans view themselves and their life as being rooted in the community they live in. If I live in a relationship, if I live in the community, I am (Hasenhütte 1991:2). The human being is a human being in community. This experience is expressed in the saying, which is found in many African languages: 'Man is man through, with and in association with other people'. E.g. ***Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*** (Zulu); ***motho ke motho ka batho*** (Sotho).

Important to the African is the fact that he/she is socially integrated. The community is ever in the forefront and not the individual. The community's social structures, of which the individual is a part, are all important.

As Setiloane puts it:

Individuals are cherished. But they find their significance only in a particular pattern of social behaviour (1976:33).

The community with its particular patterns and structures is the given platform, the starting point for each and every member of the society. It is important to note that this community transcends itself. Time-wise it reaches back towards the ancestors (living-dead) and moves into the future to include future generations.

Sundermeier (1988:26), in discussing the African concept of community stresses the fact that the word communalism (*Kommunalität*) does not adequately reflect what community means in the African context. The word communalism does not necessarily include interdependence, which is an integral part of the African concept of community. Interdependence means mutual dependence. Humans, animals and environment are involved in a constant exchange of power. Sundermeier explains:

The interdependence is almost a physical awareness. It is more than economic interdependence which determines modern life. The life of the individual, his happiness and the envy of his fellow men, his ill-fortune and the benevolence of others influences the well-being and fate of the community... (1988:27) (my translation).

The practical side of mutual dependence is participation.

Mulago describes it as follows:

The key to understanding the Bantu-community seems to be found in a unique principle - the principle of participation. The essence of participation is that the individual is incorporated into the total plan of the visible and invisible world...

Participation simultaneously serves as a link between different beings and objects without mixing them. In participation, all relationships of the members of a community culminate. It is the cord between the individual and the collective (1969:61) (my translation).

Participation not only means to participate in the vital powers of the environment, but also to share. There is a mutual giving and taking which results in a deep, reciprocal inner bond and solidarity between the human being and the world. The world is not the 'absolute' opposite of man. In this sense there is no subject-object division for an African.

1.3 Mutual assistance and sharing

As already pointed out, the community and its social structures play a dominant role. The individual finds his/her significance within this structure and within a certain pattern of behaviour. He/she is understood to be an integral part of the entire community. Within the community his/her life is shaped by all their ties and bonds, which are vital to him/ her and the community at large. Arising from this perception the concept of mutual assistance and sharing emerges.

For ages these virtues have been part and parcel of African communities. In traditional Zulu society for example these virtues find their expression in certain community events. Similar events are also to be found in other African societies. *Ilima* in Zulu refers to such a communal event. It means the communal ploughing of a big field or the communal cultivation of land which involves all the neighbours in a particular area. Another communal event called *umbutho (imi-)*, which means a combined effort to plough or hoe the fields of the chief by his people. Another event of combined effort is called *ukwakhisana*, which means to 'help one another to build a house'. Derived from that is the meaning 'to live together'.

Sundermeier points out that mutual assistance and the readiness to share in African society has to be understood as a virtue, which is applied concentrically. He says:

As a stone thrown into the water makes circles - the inner ones are the strongest, those on the outside gradually grow small and finally disappear - so the duty to help readily and be hospitable is the strongest concerning those who are close to one and one's family. Relatives, biologically or in terms of association, are accepted like brothers and sisters. To help one's neighbour who is often a relative is self-evident. Is there a meal in the house, everyone who arrives by chance is cared for (1988:208) (my translation).

An example given by an African friend may illustrate this expected readiness to help and share:

'If my house mates and relatives know that I have saved money, I have no chance. I have to share and help even without the right to get compensation...'

Whoever tries to evade these 'demands' without really good reasons, withdraws him-/herself from the community. He/she breaks the peace as well as the expected readiness to help and share. This concept can be exploited, as some try to live at the expenses of others. We shall not follow up this issue.

In how far the picture of concentric circles is valid in connection with the burial societies has still to be evaluated. At first glance it seems, however, that the biological and classifying aspects no longer play a significant role. A thorough analysis of their readiness to help might influence the judgement made. The readiness to help and share, especially in cases where need arises in daily life, is a distinct African virtue.

1.4 The ritual and dynamistic aspect of life

Rituals have a central function in the lives of African people. They stabilize life and bring about a certain equilibrium in coping with life's challenges and critical stages. Life in its different stages brings with it transition and change. This in turn creates instability and uncertainty. As the life of African people aims to sustain the power of life in the presence of all other powers (personal, communal and environmental) the rituals function as catalysts to achieve a balanced, renewed life. This new and balanced life brings harmony. It reconciles a person with him-/herself. It also reconciles a person or even a whole group of people with their living conditions and their interpersonal relationships. Sundermeier summarizes the function and importance of rituals by saying:

Rituals guide people through life, as they cling to its critical stages. They give a rhythm to life just as the year has a certain rhythm. They are repeatable and convey basic experiences of familiarity and reliability. In so doing, they decrease tensions created by life itself and help people to re-discover social integration, because they expand the experience of the individual by the experience of a community (1989:280) (my translation).

The interests of the community enjoy priority above those of the individual. An individual, therefore, cannot withdraw him-/herself very easily without endangering him-/herself and the whole community. Should an individual evade the rituals, which are geared to restore the inner and outer equilibrium of powers, he/she would destroy the process of healing. He/she also would endanger and jeopardize the community by destroying its unity and cohesion. With this in mind, it is crucial that the individual participates in the different rituals lest he/she be regarded with suspicion and subsequently isolates him-/herself.

Rituals are intended to unite people. Only if everybody upholds them can they be sure that no discord will arise, that all will be loyal to the ritual, without anger or envy in their hearts (cf. Sundermeier 1989:209).

Rituals are performed for instance, where the power of death has become evident in the death of someone close. The performance of the rituals is geared to overcome the threat and crisis triggered by death. Rituals belong to the dynamistic aspect and understanding of life.

Tempels (1959:33f;41f) points out in this regard, that there is a hierarchical order of powers for the Bantu. Life for the African means to participate in the powers which make life possible. The powers in the universe are distributed according to the principle of *superior and subordinate* (Humans-animals-plants- minerals). The concept of the community is an image of this principle. God is the source of all power. He transferred life and life power to humans in the beginning. Man now has to pass on life and life power. In this regard the living of today are links in a long chain. They owe their lives and existence to those who preceded them. The ancestors, the previous ones, are very important, because they are the links in the chain of life from the past. In that sense they are mediators of life.

What is meant by this concept of life and power of life is also captured in the Zulu word *amandla* (Sotho: *matla*). It means the fullness of power to live a worthwhile life. This fullness of power embraces all spheres of life, but at the same time the fullness of life is endangered by forces which diminish this power. The word itself means strength, power, moral strength, authority, ability, influence (cf Doke, Vilakazi 1972:9;539/ Doke, Malcolm 1982:3). Bearing these concepts in mind, the word is often used to describe the ability and power to cope with life and all its challenges.

The different actions and rituals which are undertaken in the event of death, and which are performed in the process of burying a person, can be seen under this aspect of restoring life. This includes the time and process of

mourning, in which rituals too play an important part. Death always involves a loss of strength and will to live. It hits the living as the strange force, which comes and endangers one's inner and outer stability. Therefore the regaining of the power to live and to maintain a balance in life is at stake. Thus the disruption to life is overcome and the flow of life can continue unhampered (cf. Sundermeier 1988:216).

2 Dying and death: The concept of death and the impact it has on the living in the African way of thinking .

This paragraph will not deal with the problem in detail. Nor is it the intention to deal with the changes and assimilations, which have taken place under Western and Christian influence. The impact of these influences have to be dealt with in a separate investigation. However, observations based on practical experience suggest that old patterns of thought serve to interpret death.

Traditional taboos and rituals, which help to cope with death are still in place. Death has an effect and impact on the living. It is a force which has to be faced in a particular way. The shadows of death trigger certain feelings, patterns of behaviour and actions. In so far as it is relevant for this study, essential aspects of the understanding of death and its impact on the living will have to be mentioned.

2.1 Dying and death in African thinking

2.1.1 The usage of language

Certain words in African languages (e.g. Zulu: *ngiyafa*), which 'describe' death and also refer to a loss of power in general, suggests that a decrease in the strength to live as e.g. experienced for instance in sickness, already implies dying in certain sense.

Like all human beings, Africans fear dying and death as it is an unknown, destructive force. Death is the great enemy. People are afraid of it, because it destroys what is very precious to human beings - life itself (cf. Sundermeier 1988:106). Humans try either to run away from it or to postpone it. If the inevitable happens, however, man tries to bear it, because dying and death to the African also means transition into another phase of life. (cf. Raum 1969:64/67). Setiloane says:

The ultimate of development is when, after a long life, a person joins the ranks of *badimo* (ancestors) to continue his influence and share his beneficence with the living. Death thus becomes not an enemy but further graduation in personal growth, 'the ecstasy of fulfilment' (1976:40).

This statement by Setiloane seems to contradict the one made above, viz, that death is the great enemy. However, it is not really a contradiction, as there is a natural fear of death, which is a force of destruction, and the fulfilment by being promoted through death to personal growth. There is the tension between the destructive power of death and hope.

2.1.2 *Ukuvalelisa*

Raum (1969:73) in his study *Funeral Rites in the African Pagan Society* attended to the Zulu custom of *ukuvalelisa*. This custom means a farewell dinner. The one who senses death approaching invites his/her family and closest friends to a farewell dinner. It means that where there is a premonition of impending death one is prepared to 'celebrate' the approaching separation. In doing so, death is not ignored but brought to mind and people (family, friends) can anticipate the forth-coming physical separation.

This custom is not restricted to the 'pagan society' only. I have observed that this custom is alive among Christians. A well known and dedicated church elder felt death approaching and spoke freely about it. His health

deteriorated. The loss of *amandla* (see above) was obvious. About two weeks before he died, two white sheep were slaughtered. A farewell party was held. The selection of two white sheep was symbolical. White is the colour of the ancestors (cf. Sundermeier 1988:66). The colour of the sheep indicated that the dinner not only included the living, but also the ancestors, i.e. those who had gone before.

2.1.3 Death as transition

To the African, dying and death signals a transition into another phase of life. Raum explains this by saying:

This phase is often seen as one of continued change, of becoming. The deceased after a transition period is said to become an ancestor exercising functions of significance to his descendants (1969:64).

Later on I shall deal with the aspects of transition in more detail.

2.1.4 Death in the community

The process of dying and death itself is a fact everyone in life has to deal with personally. But under normal circumstances individuals in African societies do not die in isolation. The dying are cared for by family and relatives. The fact that the dying usually do not die in isolation, is part of African humaneness (Zulu: *ubuntu* - Sotho: *botho*). It is an outflow of dignity and respect for a human. This is linked to the belief in ancestors and the concept of God. Thus it is part of a group behaviour pattern.

Setiloane describes this fact for the Sotho-Tswana community by saying:

The natural guardians of harmony among men are *badimo*. *Badimo ba gage ba na le yena* (indeed, his *badimo* are with him), is often said when one has had a narrow escape from disaster. It implies that only with their favour can life be lived to the

full - the health preserved and *diriti* (personality or human dignity and value as a psycho-physical being) maintained in proper balance. But beyond them, sustaining the harmony of that large part of the universe which is outside the control even of *badimo*, is *MODIMO* which gives to man his basic dignity and right to respect, his obligation to respect his whole environment, whether human or non-human. *Motho ke modimo* and therefore *motho ga a latlhwa* (man is not for throwing away). He must not be deserted in time of need, nor be hurt physically or mentally, nor have his dignity impugned (1976:43).

In stating this, Setiloane gives insight into the origins of care, respect and assistance humans owe other humans. Care and respect are basic virtues. Man's dignity, too, does not end even in death. This aspect is true for all African societies.

2.1.5 Death and the status of a person

The status of a person and the circumstances which led to his/her death are essential in African thinking.

Sundermeier emphasizes this when he says:

Death is not the great equalizer as it is conceived by us. Even in dying and death the difference between people still exist (1988:106) (my translation).

His observation is mainly concerned with the status a person had in life and which is not cancelled by death. Other observations show that even the circumstances of death have some influence on how the deceased is dealt with. A person who burnt to death will not be laid out in state in the house. The deceased is kept outside. The same applies to a murdered person or a

person struck by lightning or someone who was killed accidentally. They are not even fetched from the mortuary for the night vigil. Only on the day of the funeral the coffin and corpse are fetched and put outside in the tent which was erected some time before. It is believed that these kinds of death affect the living, and also affect the status of the deceased.

His/her death has marks of the unusual and unforeseen. Evil and uncontrollable powers are believed to cling to the corpse. These powers might endanger the living. Therefore the bereaved's house should not be 'contaminated'. In this regard there is a consensus of opinion among the people concerned that the above mentioned kinds of death and their potential dangers cannot be countered by the same procedures as followed in case of a 'normal' death.

Another observation in support of the fact that death is not the great equalizer, proves that there are different times for burying a child and an adult. Even the grave sites are separate in the graveyard. For all we know, there might also be some practical reasons involved, too. But more likely than that is the fact that people make a clear distinction between children and adults. A child has not yet achieved full status as a human being.

Setiloane explains:

Its *botho* (humanity) being not yet fully formed, it is subject to ill-health and prone to immature death. It is recognized that a baby lives on the margin of two worlds, that of the living and of *badimo*. Its little antics - its cooing and its smiling in sleep - are its conversation with *badimo*; and this ensures it a special place in society (1976:35).

Although babies thus have their special place in society, they are not greatly mourned. This attitude changes however when a child has reached or passed the stage of being considered a youth. The criteria for this transition in many

African societies is the initiation, where full humanity is reached and attested to the initiated (cf. Setiloane 1976:39).

Other observations confirm that social position and status are important even in death. The attendance at funerals depends on position and status of the deceased. But, unless the deceased him-/herself attended other funerals while still alive, only a few will attend his/her funeral. Both aspects are inter-locked. Lack of respect for other deceased persons is reciprocated. The length of the service also depends on a person's status. So do the time of mourning and the rituals performed.

As already indicated above, the circumstances of death can vary. There are two essential categories: timely and untimely death (cf. Berglund 1976:79). According to Berglund timely death means that a person has reached a certain age and is surrounded by children and grandchildren, who survive him/her. An untimely death however, means an early death and thus has a serious impact on human life. It is like destroying life which had potential.

This is also reflected in terms which refer to death and dying. For an untimely death Zulu use words like : *ukufa*, *ukubhubha* and *ukugqibuka*. These are strong expressions, which carry the meaning of destroying and breaking up of life. Zulu words used to describe timely death, however, imply movement, transition and continuation of life to another stage (*ukugoduka* = go home; *ukuqhubeka* = progress, proceed, move out of the way).

In addition to the words Berglund (1975:79) mentions, the word *ukushona* should be noted. It is often used in connection with dying of a person. This word is also used to describe the way of the sun (sunset). The sun sets for a short time to rise again the next day. Thus to use the word *ukushona* to characterize death and dying is not done by mere chance. The concept behind it is that the deceased is not gone forever, but that there is a place of existence for the dead in the world beyond. Contrary to untimely death, timely death is not understood as evil in itself (cf. Raum 1969:58). Rather it is seen as a natural continuation of human existence (cf. Berglund 1975:79) or 'a

further graduation in personal growth, the ecstasy of fulfilment' (Setiloane 1976:40).

