

The Sociological Functions of Funeral Mourning: Illustrations from the Old Testament and Africa

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ABSTRACT

Funeral mourning is an essential rite of passage in many societies. While there are differences among those aspects peculiar to each culture, there are certain motifs common to mourning in all cultures. Among such common motifs are the sociological functions which in most cultures are served by funeral mourning rituals. Hence this study examines the sociological functions that funeral mourning serves in the Old Testament and in Africa. The fact that mourning serves certain functions in the society has an implication for theology in Africa.

A INTRODUCTION

In the Old Testament, as in Africa, death is accorded the most important significance in the midst of other rites of passage. Hence death is mourned with varied activities. In both contexts mourning involves various elements, such as the number of days set aside for it, abstention from certain engagements, self-abasement, the dirge, and etcetera. In both contexts funeral mourning also serves certain sociological functions. For example, in Africa it serves the purpose of the preservation of cultural heritage. However, in Africa, several aspects of this tradition are dying out, giving way to Christianity and Western civilisation. The aim of this article therefore is not to compare funeral mourning in the Old Testament with what is happening in Africa but to identify the various aspects of mourning in both cultural contexts with a view to ascertaining the sociological functions they serve. If funeral mourning has certain functions in the African society, it, in turn, has implications for contemporary Christian Theology in Africa.

B ASPECTS OF FUNERAL MOURNING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

From the pages of the Old Testament the various aspects of funeral mourning among the ancient Israelites can be assembled. At the news of someone's death, the first action was to tear one's garments (Gen 37: 34; 2 Sam 1: 11, etc.). Then "sackcloth" was put on (Gen 37: 34; 2 Sam 3: 31, etc.). Sackcloth is a coarse material, usually worn next to the skin, around the waist and below the chest (cf. 2 Kgs 6: 30; 2 Macc 3: 19; cf. De Vaux 1965: 59). It is not of very

good quality. Prisoners also wear sackcloth. Sometimes it is made of goat hair and worn as a garment symbolising mourning (cf. Tyndale 2003). Prophets wore it in certain instances, that is, as a symbol of mourning the calamity which they predicted for the nation. In Isaiah (50:3) one gathers the material is dark and somewhat unrefined and definitely not smooth.

There were two prominent views on the shape of the garment. In one instance the garment was rectangular, sewn on both sides and one end with spaces left for the head and the arms. In another instance the sackcloth was a small garment resembling a loincloth (Tyndale 2003). The Hebrew practice of girding the loins with sackcloth (2 Sam 3: 31; Isa 15: 3; 22: 12; Jer 4: 8) may support this view. The coarseness of the fabric produced physical discomfort and was used to inflict self-punishment on the wearer. Although sackcloth was associated primarily with mourning, it was also worn during national and personal crises (2 Kgs 6: 30; Neh 9:1; Isa 37: 1).

On the one hand mourners were supposed to take off their shoes (2 Sam 15: 30; Ezek 24: 17, 23; Mic 1: 8) and headdress (Ezek 24: 17, 23). Yet, on the other hand, a man had to cover his beard (Ezek 24: 17, 23) or veil his face (2 Sam 19: 5; cf. 15: 30). It is probable that to put one's hands on one's head was a regular sign of mourning, for in 2 Samuel 13: 19 (cf. Jer 2: 37) it is an expression of sorrow or shame. Mourners would put earth on their heads (Josh 7: 6; 1 Sam 4:12; Neh 9: 1, etc.), roll their heads (Job 16: 15) or even their whole bodies (Mic 1: 10) in the dust and lie or sit in a heap of ashes (Esth 4: 3; Isa 58: 5; Jer 6: 26; Ezek 27: 30).

