AOSIS

1 Thessalonians 4:13 and grief management in Nigerian churches

CrossMark
click for updates

Author:
Solomon O. Ademiluka[1,2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, Faculty of Human Resources, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

[2]Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria

Corresponding author:
Solomon Ademiluka
solademiluka@gmail.com

1 Thessalonians 4:13 indicates that the Thessalonian Christians were deeply grieved about the death of their loved ones because they were not sure of the status of the deceased in the supposedly imminent *parousia*. Paul admonishes them not to grieve like those who have no hope, a caution which is highly relevant in Nigeria where death causes harrowing grief for those bereaved. This article interrogated the extent to which the application of this text relieves grief for Nigerian Christians, as well as its attendant impact on the people's culture. The article employs the historical-critical exegesis and the phenomenological approach. It found that in the traditional African setting, the grieving process involved the performance of certain rituals which Christianity has condemned as heathen, as they contradict the injunction in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Such mourning practices have been substituted with Christian models. Still, unfortunately, apart from being ineffective in addressing grief, this pastoral approach has impacted negatively on the cultural heritage and identity of Nigerian Christians. Therefore, for Christian burial in Nigeria to be desirable and effective in addressing mourners' grief, there is a need for it to accommodate traditional practices as much as possible.

Contribution: The article contributes to the interaction of Christianity with African culture. It argues that, for a Christian burial to be effective in addressing grief in Nigeria, there is a need for interaction with traditional mourning practices.

Keywords: Thessalonian Christians; the *parousia*; grief management; African mourning rituals; Christian burial in Nigeria.

Introduction

During his second missionary journey (*c.* 48–52 CE), having just been released from prison in Philippi, Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, visited Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia (Constable 2015:1; De Villiers 2008:3; cf. Ac 16 & 17; 1 Th 1:9). Because of the persecution that broke out against them, the apostles had to flee Thessalonica for Athens, which caused Paul to leave earlier 'than he had anticipated' (Tooth 2023:1). However, Paul must have sent Timothy back to establish the Thessalonian church (1 Th 3:1), and he later reported to the former the state of this church (3:6). Some had argued, though, that Paul received a letter from the Thessalonians through Timothy when the latter returned from Thessalonica (Malherbe 1990:246–257; Walton 1995:231). Whichever way, in the meantime 'pressing issues had arisen' (Tooth 2023:1) among the Thessalonian Christians; and written 50 or 51 CE, 1 Thessalonians represents Paul's response to these issues (De Villiers 2008:3). Among them must have been matters bordering on the intense persecution of the Thessalonian Christian community, and some feeling of abandonment by Paul, the founder (Nsiah 2024:3). Most important for this article, however, are certain doctrinal issues relating to the παρουσια, which 'arose within the congregation following the death of some of its members', in the persecution (Malysz 2003:66). The Thessalonian Christians seem to have been grieved sorely 'about the death of their loved ones', being confused about the status of the deceased in the much awaited second coming of Jesus (Nsiah 2024:3). Consequently, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 Paul assures the congregation that both the dead and the living will equally experience the *parousia*. Nonetheless, the focus of this essay is on verse 13 where the apostle exhorts the bereaved Thessalonian Christians not to grieve over the deceased like those who have no hope beyond death. Paul's admonition on grieving is relevant in the traditional African context, where the loss of loved ones is a constant source of harrowing grief to the bereaved. 'Grief is conceptualised as a form' of anxiety arising from separation (Nwosu et al. 2017:48). Relative to this study, it 'refers to the range of emotional and physical responses that an individual may experience following the loss of a loved one' (Adibe 2022:77). Research has indicated that 'funeral rituals play a significant role' in grief management (Aluede & Ikhidero 2024:96). However, in Nigeria the pastoral application of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 has

greatly impacted on the traditional funeral rituals, intending to lessen grief, among other purposes. Thus, both the traditional and Christian burial rites coexist and influence each other in such a syncretic way that Nigerian Christian communities are faced with the 'complexities of maintaining traditional [*ritual*] practices in the face of dominant' Christian rites (Aluede & Ikhidero 2024:97). Hence, this article interrogates the extent to which the pastoral approach relieves grief, as well as its attendant impact on the people's culture. The article employs the historical-critical exegesis and the phenomenological approach. Under the historical-critical exegesis, otherwise known as historical criticism, the biblical interpreter takes into account issues such as the literary form, the possible historical situation and date of composition of a text, the meaning of the words in the original language (Krentz 1975:6), and then attempts 'to reconstruct a history as a background to facilitate [*a*] better understanding of the text' (Cranford 2002:150). In this article, this method is employed as applicable for the study of 1 Thessalonians 4:13. For the discussion of grief in African mourning practices as well as the application of the text in Nigerian churches, the article adopts the phenomenological method of study which involves the researcher's observation and participation to describe 'the natural way of appearance of a phenomenon' and to gain insights into its meaning and essence (Qutoshi 2018:215). Greening (2019:88) opines that the critical step of any phenomenological research is the description; hence, many have seen a collaboration between this approach and the descriptive method which, as defined by Nassaji (2015:130), simply means to 'describe a phenomenon and its characteristics'. The phenomenological approach is applied in this article, as the author has consistently participated in both traditional and Christian burials.

Grief for the deceased in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: An exegesis

Ascough (2004:521) notes that in his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul is aware of at least two issues that affected the congregation, namely the question of 'proper conduct for Christians' (1 Th 4:1–12) and questions about those who had died (4:13). Therefore, having exhorted the congregation in 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12 to live as holy people of God, in verses 13–18 Paul encourages them not to be unduly sorrowful 'over the deceased members of the church' because they will rise again at Christ's *parousia* (Nsiah 2024:3). Contrary to the feeling of the Thessalonian Christians, the dead in Christ before he comes are not lost but will rise before the living. Hence, they should not be unduly grieved but comfort one another with this belief.