The description of the burial societies has shown that the status of a person is not just a thing that vanishes after death. The presence of the minister, the prayer women, the men's league and members of the burial society at the mortuary confirms the status of the deceased (1 3.2.1). The payments of burial societies differ according to the age of a person. This in itself can be regarded as a reflection of a person's status. Practical reasons are also involved, but are secondary. For reasons of justice and business practice, the pay-outs of the societies stay the same even if an honourable member of the society has died (1 2.1 /2.2/ 2.3).

Also the speeches made during the night vigil (1 3.2.3) and in church (1 3.3.5) very often refer to the status of a person.

2.1.6 Death and its explanations

Myths try to explain how death came to humankind. These myths will not be dealt with in detail. Death is seldom explicable in rational terms. It strikes and causes the end of life. There is often more to it than can be rationally explained. There are for instance causes where evil humans cause death. An example, based on personal observations, may prove this:

The divorced husband of a woman in our parish died. She went to the bereaved family to extend her condolences. Her former mother-in-law and brother-in-law, who are both *izinyanga*, received her but cursed her at the same time. They threatened her by saying that she would die if she attended the funeral of her divorced husband, because she was held responsible for his death. Strangely enough, she ignored this threat. She attended the funeral and died in the graveyard. Her death was caused by heart failure. A medical or psychological explanation for this was not sufficient for the family and the

friends. Her health was severely affected by asthma and she might have been overcome by great fear and emotional stress. But all these reasons were insufficient to explain death. It was clear to everybody that evil men were involved - and one might add that, somehow, they were!

On the day of the funeral I was surprised to see another *inyanga*, who performed his rituals to protect the bereaved and the entire funeral party against the re-occurrence of the spell.

Cases of death caused by lightning is believed to come directly from God (*Modimo/uNkulunkulu*). Often sourcerers are held responsible. Sundermeier (1988:107) points out that in these cases there are no rituals and no mourning involved. As already indicated above, the body and the coffin are not fetched for the night vigil. Only on the day of the funeral is it fetched and kept outside the house, where the service is held. This indicates that certain taboos and precautions are still observed. Special cases need special attention and measures.

2.1.7 Death as a contagious force

Another issue concerning the concept of death for African people is that death is contagious. The idea that death is contagious is expressed amongst the Zulu, for instance the concept of *umnyama* or *isinyama*. It means a state of ritual uncleanness or contamination, in which a person is involved either willingly or by chance (cf. Vilakazi 1962:92). This state of ritual contamination makes a person prone to all kinds of misfortune. A person gets into *umnyama* where he/she has contact with dying people and death. Especially those who prepare the deceased for the funeral are in a state of *umnyama*. Those who are affected by death in a particular family are also in it. Vilakazi explains:

Death renders them weak physically and
emotionally; lowers their resistance to disease

and thus renders them easy victims for sorcerers and their medicines. It also gives them *isigcwagcwa* or *isisila* which is unpopularity or disagreeableness, not because of any social misbehaviour but simply because they have been touched by death (1962:90).

In other words, the one who is affected by death is endangered. His/her *amandla* to live is at stake (cf. Becken 1972:36). As a person in case of death in his/her family is endangered by *umnyama*, nobody hesitates for long. All relatives are informed of the death as soon as possible, so that they can arrange for a leave as soon as possible. Usually they abstain from work and other activities as well. Everything is now geared to participate in the funeral activities, as a person affected by *umnyama* is bound from within to be part of the funeral and the rituals which accompany it. Part of these rituals are especially performed to liberate all those who are hampered by *umnyama*. This aspect may also be an additional explanation for the big number of people attending a funeral.

With this information in mind, it is obvious that for those who live far away huge expenses are involved. However, a certain tendency can be observed. It seems to be acceptable for only one or two family members who live far to attend the funeral and to partake in the rituals. Obviously the principle *pars pro toto* is in place.

2.2 The deceased in transition, transitional rites and taboos

In his study **Funeral Rites in the African Pagan Society**, Raum (1969:74) shows that within the structure of burial ceremonies, one has to discern mainly two corridors. The one corridor is characterized by the fact that the deceased gradually is led from the status he occupied in life to the new status as ancestor, who is "in control of the well-being of his descendants in a new and sublimated manner" (1969:74). In this phase between death, funeral and

the bringing home rite, the deceased is left in a marginal state. Raum explains:

In a way he is then an 'unincorporated being'
belonging no more to the family of the living and
being not yet joined to the group of ancestors
(1969:74).

The other corridor is marked by rituals, which prepare "the transformation of the family group so that it can face the realities of life with a new organization, in which the heirs of the various houses have assumed positions of authority, the widows have been found places and the children disposed of" (1969:74). The whole process indicated here, can also be called reorganization. What Raum actually called the two corridors is in other terms what Arnold v. Gennep meant with his theory of *rites de passage*, the transition of status. This transition is characterized by rituals, which, according to v. Gennep, have three phases, viz, separation, marginal state and introduction into the new state.

Practical observations indicate that the distinction of the two corridors made by Raum concerning pagan funeral rites are basically still alive among many Christians. The church is involved to some extent in the night vigil and the funeral itself, as described above. However, from many rites which take place within the year after the funeral - except the *unveiling of the tombstone* - the church is excluded. The reason for this exclusion is not only the fact that most of these rites are regarded as family rites, but, according to my observation, the church has not yet really come to terms with many aspects of African culture. It cannot be denied, however, that depending on the background of people, there are attempts made to re-interpret African rites against the background of the gospel. Here we cannot discuss further details. This whole complex area calls for an investigation of its own.

2.2.1 The concept of rites

It is not possible to enter into the whole discussion on rites and their functions. We merely try to pinpoint some of the features of rites, as they still play an important part in coping with life in African society. Rites and their performance very often coincide with crucial phases and crises in life.

A person which is involved in a transition or in a crisis usually undergoes a certain process. This process entails psychological involvement, as he/she moves from the present state to a new one. He/she is involved in separating himself/herself from his/her old status to adopt a new one. This process is symbolized and anticipated ritually (cf. Spiegel 1989:101). The symbolic actions included in a rite are multi-dimensional. They are directed at a person in his/her totality to help him/her as an individual. However, they are not limited to the individual, because a rite also has corporative intentions.

2.2.2 The significance and function of rites (rituals)

Above we shortly touched on the concepts of rites. In a more detailed manner the meaning and function of rites (rituals) will be dealt with now. There are different functions of rites (rituals). Spiegel (1989:103f), whom I mainly follow here, points out six functions:

1. Every transition of status means that a person leaves his/her social position to enter a new one. The ritual symbolically shows the way which has to be taken by the individual and thus helping him/her as an individual psychologically. There is also a socio-psychological dimension, as the ritual gives the signal, that somebody of the group is in transition to a new status. For the group it means the person in transition is looking forward to being re-integrated into the group. Thus the individual(s) and the group are bound together and responsible for the re-integration process, which is aimed at the new status of a person

within the group.

2. Rites and rituals are also intended to control emotions. Status-transitions release a lot of emotions, which are usually controlled. Relationships have to be restructured. At the same time driving forces like libido and aggression, affection and disassociation from a loved one are released and have to be dealt with. Rituals help to channel the the course and impact of emotions.
3. Rituals help to reduce fear and anxiety, which are caused by a status-transition. The person in transition mounts a new path. There are no absolute guarantees that an integration into the new status will succeed. Even the group, into which the re-integration must take place, is uncertain in terms of integration. The ritual reduces feelings of insecurity and fear for all involved as it promises that the transition will succeed.
4. Within a ritual a person's new status is attested or acknowledged. Every change in status needs time, but in a ritual the new is, so to speak, anticipated. Anticipation here implies that the person in transition gets under way and is eager to reach the new status already attested to him/her.
5. The ritual also has a juridical dimension, as it involves a promulgation. The social group, which accompanies the person in transition, publicly announces and acknowledges that he/she has reached the new status and thus he/she has to take up the new privileges and obligations.
6. By using the ritual, the re-integration into the group takes place (group integration). The one who lives in transition finds him-/herself in a marginal state. By means of the ritual he/she realizes, that he/she is again an integrated part of the whole social group.

2.2.3 The meaning and function of taboos

The term taboo originates from Polynesian-Melanesian culture. First of all it means things, objects, persons and actions which contain a particular intangible power in themselves and are therefore avoided. This inconceivable power can be dangerous to men. If a taboo is ignored or perhaps broken, it causes bad luck, misfortune and even death. In this sense taboos are tokens erected to point to impending dangers (cf. Sundermeier 1988:205f). Taboos cover many areas of life. In our context we dealt with taboos related to death. Those who are directly affected by death submit themselves to certain taboos, which will be discussed later. After all, death is an incomprehensible force which is ultimately not humanly controllable. Thus people take precautions to guard against the rapid and uncontrollable spreading of death.

2.2.3 Funeral rites and observance of taboos

At this point it is necessary to describe some of the funeral rites and taboos which are connected with dying and death, as certain things are still observed and effective amongst Africans. However it is not the intention to give a comprehensive description of all the rites and taboos involved nor to provide a comparison between traditional rites and taboos and possible changes.

Some details and procedures of traditional rites lost their meaning in an urban environment. However, certain traditional rites and taboos are still observed. Amongst the various peoples of Southern Africa there are also differences in funeral rites and related taboos. These differences will not be discussed in detail. In describing funeral rites and taboos, information concerning Zulu and Sotho rites is used. Despite differences in detail, similar patterns are found among all different African peoples of Southern Africa.

2.3.1 *Amakhubalo* medicine

As already indicated, death is seen as a force which spreads contamination

and uncleanness. It is omni-present and its immanent danger threatens all afflicted by death. Its uncontrolled spreading is feared. This makes a cleansing from the contamination of death a necessary procedure.

Still commonly found is the taking of *amakhubalo* medicine shortly after the funeral. This is done by the afflicted family. A cow or sheep is slaughtered and the meat is mixed with the medicine and eaten by the entire family. Vilakazi (1969:91) states that the size and quality of the slaughtered beast depends on the social status of the deceased. Personal observations confirm this statement.

Other observations, too, have shown that especially in an urban environment, it is important that the beast has to be present before the corpse is fetched from the mortuary. It is commonly believed that the spirit of the deceased is present in and around the house. "He/she has to see, what belongs to him/her", is an expression one hears. To this we have already referred.

The purpose of the *amakhubalo* medicine is to strengthen those who have been weakened by death and its dangers. After the *amakhubalo* medicine has been taken, close relatives shave their hair which is then collected and burnt or buried. In doing so the bereaved symbolically illustrate the separation between them and the deceased.

The shaving of the deceased's hair in preparation for the funeral could not be verified any more (cf. Raum 1969:74/Sundermeier 1988:103). This might indicate a change in tradition. The symbolic shaving of one's hair or cutting some of it is still in use. This ritual is not only an expression of mourning and separation, but also a symbolic action of an internal letting go of the deceased by the mourner. This kind of separation rite can also be interpreted as a kind of self-sacrifice and reparation. The hair as a part of a person, stands for the whole (cf. Sundermeier 1988:104 / Spiegel 1989:245).

2.3.2 *Ukuhlamba izandla* (Zulu)

Another rite amongst Zulus is called *ukuxokozela* (to speak loudly, make a noise) or *ukuhlamba izandla* (washing of hands). This rite takes place a few

days after the funeral. Vilakazi (1962:92) states that among the Nyuswa, this rite is performed within a period of one week after the funeral, but he also concedes that the period can be much shorter, especially among Christians, on account of work commitments.

It is often done as early as one day after the funeral. As the term *ukuxokozela* indicates, the relatives are already partially released from some taboos, as they go their separate ways. It is part of the taboos concerning death not to speak too loudly and this can be regarded as a tribute to death which has cast its shadows over the living. Speaking loudly or making a noise in a particular period after death has occurred, might stir up uncontrollable forces which have been released. Only at the right time this restriction is lifted in *ukuxokozela* (*ukuhlamba izandla*). In doing that the process of separating from the deceased is taken a step further. The aim of this rite is, as Vilakazi (1962:92) puts it, 'to wash the hands of those who took part in the burial'. One is concerned with removing the darkness of death (*ukususa umnyama womuntu ofileyo* cf. II 2.1.7). Family members, relatives and friends are called to be at ease and return to their daily occupations.

2.3.3 *Isigezo* or *Ihlambo* (Zulu) / *Go tlhatswa sesila* (Sotho)

The distant relatives of a deceased are released quite early from taboos concerning death and mourning. Close relatives, however, are released only gradually. Months after the burial they still have to watch taboos, especially a widow. After a period of time, which varies from one to three months or is connected to the seasons, the *isigezo* rite (*ukukhumula intambo*, *ukususa isisila* or the *go tlhatswa sesila* or *rola thapo*) takes place. The terms used indicate that a cleansing from death and mourning is undertaken. It marks the end of mourning.

For the Sotho-Tswana three separate rites are involved. Setiloane (1976:68f) points out that there is the *go tlhatswa sesila* (removal of uncleanness). This rite is very important and involves "a far wider circle than the immediate family of the deceased". At the end of a funeral very often the date for this occasion

is already announced. Often this rite coincides with two other rites called *go rola thapo* (the stripping of signs of mourning) and *go ntsha dikobo* (distribution of the personal belongings of the deceased). As observations have shown among Zulus, these rites do not necessarily coincide. For example the distribution of clothes is done at a later stage. The importance of the phase of *isigezo* or *go tlhatswa sesila* is that a cleansing takes place. The outward signs of mourning are removed. So *ukukhumula intambo* or *go rola thapo* means the taking away of the signs of mourning. Sometimes mourners wear a black necklace or a black ribbon or a black piece of cloth on their upper arm or even black clothes.

These things are burnt in a kind of ceremony. The word *ukususa isisila* means the removal of taboos which restricted the relatives after a death in the family. The one who is directly affected is not released from his or her restrictions. Especially if a widow stays behind, she has to continue mourning and has to observe the taboos for about a year. Widowers are released from the taboos earlier. The taboos imposed on a widow are removed when there is the *amaduduzo* (feast of comforting) or *unveiling of a tombstone* (bringing back of the deceased / reintegration of the deceased into the family) after a year or more. *Amaduduzo* and *unveiling of a tombstone* can coincide.

Taboos include the following for close relatives, and are observed carefully:

- a) No intercourse.
- b) No unnecessary noise.
- c) No entertainment or enjoyment.
- d) The widow is not allowed to visit others and to enter the premises of others. If she wants something she has to wait outside. Her shadow must not fall on anybody.
- e) Another taboo concerning a widow says that she must wash herself only after sunset, i.e., when it is dark. This was explained to me by referring to the similarity between black clothing and the washing at night. The continuity must not be interrupted. Sundermeier (1988:60) states that black (besides white) is the colour of the ancestors.

- f) She also has to be back in the house by sunset (cf. Setiloane 1976:180).

In the *isigezo* rite the taboos concerning close and distant relatives are revoked except for the widow.

The motive behind the obeying of taboos is that, if they are broken, they will bring *ishwa* (Zulu), misfortune. The bereaved are afflicted by the shadow of death. In the event of the deceased being a child, a sheep will be slaughtered on the day of *isigezo*.

Then, in a symbolic act, the signs of mourning are burnt (see above). If the deceased was a wife, a cow is slaughtered. The same applies for a deceased man.

2.3.4 *Ukubuyisa*

About one year after the funeral the *ukubuyisa* (Zulu) rite or ceremony takes place. It is also called *amaduduzo* (Zulu) or *matsediso* (Sotho). If funds are available this rite is often combined with unveiling of the tombstone. This ceremony belongs to the category of integration rites. The dead or his/her spirit is re-integrated into the family or clan. The deceased has reached his new status as ancestor.