Mourners would also shave their heads and beard, at least partly, and make cuts on their bodies (Job 1: 20; Isa 22: 12; Jer 16: 6; 41: 5; 47: 5; 48: 37; Ezek 7: 18; Amos 8: 10). Olyan (1998: 616) recognises that certain texts (e. g. Isa 15:2; 22:12; Jer 16:6; 41: 5; 48: 27; Amos 8:10; and Job 1: 20) refer to rites of shaving the head or cutting the beard, or parts of each, as rites associated with the entrance into the ritual state of mourning. Similarly, the pulling out of the hair of one's beard (e.g. Ezra 9: 3) also constitutes a rite associated with the first stages of mourning. When shaving, pulling out or cutting hair are described in the biblical texts as acts of mourning, they resemble those rites separating the mourner from the rest of the people. As with the Levites in Numbers 8, shaving is a rite associated with entering into a state of separation. Linked to mourning, shaving separates one from the community for the duration of the entire mourning period. Shaving and other rites function to induce the specific cultural prescribed reaction of misery (even when this might not otherwise manifest itself). As a reaction of misery these mourning rites have an element of self-abasement. It is possible that the constellation of these self-abasing mourning rites intend to create or intensify identification with the dead for the duration of the mourning period (Olyan 1998: 617). Some of these rites go even further, like cutting of the body. However, these rites are

condemned (Lev 19: 27-8; Deut 14: 1; cf. Lev 21: 5) for the taint of heathenism they preserve. The fact that some of these rites exhibit Canaanite influence is buttressed by Kitchen (1978:171) who lists baldness of the head, cutting of the beard, lacerating of the body, rending garments, wearing sackcloth, scattering dust on the head, wallowing in ashes, and wailing among elements of mourning in Palestine in the second and first millennia.

There are certain rites concerning food and mourning. David kept a day's fast for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1: 12) as well as for Abner (2 Sam 3:35). Nevertheless, the people were surprised that he did not fast for his dead child (2 Sam 12: 20-21). After burying the remains of Saul and his sons the inhabitants of Jabesh fasted for seven days (1 Sam 31: 13), the usual period of strict mourning (Gen 50: 10; Jdt 16: 24). Neighbours or friends would bring mourning bread and the "cup of consolation" to the relatives of the deceased (Jer 16: 7; Ezek 24: 17, 22), because the uncleanness which was attached to the house of the dead prevented food from being prepared there. Ultimately, the dead were considered so unclean that a priest could not "profane" himself by taking part in mourning rites except for his nearest blood relatives (mother, father, son, daughter, brother, and sister provided she was a virgin, cf. Lev 21: 1-4, 10-11).

Whilst mourners refrained from washing and using perfumes (2 Sam 12: 20; 14: 2; Jdt 10: 3), the chief the chief act of mourning presented itself with the lamentation of the dead. In its simplest form it was a sharp, repeated cry, compared in Micah 1: 8 to the call of the jackal or ostrich. They cried, "Alas, alas!" (Amos 5: 16); "Alas, my brother!" or, "Alas, my sister!" (1 Kgs 13: 30); or, in the case of a member of the royal family, "Alas, Lord! Alas Majesty!" (Jer 22: 18; 34: 5). For the death of an only son, the lamentation was particularly heart-rending (Jer 6: 26; Amos 8: 10).

These exclamations of sorrow could be developed into a lament, a *qinah*, composed in a special rhythm (2 Sam 1: 17; Amos 8: 10). Ryder (1982: 93) recognises the dirge as belonging to this basic genre of the Old Testament, for which the funeral provided the *Sitz im Leben*. The oldest and finest example is the dirge sung by David for the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19-27). David wrote one for Abner too (2 Sam 3: 33-4).

These laments were usually composed and sung by professionals, men or women (2 Chr 35: 25; Amos 5: 16), but especially women (Jer 9: 16f; cf. Ezek 32: 16). In a lament over the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah (9: 16ff.) heightens the imagery of desolation by calling for the professional mourning women (the *hakamot*) to make loud wailing. According to Harrison (2001: 91), these persons generally followed the bier at a funeral and loudly lamented the passing of the deceased. Brenner (1994: 37) explains further that the *hakamot* (Jer 9: 17) consists of the "skill" or cunning of certain women as mourners. It was probably a trade or profession transmitted from mother to

daughter (Jer 9: 19). These groups of paid mourners would wail on cue, like actors. There were fixed forms, and a stock number of themes, which the wailers then applied to the individual. For example, the lament over Judas Maccabee, the beginning of which is quoted in 1 Maccabees 9: 21 repeats the words of the lament over Saul and Jonathan. Thus, mourning in the Old Testament was not just an inner feeling of sadness; it was a deliberate established ritual.