Verse 13 reads: 'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope' (King James Version [KJV]). This exegesis will consider the verse in two parts, namely grieving in the church over deceased members, and the encouragement not to grieve over the dead like those who have no hope. As indicated in the verse, among the

circumstances that warranted Paul's correspondence with the Thessalonians was 'the death of some of their members' (Cornelius 2001:439; cf. Chapa 1994:156). Paul says the Thessalonians should not be ignorant about the status of 'them which were asleep' (κεκοιμημενων). The Greek word derives from κοιμαω, which refers to normal sleep but is used here figuratively to refer to the dead, specifically the dead in Christ (Malysz 2003:67; cf. v. 14). It is commonly affirmed that in the Graeco-Roman world, sleep 'was a common euphemism for death' (Keener 1993:592; cf. Westphal 1977:3).

Thus, there was a certain concern about the dead that was 'causing grief' in the Christian community (Tooth 2023:2). The Thessalonians thought that those who had died 'would somehow be at a disadvantage' at the *parousia* (Tooth 2023:2; cf. vv. 14–15). Some may think that members who died before Jesus's coming 'would remain in their graves' and would not participate in the event (Marshall 1994:1282). The Thessalonian Christians' concern about the status of their departed members implies that they expected the *parousia* 'imminently in their own lifetimes' (Gieschen 2012:40; cf. Marshall1993:58), the notion which they most probably derived from the teaching of Paul himself. Given passages such as 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 4:15 and 5:4, it is suggested by the majority of scholars that 'Paul expected to live to see the *parousia*' (Gathercole 2024:232). In this way, Paul shared with early Christianity 'a firm conviction about the imminent return of Christ' (De Villiers 2008:11). According to Wanamaker (1990:165), there was 'a moment-by-moment expectancy' in the early church such that 1st-century Christians did not entertain the thought that they would die before Jesus returned. It is therefore highly probable that the Thessalonians' concern about their departed members was caused by their understanding of 'what the missionaries themselves had communicated about the last things' (Garrow 2009:196; cf. Kim 2002:231; Wenham 1981:346). With the belief that Jesus was about to return, the Thessalonians were thus worried about the 'status of believers who had died' in that event (Sihite 2021:75). It follows, then, that Paul had not explicitly made them understand the relation of survivors to the dead at the coming of Jesus. If Paul had taught that 'we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep' (v.15, Revised Standard Version, RSV), then the Thessalonian Christians must have understood him to mean that 'all who believed would see the *parousia*' (Constable 2015:30). Nonetheless, Tooth (2023:2) opines that the Thessalonians' concern about the dead might have been enhanced by their possible interaction with certain Jewish literature from around the 1st century which contain statements to the effect that 'those who are alive at the end [*are*] in a particularly privileged position' (cf. 4 Ez 5:41; 6:18–28; 7:27–28; 9:8; 13:24).

Thus, when members of the congregation began to die, the Thessalonians became utterly distressed at the reality of the physical separation from their deceased brethren, having no hope of reunion with them at the *parousia*. These Christians were troubled, not because they doubted the resurrection of believers, but because they feared that their departed

members would be disadvantaged at the return of Christ. As Richard (1995:232) puts it, the resurrection of the dead is not the issue, but 'the status of those who die before the Lord's return'. Therefore, Ascough (2004:521) is correct when he suggests that the grief of the Thessalonians was based on 'a concern over belonging in the community'. As members of the new Christian sect, they had now joined a new family, and their grief therefore represented a 'struggling with their responsibilities toward those who have died' (Ascough 2004:521). They were confronted with the question as to whether the deceased members of the new family remained members of the larger family of God and his kingdom. In the words of Mack (1995:110), they were asking whether their 'dead still belongs to us and we to them'. In Ascough's (2004:535) summary, underlying the Thessalonians' concern seems to be whether their departed members were still part of the community – 'clearly an issue of belonging and identity'.

In his response, Paul says to the Thessalonian Christians, 'that ye sorrow not (μη λυπησθε), even as others which have no hope' (KJV). The verb λυπησθε derives from the root λυπεω, meaning 'to feel sad, to hurt, to destroy' (Sihite 2021:76). In other places Paul uses the noun λυπη [grief, sorrow] 'to express his deep sorrow toward actual death or spiritual pain near to death' (Cho 2013:39; cf. Phlp 2:27; Rm 9:2). In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, λυπη would describe 'the sad, sorrowful, and distressed state of the Christian community' arising from the death of certain of their members (Nsiah 2024:3). Paul's charge to the Thessalonians not to grieve like others, resonates with consolatory letters of philosophers of his day, who often consoled 'the recipients of their letters by saying, "Do not grieve", or "Do not grieve too much"' (Keener 1993:592). Thus, Paul's admonition falls within the idea that one should grieve with moderation; the notion which, although not shared by all philosophical schools, 'became the most common and popular in the Graeco-Roman world' (Cornelius 2001:438). This manner of consolation involved the exhortation to accept misfortune bravely, and 'not be overcome excessively by grief', as that is unworthy and could be harmful (Cornelius 2001:438; cf. Chapa 1994:151). According to Cho (2013:35), in Paul's age, the Epicureans and Stoics were the chief philosophical schools, who wielded a profound influence 'particularly in the philosophy and theology of death and the afterlife'. Among their writings were consolatory letters, which, like 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, reassured the recipients 'about the fate and the location of the dead' (Cho 2013:37). Such authors included Cicero, Seneca, Pliny the Younger, and Plutarch, 'most of whom were heavily influenced by Stoicism' (Cho 2013:37). Among these, Plutarch 'moves nearest to the grief and consolation temperament' (Cho 2013:39) of the New Testament, sharing parallels with Paul. For instance, reminiscent of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 is Plutarch's 'frequent consolatory reference of' λυπη to designate grief of bereavement (Cho 2013:39). Given these parallels, many have concluded that Paul adopted recognisable consolatory styles, reshaping them in theological and 'Christocentric fashion' (Walton 1995:231; cf. Berglund 2022:540; Malherbe 1983:238–356; 1992:278–293).