Sometimes the *ukubuyisa* rite is also called the 'second funeral' (cf. M.I.U. 1969:202). Besides the re-integration of the deceased, the widow is released from the taboos surrounding her. She takes off her mourning clothes and is from now on allowed to re marry. The feast includes communion, slaughtering, beer-drinking and good food. As with the funeral people are free to participate. The family are obliged to join in. Vilakazi, in referring to the *ukubuyisa*-ceremony, says:

With the Bringing Home the equilibrium of the group of bereaved is restored and its relationship with the ancestors re-established, including the newly

acknowledged ancestor (1969:83).

In other words : The two corridors for the ancestor and the group of bereaved converge at this point. The sequence of these parallel lines of rites is quite clearly planned to re-organize society along traditionally accepted lines (cf. II 2.2).

2.4 Some rituals and acts in connection with funerals

It is not possible to give an account of all the preparations for a funeral. At this point only a few important rituals and acts are described. My personal observations will be included in these descriptions.

2.4.1 Preparing the deceased for the funeral

In townships in general, people are not buried on the same or the day after a person's death, as is still the case in remote rural areas. These days the deceased are kept in the mortuary of the township or the nearby town. This gives the bereaved family enough time to plan the funeral, to notify relatives living far away, and if the deceased was a member of a burial society, to involve them. After death has occurred at the home of the deceased, the corpse is kept until it is fetched from the mortuary. All paper work (like death certificate etc.) is attended to by the funeral institution. Soon after a person has died relatives, friends, neighbours and members of the burial society arrive to be with the mourners.

During the days before the funeral (normally one week), people are constantly present to assist the afflicted in every possible way. The widow for instance just sits in the bedroom and mourns. She is exempt from all duties and has the opportunity to work through her feelings. Necessary arrangements are made by others. When the corpse is fetched from the mortuary and brought to the home of the deceased (Friday before the *Umlindelo*/night vigil) it is

indicated to the deceased, what is happening to him/her, as the spirit of the deceased is believed to be present.

The separation of the deceased from the living commences with the preparing of the corpse. The washing and dressing of the deceased is entrusted to experienced wives . They are also related to the deceased. According to his/her status and/or profession the deceased is dressed in his/her uniform (prayer woman, police, minister, nurses....). Sometimes the uniform is placed in the coffin or the grave. The daughter of a deceased prayer woman will wear her mother's uniform after a period of time. However, this is not standard procedure. This issue leads us to the following:

2.4.2 Gifts put into the coffin and grave

Even today, gifts are given and put into the coffin and grave. These are belongings which had meaning for the deceased or which have meaning for the living. Thus personal utensils like a sleeping mat or a blanket, a tobacco-box, clothes, a walking stick, pocket money and even a dinner-service are put into the coffin. To put seeds in the coffin is very common. The seeds are symbols of food and fertility. The living should not deprive the deceased of these (food and fertility). These things - according to the animistic explanation - are believed to be useful in the other world. The dynamistic explanation says that these things are an extension of the deceased's personality.

When the coffin has been lowered, different rites can be observed. Some people spread a blanket and a grass mat over the coffin. Later these are torn. (separation rite). The blanket seems to be a substitute for the hide, although it is sometimes put into the grave alongside the coffin packed in a plastic bag. In other cases only the hide is spread over the coffin with reference to traditional burial rites, where the deceased was wrapped in the hide. The hide of the beast which was slaughtered for the deceased belongs to him.

For the Sotho-Tswana Setiloane (1976:194) recorded a different procedure, as he says that the hide is kept and given, with head and hoofs, to the *malume*.

Church membership cards are placed in the right hand of women and in the left hand of men. The membership card referred to as *thikithi* (from ticket), functions as a kind of 'I.D. card' for the other world. However, it was not possible to get a clear explanation for the inversion concerning the placing of the cards. A standard answer was that is was just done that way (cf. Berglund 1976:368). A possible explanation for the inversion, however, could be that, in church, women sit on the left side and men on the right side. This order is inverted just as many other things are inverted in the other world.

The gifts in general include the petition and wish that the deceased, who is on the way of becoming an ancestor, should not withdraw himself from the welfare of the living, as he is believed to influence it. They also indicate that the living do not begrudge the deceased all the things laid to rest with him.

A fairly new development I observed during the last few years, is the fact that the printed programme of the funeral service, which contains a short obituary of the deceased, is distributed and then collected in the graveyard. It is thrown into the grave and buried. Three explanations for this new rite emerged:

- a) A rational explanation given to me said that the papers should not pollute the cemetery and the township.
- b) A more traditional explanation said that the family guards against misuse. They want to prevent all kinds of *ubuthakathi* (sorcery).
- c) A more sophisticated (also rational) explanation said that the papers also belong to the deceased and in putting them to rest with him, it symbolizes the separation from him (dynamistic explanation).

It has to be noted that all three explanations are valid as they reflect people's opinions and feelings in this regard. Depending on the individual, the first,

second, third or a combination of them is applicable.

2.4.3 Ritual washing

The digging of the grave in townships is no longer the task of the relatives. It is not done by agnates (brothers, sons) as for instance, among traditional Zulus in rural areas (cf. Raum 1969:75). The township administration is responsible for this job to be done in time. This indicates a change, as the traditional way of doing it is abandoned.

Sometimes, as was observed, relatives do attend to the grave before the actual funeral to 'secure' the grave by putting in some medicine. Especially if a person died in unusual circumstances, for instance, an accident.

After the Christian rites are completed, a communal act of importance to the family and community starts. Mourners line up next to the side of the grave. Starting off with the next of kin and in succession of their seniority in relation to the person laid to rest, they start to throw a handful of sand into the grave. Some also spit on the sand in their hand before throwing it into the grave. The ritual of throwing sand into the grave is "an act of solidarity with the deceased's household in their sorrow and bereavement". Setiloane (1976:193) points out further that the participation in this act of solidarity puts a person into the state of '*sesila*' (pollution) and therefore has to participate in the act of cleansing, the washing of hands, which is done at the home of the deceased's family. Then the meal is served.

Another act of communal solidarity takes place in closing the grave. The male relatives of the deceased, according to their rank and status, begin. Then whoever wishes to help will join in. Striking indeed is the speed in which the closing of the grave is completed. It seems to be a symbolic act that underlines that, for the time being, a quick and final blow is delivered.

The shovels, which were partly supplied by the family and others that were used, are taken home to be washed (cleansing rite). Setiloane (1976:195) notes that the 'washing of the spades' or *go tlhatswa digrafu* among Sotho-Tswanas is a separate cleansing rite, which takes place a week or ten days after the funeral. On the day of the funeral the spades and pick-axes are placed near the water tubs, so that, if the mourners wash their hands, water automatically falls onto the tools and cleanses them.

The owners of the tools (deceased's family members and others) do not claim them immediately. They wait till a second purification rite is performed concerning the tools used to bury the deceased. This rite is called 'Washing of Spades'. The tools which were left at the deceased's home are then washed again, because they are still considered defiled. Setiloane goes on to say:

The owners (of the tools) and other men who helped with the grave-digging are called back to the deceased's home, where beer-drinking takes place: no other food is supplied at this gathering. Again, water is provided in a tub at the same spot as on the occasion of the funeral, and, at the end of beer-drinking, each man claims his tools, washes them with water, in the same manner as the hand washing, and, without returning to the '*lapa*', or yard, proceeds directly to his home. The belief is that an unwashed tool carries to the owner's home the contamination of the illness and death of the deceased (1976:196).

This rite, described by Setiloane, still is adhered to by people, mainly Sothos, in the township. Even if men do not dig the grave themselves, they are involved in closing the grave. So their tools have been used. For some sections of the people the washing of the tools is completed on the day of the funeral.

For those who return from the funeral, two big tubs of water have been prepared. One contains clear water, the other one water and medicine (aloe leaf). Different acts can be observed concerning the ritual of washing or cleansing.

Without any exception everyone wash their hands with the medicated water. Setiloane describes the washing as follows:

The hands are washed ceremonially by scooping out the water with the right hand and making sure that, after washing, it falls on the ground and not back into the tub. In this way, the water is sprinkled on the ground - the abode of *badimo* - thereby spreading around *botsididi*, healing, coolness (1976:194).

In this description Setiloane also gives an explanation of the significance of the washing of hands. Two related actions are combined in this symbolic action:

- a) The cleansing from contamination caused by death, which includes the act of 'cooling' oneself and starts the process of healing.
- b) This whole process is linked to the ancestors, who have to be included, as they affect the life of the living. So far only the washing of hands has been mentioned. Some also wash their feet (cf. Setiloane 1976:194).

Two other ways of 'cooling off' were observed in Bethlehem Township. Some take unmedicated water from the first tub, put it into their mouths and spit it on the ground. Others wash their faces as well. The last two ways seem to be optional, whereas washing of hands is compulsory for all who participated in the funeral. As already mentioned, washing means cleansing from contamination. Water, and water plus medicine, have cleansing power. The uncleanness and contamination caused by death are washed away (cf.

concept of *umnyama*). Nobody would dare exclude him-/herself from this act of cleansing, because washing is proof of innocence.

The spitting out of water is in line with what, among Sotho-Tswanas, is termed *lotsididi*, healing, coolness. Concerning the Zulus, Berglund says:

Occasions when spitting in connection with purification of anger and other evils take place are numerous (1975:331).

Death causes displeasure and anger, which needs to be cooled off. Cool water symbolizes the cooling off within and without, as death has stirred up a lot of different feelings.

2.4.4 Cleansing of the house and washing of clothes

After leaving the house of the deceased, the funeral procession goes to church if the deceased had been a church member. Then everybody goes to the graveyard, where the deceased is laid to rest. During this time, the deceased's house is cleansed thoroughly because death is viewed as defiling and everybody and everything that comes into contact or in association with it needs to be cleansed in a ritual manner (Setiloane 1976:194). To cleanse the house, 'cleansing medicine' is used.

Another cleansing takes place some days after the funeral or on the following Sunday. The clothes of the deceased are washed, ironed and stored away neatly, till the day of their distribution. In our description of the involvement of the burial societies we referred to this. The widow sleeps in the same room where the clothes are kept.

Setiloane (1976:180) refers to it as *go robala dikobo tsa moshwi* (to sleep with the deceased's belongings). On the day of distribution of the clothes and belongings another *mosebetsi* (Sotho) or *umsebenzi* (Zulu) takes place.

For this occasion a ritual beast is slaughtered. As far as could be observed, a similar custom is to be found among all black communities in the township.

Details of the handling of this affair differ.

3. Analysis of the Investigated Burial Societies in connection with the Empirical Study and African concepts of Life and Death, Communion and Mutual Assistance

The purpose of this study up to now has been to describe the phenomenon of three specific burial societies, which are part of the continuous process of establishing burial societies. We dealt with their organization, their work and involvement in funerals, weddings and unveiling of the tombstone. The emphasis of their work, as we have shown, lies in their involvement in funerals. From the empirical study we turned to African concepts of life and death and concepts of communion and mutual assistance.

Both the empirical study and the more general part about African concepts of life and death and concepts of communion and mutual assistance serve as a background for further analysis of the three burial societies.

Founding and functioning of the burial societies are based on African concepts of life and death, of communion and a value system of mutual assistance and respect. In this regard they are an African answer to the challenges which families encounter in cases of death. Against this background I shall try to verify the basic argument in a more systematic way.

Therefore we have to look into eight areas of concern, which include traditional aspects of the life of the societies, pragmatic adaptations to a modern world and some aspects of Christian elements used in the societies. This kind of approach entails that we have to revert to findings which were stated earlier on in this study.

3.1 The Burial Societies and African concepts of communion

The burial societies as communities within the greater community, show signs and elements of African concepts of communion. As we have shown (Part II 1.2) Africans still view themselves and their lives as rooted in the community they live in. Not the individual and his/her concerns, but those of the community, are in the forefront. A human is human by participating and communicating with others. The sense of being a person and having self-esteem depends, to some extent, on being a socially integrated part of societies in general. To live in a relationship with others, to know one's place in society and to know about mutual dependency is important.

The burial societies as communities within the larger community are aware of the fact that their organization with its aims and objectives enjoy preference. The individual usually submits him/herself to the rules and regulations for the benefit of all. If a member, however, should disagree totally with her society, which occurs very seldom, she would rather leave the society than fight to her own advantage. The individual will not risk challenging the society as an individual.

This does not mean that changes are impossible. Changes within the society do not arise simply because an individual wishes it. Individuals, the chairlady and the executive might propose changes, but they will only be implemented when sufficient consensus is reached.

This principle of traditional consensus culminates in the chairlady's decisions, which are never unilateral. As they are backed by the group's consensus, the whole process of decision-making guarantees a certain unity and stability within the societies as small groups. Furthermore the principle of consensus is part of the inter-dependence or mutual dependence of people. The leader or chairlady is highly respected, whether she founded the society or was elected chairlady. Her word has weight and her position goes unchallenged. The members' respect for her grows according to her skilful handling the principle of consensus. A failure in this regard can become a source of disunity. In some instances it can also terminate the leader's position.

It seems that the principle of consensus maintains a balance between the power of the leader and the power and joint responsibility of the group. Part of the principle of consensus is the long discussion which is a central and essential event within the group. Everyone may contribute to the discussion or dialogue until a joint decision can be taken which will be binding for all members.

Nobody is allowed to defy the decision unless he/she wants to place her/himself outside the group. As the whole group has sanctioned the decision it is legally binding. The whole process of reaching consensus is time-consuming, but on the other hand nobody is excluded, as there is no majority rule or decisions taken according to Western democratic understanding. In small groups with definite aims and objectives, like burial societies, this traditional principle seems to work well. Problems are anticipated if groups become too big. As we have seen, the burial societies under investigation, very wisely, split into smaller groups when the original group becomes too big.

3.2 The Burial Societies and African concepts of life and death

The deceased, after a while become 'living-dead' or ancestral spirits and provide a link with the life-giving spirit world and are believed to influence their descendants. In order to send off the deceased in an orderly way to the world beyond, certain rituals and actions must be adhered to. Some of them have been described previously. As the relationship of the living with their ancestors is very close, some rituals are closely connected to family members only. Burial society members do not involve themselves directly in these family matters.

There are however actions and rituals in which the community itself is involved, as death not only affects the family, but the community as a whole. It is this area of commonly accepted rituals, actions and standards of a funeral that burial societies involve themselves:

Their presence in the deceased's bedroom, preparing the medicated water for the washing of hands, assisting the bereaved in the process of mourning,

arranging food, preparing and serving during the night vigil and on the day of the funeral, brewing beer for the men who slaughter the ritual beast, cleansing the house takes a lot of pressure off the bereaved family. As discussed, a smoothly run funeral is important and affords the bereaved family some peace of mind.

The performance of rituals which is geared to overcome the threat and crisis triggered by death, is not an alien concept for members of burial societies. They themselves know the healing life-giving power which is released by adhering to certain rituals and actions.

3.3 The Burial Societies and the concept of mutual assistance and sharing

In a traditional African society there are concepts such as mutual assistance and sharing (cf. Part I 2.7 / Part II 1.3). These values reign in the burial societies.

Through mutual assistance and sharing they provide a 'network' of practical support for the bereaved. The description of the societies' has shown that mutual assistance and sharing is experienced on different levels. Members of the societies experience a more personal level of mutual assistance and sharing within the group by interacting, by receiving and giving advice, by helping and being helped with personal matters etc .

In the event of a funeral the mutual assistance and sharing becomes part of the public appearance of the society. Resources of women-power and to some extent man-power are utilized.