In the books of the prophets we find imitations of these funeral hymns. The prophets used these to depict the misfortunes of Israel, of its kings and of its enemies (Jer 9: 9-11, 16-21; Ezek 19: 1-14; 26: 17-18, etc). However, the best example of all is the book of Lamentations. The book also reminds us that mourning was not only associated with death. It could also express a broken spirit or grief for sin or pain, both personal and national.

C FUNERAL MOURNING IN AFRICA

It is important to stipulate that the type of ceremonial funeral mourning which is the concern of this section pertains only to the death of the aged, for, in Africa, death that does not come in ripe old age is regarded as bad death (Van der Geest 2004), and does not attract any form of ceremony. The implication is that, as we shall see presently, in many parts of Africa mourning and rejoicing go together when it is an aged person that passes on. In many places mourning lasts for some period of time, the period varying from one place to another. In some places mourning continues for forty days, and elsewhere even three or four months. This period concerns what can be called the first burial. Those who can afford the expenses would hold a second burial ceremony for their parents. The second burial comes up one, two or three years after the parents' death, depending on when the children can afford the money.

With major or minor variations among the various ethnic groups, the principal stages in the mourning of an aged person are: announcement of the death, preparation of corpse for burial, the lying in state, the interment, and the rituals, feasting and ceremonies of the days following the burial.

Among the Kumbuo people of the Midwestern and the Niger Delta area of Nigeria the passing away of an old person is usually heralded by the crying, wailing, weeping, sighs and beating of the breast of the relatives of the deceased (Ifie 1987: 73). Similarly, among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, as soon as an old man dies, his death is announced by loud cries of mourning and shooting of guns (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 256). According to Gbenda (2005: 125), there are a variety of ways in which the Tiv people of central Nigeria announced the death of an old person in the past. The wailing of women and children signaled the death in the family. This was accompanied by cannon shots. Another medium of conveying a death notice was the *indyer* (drum). It was used mostly when a wealthy person died. Its purpose was to

inform the great ancestor of the Tiv people, Takuruku, to wait and receive the spirit of the deceased. In the past, among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, immediately after the death of an old person the first rite was to slay a fowl called *adie-Irano* (the fare-fowl). The slaying of the fowl was meant to make the road to his ancestors easy for him (Idowu 1962: 190). If the corpse had to be carried from one place to another for burial, a man went in front of the bearers with the live fare-fowl, plucking its feathers until they reached their destination. The fare-fowl acted as a ritual fowl immolated at the end of the journey and ceremonially eaten by the undertakers. Hence, the Yoruba have a saying that “*adie-Irano kii se ajegbe*” (“The fare-fowl is not eaten without reciprocation”). In other words, he who partakes of *adie-Irano* will one day provide the same when he dies (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 258).

The next stage in the mourning process is the preparation of the corpse for lying in state. In most places the corpse is properly washed and dressed in beautiful clothes. The head of a man is thoroughly shaved while the hair of a woman is neatly plaited. The Nupe, also of central Nigeria, would rub the corpse with cam wood, wrap it in a new indigo-dyed cloth, and cover the face with a cap. Among the Temne of Sierra-Leone the corpse is washed and rubbed with oil (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 263). As soon as it is laid in the sitting room, music, dancing and feasting begin. Women and children dance round the corpse singing funeral songs while the survivors and friends spend money.

In some cases the corpse may lie in state for many days before burial. For example, in Abeokuta in southwestern Nigeria, a deceased member of the Ogboni secret cult may not be buried until after one week when the corpse has begun to smell very badly. The members of the cult use this time to get a lot of money from the relatives of the deceased. Burial never takes place on the day chiefs, heroes or men of high status among the Igbo die. If the person belongs to a cult, members of his cult play important roles in the burial (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 256ff.).

While the corpse is lying in state, different kinds of music are played, depending on the religious, social and economic standing of the deceased. But the situation is different among the Tiv. In the past, the Tiv took death very seriously, and would not tolerate the corpse to remain unburied for a long time. Under normal conditions, the corpse would not stay unburied for more than 24 hours. For them death was not an occasion for merry-making but a solemn one, according the deceased a befitting burial (Gbenda 2005: 129).

While the corpse is lying in state a wake is organised, usually after sunset. The wake is not just another occasion for singing, dancing and merry-making. In fact, it is a time for various forms of expressing sorrow. Among the Kumbuo, at cockcrow, the women in the family perform a ritual crying exercise counting the good things they are now missing as a result of the

irreparable loss of the deceased. They enumerate and elaborate on the good things the man or woman had done for them while alive (Ifie 1987: 78).