Paul does not inhibit the Thessalonians from grieving for their deceased members but stresses that they must not grieve like others who have no hope. Paul must have recognised the fact that 'experiencing depression after a loss is very natural and an expected response' (Adibe 2022:79). He is therefore not saying that the Thessalonian Christians should suspend their natural ability to experience and express sorrow for the death of their loved ones. Rather, he means Christians should not grieve for their deceased fellow Christians 'as pagans grieve because Christians have hope' (Keener 1993:592). The Thessalonian Christians may grieve, but should not 'experience any such pagan grief – a hopeless grief' (Westphal 1977:3). Thus, many interpreters believe that by *others* Paul refers to non-believers in Christ whose manner of mourning depicts their hopelessness; Paul is thus here discouraging 'pagan excess in mourning' (Letšosa 2010:2). Keener (1993:592) states that most pagans did not share 'the philosophers' optimism or neutrality toward death, [*hence they*] engaged in very cathartic grief rituals'. Cho (2013:36) opines that Paul's exhortation not to grieve like those who have no hope may reflect the Epicurean thought that 'hope is for the living, but the ones who die are without hope'. In this way, the Epicureans denied the whole idea of resurrection from death, their goal in life being as Cho (2013) states:

> [*T*]o achieve peace of mind and tranquillity … When the physical body dies, the soul also disintegrates. When a person is dead, his whole self dies. Therefore, there is nothing to fear in death and there is no future punishment. (p. 36)

Paul's teaching on resurrection therefore was, albeit implicitly, a reaction to Epicurean thought 'prevalent of the pagan society in his age, including the Thessalonian Gentile people' (Cho 2013:36). For instance, Paul makes fun of the Epicureans' maxim when he writes, 'If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die' (Cho 2013:36; 1 Cor 15:32, RSV).

Thus, in saying that the Thessalonians should not grieve like those who have no hope, Paul differentiates between the grief of Christians and that of non-Christians, and 'the heart of the difference is hope', that is, the hope of resurrection for the former, which he explains further in verses 14–18 (Westphal 1977:3). Paul means that grief, occurring on account of death, is indispensable, but 'hope in Christ and his resurrection mitigates the degree of grieving' (Nsiah 2024:3). Given this hope, death is not something to respond to with excessive grieve since the bereaved have 'the hope of [*eternal*] reunion [*with*] the dead' (Cho 2013:46).

To have a proper understanding of the application of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 in Nigerian churches, it is necessary to discuss grieving as associated with death in the traditional African setting. Therefore, in the following section the article examines grief in African mourning practices, as obtained in Nigeria.

Grief in the traditional African mourning practices: The Nigerian experience

In Africa, grief manifests in varying degrees at the various stages of mourning, from the moment a person dies to the interment and throughout 'the mourning period [which] varies in different communities' (Obielosi & Okeyi 2023:120). Among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, the death of an elderly person is usually heralded by intensive crying. For instance, among the Kumbuo people of the Niger Delta region, the relatives of the deceased would wail, weep, sigh, and beat their chests (Ifie 1987:73). In the same vein, among the Igbo of the southeastern part, the death of a loved one is 'announced by loud cries of mourning' (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979:256). A prominent feature of the announcement 'is the intensity of wailing, weeping and hysteria' (Okorie 1995:79). On losing her husband, usually a Yoruba woman would cry bitterly, 'often falling into the ready hands of others surrounding her to prevent her from injuring herself' (Obielosi & Okeyi 2023:120). Okorie (1995:79) states that among the Igbo, in their wailing the friends and relatives of the deceased would regret the loss, recounting his or her achievements and benevolence. During the period of lying in state, moments of outbursts of crying and expressing grief happen. In modern times, at this stage in the mourning process, a wake is organised, which is usually characterised by singing, dancing, and merrymaking. But oftentimes, it turns out to become 'a time for various forms of express[ion] of sorrow' (Ademiluka 2009:14). In the past, among the Kumbuo, during the period of lying in state, grief expression was ritualised when at cockcrow the women in the family of the deceased performed 'a ritual crying exercise', narrating the good things they would miss by the irreparable loss (Ifie 1987:78). The interment also witnesses outbursts of crying as friends and relatives pay their last respect by throwing handfuls of earth on the casket inside the grave, with some uttering their farewell prayers in sorrowful tones. In the past, among the Yoruba of the southwestern part, drumming and the singing of 'traditional songs usually accompanied the rhythm of the spades, and the lifting of legs' as young men covered up the casket with sand (Ademiluka 2009:14). This was another time of loud crying and wailing by the relatives of the deceased because he or she 'is physically departing from them forever' (Ademiluka 2009:14). According to Ifie (1987:78), in the traditional setting among the Kumbuo, the physical separation was symbolised by the widows of the deceased walking across the grave, 'ritually proclaiming that both they and the deceased are now physically separated'. Thus, in Africa 'the grieving process involves the performing of various … rituals' (Kgatle & Segalo 2021:2) by which the bereaved 'symbolically express[es] certain feelings and thoughts' (Makgahlela et al. 2019:1). The singing of dirges at the interment and other stages in the mourning process occasions moments of intense grief. In the traditional African setting, dirges formed an important aspect of mourning, especially for elderly persons and kings. The relatives of the dead person were usually moved to tears when a traditional poet sang dirges in a sorrowful tone, 'narrating the good deeds of the departed, his genealogy, his praise names, and his farewell' (Ademiluka 2009:15). It is important to note that the dirge may also reduce grief, just as it may heighten it. For instance, among the Yoruba, when a dirge is beautifully presented by a professional, reciting the *oriki* [praise epithets] of the deceased, his or her 'people feel proud as a people with a distinct culture of their own' (Ademiluka 2009:18). And no doubt, in that state of mind, their grief is reduced. A popular Yoruba dirge goes thus:

> *Baba lo gbere a ko rii mo* [Father has gone forever, we see him no more]
>
> *Erin wo, erin lo* [the elephant has fallen, the elephant is gone]
>
> *Ajanaku subu ko le g'oke* [the elephant has fallen, cannot get up]
>
> *Eni rere lo s'ajule orun* [the good person has gone to heaven]
>
> *O d' arinako, o d' oju ala* [it is on the road, in the dream]
>
> *K'a to tun f'oju ganni ara wa,* [that we see again]
>
> *Ma j'okun, ma j'ekolo,* [don't eat the millipede or the earthworm]
>
> *Ohun won nje l'ajule orun ni k'o je* [eat whatever they eat in heaven]
>
> *Sun're, eni rere, orun re o* [sleep in peace, good person; farewell] (Ademiluka 2009:15; Daramola & Jeje 1995:155).