The financial assistance to a member, which is possible on account of the contributions of all members to the coffers of the society, becomes obvious. Sundermeier's statement (Part II 1.3) that the readiness to share in African society has to be understood as a virtue, which is applied concentric, must be slightly modified when it comes to the burial societies. As they are specific groups with specific aims and objectives, mutual assistance and sharing naturally concentrate on the group itself.

They regard themselves as a big family or substitute for the blood relatives who are often scattered all over the country. Nevertheless, if need arises, burial societies also assist the very poor who have nobody to bury them. In cases like this they join others (neighbours, churches, etc) and in a concerted effort they provide a decent and dignified funeral for a very poor person. In that sense Sundermeier's statement is still valid. Mutual assistance and sharing concentrate firstly on the family and then spreads in concentric circles.

3.4 The Burial Societies and their emotional assistance

The Burial societies' mutual assistance and sharing does not end with practical help. Their approach is holistic. As a group, they also care for the emotional needs of a person who is sick (home and hospital visitation) or has family problems and others. In times of death the emotional care as an avenue of counselling gains even greater significance.

Burial society members strengthen one another in this crisis by being present in the critical phase between the event of death and the burial itself. We described (Part I, 3.1.3) how this emotional care takes place. At this point, it is important to note that the presence of burial societymembers and others serves a good purpose. The bereaved is not abandoned to deal with conflicting emotions. It gives the bereaved a sense of solidarity and comfort. The reality of death cannot easily be denied and a sound way of working through grief is provided. Other aspects of counselling will be dealt with later.

3.5 Burial Societies and the rituals (rites) concerning death

At different stages in this study (Part II 1.4 /2.2/ 2.2.2/2.3), I tried to show that rituals (rites) have a central function in the lives of African people, as they stabilize and bring a certain equilibrium in coping with life's changes and transitions. The investigated burial societies as groups are not directly involved in death rituals related to the family as such.

Earlier on (Part II 1.1) I indicated that the living have a very close relationship with their nearest ancestors, as they are the ones who watch over their own people. As the deceased is on his way to become an ancestor or 'living-dead', the rituals concerning his transition and the transition of the family (Part II 2.2 'the two corridors') centres around them. In other words, these rituals are regarded as essentially family matters. However, as I have shown, there are common rituals and practical actions during the period and process of a funeral, and even thereafter, in which the societies assist. I shall deal with this in more detail later on in this study.

Suffice it for now to say that the burial societies, by involving themselves, are a stabilizing factor. They create an opportunity and an atmosphere in which the bereaved family can concentrate on matters they regard as important for a proper burial. In other words the family can concentrate on rituals and actions aimed at separation from the deceased.

3.6 The Burial Societies - an answer to the financial demands in case of a funeral

We have shown that a funeral must have a certain standard. To meet this standard the financial demands for a funeral are high. Especially in a township where nearly everything has to be bought, costs are ever increasing. The majority of the people cannot afford to meet these costs and most of them are not in the position to get loans or finance funerals otherwise. The need and the plight of the people is one of the reasons why Burial societies were started in the first instance. However, the financial reason is but one of many others. The payments of the societies only cover a small portion of the real expenses involved in a funeral. Some people have additional commercial insurances. to be financially on the safe side, but they would not never rely on commercial insurance only, because commercial insurance companies [are 'neutral' in the sense that they] only provide financial aid.

The burial societies on the other hand, make provision for a whole range of human interaction: unity in solidarity, experiencing sympathy and empathy,

being comforted with encouraging words and human closeness ,being part of a big caring family, receiving practical help , mutual assistance and sharing. All these are essentially part of the societies. Herein lies the strength, the community spirit of the societies and the fundamental difference between them and an ordinary insurance company.

The above mentioned elements, which add to the strength of the societies, are rooted in traditional African values and beliefs. As I have tried to show, dying and death involve major transition for the living and the deceased. It is a significant transition for African people.

3.7 Burial Societies and features of adapting to a changing environment

There are features within the societies which indicate that they have adapted to the challenges of a new situation:

- a) The financial assistance mentioned above (cf.3.6) which includes the collecting and administration of money , has become a necessity in an urban environment as natural resources are not readily available. The method of collecting money from members can be called African. As we have seen, it is done openly in their meetings by handing over cash to the treasurer. An anonymous banking system with individual deposits is unacceptable . Money has to be seen changing hands . Practical and psychological aspects of this feature were pointed out earlier (cf.part I 2.6.2).

The system of fund raising (part I 2.4) called *umjikel*o is also an African way of collecting money and serves to increase the financial potential of a society. The fact that the societies and the banks co-operate in safe-guarding the money is in the interest of both parties and falls under common business practices.

- b) A traditional focus on one's own people, like family, clan and tribe has been abandoned by the three societies investigated. This is due to four influential factors which we indicate briefly:
- 1) Township inhabitants do not originate from one ethnic group only. In other words, unlike in rural areas there is no homogeneity. Daily life and social dynamics force different ethnic groups together and purity of cultural inheritance cannot be maintained easily. A cross-cultural fertilization takes place gradually. A strict division along ethnic lines loses its original impact.
 - 2) Another reason for abandoning a strict ethnic orientation can be traced to Christian influence. The church, according to the Gospel, cannot be narrowly defined on an ethnic basis. That which is naturally apart has become one in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28 / Kol. 3:11). This is part of the background the leaders of the three societies experience in their churches where people of different ethnic origin work and worship together.
 - 3) Another influential factor which we see at work is the concept of *ubuntu*. It is known and common among all different ethnic groups in Southern Africa. As I have pointed out, *ubuntu* is practised and experienced in a particular way in the societies, centred around burial. In that sense *ubuntu* is a uniting factor.
 - 4) Admission to the societies is granted to all who agree to the rules and regulations, aims and objectives of the society. Admitting people on these grounds is practical and does not create a major problem for the executive of a society which has to agree to applications. On the other hand, this clear cut policy of admitting people does not unnecessarily hamper the growth of a society, because members can be drawn from all sectors of society.

Another interesting fact has already been noted , namely that women constitute a majority in all societies and take a leading role (cf. part I 2.6.2). Male members are excluded or if they are allowed to join, only a few will do so. In running a society they play no significant role at all. The female society members explained this phenomenon by stating that domestic and family matters are left in the hands of women. At this stage (a comprehensive discussion is not intended) we try to look briefly beyond this argument.

Personal observations show that many men indeed leave domestic and family matters to women. Already young girls are taught to be responsible for a range of duties in and around the house. Boys and young men are not always taught in the same manner to take up their responsibility in a changing social environment. At least there seems to be a vacuum in this regard. Many men struggle to find their role. Traditional role models do not fit easily into a changing social environment. On the other hand , in the absence of men e.g. due to migrant labour system, women have been forced by circumstances to take up leading roles and care for the needs of their families.

This highlights one aspect of women constituting a clear majority in the societies we are dealing with. In traditional societies men and women had their different and clearly defined roles to play in burials (cf. e.g. Krige 1981 (8) : 171ff). These different roles exist even today as we indicated earlier. Yet the interesting fact is that women claimed their particular space by establishing and leading their societies.

My hypothesis is that in doing that, they also created a space for themselves to live up to their gifts and potentials. This aspect still has to be investigated thoroughly.

- c) At least one society clearly emerged from a *stokvel*, a movement which in itself is not traditionally African. It is likely that this kind of movement emerged as early as as the introduction of the monetary system in South Africa. The information on this issue is not clear . However, in essence, this movement is a response of poverty-stricken people to overcome their financial plight.

- d) The fact that the societies have written constitutions cannot be regarded as a genuine African heritage. It is a concession to Western practices. To outline the structure, the principles, the aims and objectives of a group seems to take second place to the practical work which has already been started. In the case of the investigated societies the need for a constitution was most probably introduced via the church. We have to remember that the leaders of the three societies are leading prayer women in their respective churches. Not only the church itself, but also the groups within, have their constitutions. In one case (*Kopano ke Matla*) the constitution was written many years after the inception of the society. All constitutions of the investigated societies have not been updated (cf. part I 2). It mainly becomes a useful document, a law to resort to, together with all other recorded decisions in cases of internal dispute and disorder.

In that sense, it is functional and necessary. It seems, however, that the dynamic of the societies does not primarily lie in the written law, but in the interaction and drive to assist one another. In addition to that, the described internal cohesive forces, like peer pressure (cf. part I 2.6.2), position of the chairlady and the executive (cf. part I 2.5) and the concept of the individual's position within a community (cf. part II 1.2) are at work.

3.8 The Burial Societies and Christian influences

As the description of the three Burial societies has shown (cf. e.g. part I 3.1.1), there are inherent Christian influences. The leaders do not deny that they are active members of their churches. As we have seen, a common rule within these specific societies states that members of a society have to be members of a church as well. It is a rule which of course cannot be generalized, as societies differ.

In case of the three investigated societies, elements of Christian worship are used. As was described earlier, there are three specific points where these

elements are present. Each meeting starts with a hymn or chorus, a Bible reading with a short exhortation and prayer. An element of the ceremony of introducing new members is the singing of choruses. They frame the whole ceremony at the beginning and at the end. Instead of a Bible reading, the chairlady addresses some of the aims and objectives of the society as an exhortation to the newcomers and to all (cf. part I 2.6.1). It is obvious that especially on this occasion the emphasis lies where the heart of the society is, namely in its common purpose.

The handing over of money to the bereaved is accompanied by a small service which contains the same elements (cf. part I 3.1.1) already mentioned in connection with opening of a society's meeting. Due to bereavement, however, comforting the bereaved is emphasized.

I am convinced that the Christian elements did not just slide into the societies by mere chance. The leaders stressed the fact that these elements along with many other things are part and parcel of the procedures of their societies. This seems to be an indication that not only the African religious dimension but also the Christian dimension is at work within the societies.

PART III

THE BURIAL SOCIETIES AND THEIR CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

In the last part of this study we will deal with some challenges of the burial societies to the church. Dealing with the challenges implies of course that there is a certain limitation, that is, I cannot deny being a Lutheran. This fact has an influence on my observations, my analyse and perspective. Not everyone might share my insights concerning these and they, might also be subject to change.

Attitudes of burial society members to the church, which we have outlined earlier (Part I 2.6.6), only reveal certain tendencies and depend, of course, on the background of a member. As elements of Christian worship are part of the societies' procedures, some do not see a big difference between their society and the church. For them the society almost becomes a substitute for the church. In connection with funerals, they experience emotional, practical and spiritual help from the society.

This help is essential to them, as it has a healing effect on them. Others regard the society as a supplement to the church, which is perceived as supportive only in spiritual terms. A third group is aware of differences between their society and the church. However, they feel at home in both institutions. I am aware that some additional research has to be done in this regard, as this study only highlights the problem. I do not intend to go deeper into the area of the members' attitudes to the church.

On a more practical level there is a challenge concerning the liturgy for funerals (e.g. Lutheran Liturgy). Elements described in connection with the *Umlindelo* (Part I 3.2.3) and the funeral service in church (Part I 3.3.5) and the unveiling of the tombstone (details will be given later), suggest that the un-supplemented liturgy of the Lutheran Church does not satisfy the needs of African Christians when it comes to funerals and related issues. It seems that the Western liturgy translated and transplanted into an African context is too individualistic and 'sterile'.

Furthermore it does not really challenge African concepts of life and death from a biblical perspective. It appears to me that the current Lutheran liturgy does not integrate the deceased and those who are left behind as it should or could according to African understandings.

Only recently some attempts were made to integrate some African aspirations. However, the question remains whether these attempts are sufficient to respond to a challenge which is seated in a very strong belief in ancestors and their power, even amongst church goers. At this point the church is challenged to deal more with African concepts of life and death and to confront them with the biblical message in an attempt to integrate these African aspirations where possible.

Häselbarth (1972) made a remarkable contribution in his thesis

Die Auferstehung der Toten Afrika, in which he gives a theological analysis of rituals in connection with death in the Mamabolo Society in the Northern Transvaal. To the question of Western liturgy and African aspirations in particular we will come back to this kind of dialogue in his thesis later. It is an issue which also involves aspects of salvation in an African context.

The socio-diaconical effort of the Burial societies is another challenge to the church. Häselbarth (1972:85f) pointed out that in some areas parishes even started and managed Burial societies as part of their socio-diaconical effort. Parishes used to care in a co-operative way even for practical things related to death. Gradually these Burial societies became separate groups with their own structures and administration. Here we cannot deal with the history and the reasons of this development.

There are even some voices in the Lutheran Church (mentioned to me in discussions with my colleagues) who want to revive the above-mentioned involvement of the church. Whether it is feasible or not and what kind of motives are behind the idea of a revival of Burial societies under the leadership of the church, are matters of concern. However, we cannot deal with this question in this study.

In the last part of this study we want to concentrate on two areas to which we have already referred:

1. **Do and how do Burial Societies assist the bereaved in the different phases of mourning? How is the church (cf. above) challenged by the Societies in this regard ?**

The description of the societies has hopefully shown that counselling is one of the aspects of caring displayed by the societies. During the process of counselling, members experience salvation and healing . Both the societies and the church are involved in this process. We will try to show that this does not mean that there is no challenge left.

2. **Is there a need to reconsider the liturgy for funerals and *unveiling of the tombstone* in the African context?**

We will briefly analyse the Lutheran liturgy for funerals and unveiling of the tombstone and try to relate our findings to the basic question already mentioned , namely whether a mere integration of some African aspirations is enough to counter a challenge which comes from a belief in ancestors and their power.

1. **The four phases of mourning**

Since the studies of Kübler-Ross and others, it is known that the process of mourning caused by death is subject to certain 'laws'. In different stages mourning, which involves mental and spiritual strain, is gradually overcome. If compared, mourning rites show remarkable parallels with the phases of mourning (cf. Sundermeier 1988). Here we cannot give a comprehensive analysis of the mourning rites and the 'laws' of a mourning process, but we try to show that, at specific points in this process, burial societies are involved by accompanying the bereaved.

Although most of the studies on the mourning process have been done in Western cultures, insights which have been gathered, can provide a limited

frame of reference for the mourning process among Africans. In a short overview we will describe the four phases of mourning. From there we turn to establish in which phases and how the Burial societies assist in accompanying the bereaved. Finally I ask to what extent the church is challenged by this. We divide the process of mourning into phases in an attempt to systematize the mourning phenomena. The division of the mourning process into four phases is but one way of systematizing it. Here we follow the four-fold division of the mourning process, as it is widely accepted.

The first phase is called the **shock phase or immediate stage**. Death or a message of death has come to the family.

The second phase is called the **post-immediate stage**. It is a kind of regulated phase in which the symptoms of shock are controlled by the family, the environment and other 'agents'.

The third phase is called the **transitional stage** in which a culmination of regressive behaviour surfaces in a bereaved person more so than in any other phase. It is a time in which the bereaved is mainly thrown upon him/herself.

The fourth phase is called the **adapting or re-patterning stage** in which the process of mourning comes to an end. The bereaved person is gradually able to control and adapt his/her behaviour to his/her circumstance.

1.1 The immediate stage or shock phase

The immediate stage or shock phase is relatively short. It is normal for people to get a shock when death occurs. The intensity of the shock depends to some extent on the circumstances of the person's death. For those who stay behind there are mainly three problem areas they have to face.

Spiegel writes:

In general three dominant topics are dealt with, the question of what caused death, whether the deceased had suffered very much or not and the question whether it (death) could have been avoided (1989:61) (my translation).

Observations show that these questions are also dealt with in an African context in case of death and mourning.