The interment is usually not done in the afternoon, but either early in the morning or in the evening towards sunset. In most parts of Africa people are buried in graves. Until recently when it became mandatory in some places to bury people in cemeteries outside the towns and villages, graves were dug in the compound of the deceased. In fact, in the past people were buried inside the house for spiritual reasons. In those days before some important persons were buried certain sacrifices were offered, sometimes right inside the grave (Idowu 1962: 190), involving cola-nuts, animals, and even human beings when the deceased were of royal descent. It was also customary to bury articles such as food, drinks, clothing, even slaves and servants if the deceased was an important personality. A woman would be buried with things like necklaces, earrings, clothing materials, food and utensils. A hunter would be buried with his weapons (Awolalu 1979: 57).

The belief was that the deceased was going on a journey and would need all of these for his or her comfort. One would also infer from this practice that the dead were expected to enjoy the same social and economic advantages in the after – life as they had enjoyed in this world. But again, it appears the Tiv do not have this practice. They do not bury people with goods for they believe, among other reasons, that it may cause another death in the family. What was common then, but is fast disappearing now, was the practice of making a shed for the grave itself where clothes and other goods used by the deceased were placed (Gbenda 2005: 132).

During the interment, those individuals attending would pay their last respects, starting with the children in order of seniority, by throwing handfuls of earth on the coffin, which has by then been lowered inside the grave. As they throw it on the coffin, they also make a farewell salute and utter prayers that he/she should travel safely home; to protect those whom he/she is leaving behind from all the bad things of the world and to ensure prosperity for his family in particular and the community in general. Before Christianity and Islam took over burial services, drums and traditional songs usually accompanied the rhythm of the spades and the lifting of legs by the young men as they covered up the coffin. During this time an alternation between ritual crying and drumming is witnessed: on the one hand the joy in paying the last respect to a deserving figure and, on the other hand, crying, weeping and wailing for a beloved one who is physically departing from them forever. Among the Kumbuo, to demonstrate the physical separation, the widows of the deceased walk across the grave, ritually proclaiming that both they and the deceased are now physically separated (Ifie 1987: 78).

The interment provides an important occasion for the singing of dirges. Dirges form a significant aspect of mourning in Africa, especially for very old

people. Apart from being sung during the interment, they are also sung by professionals in the compound of the deceased when the news of his death has been announced. The dirges are sung during the feasting as well as when required as long as the ceremony lasts. They are articulated in a sorrowful tone, narrating the good deeds of the departed, his genealogy, his praise names, and his farewell. A popular Yoruba dirge goes thus (cf. Daramola and Jeje 1995: 155):

<i>Baba lo gbere a ko rii mo</i>	Father has gone forever, we see him no more
<i>Erin wo, erin lo</i>	The elephant has fallen, the elephant is gone
<i>Ajanaku subu ko le g'oke</i>	The elephant has fallen, cannot get up
<i>Eni rere lo s'ajule orun</i>	The good person has gone to heaven
<i>O d' arinako, o d' oju ala</i>	It is on the road, in the dream
<i>K'a to tun f'aju ganni ara wa,</i>	That we see again
<i>Ma j'okun, ma j'ekolo,</i>	Don't eat the millipede or the earthworm
<i>Ohun won nje l'ajule orun ni k'o je</i>	Eat whatever they eat in heaven
<i>Sun're, eni rere, orun re o.</i>	Sleep in peace, good person; farewell!

The widows of the deceased play the most significant part in the mourning of their husbands. In the past among the Kumbuo (Ifie 1987: 80) the widows of the deceased were made to sit on the bare ground near the coffin, facing north, and with their bodies rubbed with dust or ashes. (It is important to note that this was only the occasion when women were allowed to sit on the ground without placing anything on it.) During the period of mourning they were not permitted to use any form of jewelry. The Yoruba had the custom that the widow of a deceased husband was not allowed to go out of the house at all for three months. She could not go to the market, the farm or any other place. In the distant past she was even obliged to sleep on the grave of her husband for three months. She was also required to go to the grave three times a day for seven days to weep and to pay respect to him. For these three months her hair which she had loosened on the day her husband died, she might not plait; she