In Africa, the intensity of grief is determined by 'certain circumstances surrounding the death of a loved one', especially the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved (Nwosu et al. 2017:48). As expressed by Oyebode and Owens (2013:61), '[e]xactly who grieves, and to what extent, may vary considerably'. This fact is best illustrated by the role of widows in mourning their husbands, especially those who die in old age. It has been demonstrated that grief arising from spousal death may manifest in 'various depressive symptoms' such as sadness, fearfulness, hopelessness, outbursts of anger, frustration, insomnia, and restlessness, among other feelings (Muthangya, Kaaria & Katiba 2018:61). Okorie (1995:79) states that among the Igbo, the moment an old man dies, the bereaved wife 'runs about wailing at the top of her voice'. In the traditional setting, as a sign of the expression of sorrow, among the Yoruba the widow was restricted in the house for 3 months following the death of her husband. She was not allowed to go to 'the market, the farm or any other place' (Ademiluka 2009:14). She had to sleep on her husband's grave for 3 months, and for 7 days she would 'go to the grave three times a day to weep' (Ademiluka 2009:14). Similarly, among the Igbo the widow of a deceased man had to 'wake up at midnight to wail for the dead husband' (Nwosu et al. 2017:52). Nwosu et al. (2017:52) found that this practice 'heighten[ed] the grief of … the widow'. As an outward sign of grief, from the day her husband died, the Yoruba widow had to leave her hair loose for 3 months; and after 3 months her head was shaved. For those 3 months, the widow 'might not wash nor change her clothes' (Ademiluka 2009:16). Even in modern times, in specific rural Yoruba communities a widow is expected to sit on a bare floor or a mat; she is expected 'to eat from

broken plates and cook with broken pots' (Obielosi & Okeyi 2023:120). Similar practices indicating grief also applied among the Nupe of northern Nigeria. Here, widows were 'prohibited from washing or changing their clothes, [or] doing their hair, and leaving the compound for four months' (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979:263). As in some other African communities, among the Igbo, certain mechanisms were put in place to ensure that 'a widow is grieving properly [for] her deceased husband' (Kotzé, Lishje & Rajuili-Masilo 2012:754). For instance, in certain places the *Umuada*, that is, the patrilineal daughters of the deceased's family have the responsibility to ensure that the widow performs the mourning rites. 'They may accept that she is crying loud enough for their brother or … accuse her of not crying loud enough' (Nwoga 1989:3). To ensure that the widow cries enough, the *Umuada* may make her sit on the bare ground and 'sneer and jeer at her' (Nwoga 1989:3).

Nonetheless, the various Nigerian ethnic groups have ways of relieving grief for the bereaved. Right from the day a person dies, relatives of the deceased gather in his or her compound to 'condole and console members of the family' (Ojong 2008:83). Moreover, throughout the mourning period people come to keep company with the bereaved family. In their research on the Igbo, Nwosu et al. (2017:52) found that 'the continuous gathering of friends and relatives in the bereaved compound … helps to reduce grief'. The gathering also helps to relieve grief in that it prevents 'the bereaved from engaging in any physical activity' during the mourning period (Nwosu et al. 2017:55). In other words, the bereaved people are assisted to regain emotional strength when the visiting relatives and friends help in conducting domestic chores. According to Ojong (2008), during the mourning period:

> The immediate members of the afflicted family are helped by members of the community in virtually everything ranging from water fetching, wood hewing, collection of food stuff from the farms, etc. Even the cooking is done by members of the community. Within [this period], food and drinks … come mainly from other families. (p. 83)

Thus, communing with the bereaved and assisting them, have 'therapeutic value that assists the griever in moving on with her life' (Manala 2015:3). These gestures belong to what Nwoye (2005:153) calls, *African grief work* invented for the successful healing of 'the psychological wounds and pain of bereaved persons'.

The foregoing analysis represents the traditional mourning practices which the churches in Nigeria have consistently sought to change, in consonance with 1 Thessalonians 4:13. In the section below, this article examines Christian burial rites in Nigerian churches as they resonate with this text.

Christian burial in Nigeria: Practising 1 Thessalonians 4:13

In conformity with 1 Thessalonians 4:13, church burial in Nigeria seeks to substitute heathen mourning practices with Christian-formulated models. As seen in the preceding section, the most conspicuous mourning act is the excessive weeping and screaming by the bereaved immediately when someone is dead, and at regular intervals during the mourning period. For Africans, this gives them the feeling that 'they have appropriately and respectfully marked the passing of the deceased' (Oyebode & Owens 2013:62). Conversely, at a Christian funeral, with its Western influence, mourners are 'expected to behave with restraint … [in] their distress' (Oyebode & Owens 2013:62). Moreover, Christian mourners are expected to sustain their faith in God even in their grief. Hence, to assist the bereaved, pastors and other members of the deceased's church visit the family to console them with prayer and exhortation. Mokhutso (2021:6) attests to its significance in the lives of bereaved persons, when the church minister goes to them and 'consoles them … with the comforting word of God'. Prayer and exhortation also form the main contents of the various burial programmes. The main purposes of a Christian funeral are to reflect on the deceased's life while alive and to give emotional strength to the bereaved 'to cope with their loss' (Adega & Jando 2022:34). Ajayi (2017:57) notes that prayers are a 'strategic way of relieving the pain of death in the bereaved'. Christian funeral preachers say the prayers in such a way that the bereaved are reminded of the tenets of the Christian faith, particularly the hope of resurrection. Hence, Adega and Jando (2022:34) affirm that in a Christian funeral, the dead are buried in the 'hope of the resurrection of the body'. Ajayi (2017:47–49) reported that in the various church funerals he attended, one way that preachers aroused the resurrection hope in the bereaved, was to refer to the person being buried as a *body* rather than a *corpse*. In other words, understanding the lexical weight of the word *corpse,* as connoting hopelessness, the preachers carefully avoid it in their funeral sermons. This they do in following the teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that 'Christians in the real sense do not die but sleep in the Lord' (Ajayi 2017:47). They consciously and deliberately reinforce this belief in their prayers and sermons 'as a soothing balm to heal the pain' of the bereaved (Ajayi 2017:49). Another strategy funeral preachers employ to relieve grief for the bereaved, is making 'reference to the good deeds of the deceased' (Ajayi 2017:50). In resonance with 1 Thessalonians 4:13, the preachers hope that in this way they would convince the bereaved that the deceased would 'make heaven; hence, there is no need to be sorrowful' (Ajayi 2017:50). Oyebode and Owens (2013:63) opine that faith in an eventual reunion 'has been found to be comforting'.