Earlier (Part II 2.1.6) I pointed out that in an African context the reasoning behind the causes of death can include natural (rational) as well as 'irrational' explanations. A 'rational' explanation would refer, for instance to death as a result of old age. An 'irrational' explanation of death means that death is perceived to have been caused by evil people and their agents or ultimately by God himself. The question of the deceased's suffering and whether his/her particular death was avoidable, do appear.

Often the predominant questions focus on who and what caused death. In the days prior to the funeral, these questions are mentioned and discussed. The chief mourner is not necessarily actively involved. Those who are present in the deceased's bedroom (burial society members, family, friends and neighbours) with the main mourner, relate the circumstances of death to condoling visitors. In part I (3.1.1) we said that the societies like to be the first to be informed among the 'helping agents'. The reason for this is that the assistance of the society is perceived as very important.

The 'helping agents' are an essential part of the crisis management team. By being informed very early, the burial society members are the first to be present to help. Their presence helps to structure the phase of shock, the so-called immediate stage, as they render valuable practical help and emotional assistance. The shock phase is relatively short.

The line of distinction between the shock phase and the post-immediate stage, the controlled phase, tends to be vague unless we concentrate on the three questions related to the cause of death, the suffering of the deceased and whether death was avoidable or not. These questions, to which we already referred, are pursued by those who sit in the deceased's bedroom with the main mourner. The whole week before the funeral itself people come to visit and comfort and they hear about the circumstances of death.

By hearing the same story repeated frequently, the chief mourner is constantly reminded of the reality of death. Frequent mention is made of the fact that the bereaved did everything possible to help the deceased. Mentioning this and

the constant repetition of events has a therapeutic function. It combats destructive blame and reproach. According to my observations this is not consciously intended to be therapeutical but is born out of the knowledge and wisdom of ages. It is the way things are done.

With sudden or violent death the shock goes deeper than in cases where death was expected. A change in these questions was observed. Even more important than the cause of death and the suffering, is the question WHY the deceased had died. A more detailed study has to be conducted in this regard at a later stage. Here we only indicate the problem. Burial society members and others are prepared to share the questions, the suffering and the mourning of the bereaved. Human closeness and the contact with the bereaved help him/her to bear the unbearable and that which at times is logically incomprehensible.

1.2 The controlled phase or post-immediate stage

In this phase a two-fold form of control exists: The control the bereaved tries to impose on him/herself and the control of family members', neighbours', friends' and other agents'.

This phase is characterized by a high level of social activity surrounding the bereaved. The main mourner gets lots of support and is exonerated from all the usual duties, which of course, gives him/her the chance to concentrate on mourning and self-control.

Regressive behaviour can appear as early as the shock phase and the controlled phase. Regressive behaviour occurs as an attempt to cope with the loss of a relationship and the contact with the deceased. His/her psychological set-up cannot remain unchanged. It has to re-orientate itself. During this process the bereaved uses self-centred coping mechanisms, which are undifferentiated and less related to the environment. Especially in the controlled phase it can lead to feelings of disillusionment. The bereaved experiences reality as distant. His/her experiences are strangely unreal. Often disillusionment is accompanied by a kind of depersonalisation where

the predominant feeling experienced is the distance and estrangement from one's own Ego.

Spiegel says:

The Ego is distracted from its relations to the world (environment) without being able to identify with its speaking and acting (1989:64) (my translation).

On the other hand, the controlled phase makes it possible for the bereaved to overcome shock and strong self-imposed self-control by allowing him/herself, in this 'protected room', to give way to his/her feelings. However, as the mourning process is very complex, it does happen that shock and self-control cannot be regulated by others in the post- immediate phase.

During the controlled phase, burial society members and others protect or shield the main mourner with their presence. They create a protective environment by shielding them from the high level of activities in this phase. The fact that the circumstances surrounding the death are mentioned repeatedly, prevents the bereaved from denying death and can help him/her to work through a sound mourning process.

In part I (3.1 ff) I described the phase between the occurrence of death and the beginning of the night vigil. In a sense, this phase, as well as the funeral and funeral meal, is a kind of controlled phase. The immediate involvement of the burial society members is part of this controlled phase. There are certain elements and actions by means of which this phase is structured.

First of all there is, as mentioned already, the immediate presence of society members. Members are available throughout the whole week before the burial to be with the main bereaved in the deceased's bedroom. The experience of human closeness and the knowledge that one is surrounded by people who know about the vulnerability of a mourning person, aids the mourner in coping with the loss.

The presentation of money (part I 3.1.1), which include elements of a religious 'service', has a two-fold function. The biblical message, the hymns and prayers can give spiritual encouragement. The money on the other hand, gives financial peace of mind. Preparations made in the house, as described in part I (3.1.2), are customary actions. They indicate that death has cast its mighty shadow. It has intruded on life and brought about an unbalanced situation.

The status of the deceased and that of the living have changed . Symbolically the impact of death is shown by re-arranging and inverting certain objects and cleaning the house. The reality of death is acknowledged, but at the same time the destructive force and power of death is deflected from the living.

Preparing food and brewing of beer (part I 3.1.4) and the involvement of men (part I 3.1.5) are part of the customary arrangements for an African funeral. The involvement of burial society members takes a great burden off the shoulders of the bereaved family who is expected to have things ready on time. The support and commitment of the burial society members, in doing their part of the work, takes away some of the stress for the bereaved who already struggle with grief.

In a sense, they become 'helping agents ' in this controlled phase. We attempted to describe the degree of the burial societies' involvement in the phase of fetching the deceased from the mortuary, the laying-out in state, preparing the deceased and the night-vigil in detail in part I (3.2 ff). Even here it is obvious that burial society members are 'helping agents'. By helping, they express their concern as the 'extended family'.

They are, however, quite sensitive to the preparations where the bereaved family itself wishes to be in charge, for example in preparing the deceased for the funeral. We described the preparations for the funeral itself and the involvement of the burial societies in part I (3.3 ff) in detail. Their involvement in this area again shows a readiness to assist and thus provide a network of support to the benefit of the bereaved and their responsibilities . Again a holistic approach can be observed, as the societies involve themselves in practical and spiritual aspects of life.

1.3 The phase of regression or transitional stage

The bereaved interact in many different ways with the deceased. Step by step the bereaved comes to grips with the loss. The previous psychological state of mind of the bereaved was geared towards interacting with the deceased. Now is the time to accept that the loved one is gone for good. The inner acceptance is a gradual process.

During this time of transition, the bereaved will develop self-centred coping-mechanisms which are referred to as regression (see 1.2).

1.3.1 Regression as a concept

Regression can manifest itself in three related forms , which and can appear simultaneously as they are different aspects of the whole process of regression:

1. **Topical Regression,**
2. **Temporal Regression,**
3. **Formal Regression.**

1 **Topical regression** refers to actions usually controlled in a higher personality system which are present at a lower level where the Ego is unable to control it as it is threatened by resourcelessness and collapse. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness and weakness. Weeping, which occurs during this stage, is an indication that the Ego must undergo change and transition. In a state of mourning, it is common for the Ego to develop self-defence mechanisms in the sub-conscious as well as to find substitutes for lost potential on lower levels of conscious functioning (Spiegel 1989:66).

2. **Temporal regression** means a partial retreat to an early childhood phase. This form of regression causes the bereaved to withdraw into isolation and to focus on his/her grief in a very self-centred manner (Spiegel 1989:67).

3. **Formal regression** means that the bereaved reverts to primitive thought patterns and concepts of reality. The bereaved develops forms of supernatural thinking, which can include a mixture of superstition, subconscious belief in one's own omnipotence and a primitive fear of being punished (Spiegel 1989:68).

1.3.2 The regressive phase and the bereaved

The regressive phase is one of transition. This means that the bereaved are in a critical stage, where they have to overcome their loss and to re-discover their Ego. They have lost partial control over themselves and the outcome of reorganizing is still uncertain. Libidinous and aggressive energies are released which previously were contained in a relationship with the deceased. They are now faced with these energies. A lot of energy has to be channelled into the process of sustaining their disrupted emotional balance.

Apathy, irritability, vulnerability and a retreat into oneself are characteristic of this phase. The bereaved also tend to simplify matters of a complex nature (cf. Spiegel 1989:70).

It sometimes happens that the bereaved reject the reality of death. They try to avoid memories of the deceased or compulsively try to forget the deceased, "because he (the deceased) did not deserve the love that the lonely ones who are left behind, bestowed on him" (cf. Spiegel 1989:70).

Another observed tendency is that the deceased is glorified which seem to have different functions. Spiegel (1989:70) mentions three reasons for this:

- a) deep ties and bonds with the deceased overshadows memories of daily quarrels and conflict,
- b) the bereaved wants to free him/herself of guilt by praising the deceased,

c) there is the wish to open heaven for the deceased.

Some of these elements were mentioned and described in part I (3.2.3 and 3.3.5). The issue cannot be discussed whether the phases of mourning overlap or whether participants anticipate the transitional stage for the sake and benefit of the bereaved. Further detailed studies are necessary in this regard. The same applies to the following elements of the regressive phase. A sudden awakening of religious issues and doubts were observed. The bereaved can also develop feelings of guilt and anxiety. In how far this is true of an African society has to be dealt with in a separate investigation.

In the context of this study we can only go as far as to say that the regressive phase in an African context, unlike others, is much more structured by rituals and taboos which help to channel and control the forces which are operative in the process of grief. The influence of the Burial societies in the regressive phase is less than during the first two phases, as the rituals and taboos within the family gain more momentum.

In part II (1.4) we outlined the importance of rituals among African people. They have different functions (part II 2.2.2) and in that way they provide ways and means of stabilizing the lives of those who pass through these different stages. Where life is in transition, rituals bring about a certain equilibrium. Taboos (part II 2.2.3/ 2.3 ff) which are signs erected to point to impending dangers, also have a stabilizing function. In a sense they are signs of control over life and forces which are released in e.g. situations like death.

There are rituals and taboos which can be linked to the regressive phase. One of these rituals is the preparation and taking of *amakhubalo* medicine and other related rituals which we described briefly in part II (2.3.1). Another rite is that of *ukuxokozela* or *ukuhlamba izandla* in which the family members are partly released from certain taboos. After some time - one to three months after the funeral or connected to a specific season of the year - the *isigezo* (part II 2.3.3) takes place, which not only involves the family members but a wider circle of people. The number of people, however, is less than at the funeral itself and the burial societies as groups are not involved in preparing food. The

importance of the *isigezo* is the fact that a cleansing combined with slaughtering and a communal meal takes place. The external signs of mourning are lifted for members of the family.

Taboos concerning the widow are still to be observed by her until the *amaduduzo* is held (cf. part II 2.3.3). The burial societies as groups are not involved in these rites either. One society however, arranges its monthly meeting one month after the funeral in the house of the bereaved member to show their concern and to bring comfort.

1.4 The phase of adaptation

This phase is characterized by a process of adapting to the loss of a loved one. The bereaved comes to terms with what has happened and adapts to his/her new situation. Spiegel summarizes the current discussion:

The process of mourning is not predictable, as the kinds of relationship which connected the bereaved and the deceased are heterogeneous. The environment reacts very differently and the resources and coping-mechanisms at the disposal of the bereaved vary from person to person. There is neither the normal process of mourning nor the appropriate re-adaption (1989:75) (my translation).

In other words, the factors which influence the process of mourning are numerous and stratified. The main objective of the adaptive phase however is that the bereaved regains a sense of the new reality and receives him/herself back as a person by letting the deceased go. In an African context the end of the adaptive phase is marked by the *amaduduzo* feast (feast without unveiling a tombstone) or the unveiling of the tombstone) which takes place about one year after the funeral. During this feast the deceased is re-integrated into the family. He becomes a 'living-dead'. The taboos concerning the widow are revoked. She is free to remarry and participate in society free from restrictive

taboos regarding death. In the adaptive phase the burial societies are not largely involved.

However, they assist in the *amaduduzo* feast and unveiling of a tombstone by giving a certain amount of money and by preparing the food for this occasion. According to their information they are not directly involved in the rituals which are performed for 'bringing home' the deceased. This part of *amaduduzo* (*unveiling of a tombstone*) is regarded as a family affair. The involvement of the burial society in the *amaduduzo* feast (unveiling of a tombstone) is welcomed by the members as many participants are expected to attend this occasion. It is compulsory for relatives to attend to this 'second funeral', as it is sometimes referred to. Friends, neighbours and others participate as they did in the funeral itself. Slaughtering, preparing food and serving it again is an integral part of the feast. The society members are mainly involved in preparing and serving food for the communal meal. In doing that, they play an important part as the 'team' who has gathered to comfort the bereaved in this final step of 'official' bereavement.

2. Summary and conclusions with regard to the Burial Societies' involvement in the phases of mourning

As I have already indicated I could not give a complete analysis of the phases of mourning, the rituals performed within these phases and the link with the burial societies and compare them with their Western counterparts. In due course a separate investigation has to deal with this in more detail. Here I could only indicate that there is a link between the phases of mourning, the respective rituals and the involvement of the burial societies.

It seems that the main involvement of the burial societies as groups in funerals concentrates on the shock phase, the controlled phase and again towards the end of the adaptive phase. Their work in these phases, which are of communal interest as well, comprises of counselling and practical assistance.

In that their approach is holistic. Guided by common sense and the knowledge of what the customary framework demands in connection with a funeral, they involve themselves to the benefit of the bereaved.

Christian elements like reading from Scripture and preaching, singing hymns and praying add to the customary framework. The extent to which the traditional part is actually integrated into the Christian message, is still an open question. For some there seems to be co-existence. For other Christians it is a battlefield. On the one hand, they see that the rituals, from which they cannot exclude themselves very easily, have their place as helping, healing and structuring elements in a process of mourning. On the other hand, they want to give them meaning based on the biblical message.

The basic conflict for them is not only the relationship between the culturally rooted rituals and the biblical message, but how to relate them to the Christian Triune God in an appropriate way. In this regard a church elder told me about problems and conflicts he has. As a family member one is obliged to take part in all rituals. His problem is not the rituals as such, but to give them an acceptable biblical meaning.

3. The counselling efforts of the Burial Societies as a challenge to the church

In various stages of our study I have shown that the founding and functioning of the burial societies are based on African concepts of life and death, of communion and a value system of mutual assistance and respect (cf e.g. part II (3)).

Counselling as a caring attribute of burial societies is linked to these understandings and can, therefore, not be seen in isolation. It is part of their entire entity and approach and thus does not function in a vacuum. Therefore, before we can deal in some more details with counselling efforts of the Burial

societies and the implied challenge to the church, it is necessary to reflect on some aspects of traditional understandings of salvation, which are alive, even though they have already been influenced by Christian thought patterns and practices.

In part II of my study I have already touched upon traditional understandings of salvation. Here we give a short and more systematic overview.

3.1 Aspects of traditional concepts of salvation

1. To a large extent salvation is conceived to be this -worldly. It has to do with the concrete existence of individuals within a family, a clan or a group of people. Mbiti states,...

that salvation in African Religion has to do with physical and immediate danger (of the individual and more often of the community) Salvation is not just an abstraction: it is concrete (1974a:112).

2. Salvation in concrete terms has to do with overcoming existential problems like suffering, sickness, misfortune, death and many other calamities that can threaten the equilibrium of the individual's life and that of a community at large.

3. In concrete terms salvation for an African means to overcome personal or impersonal evil powers which can destroy his/her life. Death as an impersonal power, for example, forces him/her into a state of *umnyama* (cf. part II 2.1.7). He/she can also be affected by personal, but for uncontrollable powers (cf. part II 2.1.6). In this context people are predominantly perturbed by the question of who was responsible for the suffering and mischief. The more rationally-orientated question as to what actually caused death is considered to be of secondary importance (cf. part II 2.1.7 / Dierks 1986:159).