also might not wash nor change her clothes. After three months, had passed, she would shave her head. Then she is free to go out, but only after she has received a sacrifice Daramola and Jeje 1995: 153). Similarly, among the Nupe, widows were expected to mourn for forty days. Apart from being required to wear simple dresses of mourning, they were prohibited from washing or changing their clothes, doing their hair, and leaving the compound for four months (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 263). Among the Igbo the first phase of the mourning usually lasts for seven days. In the past, at dawn of the seventh day, the widows were brought out of their confinement and washed ritually. This ritual concluded the first phase of their widowhood. They could then go to the farm, the market and the stream. But they could not attend ceremonies of any kind, or visit anyone until the second phase was over, which was the fortieth day. In some cases, the yoke of widowhood lasted for one year. If the widow was pregnant before the death of her husband, she was in the yoke as long as she carried the baby (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 256ff.).

As we have said, the mourning period varies from place to place. Among the Kumbuo it is concluded formally on the third or fourth day of the burial by all the members of the family washing all the clothes they had worn during the funeral ceremonies. The widows put away all the beddings they had shared with the deceased when he was alive. Their deceased husband is thereby ritually divorced. From this moment on the former husband passes on to be a guardian spirit of the widows' children. She is now traditionally permitted to ask members of her former husband's family to pray to the deceased for the safeguarding of her children and to bestow prosperity on them (Ifie 1987: 80).

According to Awolalu and Dopamu, among the Nupe, the mourners continue in this sorrowful mood for eight days. During this period the relatives of the deceased may not wash, dress their hair or change their clothes. Neither the old people nor the women may leave their huts, except to relieve themselves. Young men observe the regulation for only four days so that they may prepare for the feast coming on the eighth day. Among the Akan of Ghana, on the sixth day of the burial process all the blood relatives of the deceased shave their heads. The hair is then placed in a special pot. At sunset some women take the pot to the graveside with some food and all the utensils from the hut, specially built for the occasion. These are deposited in a particular part of the cemetery, and the deceased is told that the ritual is finished (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979: 263, 269). It must be pointed out, however, that many of these traditions have changed significantly.

D SOCIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF FUNERAL MOURNING

Several elements of mourning in both the Old Testament and Africa are meant to play certain sociological roles in the society. Washing the corpse, shaving it or plaiting the hair, decorating it with beautiful clothes, all indicate the desire to dignify the deceased. It is obvious that this honour is not bestowed on the dead

body but on the personality which it represents. But this desire is indicated more in those self-abasing measures which the people inflict upon themselves during mourning. They include such self-punishments and discomfort as putting on sackcloth, rubbing body with earth or ashes, making cuts on the body, fasting, not washing or changing clothes, seeping on the grave, etcetera.

Another function of mourning is the preservation of cultural heritage. The significance of a socio-cultural system based on the traditions of a people is best appreciated, as Ademiluka (2003:136) points out, in Emile Durkheim's functionalist theory of religion with respect to the social organisation of aboriginal tribes in Australia. Durkheim maintained that religious activities enabled those tribes to take cognisance of themselves as collectives, to symbolize their social order, and, in the representation of a totemic animal, to gain an objective sense of their own society. By means of myths and rituals they were able to entertain collective sentiments and express a sense of social unity. Thus, when a people come together to mourn the deceased in their own traditional way, they unwittingly gain a renewed and serious sense of themselves and the legitimacy of their social organisation. Occasions like these enable the re-union of people and the reassertion of their solidarity.

In both the Old Testament and Africa, the dirge as an aspect in the mourning process serves a very significant role in the preservation of cultural heritage. As studied by F. B. O. Akporobaro (2004: 59, 258) with respect to Africa, the dirge is one of those song poems that feature in all aspects of African life and are well-known in terms of the social occasions they are associated with. Other examples of these song poems include work songs, war songs, rowing songs, drinking songs, and etcetera. A song poem is an expression of personal mood or thoughts, sung with or without the accompaniment of musical instruments like drums, rattles, bottles or the knocking of sticks. The funeral dirge is not just a formless cry of bereavement; it is a highly stylistic form of expression that is governed by specific poetic recitative conventions used to express the feelings of the mourners in determinate form and personal procedure. Ifie (1982: 141) recognised the value of traditional songs for the identity of a people when in 1977 he went about collecting dirges used by the Kumbuo in their burial ceremonies. His aim was to save a "great treasure from being lost to posterity." Ogbonna (2003: 95) also says the Igbo find meaning in the funeral ceremonies of their deceased parents when traditional music is involved.