Another aspect of traditional mourning that has virtually given way to Christianity and modernity, is the employment of traditional songs. Growing up in my part of Yorubaland, there were those traditional mourning songs we used to sing, accompanied by drumming and dancing, going about the length and breadth of the village, with some young men carrying the coffin. Singing of local mourning songs with drumming at the graveside resonated with the rhythm of the lifting of legs by young men inside the grave, marching in the process of covering up the coffin with sand. This tradition effectively relieved grief for the bereaved, as they too

participated in singing and dancing. But, considered heathen by the churches in compliance with 1 Thessalonians 4:13, it has since been replaced with Christian hymns, choruses, and music. Abiose (2021:175) buttresses this fact when she states that a Christian burial is devoid of all the celebrations and festivities 'associated with "pagan" burials …. It [*is*] a solemn affair marked by Christian prayers and hymns'; as these are believed to help in ameliorating 'the agony and pain of the bereaved', as earlier mentioned (Ajayi 2017:59).

More importantly, most of the rituals by which widows used to express grief for their late husbands, as discussed in the preceding section, have been discarded from Christian burial, as they are considered to conform to what is meant by grieving 'as those who have no hope' in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. While in traditional African beliefs 'there is some evidence of the therapeutic value of widowhood rites', the mainstream Christianity maintains that they contradict human dignity, respect, and decorum (Manala 2015:4). According to Kalu (1989:143), they are often 'enmeshed in myth or a mysterious outlay'. Obielosi and Okeyi (2023:123) observe that the impact of Christianity on widowhood practices in Nigeria 'is highly conspicuous', referring to them as obnoxious. The authors find this impact on rituals such as shaving hair and wearing black clothes, among others. Unlike in the past when widows had to shave their heads and some other parts of the body, presently the reverse is the case because hair shaving, as a sign of mourning, is 'for unbelievers who are not Christians' (Obielosi & Okeyi 2023:123). Unlike before when widows would put on black clothes during their mourning period, now in line with 1 Thessalonians 4:13, which encourages Christians not to mourn like traditional people who are hopeless, 'Christian widows mourn with white cloth because death is a passage to eternity' (Obielosi & Okeyi 2023:123). In place of the traditional practice of mourning for months and years, most denominations in Nigeria end mourning for a widow on the 40th day after the death of her husband. In the Roman Catholic Church, a funeral service is conducted, 'usually not more than three weeks' from the date of death (Obielosi & Okeyi 2023:124). This practice is believed to alleviate the suffering associated with the prolonged period of mourning in the traditional setting.

In the section below, the article examines the extent to which this pastoral approach relieves grief, as well as the concomitant impact on the people's culture.

Appraising the desirability of the pastoral approach

As discussed in the preceding section, Nigerian churches have replaced most traditional mourning practices with Christian models in compliance with 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Significant in this regard are those rituals by which widows symbolically expressed grief for their dead husbands. Admittedly, some of these practices would have had negative effects on the performers. In this category are rituals like

unduly restricting a widow's movement, making her go to her husband's grave at night to weep, not taking a bath, leaving her hair unkempt, and not washing her clothes throughout the mourning period, which might last several months. One would agree with Nwosu et al. (2017:54) that rather than lessening the pain of the bereaved, in effect these practices added to their grief, and exposed a widow 'to humiliating physical and psychological violence'. However, other rituals are not necessarily harmful, such as leaving the hair loose, if properly kempt, sitting on the bare floor as long as the health of the woman can accommodate it, as well as cooking with and eating from a broken pot. There are other practices that are completely harmless, which are equally being disallowed. As earlier mentioned, loud crying in the process of mourning is discouraged by the churches because it is designated as a heathen practice according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13. On the contrary, it has been discovered that 'wailing at the death of a loved one is necessary to release emotion' as Nwosu et al. (2017) explain:

> Those who [*do*] not wail at the death of their loved ones, end up having more depression because their emotions are bottled up. And they [*find*] expression in different psychological disorder[*s*]…. [*W*]hen we experience intense emotional distress such as [*the*] death of someone we love, our bodies produce a number of powerful painkilling chemicals [*such as*] tears [*which*] … carry the chemicals to the surface of our eyeballs, where they are absorbed and may serve to ease the emotional pain. … [*Therefore,*] crying is an important part of the grieving process. (pp. 54, 55)

It was shown in the previous section that bereaved people got relief when they participated in traditional mourning songs and dancing. Hence, Ogbonna (2003:95) asserts that the Igbo find meaning in funeral ceremonies 'when traditional music is involved'. The funeral dirge may not only reduce grief but also heighten it, as discussed earlier. Nonetheless, it has other cultural purposes, such that in those days the funeral of an elderly person was incomplete without the dirge. To this end, Akporobaro (2004:258) opines that the dirge was one of those song poems that were well-known as a necessary part of most social occasions. Akporobaro (2004) explains that:

> 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. (p. 258)

Ifie (1982:141) considers dirges as an integral part of burial among the Kumbuo when, in 1977, he went about collecting them to save a 'great treasure from being lost to posterity'. Unfortunately, traditional songs, as an aspect of burial, are being forgotten among the people of Nigeria due to the influence of Christianity. Writing on the people of Elugwu Ezike among the Igbo, Onu and Solomon-Etefia (2019:119) state that Christianity has negatively affected the traditional burial in that community, which has led 'to the disappearance of the dirges associated with … burial rituals'.