4. Salvation has to do with weakening and strengthening of life within the

set-up of a group. Both features, weakening and strengthening of life do not only affect the individual but the entire group, as both are linked (cf. part II 1.2). Where African people pursue helping and comforting one another and where they are maintaining and strengthening life, their desire for salvation is involved. Salvation is never directed at the individual only, but includes the family, the group and the community.

5. Salvation is not a static theory in people's minds. Salvation means that there is a process of healing and regaining of power involved (cf. part II 1.4 - the dynamistic aspect of life). Concerning the regaining of the life-force, Westermann states:

Man wants something more powerful to supplement his own activity to overcome those adversities which are beyond human aid...The absorbing question for him is now to acquire some of this power so that it may serve for his own salvation or that of the group...(1937:84)

6. Within a traditional concept of salvation the ancestors, who are nearer than the living to the source of life-giving and life-generating power, that is the power line of the lineage, have their role to play (cf. part II 1.1/ 2 ff). They are, or they become mediators, carriers and representatives of salvation. They are no less and no more than that. The lineage (the chain of generations) in its life-generating vitality is the source of true life (being) and the only locality of salvation (cf.Nürnberg 1975:157). It is the principle agent in mediating salvation. God the Creator, who is known to be the ultimate source of life and salvation is only vaguely involved.

7. In experiencing and receiving salvation or healing rituals, medicines and taboos become integral means in achieving the end (cf. part II).

8. The question of salvation becomes a burning issue in facing death. Even though there is an expectation of personal growth after death (cf. part II 2.1.1), it is feared as an incomprehensible force of destruction. Ancestors "survive " for as long as they are remembered by the living. In that sense, death is the beginning of the end. Mbiti affirms this when he states that in traditional African religion death is the weakest point, as it is the beginning of the end and leaves no real hope for life after death:

African Religion does not tell people how to conquer
or escape death (1975:99 / cf. 1974 b:124).

3.2 The challenge with regard to counselling

Counselling does not take place in a vacuum. As one of the caring attitudes of the Burial societies, it is linked to African concepts of salvation of life and death and to concepts of mutual assistance and respect. It is also linked to the phases and the process of mourning. In this regard we tried to describe and analyse the societies and their practical involvement in funerals - from death to the *unveiling of the tombstone*.

Counselling in cases of death is not only a caring attitude of the Burial societies. The church, on scriptural grounds, is also involved in counselling. Therefore we have to look at a two-fold challenge, namely the challenge on the part of the societies and the challenge on the part of the church. We start with challenges emerging from the societies' side. In this regard, we formulate theses, which will be explained briefly. Here we will not enter into a broad discussion. The theses may serve as a source of future deliberations in the church and critical dialogue with burial societies.

1. Counselling within the societies is a result of *ubuntu*, of being human (cf. part I 2.6.5). Where and when the church is engaged in counselling, members have to take note of the African concept of being human. At the same time, they have to get clarity on a biblically based view of humanity.

Here we deal with two different concepts which cannot easily be knitted together. *Ubuntu* is an outflow of an African religious and social fabric. Behind being human in a Biblical sense, is the belief that we are created in the image of God who ultimately incarnated himself in Christ and thus showed his love to humankind.

2. Counselling of the societies takes place within a holistic approach to life. Life is one. Spiritual needs cannot be separated from physical ones (cf. part I 2.6.6). If either side is preferred above the other, it can result in failing to address human needs. The church is reminded to guard against an unhealthy way of spiritualizing. Biblical teachings on salvation include all aspects of 'shalom'.

3. Society members have a strong sense of loyalty and unity, which is based on African concepts of life and death, of communion and respect. Within this atmosphere counselling takes place aiming at overcoming all sorts of calamities (cf. part I 2.6.6). A church and its members can only develop meaningful counselling if they are aware of these facts. Likewise it is necessary for them to get clarity on the roots of their unity. The unity and solidarity among members in their church is based on Christ who joins us all in unity. The church in all its different places is called to be a community of sharing (Acts. 2:44) and assisting others with their needs (2.Cor.8:19). Thus on a practical level the church is challenged by what the societies do, namely to live in solidarity with those who suffer.

4. The societies take cognizance of the fact that the suffering of one member affects the whole group. Counselling in words and deeds is perceived to be very important. Thus comforting, guiding and helping one another are integral parts of their efforts. Healing experienced by one member serves the well-being of the whole group. The church is challenged not to take the suffering of its members lightly. The suffering of one member affects the whole 'body'.

Biblically speaking we 'are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another' (Rom. 12: 5). 'If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it' (1.Cor. 12:26).

5. The tacit presupposition of counselling efforts and the involvement of Burial societies in general is based on traditional beliefs concerning life and death. In experiencing death, rituals become very important for African people. Although Burial societies as groups are not directly involved in rituals which are perceived as family rituals (cf. part II 2.1.2 ff/3.2/3.5) they are not opposed to them either. In practical terms they even assist in some of them to bring comfort and relief. (cf. e.g. part III 1.4 unveiling of the tombstone/ *amaduduzo* and customary actions of the pre- funeral and funeral phase, as described in part I).

In part II 2.2.1 ff we briefly discussed that rituals have different structuring and healing functions within a process of mourning which, at the same time, is a transitional period on the way to a social equilibrium within the family. The same applies to taboos. The church does not do well if she condemns or underestimates the influence and power of rituals and taboos without acknowledging the positive side of them.

To deny this reality or to take a neutral stance in this regard, could mean that we do not take the fact seriously enough that God, in his plan to save and heal, incarnated himself in Christ. Therefore the church is called upon to enter into a meaningful and critical dialogue with African reality. Within a process of meaningful and critical dialogue with the societies and within the church we should be guided by certain questions and criteria. Here we raise some of the main aspects. A full discussion of them is not intended.

1. How do rites promote salvation and healing, which is in line with a biblical understanding of salvation and healing? Is a re-interpretation in Christian terms necessary and possible?

2. Rites and taboos in the context of ancestral belief, to some extent ,are linked to concepts of death as a contagious force (cf. part II 2.1.7). This force is not neutral. It is believed to be personal. The Old Testament, contains instructions for cleansing rites, if for instance people had come into contact with corpses. The body itself is perceived to be dirty. However, death as such is not a personal contagious force. Ultimately it is not a power independent of God.

In the New Testament, death is viewed from a Christological angle. What happened in Christ has soteriological consequences. Whoever puts trust in Christ , can experience that deliverance from an existence engulfed by sin. 'Death' as a metaphor for being separated from God has been overcome for him/her. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not primarily aim at the psycho-physical fading away of a human being with his biological death. It focuses on overcoming the distance between mankind and God. The rift between God and man , caused by sin, has been overcome.

This of course casts some light on the psycho-physical death of humans. Freedom under God's deliverance from sin grants freedom in death as a psycho-physical process. Freedom through Christ's presence also creates readiness to accept death in its different occurrences (cf. part II 2.1.5). In short, death, be it a metaphor of separation from God or be it death as a psycho-physical fading away of man, is biblically speaking an event which occurs under grace and judgement.

How does the concept of death as a contagious force fit into a biblical view of death? Does it fit at all? What can be said about taboos concerning death from a biblical point of view? Are they expressions of fear? If so, how can fear be overcome? Taboos do not aim only at widows, but most of them do. For some it is quite a burden. How can a Christian congregation help to overcome the burden and fear involved?

One possible way of overcoming fear and alleviating the burden is to address the problem by counselling, to guard against self-isolation on the side of a person bound by taboos, and also to ward off isolation from the side of the congregation.

The freedom born out of the gospel has to become transparent in this regard. As many church members are also society members, a critical dialogue between these two entities should get off the ground.

3. A crucial contemporary issue in the encounter between the biblical message and traditional beliefs is the question concerning the ancestors. They are still of great importance to many African people (cf. part II 1.1/ 2.1.3/ 2.2) Here we cannot enter into the still unresolved question as to whether ancestors are only "respected" or actually "worshipped".

Observations show that ancestor- belief as social and/or religious reality, has its own dynamics. For many Christians in the church and in the societies, however, the question arises of how to relate the communion with them to the Christian Triune God in an appropriate way (cf. part III 2). The way of relating these two entities is not easy. Here I only indicate a few theological problems and aspects which exist.

To begin with, we look at two theological problems concerning ancestral belief, their function and influence in relation to aspects of the biblical message. Considering the eminent position of the first commandment in the Old Testament on the one hand and the eminent position and influence of ancestors in African societies, on the other hand, a conflict in loyalty arises and can indeed be observed. Another problem we will look into briefly is that realities such as sin (being separated from God) and guilt, are not given due consideration.

1. The first commandment in the Decalogue and in the context of the Old Testament as a whole, greatly emphasizes the fact that God is one. He is jealously watching over his people. He is the one who liberated his people from bondage and he demands obedience to Him. He demands to be the exclusive one. Against this background, he is to be considered the only one worthy of his peoples' ultimate loyalty.

Divided loyalty is a contradiction in terms. If we take a brief look at for instance Deuteronomy 13:7-12 we see that the Old Testament does not subscribe to an idea of a family or generation being supreme or being an agent of any kind of salvation. It is, of course, part of God's order in his creation. But the Old Testament does not support any glorification of this institution.

All 'natural' powers which a family or, for that matter, generations might have, are powers invested in them by God to whom humans owe their loyalty. Hence there is a built-in conflict or tension between demands from the side of a family and obedience and loyalty to God.

A brief look into the New Testament indicates that this conflict or tension has not been dissolved (e.g. cf. Mt. 10:37). Coming back to the Old Testament and the ten commandments - the fourth commandment, which reflects on the historical sequence and existence of families and generations cannot be isolated from the first commandment which is paramount to all. It is true that we received life and that our parents precede us and that we have to respect them. Life is a God-given gift and biologically speaking we are there because of our parents and those who lived before them. This entails, on our part, social responsibility and respect while they are still alive. But from what can be concluded from the Old Testament and elsewhere, we cannot see that a lineage of family and beyond that, the deceased or the ancestors in particular, are in a position to mediate or guarantee salvation of any kind.

2. The deceased in an African context tend to become 'saints' regardless of their actual trust and faith in God. Besides the fact that Lutheran theology does not regard saints as mediators, the question arises whether prayer to an ancestor, regarded as mediator, who in life did not have a personal and dynamic relationship with God can link the living with God or can ask for his help.

Here I cannot develop an extensive theology concerning the integration of African concepts of the communion of ancestors in relation to the Christian Triune God. We only indicate a possible point of departure.

Faith in ancestors and their power, among many other things, means that there is a line or chain of ancestors going back as far as the lineage or, for that matter, humankind itself.

It is believed that life-power and the source of life itself is placed within a lineage. A biblically founded starting-point can be the lineage of David and Jesus. By means of them, one could point out God's blessings in history. The ultimate source of blessings, however, is not the lineage itself. It is God in all his wisdom. Another starting-point can be Paul's distinction between 'flesh' and 'spirit'. Man as a natural being, who is in a line of generations starting from Adam, is subject to death as a natural inheritance. Through faith in Christ, man as a spiritual being, will be incorporated into the chain and generations of believers, which started with Abram. Eternal life is promised to all who believe in Christ.

While Adam represents the chain of sin (of being separated from God), those who trust in Christ are connected through baptism and a living faith with the generations which go back to Abram, father or prototype of all true believers.

4. We have seen that the societies are involved in *unveiling of a tombstone* (*amaduduzo*). This festivity, which depends on the family and other circumstances usually has a strong connotation with faith in the ancestors (cf. part II 2.3.4). Except for the time-frame in which it usually takes place (cf. part II 2.3.3) it can be influenced by instructions received in a dream to sacrifice and erect a tombstone.

It also can be prompted by calamities within a family. In that case a ancestral priest is consulted who would advise them to improve the communion with their ancestors and to erect a tombstone. The societies as such do not necessarily interfere or question this background. They readily assist in practical terms, thus contributing greatly to the 'success' of that particular feast.

The Lutheran Church's commitment to be involved, varies. Although a liturgy is set aside for this occasion (Lutheran Altar Book p.111f) there seems nevertheless to be quite some reluctance to take an active part by conducting a service when unveiling a tombstone. According to my understanding, the minister and the congregation should not hesitate to perform a service if they are invited to do so. After all a biblical understanding of life and death has to be communicated to the people in different spheres of life. Between a biblical understanding of life and death and African understandings conflict still exists.

The crucial issue as already indicated is what portion the deceased have and whether they have a role to play in mediating salvation or not. Both the Old Testament and New Testament are opposed to the idea that the deceased influence salvation. For the Old Testament the deceased are dead and do not have any life-giving and life-sustaining power at all. They can neither claim any moral authority or power to reveal anything, nor are they in the position to intercede on behalf of the living.

All along, the Old Testament is strongly opposed to mediums and people using deceased and their spirits. To be involved in practices of that nature is regarded as defilement and calls for the death penalty (cf. Lev 19:31 ; 20:6-27). Yahweh is the only and ultimate source of life and salvation. There are no personal ancestors in the Old Testament. The patriarchs are respected as people in whom and with whom God revealed his dealings with his people. In times of crisis they are remembered as people who received grace from God, but they are never venerated or worshipped. They are only guarantees of God's mercy and love towards mankind. They are symbols of God who used them in making his history.

Like them, God called other living people to promote his work and will among his people. In the beginning he called Moses who passed God's law and covenant on to his people. He called kings to be mediators of power. He called priests to be mediators of reconciliation and prophets to be his voice proclaiming his will. An important fact to keep in mind is that Yahweh called all these mediators in his own wisdom. None of them were called by their own power or by virtue of having precedence in the genealogy. Power and authority were invested in them by God. I cannot unfold all aspects of the New Testament's teaching with regard to death here. I only touch upon some additional aspects (cf. part III 3.2 ; 5.2). The New Testament uses the apocalyptic model. In short: the deceased who are in God's hand, will be raised from the dead on the day of judgement. Until then they are "asleep" and not forgotten. Should someone, who believed in Christ, die before the day of judgement and resurrection he/she still will be in him and wait for God's act of resurrecting.

1. Thess 4:13 ff shows that the deceased are of some concern to Christians. Not the deceased as such are a matter of concern. The question asked here is:

What happens to them and the living if the Lord were to come now?

We see that those who are dead or asleep in Christ are not forgotten; they are part of the eschatological community. They will be brought along by God for the day of the Lord's coming. They will not be at a disadvantage. Time and death do not matter; they will be raised first. Here and elsewhere there is no indication that the deceased play an active role whatsoever. The only exception is Christ himself. He is the first who has risen from the dead. In faith and through the Spirit we participate in his resurrection, though the ultimate resurrection has yet to happen.

Based on what has been said so far, we return to the Lutheran liturgy of 'unveiling' (we disregarded the chronological order: burial- unveiling) and briefly try to examine it. My hypothesis is that the present Lutheran liturgy tries to accommodate traditional patterns of thought in regard to ancestral belief and their influence by pointing to a possible Christian attitude towards deceased and by accommodating African aspirations. This, however, is not enough to reach the roots of ancestral belief.

A liturgy has to be accompanied by biblical doctrine and preaching which does not hesitate to confront issues of ancestral belief, because there is still a power struggle between both entities.