Among the attributes of the deceased sung in a Yoruba dirge is his *oriki* (or praise names). As defined by E.A. Ayandele (1966: 258), *oriki* is a sort of blank verse, often lengthy, transmitted from generation to generation by rote, depicting the characteristics and events in a family's history, and always a source of inspiration to the members of the family whenever it is recited. Every Yoruba has his own *oriki*. It may be sung by professional bards or played by

drummers. Hence when a dirge is beautifully sung by a professional during a funeral ceremony the Yoruba people feel proud as a people with a distinct culture of their own.

Most of the elements of funeral mourning in Africa, especially in the days of yore, were meant to prepare the deceased for acceptance in the world of the ancestors. As we saw earlier, the purpose of *adie-irano* among the Yoruba, for example, was to make the road to the next world smooth for the deceased. Similarly, the purpose of washing and decorating the corpse was to make him neat enough for acceptance in the world of the ancestors. Because it was believed that he would become an ancestor himself, the deceased was buried inside the house where his children would continue to worship him in that capacity. The deceased was buried with all the food and materials he was expected to need on his journey. On the whole, it was believed that the grander the funeral ceremonies of the deceased, the more acceptance he would be accorded in the world of the ancestors. It is important to note that it was only those people whose lives were considered beneficial to the community that were honoured with an appropriate burial. Evil and lazy people did not qualify for proper burial. Hence the sociological significance of treating the deceased according to the life he has lived, inculcated in the African the desire to live a good life so that he would be dignified when he died, and accepted in the world of the ancestors. No doubt, most of these beliefs no longer hold sway. Those elements of funeral mourning that are still practiced are done customarily. But many Africans still want to live good lives so that they can be given a good burial when they die.

E IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGY IN AFRICA

It is evident that funeral mourning plays a sociological function in society. In Africa in particular, its most important role is that of the preservation of African cultural heritage. However, several aspects of this tradition, like other aspects of African culture, are dying away among African Christians due to Western civilization and the attitude of Christianity towards African Culture. Particularly, Christianity's discouragement of mourning is based on the belief in the resurrection of the body (1 Thess. 4: 13-18) and the fact that many African funeral rites are inseparable from African Traditional Religion. The contention here is how to accommodate these rites within Christianity in Africa without jeopardising the essence of the religion. Within this context, I want to suggest, in line with the popular argument that Christianity should identify with people's culture (e.g. Nthamburi 1983: 165; Adamo 2005: 9), that while we do away with those elements that are strictly illegal, anti-social, unhygienic and incompatible with Christianity, we should encourage others that serve to preserve African culture. Examples of the latter are the announcement of the death of aged persons with gunshots and traditional drums; the washing and

decorating of the corpse, a mourning period of several days, ritual crying, traditional music, the dirge, and the veneration of the dead as an ancestor.

As mentioned earlier, these elements signify that Africans place a high value on human life and play an important role in the preservation of African culture. As these rites do not in any way diminish the essence of Christianity, they should be incorporated into Christian burial programmes in Africa. As I (Ademiluka 2007: 281) have argued elsewhere, since veneration is different from worship, African Christians should be able to design programmes to commemorate the good deeds of their ancestors. The African Synod of the Catholic Church (Ogbonna 2003: 97) recognised this fact when it recommended “that ancestor veneration, taking due precaution not to diminish true worship of God ... should be permitted with ceremonies devised, authorised, and proposed by competent authorities in the church.” Hence African funeral rites which recognise the deceased as joining the world of ancestors need not be condemned as long as they heed this warning.

F CONCLUSION

Funeral mourning was an important aspect of the life of ancient Israel and it still is an essential part of African culture. In both societies mourning serves some sociological functions. Several of the rites show that they place a high value on the human person. In Africa in particular mourning serves the purpose of preserving African cultural heritage. As they come together to mourn the deceased in the traditional way Africans are reminded that they are a distinct people with a rich culture. This gives them some sense of solidarity and cohesion. Hence in Africa, rather than allow this rich tradition to die, aspects of funeral mourning that are not detrimental to Christianity should be encouraged and incorporated into Christian burial service.

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