Thus, the pastoral approach to mourning in Nigeria has eradicated most of the traditional rituals by which African peoples expressed grief for the deceased. Unfortunately, it has not proved much more effective in addressing grief. In the first place, a Christian funeral is unable to relieve grief for the African mourners because it is not effectively adapted to the African context. Rather, it is based on a theology of grief that is meant to instruct practitioners of faith in the form of pastors and counsellors, on 'addressing grief when it arises among their followers' (Kgatle & Segalo 2021:3). Unlike African traditional mourning, Western theologians composed this theology, and 'concentrated extensively on individual healing … leaving gaps in collective grieving' (Kgatle & Segalo 2021:3). Such theology fails to recognise the fact that 'grieving in Africa cannot be easily individualised because it is a communal practice' (Baloyi 2024:8). Mention has been made above of mourning rituals that were not necessarily harmful, but which have given way to Christian models. Another problem with the Christian approach is the shortening of the mourning period. While the traditional mourning period of several months might be too long, a Christian funeral 'does not address the issue of … a mourning period' (Mokhutso 2021:5), as it does not formally recognise any period for mourning. After the initial visits of the pastor and the church members for the first few days, the bereaved family is left alone until the day of the interment, which may be some months, depending on the choice of the bereaved family. This means that the traditional communing and assisting the bereaved with the value of giving emotional strength to them are lost, and 'they suddenly feel abandoned and alone' (Oyebode & Owens 2013:61). Thus, the traditional rituals that relieved grief have been eradicated but not effectively replaced with better models. That is why the pastoral approach has not yielded much in relieving grief for African mourners. Despite the 'promise of reunion between the dead and the mourners, the physical separation of the dead from the living [remains] a most excruciating experience' (Ajayi 2017:44).

Christian burial in Nigeria is not only ineffective in addressing the grief of the bereaved, it has also eradicated all mourning rituals by which Africans were identified as a unique people. As Mukhutso (2021:5) puts it: '… the church seems not to be able to address their Africanness during the critical process of bereavement', thereby impacting negatively on the people's culture. As Western missionaries were concerned only about the evangelisation of Africans 'without recourse to their cultural feelings' (Obasola 2017:100), they failed to understand that burial rituals are not only theological and eschatological 'but must also encompass human values and local wisdom' (Tololiu et al. 2013:208). As expressed by Aluede and Ikhidero (2024:96), traditional burial rituals have significant value for the identity and existence of the people concerned. According to Aluede and Ikhidero (2024):

> The significance of these rituals extends beyond the mere commemoration of the deceased; [funeral rituals] are symbolic acts that hold deep meaning and value within the cultural fabric of a society. By examining death rituals, we can better understand the values, norms, and worldviews that shape a community's identity and provide a sense of continuity and connection with the past. (p. 96)

In other words, for Africans, observing traditional burial rituals is a way of preserving their values and identity as African people, as culture is said to be 'the protective shell of a community' (Mokhutso 2021:6). Thus, when Nigerian Christians come together to mourn their loved ones traditionally, 'they unwittingly gain a renewed and serious sense of themselves and the legitimacy of their social organisation' (Ademiluka 2009:17). Therefore, by neglecting traditional burial rituals, the Christian funeral accentuates the disregard for cultural heritage and identity among Nigerian Christians (Onu & Solomon-Etefia 2019:120; Tololiu et al. 2013:215). To this end, many have recognised the inadequacy of Christian funerals in relieving grief for African mourners and have therefore called for a relevant theology of grief that would recognise the communal life in Africa 'whereby mourners come together to wrestle with grief, rather than passively accepting it' (Kgatle & Segalo 2021:3). For instance, Nwoye (2000:59–72) calls for an African Grief Therapy (AGT) which takes seriously the traditional ways in which African communities respond to the loss of their loved ones. In another place, he calls it African grief work, defining it as 'the patterned ways invented in traditional communities for the successful healing of the psychological wounds and pain of bereaved persons' (Nwoye 2005:148).

In resonance with these propositions, for Christian funerals in Nigeria to be desirable, it will have to incorporate traditional practices as much as possible, since Nigerians need not lose their identity as Africans to be Christians. This echoes the popular argument that 'Christianity should identify with people's culture' (Ademiluka 2009:18; cf. Adamo 2005:9; Ademiluka 2003:134–142; Nthamburi 1983:165). As Okorie (1995:83) admits, the fact that Christianity has 'won and eaten deep' into the hearts of Nigerians, does not call for the eradication of the traditional culture, but indeed a modification of oppressive and crude practices (cf. Ademiluka 2009:18). This suggestion implies that a new model of Christian burial is required which 'retains traditional values while accommodating insights' from the Christian faith (Baloyi 2024:8). Such arrangement would reflect a balance between preserving the cultural heritage of Nigerian Christians and 'embracing modern religious practices' (Aluede & Ikhidero 2024:102). It is through this approach that the church in Nigeria can integrate local values and the truth of the Christian faith, thereby 'creating an inclusive and profound … growth of the congregation' (Tololiu et al. 2013:219).

Conclusion

1 Thessalonians 4:13 indicates that the Thessalonian Christians seem to have grieved sorely about the death of

their loved ones, as they were not sure of the status of the deceased in the much awaited *parousia*. For this reason, Paul admonishes them not to grieve like *others* who have no hope beyond death. Moreover, the dead in Christ will not be disadvantaged at the coming of Christ. *Others* are commonly held to refer to the heathen whose manner of grieving depicts that they have no hope in life after death. Paul's exhortation here finds relevance among most Nigerian ethnic groups, among whom death causes harrowing grief for the bereaved. In the traditional African setting, the grieving process involves the performance of varied rituals which Christianity has associated with the traditional religion, and therefore contrary to the injunction in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Hence, the Christian funeral in Nigerian churches principally seeks to substitute these supposedly heathen mourning practices with Christian models. Prayer, admonition, and Christian songs constitute the programme with the principal purpose of giving emotional strength to the bereaved, reminding them of the tenets of the Christian faith, particularly the hope of resurrection. However, with time Christian models have supplanted all traditional mourning practices and rituals by which Nigerians used to relieve grief, condemning them as 'pagan'. Admittedly, particular practices would have had negative effects on the performers, especially widows, but other practices that were completely harmless have been equally eradicated. Unfortunately, the Christian funeral has not proved more effective in addressing grief, as it is based on the Western theology of grief that concentrates on individual healing as against the African communal practice. More importantly, since traditional burial rituals have significant value for the identity and existence of the people concerned, Christian funerals have impacted negatively on the cultural heritage and identity of Nigerian Christians. Therefore, to be desirable and effective in addressing mourners' grief, the Christian burial in Nigeria will have to incorporate traditional practices into its programme.