I cannot develop my hypothesis in detail, but I want to analyse the relevant section of the Lutheran liturgy for unveiling a tombstone briefly. This section reads as follows:

You as relatives of the deceased remember: When we buried him/her, we committed the deceased into the hands of Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, if a tombstone is unveiled, we do not do it in fear of the deceased. This stone is erected in remembrance. We remember that the living God is his/her God. He

is the one who will fulfill his promises.

Furthermore, what we do, reminds us that Jesus has overcome death and has power over it. Therefore the deceased together with you all will still face the day when the one who is Lord over life and death is coming to judge the living and the dead. He will give all who believe in him a new life
(Lutheran Altar Book (Zulu) p.111f)(my translation).

These elements of Christian doctrine must be exemplified and developed in preaching and teaching, because in this form it is like a block of Christian truth. It has to be unfolded against the background of African understandings of the rite concerned. The *ukubuyisa* rite or 'unveiling' is not only the end of a psychological process of mourning. Nor is it merely a wish to re-integrate a deceased after a phase of separation from him/her. First and foremost the deceased, who otherwise might have been forgotten very easily, is charged with power and authority. By performing the rite the living actively introduce the deceased into a new position as ancestor, who is believed to influence the living.

At this point Christians are asked to take a stand and explain themselves (cf. above), because the African and the biblical paradigms clash. In practical terms the instructions to the liturgy for unveiling suggest that a bereaved family should be advised and encouraged to express their faith by having a biblical word or verse from the hymn book engraved onto the tombstone. This kind of measure and act of witnessing to my mind should be accompanied by getting the biblical message of life and death across. And indeed, it has been proven that in discussing this issue with a bereaved family, the elements of doctrine mentioned in the liturgy (cf. above) can be explained by a minister and members of the congregation in more detail.

An opportunity to get biblical concepts of life and death across is rife during

preaching in the service of unveiling. According to my understanding both aspects, teaching (explaining) and preaching, belong together. Both in teaching and preaching we have to be aware of the fact that even now the unveiling, which has been given a liturgical frame by the church is still ambivalent in itself.

From my observations and interaction with African Christians I know that deep down the question for them is whether he/she can let a deceased go so as to be in Christ's hands and overcome the fear that a deceased has power and authority over him/her. Earlier (part III. 3.2 /5.1) I raised the question whether rites promote salvation and healing and whether a re-interpretation of African rites in Christian terms is necessary and possible.

This, of course, is a broad field and cannot be discussed in detail in this study. My hypothesis, however, is that rites, as a human ways of expressing oneself, can help to promote healing and salvation in Christian terms, if and when the biblical message of life and death takes over. This means a change in reference which will in turn, necessitate changes in the way rites are performed.

Returning to the liturgical instructions, we see that verbal contributions of others within the service are excluded. Whoever wants to express him/-herself on this occasion can do so after the blessing (cf. Lutheran Altar Book p. 111). According to my understanding one or two members of the family or members of the congregation should be allowed to express themselves within the service, which already takes place unofficially. It should be an official item within the service to prevent a drifting apart of the people's aspirations and feelings and the biblical message. If preparations for an unveiling are done with a bereaved family, the minister should encourage someone of the family or congregation to prepare a contribution of this kind. A planned verbal contribution usually enhances the quality of the contents.

3.3 Challenges with regard to the funeral service

In the last paragraph, I touched upon challenges in connection with the service of 'unveiling a tombstone'. Here we want to take a closer look at the funeral service itself.

We deal with the Lutheran funeral service, its liturgy and in particular why and how African aspirations in connection with a funeral should be integrated into the funeral service by the church.

Officially the church tends to argue in favour of a 'pure' service. It would like to see that the congregations adhere to the prescribed way of the liturgy. In practice however, the liturgy is supplemented by other elements, which we described very briefly in part I 3.3.5. This fact seems to be the background of suggestion or requests made in the Ministerial Council Minutes No 72 of October 1993 which reads:

It was suggested that funeral services are part and parcel of the church service so all parishes are encouraged to adhere to this procedure. It was further suggested that parish members should be taught about this so that there must be no friction regarding the procedure. It was also proposed that all speeches should be encouraged to be done in the revival (*umlindelo*).....

A very recent development shows a shift in what the committee on liturgy stated before. In March 1994 it surprisingly proposed (not yet implemented) three innovations which we regard as a step in the right direction. The innovations are:

- 1) that the order of Funeral Services should follow that of the Main Service from the introit to the creed,

- 2) that the Eucharist be celebrated during the service if the bereaved family so desires, and
- 3) speeches (eulogies) be limited to three (cf. Diocesan Minutes No 73 App. II,6).

The old liturgy (cf. Lutheran Altar Book p.83 ff) which is still in use has nearly all the elements of a service ,eg. readings from the Bible, prayers, hymns, intercession, sermon, benediction ,etc, but it is very short. Neither does it provide integration of celebrating the Eucharist , nor does it make any provision for speeches (eulogy).

Reading of messages on wreaths and collecting an offering which is blessed and passed on to the bereaved family as a token of assistance is not yet envisaged . These elements unofficially crept in later as congregants felt that the existing liturgy was too 'sterile'. From the elements which crept in long before the new proposals of the committee on liturgy concerning the order of a funeral came out, only three speeches (eulogies) are recommended and integrated.

The other elements mentioned above are not considered in the proposal. However, their integration, according to my understanding, is necessary and desirable, because in funerals and funeral services we do not only deal with death. We deal with a real person who was a member of a specific congregation and who lived in relation with others. He/she was part of a cultural and social set-up and , in ecclesiological terms, the deceased was and is still a member of Christ's body.

This constellation, of course, places a funeral and a funeral service into a sphere where there is conflict between the gravity of the case, namely death and the acts of God's grace and mercy. The church rooted in God's calling is called to accompany her deceased members to the throne of God. From the

essence of the Gospel it has to give witness to the conviction that death has been overcome by Christ's resurrection. The conviction of Christ's resurrection, the hymns of God's victory over death, the prayers and intercession have to indicate that death does not exclude the deceased from being a member of Christ's body, which embraces the living and the dead. In other words, as long as the funeral service is centred around the prophetic-apostolic tradition and shaped by it, the elements mentioned above should be integrated in an orderly manner.

Earlier on (cf. part I 2.6.6) I mentioned that sometimes tension builds up between societies and ministers who get the feeling that their services have been 'hijacked' by a society. According to my experience this tension is part of the confrontation between the gravity of the case itself and the cultural dynamics and the societies' emphasis of being involved on the one side and the minister's responsibility to get the biblical message across.

My personal approach to this area of conflict has been one of entering into a critical discussion with them to solve the issues at stake while bearing in mind that there are legitimate cultural and socio-religious needs on their side and claims on the side of the church based on the gospel. As long as adopted cultural and socio-religious elements are not in flagrant contradiction with claims of the Gospel, there is freedom to integrate them.

4. General Results and Conclusions

The undertaken study of the three Burial societies has hopefully shown that these Burial societies are rooted in African traditions and are to some extent run by principles emerging from these traditions. Funerals, *unveiling of the tombstone* and weddings are amongst other things important turning points in life.

African traditions must be respected. Apart from African traditions in which the

societies are rooted, we found that there are on the other hand external reasons for establishing such societies. A shift in the social set-up, the transition from a rural to an urban society, left many African without the resources to run a funeral according to expected standards. Many need to care in advance for forthcoming funerals in their families. It is here that the Burial societies stepped in by providing a substitute family, a system of mutual assistance and caring. In doing that they draw from African traditions and values.

African concepts of life and death, concepts of communion and mutual assistance and sharing, are the backbone of these societies. An African understanding of humanity (*ubuntu*) and common knowledge of how to handle a funeral, operates within the societies and their work.

Furthermore we have shown that they are, to some extent, involved in traditional rituals concerning death. The line between rituals concerning the family only and rituals involving the community, however, is observed. They refrain from direct involvement in family rituals. Their stabilizing contribution is one of providing a network of practical and spiritual assistance.

Concerning the relationship of the societies to the church, I could only establish certain tendencies. Elements of Christian service are part of the societies' procedures and can be intensified by those who are both members of the church and members of a society. Apart from the traditional religious dimension it shows that Christians are present. How intense the inner dialogue between these two dimensions within the societies are, has not been established. It has to be dealt with in a separate study.

The leaders of the societies who are active church members, wish to see a good relationship between their societies and the church. They are aware that church and burial societies are different entities, but according to them they don't have to be at loggerheads. The emphasis on church membership for

society members, has practical reasons. It also indicates a wish to co-operate. This finding cannot be generalized, because the 'policies' of societies differ. However, in our case the leaders emphasized that both the societies and the church have to play their role.

The attitude of members with regard to the church differs according to how deeply they are rooted in their church. Three main tendencies have been discovered, which, with due caution, can be generalized:

1. Some members do not see any difference, as Christian elements are used in the societies. In this case they perceive the society as substitute for the church or at least a place of greater fulfilment.
2. Others regard the society as a supplement to the church, which is conceived to be supportive only in spiritual terms. They feel more at home in their society, which to them combines spiritual and practical help.
3. A third 'group' is aware of differences between the society and the church, but tries to be loyal to both. They feel at home in both institutions. As indicated some more detailed research has to be done in this regard.

Concerning the challenge of the societies to the church, we discussed two areas of concern:

1. Challenges to counselling in connection with traditional concepts of salvation. We stated that there is a link between the phases of mourning and the societies' involvement. The finding was that the societies as groups involve themselves mainly in the so-called shock

phase and controlled phase and again towards the end of the adaptive phase. A major involvement in the regressive phase could not be established. An assumed, but likely reason given for this is that the rituals within the bereaved family come to the forefront. In practical terms we have shown that a dialogue in regard to counselling has to take place between the societies and the church. The arguments outlined earlier, are meant to serve as a starting point for further discussions.

2. The challenges concerning aspects of the Lutheran liturgy for *unveiling of a tombstone* and funeral. Here we opted for an intensified biblical teaching which takes up issues regarding African concepts of life and death. My personal standpoint or 'strategy' in dealing with the challenges and relationships between burial societies and the church is and has been one of co-operation and dialogue based on my Christian convictions, which allow to "test all things and hold fast what is good" (1.Thess.5:21). In that regard the counselling already done by members of the societies is good and helpful for those who are bereaved and it can be intensified through appropriate teaching by the church. For this we did not develop any practical solution in this study. It has to emerge in a practical encounter with the societies themselves. Concerning the aspect of caring, sharing and mutual assistance lived and experienced by members of the Burial societies we tried to show that they are based on African humanism. These positive values, rooted in African traditions, are comparable to biblical values. A task which is still ahead will be to correlate these values with the biblical message. In that sense this study was only the beginning of a critical dialogue.

APPENDIX

THUSANANG WOMEN'S CLUB

Name:

The Club shall be known as *Thusanang Women's Club*, here after referred to as the club.

Area of jurisdiction:

The area of jurisdiction of the club shall be South Africa, including the Republic of the Transkei and Bophuthatswana. It is within the previously mentioned jurisdiction that the activities of the club will be confined.

Aims and objectives:

1. To build fellowship amongst Women and to help each other in all aspects of individual and community life.
2. To encourage co-operation amongst different Women's Associations and to avoid, as far as possible, any duplication of service.
3. To act as a mouthpiece in case representations concerning matters affecting women members to local authorities are called for.
4. To stimulate interest in concerns of life in general and assisting in procuring know-how in leadership.

5. To enhance know-how amongst mothers regarding health and such things as family planning by inviting experts in such field as and when it is deemed necessary.
6. To educate mothers in matters relating to cooking and baking by providing live demonstrations.
7. To organize and arrange girl's clubs, teaching them matters related to biblical studies and indoor games.
8. To assist, through recognized institutions, epileptics and mentally retarded persons in any manner that the club may deem fit within the precinct of the law.
9. To enhance a spirit of competition amongst residents by organizing gardening competitions and the like.
10. To assist members in case of death in the manner detailed in the addendum and the conditions referred to there-in.

Addendum to clause related to death:

- a) Tombstone
- b) Burial assistance after three month concerning new members
- c) Each affiliated club will donate a sum of R 20 (has been changed) in the event of death of husband or member.
- d) R 200 (now R 800) in the event of the death of a member or any of her dependants.
- e) R 200 to be donated in the event of a wedding of a member's daughter or son by the local club.
- f) Each member will be required to subscribe.
- g) R 100 in the event of still born .

Conditions:

1. Death certificate will on demand be produced as proof.
2. Proof of relationship to be produced on demand if such relation is not reflected in the register.

Membership:

Any black, Coloured or Indian woman who shall have accepted the terms and objects as detailed in the Constitution will be eligible for membership.

Condition to membership:

1. Dependants of members shall be her family, her parents and her in-laws.
2. The club shall not be responsible for any resignation submitted on behalf of a bona fide member.
3. Members shall be expected to procure for a nominal fee a badge and a brochure which shall always remain the property of the club.
4. It shall be the responsibility of the club to ensure that on resignation, the property of the club is returned to the club.
5. Any member who absents herself for three consecutive meetings of the club without a reason acceptable to the executive committee of the club will automatically forfeit her membership.
6. After an initial payment by the member issued with a badge and a brochure will be required to pay an annual subscription fee of R 3 (for details see report)

Policy:

- a) The club shall be a non-profit making organisation.
- b) The club shall not affiliate to any political organisation.

No member of the club shall exercise and/or an individual subscribe to any political organisation in the name of the club.

The establishment of Girl's Club under the banner of the referred Club in terms of clause 3(7) of the constitution

Aims and objectives :

- a) To bring them nearer to parents.
- b) To build self-confidence amongst children.
- c) To allow children to manifest their talents.
- d) To enable children to adapt themselves to the environment and to appreciate their different stages in life.

Offices:

The Administration of the *Thusanang* shall be vested in the National executive Committee which will be structured as follows:

- a) The life President and Vice President.
- b) The General Secretary and Assistant.
- c) A Treasurer.
- d) A Recording Secretary.
- e) Two ordinary co-opted members.

- 1. It will be the duty of the president to install new members where geographically possible.
- 2. It will be the duty of the president to inaugurate clubs as affiliates.
- 3. The president will act in arbitral capacity.
- 4. The president will preside at annual general meetings as well as conferences.

Headquarters:

The Headquarters of *Thusanang* as an Association shall remain at 252 Moriting Section Tembisa unless otherwise decided to the contrary by the National Executive.

Branches:

Branches will be established in terms of section 2 of the constitution and subject to the rules and conditions of the referred constitution.

Administration at Branch level:

Branches as referred to under 2 will be administered on the same basis as the National Executive with one provision that the chairlady will have an assistant and will exercise duties and responsibilities which would otherwise be exercised by the president in as far as item 4 under "president" is concerned.

Branches:

Branches shall convene meetings once per month minimum and at any other time as the executive would deem necessary to consider.

- a) Matters related to the Branch
- b) Correspondence
- c) Any matters of emergency

National:

Meeting of the National Executive will be convened three times per annum minimum. To consider matters concerning the general administration and welfare of the Association at National level.

Structures:

See above

General meetings:

1. Annual general meeting of which no less than a month notice shall be given.
2. Reading of notice concerning the meeting.
3. Minutes of last general meeting.
4. Chairladies annual reports.
5. Amendments to the Constitution.
6. Election of office bearers for the ensuring year.

Finances:

1. The Association shall open a banking account with a recognized Bank or Building Society preferably South African Permanent Building Society.
2. The treasurer shall receive moneys and make all payments as authorized by the Association.
3. Receipts shall be issued to any payee and received from any debtor for all payments made.
4. Cheques drawn from the Association shall be signed by the chairlady, treasurer or secretary (vice chairlady to sign in the absence of the chairlady).
5. The treasurer shall furnish a financial statement at every executive and special general meeting.
6. The Association shall also pursue fund raising projects .