Acknowledgements

Data availability

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

References

Abiose, O.O., 2021, 'Influence of Christianity on Yoruba burial rites in Ogbomoso L.G.A., Oyo State', *Jos Journal of Religion and Philosophy* 3(3), 166–178.

Adamo, D.T., 2005, *Explorations in African biblical studies*, Justice Jeco, Benin.

Adega, A.P. & Jando, F.S., 2022, 'Tiv traditionalists and the crave for Christian burial', *International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 10(7), 32–40.

Ademiluka, S.O., 2003, 'The impact of Christian missionary activity on the socio-cultural heritage of the O-Kun Yoruba', in A. Olukoju, Z.O. Apata & O. Akinwumi (eds.), *Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in the history and culture of a frontier zone*, pp. 134–142, Rex Charles, Ibadan.

Ademiluka, S.O., 2009, 'The sociological functions of funeral mourning: Illustrations from the Old Testament and Africa', *Old Testament Essays* 22(1), 9–20.

Adibe, C.V., 2022, 'Bereavement and grief: Their predictive impacts on sense of coherence among Nkpor natives in Anambra state, Nigeria', *Journal of Psychology and Behavioural Disciplines* 2(1), 76–89.

Ajayi, M.T., 2017, 'Language use and pain-relieving strategies in Christian funeral sermons and services in Nigeria', *Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education* 11(1), 42–63.

Akporobaro, F.B.O., 2004, *Introduction to African oral literature*, Princeton Publishing Company, Lagos.

Aluede, C.O. & Ikhidero, S.I., 2024, 'Syncretism and cultural resilience: The coexistence and evolution of traditional *Itolimin* and Christian burial practices in Esanland, Nigeria', *Journal of Contemporary Rituals and Traditions* 2(2), 95–108. https://doi.org/10.15575/jcrt.448

Ascough, R.S., 2004, 'A question of death: Paul's community-building language in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123(3), 509–530. https://doi.org/10.2307/3268045

Awolalu, J.O. & Dopamu, P.A., 1979, *West African traditional religion*, Onibon-Oje, Ibadan.

Baloyi, E.M., 2024, 'A critical evaluation of the impact of religious belief (Christianity) within post-colonial African burial rites: A South African perspective', *Religions* 15(2), 248. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020248

Berglund, C.J., 2022, 'Paul's rhetorical efforts to establish goodwill in First Thessalonians', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44(4), 539–560. https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X221087423

Chapa, J., 1994, 'Is first Thessalonians a letter of consolation?', *New Testament Studies* 40(1), 150–160. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500020506

Cho, J.K., 2013, 'The rhetorical approach to 1 Thessalonians in light of funeral oration', PhD thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

Constable, T.L., 2015, *Notes on 1 Thessalonians*, viewed 04 June 2024, from https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=1e2fecf0 e83e1635639c45e0b72d2d98f8548cd0.

Cornelius, E.M., 2001, 'The purpose of 1 Thessalonians', *HTS Teologiese Studies* 57(1 & 2), 435–446. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v57i1/2.1873

Cranford, L.L., 2002, 'Modern New Testament interpretation', in B. Corley, S.W. Lemke & G.I. Lovejoy (eds.), *Biblical hermeneutics: A comprehensive introduction to interpreting scripture*, 2nd edn., pp. 147–162, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN.

Daramola, O. & Jeje, A., 1995, *Awon asa ati orisa ile Yoruba*, Onibon-Oje, Ibadan.

De Villiers, P.G.R., 2008, 'The eschatology of 1 Thessalonians in the light of its spirituality', *Acta Theologica* 28(1), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.4314/actat. v28i1.48865

Garrow, A.J.P., 2009, 'The eschatological tradition behind 1 Thessalonians: *Didache* 16', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X09351055

Gathercole, S., 2024, 'Is there an imminent expectation in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18? Reconsidering Paul's Syntax', *Novum Testamentum* 66(2), 231–256. https://doi. org/10.1163/15685365-12341736

Gieschen, C.A., 2012, 'Christ's coming and the church's mission in 1 Thessalonians', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, 37–55.

Greening, N., 2019, 'Phenomenological research methodology', *Scientific Research Journal* VII(5), 87–92. https://doi.org/10.31364/SCIRJ/v7.i5.2019.P0519656

Ifie, J.E., 1987, 'Death and afterlife in Ezon religion: The evidence of Kumbuowei clan', *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 19(2), 73–89.

Kalu, W.J., 1989, 'Widowhood and its process in contemporary African society: A psycho-social study', *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 2(2), 143–152. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515078908256674

Keener, C.S., 1993, *The IVP Bible Leicester commentary: New Testament*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester.

Kgatle, M.S. & Segalo, P., 2021, 'Grieving during a pandemic: A psycho-theological response', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42(1), a2260. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2260

Kim, S., 2002, 'The Jesus tradition in 1–Thessalonians 4.13–5.11', *New Testament Studies* 48(2), 225–242. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688502000164

Kotzé, E., Lishje, L. & Rajuili-Masilo, N., 2012, '"Women … mourn and men carry on": African women storying mourning practices – A South African example', *Death Studies* 36(8), 742–766. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2011.604463

Krentz, E., 1975, *The historical-critical method*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA.

Letšosa, R., 2010, 'Liturgical aspects of funeral services in Reformed Churches of African origin', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 31(1), a361. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v31i1.361

Mack, B.L., 1995, *Who wrote the New Testament? The making of the Christian myth*, Harper, San Francisco, CA.

Makgahlela, M., Sodi, T., Nkoana, S. & Mokwena, J., 2019, 'Bereavement rituals and their related psychosocial functions in a Northern Sotho community of South Africa', *Death Studies* 45(2), 91–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1616852

Malherbe, A.J., 1983, 'Exhortation in first Thessalonians', *Novum Testamentum* 25(3), 238–256. https://doi.org/10.1163/156853683X00041

Malherbe, A.J., 1990, 'Did the Thessalonians write to Paul?', in R.T. Fortna & B.R. Gaventa (eds.), *The conversation continues: Studies in Paul and John in honor of J. Louis Martyn*, pp. 246–257, Abingdon, Nashville, TN.

Malherbe, A.J., 1992, 'Hellenistic moralists and the New Testament', in W. Haase (ed.), *Aufsteig und Niedergang der riimischen Welt II, 26.1*, pp. 267–333, De Gruyter, Berlin.

Malysz, P.J., 2003, 'Paul's use of the imagery of sleep and his understanding of the Christian life: A study in the Thessalonian correspondence', *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67(1), 66–78.

Manala, M.J., 2015, 'African traditional widowhood rites and their benefits and/or detrimental effects on widows in a context of African Christianity', *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 71(3), a2913. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2913

Marshall, I.H., 1993, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Marshall, I.H., 1994, '1 Thessalonians', in D.A. Carson, G.J. Wenham, J.A. Motyer & R.T. France (eds.), *New bible commentary*, pp. 1277–1285, InterVarsity Press, Nottingham.

Mokhutso, J., 2021, 'Are Methodist Church bereavement rituals sufficient for its black African members? A qualitative analysis of a church in Mamelodi, South Africa', *Pharos Journal of Theology* 102, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.102.021

Muthangya, A.K.M., Kaaria, Z. & Katiba, D., 2018, 'Psychosocial challenges experienced by women after spousal death within selected churches in Nakuru County, Kenya', *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 23(11), 58–64.

Nassaji, H., 2015, 'Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis', *Language Teaching Research* 19(2), 129–132. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747

Nsiah, G., 2024, 'Reception of Paul's eschatological teaching in Ghana: A contextual study of 1 Thess. 4:13–18', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(2), a9065. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i2.9065

Nthamburi, Z., 1983, 'Making the gospel relevant within the African context and culture', *African Ecclesia Review* 25(3), 160–172.

Nwoga, I.D., 1989, *Widowhood practices: The Imo experience*, Mimeographed, 06 June, Multi-Purpose Hall, Owerri.

Nwosu, I.A., Njemanze, V.C., Ekpechu, J. & Popoola, B., 2017, 'Socio-cultural context of death and mourning practices in rural Igbo communities of Nigeria', *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 22(8), 47–57.

Nwoye, A., 2000, 'Sources of gain in African grief therapy (AGT)', *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* 11(1), 59–72. https://doi.org/10.1300/J085v11n01_04

Nwoye, A., 2005, 'Memory healing and community intervention in grief work in Africa', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family* 26(3), 147–154. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1467-8438.2005.tb00662.x

Obasola, K.E., 2017, 'Contextualization and Christian practices: A study of its impacts and challenges on contemporary mainline churches in Nigeria', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 7(9), 97–103.

Obielosi, D. & Okeyi, V.O., 2023, 'Christian impact on obnoxious traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria', *AKU: An African Journal of Contemporary Research* 4(3), 117–126.

Ogbonna, E.N., 2003, 'Models of inculturation: A case for traditional Igbo burial music and funeral rites', in N. Omenka (ed.), *The church in Nigeria: Studies in its religious and socio-cultural challenges*, pp. 83–98, Snaap Press, Enugu.

Ojong, F.E., 2008, 'Funeral rites of the Ejagham people in Cross River State: An appraisal of Akamkpa Local Government', *Global Journal of Social Sciences* 7(2), 79–84. https://doi.org/10.4314/gjss.v7i2.48844

Okorie, A.M., 1995, 'African widowhood practices: The Igbo mourning experience', *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 14(2), 79–84.

Onu, J.O. & Solomon-Etefia, P.O., 2019, 'A functional-semiotic investigation of traditional funeral rites and rituals in Elugwu Ezike in Igboland', *International Journal of Language Studies* 13(1), 99–128.

Oyebode, J.R. & Owens, R.G., 2013, 'Bereavement and the role of religious and cultural factors', *Cruse Bereavement Care* 32(2), 61–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2013.812828

Qutoshi, S.B., 2018, 'Phenomenology: A philosophy and method of inquiry', *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 5(1), 215–222. https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v5i1.2154

Richard, E.J., 1995, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.

Sihite, F., 2021, 'Theological studies of Paul's teaching based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 for the elderly congregation in the church', *International Journal of Culture and Religious Studies* 2(2), 70–84. https://doi.org/10.47941/ijcrs.682

Tololiu, N.M., Weol, W., Sellano, S. & Kambey, E.S., 2023, 'Hermeneutics of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and death rites according to Pamona culture as a strategy for Christian religious education for GKST Imanuel Taripa', *International Journal of Education, Information Technology and Others* 6(4), 207–221.

Tooth, S.E., 2023, '1 Thessalonians', in J. Crossley & A. Lockhart (eds.), *Critical dictionary of apocalyptic and millenarian movements*, viewed 13 October 2024, from www.cdamm.org/articles/1-thessalonians.

Walton, S., 1995, 'What has Aristotle to do with Paul? Rhetorical criticism and 1 Thessalonians', *Tyndale Bulletin* 46(2), 230–250. https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30409

Wanamaker, C.A., 1990, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A commentary on the Greek text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Wenham, D., 1981, 'Paul and the synoptic apocalypse', in R.T. France & D. Wenham (eds.), *Studies of history and tradition in the four gospels*, pp. 345–375, JSOT Press, Sheffield.

Westphal, W., 1977, *An exegetical study of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 with reference to the rapture*, viewed 09 October 2024, from http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/979/WestphalThessalonians.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.