Minutes:

Minutes of all meetings held shall be kept by the secretary or assistant secretary.

Power:

The Association shall have powers:

- a) To raise money and funds for the purpose of the Association.
- b) to invest all money and funds of the Association which are not required immediately for the purpose thereof.
- c) To assist past and present members to establish themselves in life and to form and contribute to and administer special funds for that purpose.

Banners:

For the purpose of identity the club will maintain specific colours of the flag at national level. The make up of this flag will be in such a manner that flag colours of affiliates will be incorporated. The raising of the flag will be once per annum at the headquarters in a special general meeting. The date thereof will be determined by the president.

Period of office:

- a) Legal aspects.
- b) Colours of the flag blue with powder blue letters
- c) Colours of the uniform : Navy blue costumes and powder blue blouses
- d) Disciplinary committee.
- e) Elections to be preceded by branches.
- f) Other incentives: Tombstone and funerals local members
to attend night vigil or funeral.

Delegates:

Executive Committee Members of branches and any other member can attend.

Amendments to constitution:

The right to improve and/or amend the Constitution will be vested in the National Executive.

Dissolution:

1. The resignation of a member, ordinary or otherwise will not effect or cause the club to dissolve.
2. The president will, in case of a dispute within the club, act in arbitral capacity.
3. The right to dissolve a club will be vested in the president, who will also act as a presiding officer at the re-establishment of the said club, by way of conducting elections.

CONSTITUTION OF *KOPANA KE MATLA*

1. NAME OF THE SOCIETY:

We the undersigned declare that the name of this Society is *Kopano ke Matla*.

2. DATE OF FOUNDING:

This society was founded 6 March 1981.

3. HEADQUARTERS:

The headquarters of this society is in Bethlehem/Bohlokong Location
1732 Mabhele Street. Tel. 41634

4. CONSTITUTION (EXECUTIVE) OF THE SOCIETY:

The Executive of the Society is in the hands of:

- a) Chairlady: Elizabeth Nhlapo
- b) Secretary: Eliza Ntobela
- c) Treasurer: Fanny Ratebe
- d) Plus : Two additional members

4a. MEMBERSHIP:

The society is open for residents of Bohlokong and other towns near Bethlehem.

People who are covered by this society are:

- a) Member
- b) Father

- c) Mother
- d) Mother in-law
- e) Father in-law
- f) Husband
- g) All the children of the member.

The above mentioned must be blood relatives!

If a member paid the joining fee of R 35 the member is helped.

5. JOINING FEES

- a) The joining fee is R 35.
- b) Every member has to pay R 15 monthly.
- c) Each year in Feb. each member has to renew her/his membership.

6. SERVICES WHICH ARE RENDERED BY THE SOCIETY

The society only helps in case of death!

- a) If a child of one month up to 10 years dies, you get R 300.
- b) From the age of 11 years upwards you get R 500.
- c) R 60 for the bus used at funerals(not applicable any more)
- d) For adults covered by the member you get R 800.

Provision: In case moneys are available the output can be increased.

7. MEMBERS WHO WILL BE HELPED BY THE SOCIETY

- a) A new member is supposed to wait for six months to be helped. There are six months of trail, but within this period the new member has to go on paying R 15 monthly (monthly fees)
- b) No member will be helped by the society if he/she is owing money to the society, this means the initial joining fee of R 50 or the monthly fee of

R 15 or the R 10 for renewal of membership.

- c) Each member who will be helped and afterwards leaves the society or is not paying the money which she owes, is supposed to bring back all the money which she/he received and was helped with for the funeral, even if she paid all the dues before the death occurred. The member has to pay the money at the chairlady's place. It will be up to the society's decision how she has to pay the money back (monthly or all in cash).

8. ANNOUNCEMENT OF DEATH

The member shall announce the death of a person covered by her in writing. It must be sent to the chairlady including the death certificate before the society can help.

9. EXPULSION OF A MEMBER

A member who does not obey the rules and regulations of the society can be expelled by the chairlady and the society under the rule of the constitution. For expelling a member there must be sound reasons.

10. RESIGNATION

If a member leaves the society she/he gets no refunds. She/he has to leave everything which has been granted to him/her by the society, because she/he broke her/his promises.

11. UNIFORM

Each and every member has to have a full uniform which the society decided on. There must be mutual respect all the time.

12. ADMINISTRATION OF MONEY

CHAIRLADY:

The chairlady will lead all meetings of the society with the aim to maintain the aims and objects of the society. She has to sign the minutes of the society written in all meetings along with all the money which has been received by the treasurer.

SECRETARY:

The secretary has to write all the minutes of the society. She also has to write all the letters decided on by the society.

TREASURER:

All the money received by the society will be paid to the treasurer. She has to take the money to the Bank not keeping it longer than three days after the meeting.

13. THE RULES OF THE CONSTITUTION

Each and every member must be supplied with the constitution. The rules and regulations of the society can be changed at any time by the executive when the society is growing and need arises. Every changes are then part of the rules and regulations of the constitution. They are binding.

The society has to have its own property like pots, dishes etc... No member is allowed to use the property of the society without the consent of the chairlady or the society.

Signed by: Chairlady

Secretary

Treasurer

Lawyer

Date of signing 2.May 1990

CONSTITUTION OF *ITSHWARELENG HELPING SOCIETY*

1. *Itshwareleng* buries eight(8) people (in a family).
2. Its new member is supposed to wait for six month to be helped, In these six month she/he has to pay the monthly fees. After six month a new member can be helped. One is regarded a full member after 12 months (1 year). After one year every member who would like to go on with the society, must renew his/her membership. If a member wants to leave the society she/he will be allowed to leave if she/he had been with the society for a year. To leave is possible after the first month of renewal. When a member leaves, no money is refunded.
3. A member, on joining, binds itself to obey all the rules and regulations of the society.
4. In the monthly meetings of the society the fees must be paid. If a member has good reasons for not attending, it should send a report in writing, but the fees have to be sent by all means. In case a member has no money it should borrow it and pay it to help and be up-to-date.
5. If a member is not going to help other members, that member will not be helped either.
 - a) If a member is not wearing the uniform there will be a fine of R 5.
 - b) If a member is late for the society's meeting she/he will be fined R 1.
6. The meeting for all members will be held once a month in the first week of the month (Sunday afternoon)
7. A member who cannot obey the rules of *Itshwareleng* must give notice to the executive in writing - three months in advance - so that when the new year of the society starts with the renewal of membership her name should not be written down in the books.
8. A member who cannot obey the rules and regulations of the society is asked not to stand in the way of other members or the life of the society,

because *Itshwareleng* like a person, wouldn't like to be disturbed. Leave *Itshwareleng* in peace!

9. A member must pay R 5 if he/she is in arrears with the monthly payments, also for not coming to the society without a report which states valid reasons.
10. Services which are rendered by the society:
 - a) Weddings
 - b) Consolation(funeral)
 - c) *Unveiling of a tombstone*
11. At the services of the Society there has to be:
Dishes, pots, but most importantly of all helping hands. A member must pay R 22 every month. If a member dies or one of the family, they are given R 940 (an adult). For children it is R 500.
A still-born is not buried by the society.
Besides the monthly fees every member of the society has to pay R 2 for *matshediso* (consolation)
12. The money must reach the deceased's family three days before the funeral. If someone has passed away the society and its members have to be told first, so that they can help right from the start. If a member didn't pay for one month she won't be helped by the society.

QUESTIONNAIRE: A

QUESTIONS PUT TO SINGLE MEMBERS OF BURIAL SOCIETIES

1. How do you feel about the rules and regulations of your society ?
(Are they helpful - if so - in which way, are they hard if so - why) What do they mean to you? Please explain your view in some sentences!
1. Uzizwa unjani ngemithetho neziyalo zeSociety yakho na? Ziyasiza? Uma kunjalo, zisiza kanjani? Lemithetho neziyalo zinzima ? Uma kunjalo,zinzima kanjani? Imithetho neziyalo zisho ukuthini kuwena? (Ake uchaze)
1. Maikutlo a hao ajwang ka melao le ditaelo tsa Society ya lona ?
(Di na le thuso? Ha ho le jwalo, di thusa jwang? Di boima? Ha ho le jwalo, di boima jwang? Melao le ditaelo di bolela eng ho wena? (Hlalosa)
2. What does the burial society mean to you, your family and the circumstances you live in? What do you get out of it except financial assistance in case of death ? In which ways and areas of life you are helped ? Please explain in some sentences!
2. ISociety yesifo isho ukuthini kuwena na, isho ukuthini kumndeni wakho nasesimeni sempilo yakho? Yini oyitholayo kuSociety ngaphandle kwemali noma ngaphandle kosizo maqondana nesifo na? Usizwa ngaziphi izindlela empilweni? (Chaza)
2. Society ya lefu e bolela eng ho wena, le le lapa la hao, le ho maemo ao o phelang ho ona? O fumana eng ho Society ntle ho tjhelete kapa yona thuso mabapi le lefu? thuswa
ka ditsela dife bophelong? (Hlalosa)

3. If you compare your Society with your church, where do you see the differences?
3. Uma uqhathanisa iSociety yakho neKerike, ubona ukhona umehluko na?
3. Ha o bapisa Society ya hao le Kerike, o bona phapang e le ho kae ?
4. Is it true that you within the society show and live *ubuntu*?
Kuyiqiniso lokuthi eSosayithini niveza nikhombisa *ubuntu* na?
Nibukhombisa kanjani na? Please give examples!
4. Kuyiqiniso ukuthi eSosayethini niveza futhi nikhombise *ubuntu* na? Nibukhombisa kanjani na?(Chaza)
4. Na ke nnete ka hare ho Society le bontsha le ho *botho*? Ke nnete hore Societing le bontsha le ho hlahisa *botho*? Le ho bontsha jwang?
5. Which are the main things for you, which have to be done and cared for before, during and after a funeral. Please explain!
5. Yiziphi izinto ezibalulekile kuwena, okufanele ukwenziwa nokuqashelwa ngaphambi kokuba kungcwatshwe, nangemuva komngcwabo (sekungcwatshiwa)?
5. Dintho tsa bohlokwa ke di feng ho wena, tse tlamehileng ho etswa le ho hlokomelwa pele ho lepato, le ka mora lepato? (hlalosa)
6. Is it a burden to always attend your regular meetings ?
Kungumthwalo onzima kuwena ukuya emhlanganweni weSosayithi yakho ngezinzuku zakhona na? Uzizwa kanjani uma kufanele uye emhlanganweni na? Please explain!

6. Ke morwalo o boima ho ya dikopanong jwalo jwalo(kemehla yohle? (o ikutlwa jwang?)

QUESTIONNAIRE: B

QUESTIONS PUT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETIES

Questions concerning burial societies as socio-religious groups in the townships: (Questions concerning structure, procedures, work and relations)

1. When and by whom was the S. founded? Are the founding members still alive?
2. Do you have a written constitution? (if so, ask for handing it out for further analysis)
3. Questions concerning the constitution, structures and procedures
 - a) Do you have an executive?
 - b) If so, how many members are there?
 1. Are they elected or appointed?
 2. Whatever the case, how long do they stay in office?
 3. How many members must attend a meeting in order to vote on any issue? How often do you have elections? Are re-elections of committee-members possible? Is a dissolving of your S. possible? Under which circumstances?
 - c) How is your decision-making process organized?
 - d) Are changes and amendments to the Constitution possible?
4. Questions concerning membership
 - a) How many members do you have in your society?
 - b) Do you recruit members actively?
 - c) Do you recruit your members from all over the township or is the area somehow divided?
 - d) Do you limit membership by imposing preconditions?
 - e) Do you limit the number of members some other way?

- f) Do you admit new members?
 1. Are there any preconditions for entering the S.?
 2. Do those who enter have to qualify in some or other way?
 3. Has a newly admitted member to invest (or pay) a certain amount other than the monthly fee?
 4. Do you also admit people from the farms?
 5. Do you follow a certain pattern to introduce newcomers as full members? e.g. by let him/her confirm all obligations of the constitution
 6. How is your S. composed?
 - 6.1 Is it mixed (Sotho/Zulu)
 - 6.2 or is it more ethnic orientated?
 7. From which social backgrounds are your members mainly?
 8. Do you have more man than women as active members?
 - 8.1 If there are more women , how do you explain this fact and visa versa?
 9. Have your members to be church members of any church?
 10. From which churches are your members?
 11. Are there also non-church-members?

5. Membership fee and output

- a) How high are your fees?
- b) Is there any connection or relation of social background and the monthly fees?
- c) Do the fees cover the whole family or only individuals?
 - 1 Is there a difference in the monthly fees?

- d) How is the money collected and administered?
(cf. constitution)
- e) Can you as B.S. negotiate a good deal with the caretakers?
- f) Can you also negotiate a good deal with the transport agency?
- g) How do you give in case of need?
- h) Do you pay the amount in case of burials directly to the bereaved families?
- i) Do you give finance reports regularly? (check of constitution)
- j) What happens, if a member is not paying his/her fees or delays it or is in financial troubles?
 - 1. Do you use disciplinary actions, if - when? and which are the measures? (cf. Constitution)
 - 2. How do you explain the discipline in paying the fees?

6. Work and Relations

- a) Does your S. include also preps for marriages and other festivities? (constitution)
- b) Do you also provide for other social activities like outings?
- c) Is there any interaction between your society and othes?
- d) What kind of work are you practically doing in the society?
 - 1. Do you delegate work especially assigned for men and women?
 - 2. Do you have someone who specializes in paper-work?
- e) Which *amasiko* are important for you to uphold?
 - 1. What do your "clients" expect in this regard?

- f) Do you assist the bereaved family in drawing up the programme for the funeral?
(*uhlelo lokumngcwaba umuntu*)
- g) Does your society play any role in the night vigils?
- h) Does your society play any role in the *isiko* of unveiling a tombstone?
- i) Do your members expect the society to play a part in the *isiko* of *ukubuyisa*?
- j) Do you consider your service to be a service for the dead or the living?
- k) If you have non-church-members, do you arrange a speaker and conductor for the funeral?
- l) How would you describe or define your relationship as a burial society to the churches?
 - 1. What do you consider as more important, the preparations for the funeral or the service of your minister?
 - 2. What does the church service at funerals mean to you?
- m) Do you have a plan to visit a bereaved family before and after funeral?
- n) Do you or the family inform the relatives in case of death?

7. How do you yourself understand the community in the B.S. and your being in it?

- a) a society which provides services?
- b) a society where you meet friends who have a common purpose and interest?
- c) if so, how would you describe the common purpose and interest?

- d) a society which has a common understanding of death and its effects and the way things should be handled in case of death?
 - e) a society which only caters?
8. To whom would you refer, if you hear the word "home-societies" ?
 9. In how far do you think that burial societies are a kind of substitute for amakhaya?
 10. What would it mean to you, if a normal or regular funeral would be possible?
 11. Is there some umsebenzi (preparation) concerning the deceased in time before burial undertaken by the burial society?
 12. To which churches do you members belong?
 13. What moved you to join the burial society?
 14. What value has the community and fellowship which you experience in the burial society?
 15. Would you say that besides the economic aspect, there is also the aspect of African concept of life and death at work in forming and joining the burial society?
 16. The gifts given or laid into the grave, is it family affair or is it encouraged by burial society? What do these gifts stand for?
 17. Do the families or burial society still prepare strengthening medicines (umsamo)?
 18. How do you explain the big numbers at funerals?

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